

Shirase returns to Sydney

On 24 March around 230 guests attended a reception on board the icebreaker *Shirase* and enjoyed the hospitality of the *Shirase* crew and the Japanese Antarctic Research Expedition (JARE) members. Captain Hisanobu Oga, Commanding Officer of the *JS Shirase*, hosted the event together with the Consul-General of Japan in Sydney, Mr Masato Takaoka.



In his speech, Consul-General Masato Takaoka remarked that the name “Shirase” has much history in Sydney and is symbolic of the friendship between Japan and Australia.

A traditional *kagami-biraki* sake barrel opening ceremony was performed by dignitaries, but the sake could be enjoyed by all.



It was a warm welcome back for the *Shirase* which returned to Sydney after a two-year absence. The *Shirase* is a state-of-the-art Japan Maritime Self Defense Force icebreaker built for Japan’s Antarctic observation program. The current *Shirase* 5003 is the fourth generation. Since 1957, *Shirase* and its predecessors have been visiting the Antarctic annually, taking JARE members and materials to and from Antarctica.

The 58th expedition was transported by the *Shirase* this southern summer and will remain to conduct research on biodiversity and environmental conservation mainly at the Japanese base, Showa Station.

The icebreaker *Shirase* has helped out Australian friends in need on several occasions. The most recent occasion was earlier on 6 March this year. The Australian vessel *Aurora Australis* had been grounded and damaged during a blizzard, so the *Shirase* rescued 66 Australian expedition members stranded at Mawson research station. The previous *Shirase* icebreaker (third generation: 1983-2008) rescued the Australian icebreakers *Nella Dan* and *Aurora Australis* when they were enclosed in ice in Antarctica in 1985 and 1998 respectively.

Shirase’s call at Sydney was its final stop on its way back to Tokyo after its 40,000 km journey.

“The spirit of friendship fostered between Lt. Shirase’s expedition and their Australian supporters almost a century ago is echoed in contemporary research and logistic cooperation between Japan and Australia in the Antarctic.”

Japan Maritime Defense Forces

Six months in Parsley Bay

The *Shirase* icebreaker owes its name to the early explorer Lieutenant Nobu Shirase. Back in 1911, there was a race on—a race to reach the South Pole. The Norwegian Amundsen and the Englishman Scott are famous explorers, but right behind them was a third party, an expedition from Japan led by Lieutenant Shirase.



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His party arrived in Antarctica in March and conditions meant the expedition had to turn back. They came to Sydney to spend the winter in safety before making another attempt. After some initial hesitations, permission was granted for *Shirase*’s expedition to make camp at Parsley Bay, a name probably little known outside the eastern suburbs of Sydney where the small bay is found.

During the sixth months in Parsley Bay, the locals and Japanese expedition got to know each other. The Australian Museum has produced a really interesting online video using contemporary photos taken by a Japanese doctor accompanying Lt Shirase and accounts by locals who interacted with the expedition. It also tells of the 17th century sword now kept at the Australian Museum given by Lt Shirase to Prof. Edgeworth David to express his thanks to the professor for his assistance and friendship.

Even if you think you already know the story of the Lt Shirase’s expedition at Parsley Bay, this is worth a look.

australianmuseum.net.au/movie/shirase-sydney