

1920

NAT/SEA/1 # 16

C.S.

Repat	Sealing
No.	179

Administrata

SUBJECT.

1920

20th Decm

Repat on Mr J.E. Hamilton's visit to Seal rookeries on Volunteer Rocks.

Previous Paper.

MINUTES.

Letter to Mrs. Hamilton, 21.2.20.

1

N.E. I have received the enclosed account from J. Davis for £5, hire of cutter to take Mr Hamilton to Volunteer Rocks. ? payment approval, per XII. Transp

1. Passages -

Thy.
1.3.20.

Payment app! XII - 1.
T-R. 3/4

March 1/20

Vouchers passed 2.3.20.

Letter from S. M. West Falkland. 8. 3. 20.

Subsequent Paper.

N.E. ? no action called for. Draft repaid has been returned. Thy.
11.2.20.

P-A. T-R. 3/4. March 11/20

179/20.



Office.

Copy of W. Hamilton's report
on his visit to Volunteer Rocks
annexed for record in C. S. O. Copy
of the report was forwarded to
Sec. of State under cover of despatch
no 21 of 20/2/20.

Please return original to W.

Hamilton

T-R 114
Adm.

21/2/20.

REPORT ON A VISIT TO THE SEAL ROCKS
OFF VOLUNTEER POINT.

At 8.15 a.m. on the 14th of February I left Stanley for Volunteer Point in the sailing cutter "Indiana" 3½ tons carrying capacity. There was a light breeze from the West at the time which fell away altogether as soon as we passed the Narrows of Stanley. But a light air sprang up from the South and rapidly backed into the East, and eventually into the North East, being all the time very light.

We came to off Volunteer Point a little after three p.m. and anchored off the South side of it in 8 fathoms. The distance is only about thirteen miles but the wind was so light that the owner and his companion were forced to use the sweeps for a considerable time.

As soon as the cutter was anchored the flat bottomed scow which serves for a dinghy to the "Indiana" was put over the side and we rowed towards the First Rock, that is the rock nearest the shore.

There was a swell of considerable height running and breaking on most parts of the rock as well as right across the space between the rock and the mainland. On the side from which we approached (the South) there is an irregular row of low but sharp rocks lying off the main rock and it is necessary to pass inside the land, the intervening space is covered with kelp.

Since the owner of the cutter was not acquainted with the known landing place we had to choose a spot where the swell was not breaking too heavily and to jump ashore in the trough of the waves when a foothold was uncovered. A stern rope had been attached to the kelp some distance out in order to haul the boat off when the swell came in.

Immediately

Immediately after landing it was necessary to scramble up the rock to avoid the next wave, and then to walk along a sharp and broken ridge on to the main body of the rock.

The surface of the Volunteer Rocks is extremely rough and broken up except in the western end of the first rock where there is a little tussock and the crevices are filled up by a gritty substance which seems to be largely composed of the excrement of sea birds. This part does not seem to be affected by seals, but is occupied by colonies of shags and Scaresby's gull. It is in the west end that the shelter erected by sealers of former years is situated. It is triangular in elevation and about six feet in height, being about eight feet long and six wide. The outside has been covered with skins of young sea lions, but many are now washed or blown away. There were many relics of the former occupants including a rusty rifle which was brought away for the Falkland Islands Museum. A small sea lion had crept into this place to die as was proved by the finding of the bones.

Since there were no seal at this part of the rock I walked towards the seaward end and at once found numbers of sea lions of all ages. The recognized landing place which was easily found is a beach of small boulders and was actually covered with sea lions to such an extent that it seemed likely that they would have seriously interfered with a landing on account of such a large number of animals rushing about in a small area of water in their efforts to get to sea.

The landing place is on the south side of the rock and almost landlocked. It is perhaps fifty yards across and the entrance looks to the south east. It had been concealed by a part of the rock as we came up from the south west.

On the north side of the rock at about the same level a long narrow gulch runs in from the east, the rock on the

outer

outer side of it rising to the height of the main rock. On the top of this outer wall there were about 20 fur seal bulls. They exhibited a very different demeanour from that of the bull seals on the Elephant Jason rookery, being uneasy at our approach and frequently moving off when we were some distance away, although many would stand until we were within 20 yards.

Having photographed some of them I proceeded further towards the point of the rock.

From the south side of the rock near the recognised landing place I was able to see a great number of fur seal on what turned out to be a separate rock altogether. In order to reach them it was necessary to cross a narrow cleft about 2½ feet wide each side of which was composed of rather slippery stone. The sea was rushing through the cleft the whole time, but as each swell came in the water rose nearly to the level of the top of the crack. This place was crossed and I turned towards the place where the fur seal were, to find that there was a passage about 10 or 15 ft. wide between, but fortunately a projection ran out from the rock on which we now were towards the other and was nearly met by one from the other side. Here again the swell was coming in and the leap was only exposed at the bottom of each swell. But by watching for this and by following the water down it was possible to cross. After climbing over a few ridges of rock I was close to the seals and was able to see that both bulls and cows were present and while watching them a number of the small black pups bleating with fear began to climb out of the crevice in front of me and a few minutes later I saw another collection of the little creatures. There was a bull on a minute beach where there were two pups and when we approached he roared and moved about but seemed to be unable to make up his mind whether to stay by the pups or go into the water. After looking at each other from about 12 ft. distance one of the men made a noise and the bull then moved towards the water and we left him.

We returned by the same route as we had used and found that the first jump was a little more difficult from the outside.

On arriving at the hut I made notes and then went over to look at the hut, after which we went back to the cutter.

By this time there were indications that a breeze was coming from the north which eventually increased in strength so that the run home was made with ease and in about two thirds of the time of the outward journey.

The whole time taken was about 14 hours, and the conditions were such that landing was not particularly difficult. But it was only by extreme good fortune that the business could be accomplished so quickly, since in a climate such as that of the Falklands and with the necessity of using the small sailing boats vessels which are the only means of reaching such places as the seal haunts it is always possible that one may be compelled to abandon an expedition or that it will take a time enormously in excess of that estimated. In localities such as the seal favour there seems usually to be no reasonable anchorage, and one is therefore entirely dependent on the chance of a favourable wind for ability to stay at such places as well as for even approaching them.

So far as the seal on the Volunteer Rocks were concerned there were, from a rough count and partly from estimate, 500 on the 14th of February. A very large number of these were bulls but females, pups, and immature animals were also present. The herd seems to have broken up by this time. I could see no sign of a "harem organisation" all stages seemed to be mixed up together. That the harems are disorganised is certainly suggested by the timidity of the bulls. The animals of that sex were obstinately fierce when I visited the Jason rookery in the middle of December, 1919, in the height of the breeding season. The bulls at this time of the year seem to have a tendency to keep to themselves.

I suggest that if any license is issued for the Volunteers it should not be for a greater number than 50 skins.

(Sgd) J. Erik Hamilton.

179/20.

179/20.

21st February, 1920.

Sir,

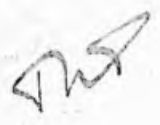
I am directed by the Administrator to return to you herewith your draft report on your visit of inspection to the Fur Seal Rookeries on Volunteer Rocks.

A copy of the report has been forwarded to the Secretary of State.

I am,

Sir,

Your obedient servant,



(T. N. Compton.)
for Colonial Secret.

J. E. Hamilton, Esq.,
Stipendiary Magistrate,
Fox Bay, West Falkland.

Feb. 28th.

1920

The Colonial Secretary.



John Davis

"Indiana"

Feb. 14th

Higher of butter to
Volunteer Rocks for
Mrs Hamilton

£5 - -

179/20



The Office of the Magistrate
Fox Bay
West of Falkland
March 5. 1920

Sir,

I have the honour to request that if it be at all possible a copy of my report on the fur seal of Volunteer Rocks may be sent to me; or failing that, that I may have the original manuscript. I am at present without a copy of the report in any form, and should greatly like to have one for reference, and comparison with the other reports I have written on the subject, or may write in the future.

I have the honour to be,

Sir,

Your obedient servant
J. S. Hamilton,
Stipendiary Magistrate, W. F.

The Honorable
Colonial
Secretary
Stanley.