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Voyage of the S. Y. "Nimrod.": Sydney to Monte Video Viâ Macquarie Island, May 8-July 7, 1909

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The survey is based on the three known points of Keffi, Loko, and Lokoja, the telegraphic longitudes of which were determined in 1905-1906 by Captain R. Ommanney, R.E., and Captain G. F. Evans, R.E. Bearings with prismatic compass were taken every quarter of a mile on every road traversed; the routes thus plotted were adjusted by the help of latitudes obtained in various places by meridian altitudes of north and south stars. Plane-tableing was also done to a small extent from Nassarawa to Keffi.

VOYAGE OF THE S.Y. "NIMROD."*

SYDNEY TO MONTE VIDEO VIA MACQUARIE ISLAND, MAY 8—JULY 7, 1909.

By Captain J. K. DAVIS.

ACTING under instructions from Sir E. Shaekleton, an attempt was to be made to locate the positions of some charted islands marked "doubtful," viz. (1) Royal Company islands; (2) Emerald island; (3) Nimrod islands; and (4) Dougherty island. The approximate charted position of each of these groups is shown on diagram (map). In the event of being able to find any of these "doubtful" islands, we were to land (if possible); obtain their precise positions and main features, etc. In the event of no land being visible at or near the charted position, deep sea-soundings were to be taken and vicinity searched.

Meteorological observations were to be taken at intervals of two hours during the voyage, and these are of some interest, as ships do not usually traverse these latitudes in the months of May and June.

With reference to each of the charted island groups, viz. Royal, Emerald, Nimrod, and Dougherty, I propose to lay before the members very briefly:—

- (a) Short extracts from the reports furnished by navigators of having sighted such an island.
- (b) The steps taken during our voyage to ascertain the existence (or non-existence) of each island or group.
- (c) Short extracts from reports of navigators who have tried to locate the positions, but failed in the attempt.

Having placed before you such evidence as I have been able to collect from reports, and, with your kind indulgence, narrated the steps taken on this voyage to locate the positions of the doubtful islands, I will give a brief description of our visit to Macquarie island, where we spent a few days (May 26-30, 1909).

The *Nimrod* carried five Admiralty chronometers, which had been previously rated (April, 1909) at the Sydney observatory. Observations, at sea, were taken by three independent observers (weather permitting).

The grey skies and short hours of daylight during the southern winter are not favourable for search work. It was no unusual occurrence to be forty-eight hours without getting a glimpse of the sun, or being able to take stellar observations. Very heavy seas and strong winds (often blowing with hurricane force) rendered

* Read at the British Association, Sheffield, September, 1909.

deep-sea soundings almost impossible. On the other hand, we were favoured by clear moonlight on two or three occasions, when such help was particularly important and of great value.

The *Nimrod* left Sydney on May 8, 1909, having stores for twelve months for a crew of twenty-one all told, and 298 tons of coal. We ran south on the 151st meridian until May 13, when our course was shaped towards the position assigned to Royal Co. islands. On May 17 our position at noon was 97 miles from the charted position of the islands, $50^{\circ} 25' S.$, $143^{\circ} E.$ (approximate) about 430 miles south-south-west of Tasmania.

No reliable information is obtainable as to the date of first reported appearance; but the following extract from d'Urville's Journal shows that these islands had been charted previous to 1840. D'Urville left Hobart Town for the south on January 1, 1840; he writes—

"On January 11, 1840, we found ourselves in the position assigned by several hydrographers to the Royal Co. islands; notwithstanding careful searching and a most favourable horizon, we saw *no land*. . . ."

After fixing our position at noon on May 17, the weather being fine, we sounded in 2430 fathoms. Unfortunately, in heaving in, the wire parted, so that a specimen of the bottom was lost. On May 18, at 2 p.m., in fine clear weather, we sailed over the charted position with no land in sight. We then stood east till 6 p.m., and then south, but saw no indications of land.

These islands were not seen by Wilkes during the United States expedition, 1840. I have been unable to trace any report of their having been sighted during the last sixty years.

Continuing our voyage, we were, on May 24, 190 miles from Macquarie island, and here encountered a heavy north-west gale with very high sea. On the 25th we were close to the position of the island (by dead reckoning), but the weather was thick, and no signs of land could be seen from the masthead. Having been without observations for two days, with a falling barometer, I now stood south for 20 miles. We then hove to, and soon after dark the wind blew hard from the south; it moderated about 11 p.m., and very shortly after that time we were able to make out land to the northward. This was a great relief, as during the last twenty-four hours we had felt some anxiety about our position.

The position of the island, as shown on the Admiralty chart, was not correct.

We soon steamed to leeward of the island, where wind and sea were less violent. At daylight we steamed into Lusitania bay, where we anchored in 8 fathoms, about a quarter of a mile from the shore.

Macquarie Island.

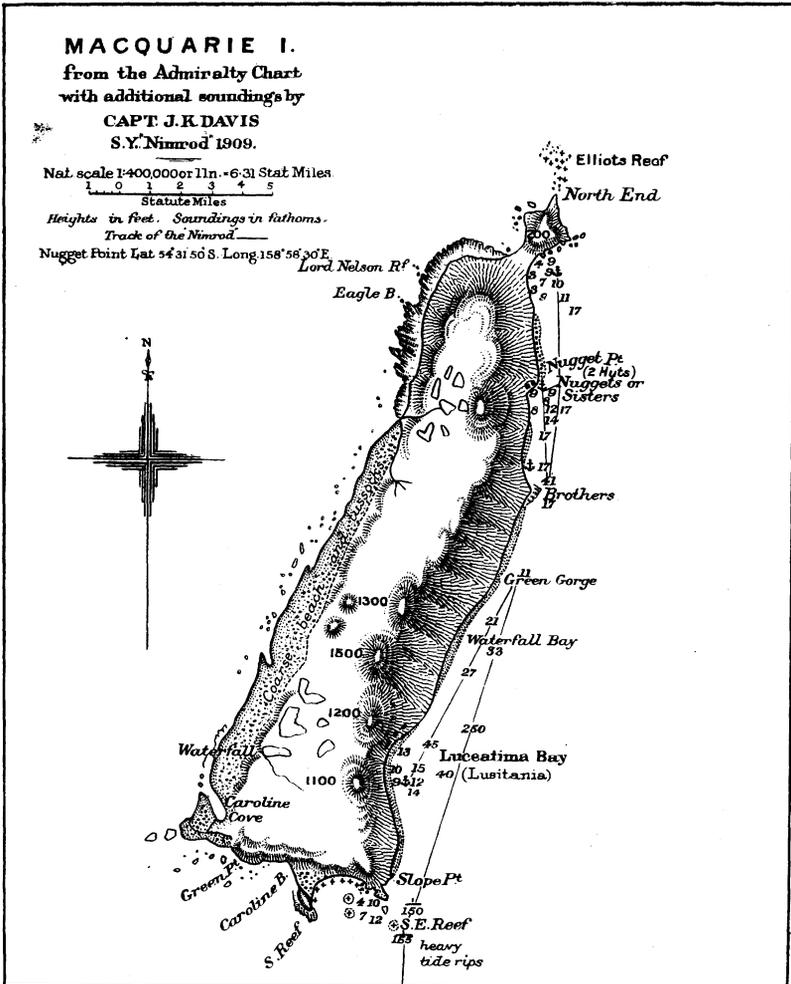
May 26-30.—About 545 miles from the southern extremity of New Zealand lies Macquarie island. Captain Hasselborough, of the brig *Perseverance*, landed there in 1809, but as he saw the remains of a wreck on the coast, it may have been visited by some navigator at an earlier date.

Lying as it does in a north-east and south-westerly direction for a length of over 20 miles, it forms a huge breakwater exposed to the full force of the prevailing westerly winds. It is a mountain ridge rising from a considerable depth; we found a depth of 300 fathoms about half a mile from the eastern shore, shoaling rapidly as we approached the land to 40, 10, 8 fathoms.

The south-east side is, for some miles, a precipitous cliff about 200 feet high, broken here and there by watercourses coming down from the plateau behind. The plateau has an average height of about 500 feet at the southern end of the

island, but there is one peak rising to a height of at least 1800 feet. From our anchorage in Lusitania bay, we could see the slopes (covered with green coarse grass) rising abruptly from the line of surf, and we could hear the squeaking of the king penguins and the grunting of the sea-elephants. The latter spend much of their time asleep in the long grass close to the water.

We lowered a boat, and, after some adventures in the surf, a landing was



effected. There we found the remains of two huts—both in a wretched condition, dating back to the days of the sealers; but now all was deserted and desolate. The low ground was swampy and covered with long coarse grass.

The patches of swamp were filled with dense masses of vegetation, like bog-mosses, but which, as I have been informed, may be dwarfed flowering plants. Two small microscopic animals have been found in this "moss"—these are known

as "Water-bears" (*tardigrada*), their feet resembling those of bears. It is a curious fact that one of these is known in South Africa, North island of New Zealand, and in Fiji—all *warm* climates.

Not far from the huts were numbers of sea-elephants—huge, unwieldy creatures, some 25 feet long; the larger ones appear formidable, but they are not dangerous. The penguin rookery was on a small eminence. A number of young birds, about three weeks old, were huddled together, while the parents formed a circular line of defence and vigorously opposed any attempt on our part to approach the young too closely. We spent some time collecting specimens, which were brought safely on board.

The following day we steamed along the coast to the northward, and at 3 p.m. we were approaching Nugget point—a curious reef of pinnacle rocks, from which observations for latitude and longitude (with sextant and artificial horizon) have been taken by Captain Blackburn for the New Zealand Government.

When fairly close to the shore, we could make out two huts, and we could see the figure of a man standing at the door of the smaller one. We anchored close to the shore, and a boat was lowered amid great excitement. There was a big surf, but our friend, after pointing to the best landing-place, walked into the water and assisted in beaching the boat.

We learned that this solitary stranger had spent the last three months alone on the island. He had arrived as an oilman on board a small schooner which visits the place once a year to collect sea-elephant oil. On the last occasion, when the ship was ready to sail, MacKibben announced his intention of spending the winter on the island. He was deaf to all persuasion, and so stores had been landed for his use, and the ship returned to New Zealand. He was an Irishman, fifty-one years of age, and had spent over twenty years in the navy. He had been to the Arctic ocean on the paddle frigate *Valorous*—a relief vessel. He was a very quaint character, and seemed to thoroughly enjoy life on this wind-swept island. His hut of two rooms was warm and cosy; each room had a stove, the coal for which he had to carry from the depôt—a distance of 4 miles. He had plenty of ordinary ship's stores, and, for fresh meat, he used the hearts and tongues of the sea-elephants.

The next day we went up to the northern anchorage—about 5 miles from Nugget point. This is the best landing-place round the coast. We were soon on shore on a narrow strip of land which joins the mainland to a flat square-topped hill, beyond which a reef of rocks extends for some distance north. Here we obtained some skeletons of the sea-elephant, which we brought on board. The following day, May 30, we were to continue our voyage at 8 a.m. I had suggested to MacKibben on the previous night that he should return to civilization with us—a proposal he replied to as follows: "Why should I? I'm happy enough here, and have all I want. I'm glad to have seen you, but I don't want to leave the island." As we steamed away we dipped our flag to the old man, who waved farewell to us from the beach.

The history of Macquarie island and of its former occupation by sealing gangs is given at some length in a book called 'Murihiku,'* by M'Nab, formerly Minister of Lands in New Zealand. The Maori name signifies the last joint of the tail, and is applied to the extreme southern part of the South island, New Zealand.

The first "sealing fleet" to Macquarie consisted of six vessels. The first

* 'Murihiku,' by Robert MacNab (Whitecombe & Tombs, Ltd., 1909).

vessel sailed from Sydney September 19, 1810; this vessel was followed by a second on October 3, and so on.

Returning to Sydney in the following year, these vessels brought skins and oil in abundance; one vessel landed a cargo of not less than 35,000 skins. The masters of these vessels brought back reports of terrible weather met with off the coasts of Macquarie and Campbell islands.

It was no easy matter to keep the shore gangs supplied with food and other necessaries. A tale of storm and sea near this island is related about the brig *Concord* sent from Sydney with supplies for the sealing gangs on Macquarie ('Murihiku,' p. 180).

We left Macquarie on May 30, and the following day was passed in running before a fresh west-north-westerly gale with high sea.

Emerald Island, 57° 30' S., 162° 12' E.

May 31.—At noon we were 12 miles south of the supposed position of Emerald island.

First report. C. J. Nockells, to whom the nautical world is indebted for several careful observations in the *Atlantic*. He reports—

December 13, 1821.—“At 11 a.m. we saw the semblance of an island bearing east by north about 25 miles from our position. It appeared high with peaked mountains—about 30 miles long—the longer axis direct north-east and south-west.”

A propos of this locality, in 1894 the *Antarctic* sighted an immense barrier of ice from 40 to 60 miles long, north-west and south-east, highest point over 600 feet, dark grey in colour, and which, *at a distance*, resembled land. (58° 14' S., 162° 35' E.)

At 8 p.m. the *Nimrod* passed over the charted position of Emerald island. It was a fine, clear moonlight night—had any land been in the vicinity, it would have been sighted to a certainty. There was a high sea running, and sounding was impracticable.

In the *New Zealand Pilot*, 8th edit., 1908, it is recorded that “The supposed site of Emerald island was passed by United States Expedition (Wilkes) in January, 1841, without seeing the island or any indication of land.”

The Nimrod Group, 56° 30' S., 158° 30' W.

June 9.—At 8 a.m. the propeller was connected, as we were close to the assigned position of this group. We had obtained stellar observations just before daylight.

1828.—Captain Eilbeck of the *Nimrod*, when on a voyage from Port Jackson round the Horn, reported having seen this group; numerous birds were seen, and there was much marine vegetation floating in the vicinity. (56° 30' S., 158° 30' W.)

The *Nimrod* steamed over the assigned position at 1.15 p.m. without seeing anything of them; clear horizon of 9 miles. The sea was too heavy at noon to take a sounding. At 4 p.m., after steaming 16 miles to the east, the sea had moderated, but it was snowing hard and the ship was tossing about like a cork; however, we attempted a sounding, and paid out 1140 fathoms of wire without obtaining any bottom, and then hove in. I attached some importance to this sounding, as Biscoe, when searching in the vicinity (in 1831), had reported the appearance of a bank, which he was unable to prove or disprove, owing to the heavy weather prevailing at the time. After the sounding, I decided to continue

our voyage: the barometer was very low, and there were signs of a gale from south-west. The chief anxiety being the possibility of meeting with ice, sixteen hours of darkness out of twenty-four, with blinding snow squalls during the south-west gales, make things unpleasant.

1831.—Captain Biscoe, on his return voyage from Enderby Land to Hobart Town in the brig *Tula*, sought for this group without success; he reported having seen numerous birds and masses of floating vegetation, but no land.

Dougherty Island, 59° S., 120° W.

June 17.—At 8 a.m. we were (by dead reckoning) close to this island, but as the weather was overcast we could not be quite sure of our precise position. From observations at noon, we fixed our position at about 11 miles east of the position as given by Dougherty.

1841, *May* 29.—Captain Dougherty, of the whaler *James Stewart*, reported that he had passed an island within 3 cables when running at 10 knots. He estimated the length at 5 to 6 miles; direction of main axis north-east, to south-west, with high bluff at north-east end and low land at south-west. The intermediate low ground was covered with snow and ice. (59° S., 120° W.) ('Pacific Islands,' vol. 3, 3rd edit., 1900.)

1859, *September* 4.—Keates, of the *Louise* of Bristol, sighted an island in 59° 20' S., 119° 7' W.

1836.—Stannard, of the barque *Cingalese*, reported having, when in company with the ship *City of Agra*, been close to this island for three days. He describes it as being 6 miles long, 300 feet high at north-east, and very rugged at south-west, but no signs of snow or vegetation.

1890.—The same mariner reports having seen the island again. (Supplement, 'Pacific Islands,' vol. 3, corrected to June, 1903.)

From these reports there appeared every probability of sighting an island in the vicinity, and I determined to spend a little time searching the neighbourhood.

We continued eastward on the same parallel to the position as reported by Keates; we saw no signs of land. We then stood back to the westward. On June 18, good stellar observations, which were confirmed at noon, gave our position as within 4 miles of the charted position according to Dougherty. With a clear horizon, nothing was visible from the masthead. We then stood east again, and just as it was growing dark, we sailed over the position as reported by Keates. No signs of land, although it was clear enough to have made out any high land within 10 miles. We then continued eastward along 59° 20' S.

In *January*, 1894, the master of the steamship *Rimutaka* reports having passed over the charted position in fine clear weather, but without seeing any signs of land.

On *June* 25, 1904, Captain Scott, R.N., reports: "We arrived at the charted position of this island and found a depth of 2318 *fathoms*. It was remarkably clear, both before and after we took this sounding, and had there been an island within reasonable limits of its supposed position we could not have failed to see it" ('Voyage of the *Discovery*,' vol. 2, p. 401).

June 19.—We sighted two icebergs; the larger one answered the description given of Dougherty island. Ice was sighted again on June 21.

On June 27, at 4 p.m., we were 49 miles from the Diego Ramirez islands, a group of islets extending for 5 miles south-south-east to north-north-west;

the highest point is 587 feet above sea. These islands were sighted at 10 p.m. about 12 miles distant.

This was a very satisfactory landfall. It proved that, in these latitudes, it is quite possible to see land at a distance of 12 miles by *moonlight*, although such land may not be of any great extent or height. It was very satisfactory to know that our chronometers had behaved so well, notwithstanding the varying temperatures, etc., through which they had passed.

PRINCE HENRY OF PORTUGAL AND THE PROGRESS OF EXPLORATION.

By Prof. RAYMOND BEAZLEY, D. Litt.

I. A MINIMIZING school, which has found little to admire in the life and work of Christopher Columbus, has also dealt in its own fashion with Prince Henry of Portugal. Somewhat light-heartedly, perhaps, it has denied that the Infant had "ever formed any plans for the extension of ocean navigation beyond a point long previously reached by the Genoese, or ever thought of the route round Africa as a practical route to India." The picturesque title of the Navigator, in this view, is merely calculated to mislead, and the work of the so-called Navigator has practically no more concern with the development of nautical enterprise, for its own sake, than with that of geographic knowledge and science.*

In this paper I wish to call attention to certain evidence bearing upon this question—the at least incidental connection of Dom Henrique and his movement with exploration and with science—and the reader can judge whether the verdict just quoted completely satisfies the requirements of the case.

Now, the European expansion oversea led by Dom Henrique at the end of the Middle Ages and the beginning of Modern History—between the battle of Agincourt and the accession of Edward IV.—is of course more than a simple enterprise of discovery. It has its crusading, proselytizing, trading, and colonizing aspects also. As a mainly Portuguese undertaking, it is bound up with the political and social advancement of that people. As a human undertaking, it is concerned with practical objects. But is it quite destitute of exploring purpose and scientific result?

We could not perhaps find a more suggestive answer to this question than is given us by Djogo Gomes of Cintra, that body-servant, naval commander, and diplomatic agent of Prince Henry, who attended him in his last illness, and whose crude Latin so well expresses the practical man, who had taken part in the actions he records.

In the few words of introduction with which he brings us to the *Finding of the Azores*, *Inventio insularum de Açores*, Gomes has the temerity to differ, it would seem, from some modern criticism. "The Lord Infant Henry, *desiring to know the outer parts of the Western Ocean, whether they would find islands or mainland beyond the description of Ptolemy (i.e. beyond the furthest limits of ancient knowledge) sent out caravels to search for lands.*" † The same suggestion of general exploring

* See E. J. Payne, in 'Cambridge Modern History,' vol. 1 (1902), pp. 12, 13, a weak passage, as it seems to me, in an often admirable article.

† " . . . Cupiens scire partes extraneas Oceani occidentis, si invenirent insulas a terram firmam ultra descriptionem Tolomei, misit caravelas ad quarendum terras," Gomes, 'De inventione Guineae, De insulis primo inventis in mari oceano,' etc., edited by Dr. Schmeller in the *Abhandlungen* of the Royal Bavarian Academy of Sciences, Class I., vol. 4, part iii. (a), p. 40.