Spinning a yarn to preserve our Antarctic heritage

By JARED LYNCH

UNLESS you really like ice-cream, spending three hours in a freezer is not exactly fun, but Marion Wheatland took to the chill to prepare for a journey to help save Antarctica’s adventurous past in Antarctica.

Almost 50 years after Sir Douglas Mawson led a heroic expedition across the snow-clad continent, the Melbourne modeller is putting away her wool to preserve the wooden huts where the team lived.

She will spin wool at Cape Denison outside the rickety buildings, 5000 kilometres south of Hobart, and auction all her yarn.

"Most women my age holiday in more sedate locations, soaking up the sun and sand," the 53-year-old said. "But no, well... I intend to spin on the ice."

Ms Wheatland hired a portable cool room, set at minus-16 degrees, in Kellock Island to prepare for the icy temperatures.

"I have always wanted to visit Antarctica and when my father died two years ago, he left me some money to fulfil her dream."

"He encouraged me to do adventurous things and I thought this would be a great way to honour his memory."

The huts were built for Mawson’s 1911-13 Antarctic expedition, during which he survived being lost on the ice for weeks, and were last used in the 1990s before being left to the elements.

Mawson’s Huts Foundation chairman and chief executive David Jensen said Ms Wheatland’s fund-raising was unusual. "But it’s certainly a lovely gesture and we are grateful," he said.

Mr Jensen said the foundation’s yearly expedition to maintain the huts cost about $500,000.

The foundation has invited the buildings’ roof to stop snow and ice building up. Artefacts are also being recovered and restored at a nearby laboratory.

"There is a lot of ongoing maintenance and Marion’s efforts will help us with all this conservation work," he said.

"Many people don’t realise that Mawson was responsible for Antarctica’s 62 per cent scientific data. Our work is about preserving this special site."

The foundation will send a team of eight people, including heritage builders and an archaeological, to Antarctica in early December. Ms Wheatland will leave on December 28.