

C.S.

Sealing

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S.M., West Australia

SUBJECT.

1920

9th February

Previous Paper.

Report of Mr J. E. Hamilton on visit
to South Georgia.

MINUTES.

11.8.

Submitted.

I presume that other copies have been
transmitted direct by Mr Hamilton

T.R.P.

13.2.20.

Report forwarded to Sec. of State
under cover of despatch h^o 21
19/2/20.

T-R.P.

Subsequent Paper.



102/20

Office of the Colonial Secretary.

Stanley.

6th February 1920.

Sir,

I have the honour to forward herewith a Report on my recent visit to South Georgia, and also on the call made by H.M.S. Dartmouth to Beauchene Island for the purpose of enabling me to inspect the Fur Seal there.

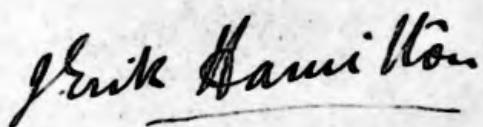
It gives me great pleasure to record my gratitude to Captain Mops R.N. and all the officers of H.M.S. Dartmouth for their uniform kindness to me during the period when I was their guest.

I should also like to state that I received every assistance from Mr. E. B. Simms, Stipendiary Magistrate, South Georgia, as well as from all the masters and their employees on the whaling stations when I came in contact with them.

I have the honour to be,

Sir,

Your obedient servant,



A handwritten signature in ink, appearing to read "John Hamilton". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line underneath it.

(John Hamilton)

Stipendiary Magistrate.

West Falkland.

The Honourable Colonial Secretary.

A REPORT OF A VISIT TO SOUTHERN ALASKA

IN JANUARY 1920.

On Tuesday January 13th 1920 I left Port Stanley, Falkland Islands in R.M.S. Dartmouth for South Georgia, and after a rough passage the ship arrived at King Edward's Cove, Cumberland Bay on the evening of January 16th.

On the evening Mr. J. D. Binnie, Stipendiary Magistrate, South Georgia came on to the ship and I learned there work was almost entirely suspended at Grytviken (King Edward's Cove) because of serious account of very serious labour disturbances.

There were next morning a total of about twenty whales moored in the bay waiting to be hauled up, and that day a very little work was done, after which all work was suspended until the following Tuesday. On this day the leaders of the whalers were deported to take their dues under the new regulations, and the same afternoon work was resumed and on the following day, Thursday January 22nd it was in such progress as far as the shortage of oil car would permit.

The whaling steamer were not able to go to sea during the week, and the manager of the station, Mr. Jacobsen, recognized that there was no use in catching whales if they could not be used.

Until work was resumed there was no possibility of visiting the other whaling stations or any of the larger whaling local stations, but on Tuesday January 21st I inspected a few of these stations in ~~the~~^{at} Grytviken, Cumberland Bay.

Friday was spent in visiting a large sealing concern in Cumberland Bay, and also the Station of the Ocean Fisheries Service on New Foundland Bay.

Saturday was spent at Grytviken, and on Sunday January 24th I was present at a Reindeer hunt, along with a party of officers from R.M.S. Dartmouth.

On Monday evening I rejoined the ship, having been a guest of Mr. Binnie for a week, and on my return to the Falklands I crossed the South Shetland Islands, where the Falklands Islands I saw on the 20th.

During ~~Friday~~ the evening of the 27th...and the morning of the 28th I was ashore at Leith Harbour Whaling Station and on both occasions saw the manager of the Svalbard Company's station as well as Mr. Anderson of Esso Petroleum Station.

Arrived back from Georgia on the 28th. The ship was off Bear Island at 3-30 a.m. on the morning of Sunday 1st February. An attempt to land more men frustrated by the heavy swell and the captain and crew proceeded to Port Darwin, where we remained from the afternoon of the same day until Tuesday February 3rd, when we sailed for Esso, arriving the same day.

The passage from South Georgia to the Falklands was rough and gale winds were on the vines.

NOTES ON THE WHALING IN SOUTH GEORGIA.

During my stay in South Georgia I was able to visit three of the whaling stations namely Trygghamn (Compania Argentina de Pesca), New London Bay (Ocean Company) and Leith Harbour (Esso Petroleum) and also to have a conversation with the manager of the Svalbard Whaling Company, Copenhagen.

Large whale were to be seen in great numbers in the waters of South Georgia, and those of male size are still caught; one of 90 ft. long was landed during my stay; it was a fine whale.

During our approach to the island I saw a fair number of the animals now more than twelve miles from the shore and on Monday 10-January the whaler "Minerva" sighted a whale four miles from Cape Reinga.

A few dugongs are still taken. There was a female of this species on the plains at New York the day before I was there. It was about 40 feet long, and from external appearance possibly pregnant. Lying beside this animal on the plain was a fossilized skeleton of the same species the length of which was about eight feet.

All the whaling has been discontinued that the Japanese have only been spared by the hunting and not exterminated.

The other species which ^I saw, perhaps 50 in all, are all Blue and Fin-whales, the exceptions, one other Humpback at Grytviken and a Right Whale at Leith Harbour, this being the first of the species taken this year at South Georgia so far as I was able to find out. I had no reports of Sperm Whales this season.

A few touched whales of the smaller species are taken at times apparently more as a diversion than for their commercial value. I was shown photographs of a Black Fish (*C. melachyrus*), a Ritter (*C. orca*) and a smaller black and white whale which I have not yet been able to identify, it cannot be the Orca since it has a popular Norwegian name.

ON THE ECONOMIC USE OF THE WHALE BONES.

At each of the three stations which I visited there was evidence of a greater or less amount of waste in utilising the whale bones.

At Grytviken, which is the oldest station, the bottom of the entire bay is littered with bones, which extend on the South side for a mile beyond the narrow mouth, that is for a total all round this place of possibly three miles. There is probably at this place thousands of tons of clean bones. There are also bones lying round the beaches at New Portus Bay and Leith Harbour. Since these bones are all clean they are probably relics of the earlier days when no attempt was made to use up the carcasses.

But in ^{decomposing} addition to the ones there are numbers of carcasses, mostly lacking the head and tail, left with a great quantity of meat remaining. They are of varying ages, but must all be comparatively recent, and have been deliberately or accidentally allowed to go adrift from the stations. Each one has been worth a considerable quantity of oil.

It appears to be the custom to flense the whale, remove the head, tail and viscera and then to cover the carcass in the harbour if there is a press of work; later on when the weather is not so good the carcasses are brought up again to be dealt with.

But it seems clear that in the whales brought in continue to be numerous that some at least of the carcasses will never be used at all, but will be allowed to drift away if they break loose.

Mr. Bannister confirmed this idea as to the waste of the general part
~~carcasses~~
 of some carcasses. I say that a similar practice ~~exists~~ at New
 Fortune Bay and at Leith Harbour.

Another source of waste is to be found in the incomplete utilisation of the internal organs. I was informed that at Grytviken none of them are used, at New Fortune Bay the intestines are wasted, heart lungs and liver being sciled down, and at Leith Harbour none are used. The Bankallford Co., on the other hand while using all the internal organs neglects at least part of the carcass of every whale taken.

Having regard to the general conditions at all the stations seen it is impossible to avoid the conclusion that there is waste, in order to prevent which more pressure boilers would have to be put up at probably all the stations.

There seems to be some diversity of method in the actual process of cooking the blubber, I was told that at Grytviken only one boiling is given, while at Leith Harbour I concluded from the arrangements of the boilers that at least two are given to the blubber.

The highest quality of oil is extracted without pressure which can be used in the second or even a third boiling, to produce a maximum yield. But if the third boiling were under pressure the second would be without.

It might be worth while to make investigations in Norway as to the most modern and economical methods of using whales so that advantage might be taken of this knowledge in framing regulations for the industry.

It does not seem probable that persons engaged in a commercial enterprise will take steps to use up the whole of their raw material when this entails greater trouble than the methods they now practise and when it will not produce higher dividends.

I beg to suggest that instructions might be given to the Stipendiary magistrate South Georgia to enable him to order the recovery and utilisation of carcasses which have been allowed to go adrift from the factories. It would also be of great use from the point of view of economy in whale material if he had power to order the suspension of catching operations when in his opinion an increase in the number of whales awaiting treatment at moorings would lead to waste, that is to say to an excess of raw material over the full capacity of the factory or factories concerned.

ON THE ELEPHANT SEAL IN SOUTH GEORGIA.

On Friday January 22nd I had a fine day, shooting seals. The weather was fine, the sun was up, and many seals were to be seen along the coast.

So far as my personal observations and the information given to me go there is no doubt as to the great abundance of the Elephant Seal in this island.

Besides the breeding rookeries there seems to be hardly a small bay or saltwater beach where these animals may not be found in the summer; during winter they spend most of their time in the sea.

At the time of my visit, that is the last two weeks of January the breeding season was over. It extends from September to December inclusive of both months. The bull seal and the cows both come ashore early in September, the pups are born when the females have been ashore about three weeks and are suckled for about a month. About six weeks after parturition the females are again served, so that the period of gestation must be ~~over~~^{about} ten months. Mr. Dennis considers the male seal serve fifty females in one season. By the beginning of January the males are in poor condition on account of their sexual duties and their constant alarms. About the same time the seal begin to leave the breeding grounds, and the majority of them were at sea by the time I arrived in Georgia.

On Thursday January 22nd, by the courtesy of Mr. F. J. Cohen manager of Grytviken Whaling Station I was given the use of the whale boat "In the Karl", in which I started at 11 p.m. on the 21st, in anticipation of an early start for one of the ~~last~~ breeding grounds.

We left Grytviken about 4-30 a.m. on the 22nd and after a fine run came into Stromness Bay about 6-30. It was my original intention to go to Royal Bay, but one of the officers of the "Karl", K. Hollander, who is an expert elephant seal hunter said that St. Andrew's Bay is a larger rookery than Royal Bay and would always be uncertain of land and at Royal Bay on account of the very strong local wind which is usual there; having regard to these two points I decided to go to St. Andrew's Bay instead.

This bay is wide and shallow being perhaps two miles across, it is quite open to the sea and is divided into two parts by a glacier which comes down onto the beach. There was a slight swell setting into the bay, but it did not trouble the landing place which is very well sheltered.

Leaving from the landing place I walked to the foot of

the glacier and then back.

The beach is steep and composed of coarse almost black sand. The first ground traversed was a flat area perhaps half a mile across having the beach as one margin and surrounded on the other sides by rocks, glaciers, and part of the terminal moraine of the central glacier. It is traversed by numerous streams from the ice, which are shallow but very wide in the sandy part nearest the landing place while in the other parts they are deeper and very swift, there is a certain amount of scrubby grass and tussock in places.

On the sandy part there was a good number, 30 to 40, adult Elephant seal bulls sleeping ~~sitting~~. They are usually from 15 to 20 feet long, and at this time ^{keep to} ~~up~~ themselves, although a few had one or two females with them, but this might have been the result of accident. Seal were to be found right along the beach, beneath the glacier and beyond it as well as on the part which I examined at close quarters. They occurred over a hundred yards inland among the vegetation, but the animals here were the lighter and smaller females and immature animals, some of the pups were only six or seven feet long and these were born this year, as I was assured by Hollander who was with me. There were a few skeletons of very young pups lying about, presumably they had died soon after birth, at my rate they were only about four feet over all.

St. Andrews bay is one of the places from which seal are taken and except for one pup mentioned above, all the skeletons which I saw, which were many, were those of adult or almost adult males.

I was assured by Mr. Binnie that there is a great excess of bulls which provide a constant source of disturbance during the breeding season because they fight continually and at times are so engrossed in this that females escape into the sea without being served, I was also informed that pups are crushed to death in the disturbances, which seems possible considering the small size of the pups compared with that of the enormous bulls.

The present open season is from March 1 to August 31 and the whole of the killing is in the hands of the Compania Argentina at Trelew, who employ picked men for the work.

I beg to suggest that for the present no change be made in the open season except with reference to the rookery to be chosen by the Subsidary Magistrate South Georgia. For this one rookery a special open season from the beginning of November to the middle of October of this year might be instituted, but it should in such case be closed for the rest of the year.

An experimental killing of this kind would not be in any way likely to injure the herd as a whole but would prove whether the presumed advantages could accrue ~~from a habitual change in the open season & the taking turns to part for future regulations~~. These advantages are that the rookeries would be more frequented by the removal of superfluous cattle and that there would be fewer instances of bulls being killed or females escaping unimpregnated. I was assured that both of these events frequent in happen in present conditions owing to the bulls fighting so much.

It follows that the killing of bulls may alongside a female did not damage the latter in the least.

Both before and after killing, inspections of the rookery should continue, and at all possible counts of the herd should accompany the subsequent report. This report should have particular reference to the effect on the rookery of killing bulls at this time of the year. The inspection soon after killing would also be a check on the possible killing of cows, since their carcasses would not be seen, especially if the Subsidary Magistrate had kept his intention of making a second visit secret.

In the event of a complete change in the open season being made to the time suggested, it is to say, if the spring killing were to the advantage of the breeding herd, Mr. Jacobson assured me that a permit to kill 4000 and not 6000 for the three divisions named would satisfy him in every way. The same gentleman appeared willing to realise the importance of maintaining the herd by not killing females at any time.

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NOTES ON OTHER WILD ANIMALS IN SOUTH GEORGIA.

1. Weddell Seal. There is a breeding colony of this species in Larsson Harbour, near Cape Disappointment.
2. Fox Seal. Four of these animals are reported to have been seen on Bird Island in the end of 1919, by the master of one of the whalers.
3. Reindeer. A party from H.M.S. Dartmouth engaged in a reindeer hunt on January 24 when about 60 reindeer were seen. In the herds of the two harbors seen, about 60 in number there were as many stags, possibly 20. Mr. Winnie considers that there is an excess of males, which fight among themselves, and in some cases lose their antlers and as a result starve to death. If this is so it would be to the advantage of the herd to keep the males down to the number required for breeding.

These animals are quite wild and seem to be flourishing and multiplying. There are believed to be about a hundred.

4. The Upland Goose introduced are increasing, there being about 20 now.

Report on a conversation with Mr. Jacobsen on
SEALING IN SOUTH GEORGIA.

During a conversation with him Mr. Jacobsen he told me that the Sea Leopard was one species of which he wished to take ten thousand skins, each being worth from one pound to thirty shillings.

He could acquire one of the vessels which are used in Norway for sealing, and engage an experienced master to be master of her, and in addition might go down to the Antarctic himself for the first two seasons.

I said that it was the wish of the Government to develop industries in such a manner as to make them permanent, that if a license were granted it would be for a species or species named in the license, and that if Fox Seal were found that the locality and even their existence must be kept secret on account of the possibility of poaching.

Mr. Jacobsen appeared to realize the importance of not overkilling, in order that the industry should remain permanent. He had never heard that Weddell Seal was abundant in some places.

I beg to suggest that in the event of a license being granted, it might have the following conditions attached:

1. For the first season it might be confined to Sea Leopards.
2. A full report on the numbers and distribution of all seals seen or taken should be made, with references to exact positions on the charts whenever possible. And that information should be collected on the breeding habits to the fullest extent. If possible photographs should be supplied.
3. The first specimen of any species of seal other than the Leopard should be killed and the entire skin salted and the skull preserved in the flesh for the information of the Government with full notes as to its locality.
4. The catch should be inspected on arrival in the colony as a check on the possible killing of species other than that or those named in the license.

Mr. Jacobson said that he would very much like a decision by April when he is going home, so that he might make arrangements with the Compania Argentina de Pescos de Buenos Aires on route.

John R. Moulton

NOTES ON BEAUCHEMIN ISLAND.

On the morning of February first, H.M.S. Dartmouth was off Beauchemin Island and at 5-30 a.m. an attempt was made to land me in one of the cutters, by the courtesy of Captain Hope R.N. There was a heavy swell and it was quite impossible to land, but we approached the island and infinitely closer for me to assure myself of the presence of Fox Seal on the West side of the island where there is a long slope of rock running down to the water's edge.

There were perhaps 50 seals, and none of them were pups so far as I could see, in fact most of them seemed to be adult males.

From so many a visit it is not possible to form any very definite conclusions, but there is no doubt that this is only a small colony not at all comparable in size to that in the Jacobs.

On the West side there were many Sea Lions and there is an enormous rookery of the Black-capped Albatross (Mollymook) nest cl. 10 on this side also.

Beauchemin Island is divided roughly into two equal parts the Northern and higher of which is for the most part covered with thick scrub, while the remainder is broken up and very rocky.

It can only be possible to land in the very calmest weather since there is no protection at all, not even a bay of any sort.

The island is about two miles long and perhaps half a mile wide. The appended sketch shows the places where the fur seal were seen.

J. R. Hamilton.

(J. R. Hamilton)
Stipendiary Magistrate.
West Falklands.

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