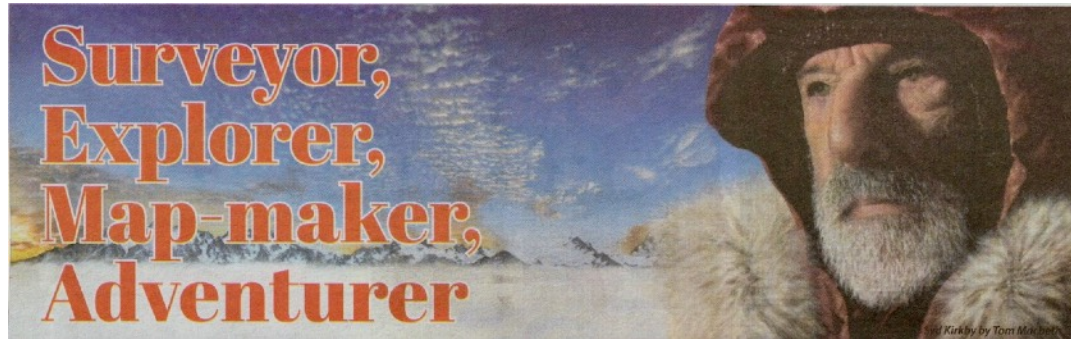


# Sydney Lorrimar Kirkby AO MBE



**Sydney Lorrimar Kirkby** (13 June 1933 – 7 July 2024) was an Australian surveyor and [Antarctic](#) explorer

Syd Kirkby was first appointed Surveyor at [Mawson Station](#) for 1956, the third year of [ANARE](#) operations in [Antarctica](#).<sup>[1]</sup>

Syd Kirkby was Surveyor and/or Station Leader of the ANARE 16-month wintering party at Mawson Station for three years: 1956–57, 1960–61, 1980-81. Additionally, he was a member of the summer operations team for four years: 1961–62, 1962–63, 1964–65 and 1979-80.

Kirkby's many accomplishments in Antarctica include establishment of the easternmost, westernmost, and southernmost [astrofixes](#) in [Australian Antarctic Territory](#). During his first expedition (1956–57), he was the first man to venture into the [Prince Charles Mountains](#) with sled dogs. In the autumn of 1960, he and his team journeyed 400 kilometres through [Enderby Land](#) from the [Napier Mountains](#) to Mawson station. Between 1961 and 1965, he surveyed more Antarctic territory than any other explorer. His contributions have made a significant impact on the fields of regional [geochronology](#), [petrology](#), [tectonics geology](#), [orogeny](#), [glaciology](#), [geomagnetism](#), and [paleomagnetism](#).

In 1959, Kirkby joined the Commonwealth Government Division of National Mapping based in Melbourne. From 1961 he undertook extensive mapping control surveys in remote areas of Australia. In 1966 Kirby became Senior Surveyor in charge of National Mapping's airborne distance measuring (Aerodist) program. Later he became a Supervising Surveyor. Between 1976 and 1984 Kirkby was the Assistant Director in charge of National Mapping's Melbourne office.

Kirkby died in [Nambour, Queensland](#) on 7 July 2024, at the age of 91.

(Wikipedia)



## Sydney Lorrimar Kirkby AO MBE was a charismatic adventurer who overcame polio as a child to become an explorer, surveyor and map-maker through many Antarctic expeditions.

by DOUG PATTERSON

13  
OCTOBER 2024  
HINTERLAND TIMES

The *Hinterland Times* had the great pleasure of interviewing Syd eight years ago (*Explorer Syd Kirkby tells of his father's gift - HT July 2016*), and we are extremely saddened to learn of his passing. As a fitting tribute to an exceptional member of the hinterland community, Doug Patterson, from the Montville History Group, shares some of Syd's incredible history once again for those who may have missed out.

Sydney (Syd) Kirkby's life has been celebrated around Australia by so many people in so many circles. Some knew him from his early years, while others knew him as the inspirational surveyor who helped establish the first permanent base in Australian Antarctica. Some knew him from his leadership in later Antarctic Expeditions, others from his technical achievements in mapping Australia through aerial photography, and by digitising these complex drawings.

Only a few knew the more private Syd, of his life with Jude Lang, his wife for more than forty years, of his ongoing battle to preserve Antarctica, and of his commitment to the environment, community and family.

At an early age, Syd suffered from polio and, in a very positive way, this battle defined the man he was to become. When diagnosed that he would never walk again, with the help of his Dad, Syd challenged this sentence. Once rid of callipers, he learnt to walk again, then to run, then to play football (AFL), and to box. As his confidence grew, Syd became involved in acting and debating. His attitude in meeting these challenges became the mantra for the rest of his life: 'Find Your Frontier.'

In 1956, Syd was eligible to join the boxing team at the Melbourne Olympics. Instead, he applied to join an Australian expedition to establish the first, permanent

base in Australian Antarctica. He was 22 with three years' experience as a cadet surveyor applying for a position advertised for an experienced surveyor at least 28 years old, the minimum age to join the expedition. He had to pass a strict medical, and despite a permanent limp, Syd's application was accepted; and Syd began his life-long passion for this unknown, unmapped, frozen continent. Syd often reflected that Antarctica was God's gift to him and shaped the rest of his life.

Many expeditions later, Syd became leader of the 1980/81 expedition to survey and renew Australia's management of its Antarctic Territory. The members of that expedition gave him a nickname; The Godfather. Syd talked to them about the rich tapestry of life and challenged them to find their own frontier. As Godfather, Syd was the epitome of a true leader.

His time with National Mapping demonstrated that these leadership qualities were at the fore as he helped that organisation meet the challenges of aerial photography surveying and, later, the digitisation of map-making.

At the same time, Syd became increasingly concerned about the direction the government was taking in how it executed its responsibility for managing scientific research in Australian Antarctica. One issue that he personally and vehemently opposed was the replacement of dog-team drawn sleds with motorised ones on supposed environmental grounds. His question was, which had less impact on the Antarctic environment?

After eight years holding senior administrative positions, Syd took an early retirement and moved to Brisbane in 1982 where he met Jude Lang and they married the following year in Perth. By 1984 they had moved into their new home at the end of Rosewood Rise overlooking Kondalilla National Park.

Syd became an executive member of The ANARE Club and supported its continuing battle for ongoing scientific research on the Australian Antarctic Territory.

At home on the Range, he became involved in local issues; opposing the proposed closure of Phillips Road, one of only four roads off the Blackall Range, as ill-considered; and supporting the designation of Iconic Status for the Blackall Range to better protect its environment against commercial development.

With seven different, and very prestigious awards, Syd is one of the most recognised men of his generation. He has been acknowledged as an explorer, adventurer and surveyor who mapped Antarctica, who had mountains and glaciers named after him; as a map-maker and administrator who steered mapping Australia into the digital age; and as a steward of the ANARE Club that celebrates and over-views Australia's continuing presence in Antarctica.

Syd Kirkby served his nation and his community very well indeed. He lived a big life that has enriched so many and his final message to us is universal, "Find Your Frontier".

Vale Sydney Lorrimar Kirkby AO MBE - 1933 to 2024 🇺🇸



Syd and Jude  
in 2016