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### Notes on the Sub-Antarctic Islands

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# THE SCOTTISH GEOGRAPHICAL MAGAZINE.

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## NOTES ON THE SUB-ANTARCTIC ISLANDS.

By W. S. PILLANS, F.R.S.G.S.

(*With Maps.*)

FAR away in the Southern Ocean to the south of New Zealand are several groups of uninhabited islands which are believed by geologists to be the tops of the mountains of a submerged continent of which New Zealand formed a part. These islands have come into notoriety, not on account of their natural fertility or products, but because they lie in the track of vessels trading between Australian ports and Europe, *via* Cape Horn. The prevailing winds in these latitudes are westerly, and the weather generally thick and foggy, with the result that many a good ship, posted "missing" at Lloyd's, has been wrecked with the loss of all hands on the rugged cliffs which form the westerly coasts of these rock-bound islands.

For some years depôts of provisions, with huts and boathouses furnished with boats, have been established by the New Zealand Government on the islands for the benefit of castaway mariners who may be so fortunate as to reach the shore alive. The New Zealand Government's steamer *Hinemoa* takes annually a trip round these islands in order to see that the depôts, etc., are in good order, and to bring away any survivors of the crews of vessels that may have been wrecked there during the previous twelve months. The *Hinemoa* visits the Snares, Auckland, and Campbell groups, and the Antipodes and Bounty Islands. Through the courtesy of the Minister of Marine of New Zealand the writer of these notes was permitted to go as a passenger on the *Hinemoa* during her last trip, and perhaps a short description of these remote British possessions may interest the readers of the Royal Scottish Geographical Society.

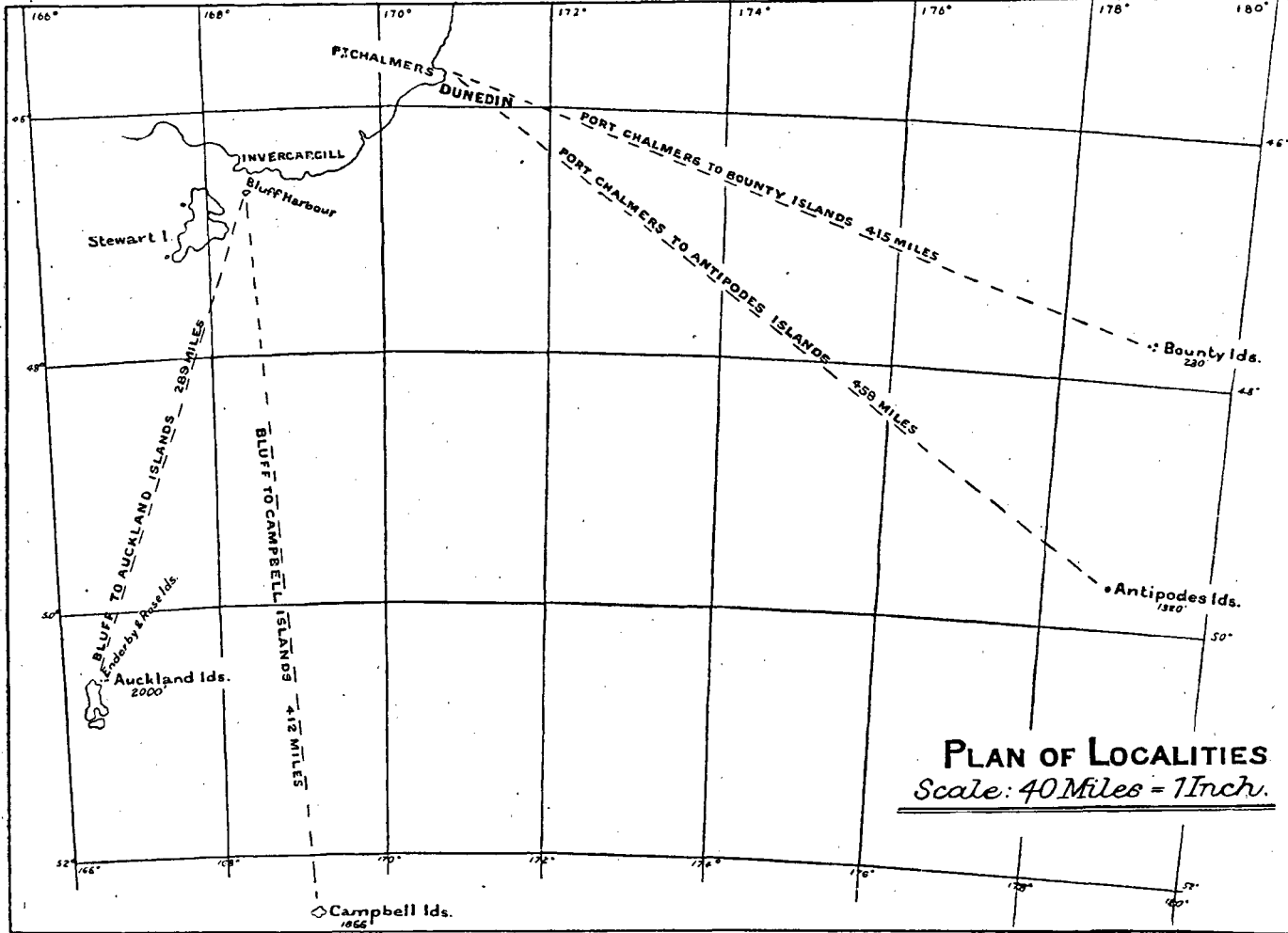
### THE SNARES.

These islands, situated about sixty miles south of the southern extremity of New Zealand, in  $48^{\circ} 6' S.$  lat. and  $166^{\circ} 29' E.$  long., were first

visited. They consist of one large island, over a mile long and about three quarters of a mile wide, and several smaller islets and outlying rocks. They have steep rocky shores, and, more particularly on the western side, precipitous cliffs. The Auckland Islands, 150 miles further south, bear an evil reputation by reason of the wrecks and loss of life *known* to have occurred there, but it is probable that the Snares have taken a still greater toll of life and shipping, though the records of such disasters are few because there have been no survivors to tell the tale. The Snares lie not only in the track of vessels going round Cape Horn from Australia, but also of those coming to New Zealand ports from Europe *via* the Cape of Good Hope.

Before landing we went in the boat with flaring torches into a deep cave, disturbing a large Fur Seal which dashed past the boat to gain the entrance, and also through a long natural tunnel in the cliffs. There was little more than room in some places for the boat to pass through, but in others the roofs of both cave and tunnel were high and vaulted, giving back resounding echoes to the shouts of our Maori crew. On approaching the landing-place near the *dépôt* our boat was surrounded by several large Sea-lions—a gigantic kind of seal. They came quite close to the boat, roaring defiance at us, and sometimes biting viciously at the blades of the oars. There are large numbers of tufted and crested Penguins breeding all over the island, and on approaching their rookeries the clamour and smell are almost overpowering. Several other kinds of sea-birds were also breeding on the island. One of these, the Southern Skua or Sea-hawk, is most rapacious in its habits. This bird, called by ornithologists *Megalestris antarctica*, is very similar in appearance to its congener the Great Skua (*Megalestris catarrhactes*) or Bonxie of the Shetland Islanders, which is now nearly extinct. Round the nests of the Sea-hawks we found the mangled remains of a great variety of sea-birds—Cape Pigeons, Mutton-birds, and more than one variety of the smaller Petrels, beside the shells of innumerable eggs that had been stolen from the penguin rookeries. It is wise to take a stick to defend yourself with, as the Sea-hawks are very bold and fierce in the defence of their nests, dashing down savagely on the intruder. A photographer of our party was knocked down by one of these birds which swooped down on him while he was engaged in photographing its nest and young ones. Mutton-birds and smaller varieties of Petrel were also nesting in burrows in the peaty soil and under the ledges of rocks, and it is said that that most beautiful little sea-bird the Cape Pigeon (*Daption capensis*) also breeds here, though we did not find any of their nests. The white-capped Mollymauk is also said to breed on the Snares toward the end of January, but we were more than two months too early to find them nesting.

It is strange, if these islands were ever joined by land to New Zealand, that none of the flightless birds, such as the Kiwi, Kakapo, and Weka, which inhabit the south-west of the Middle Island and Stewart's Island are not found on the Snares. There are, however, several curious land-birds, some of which are not found in any other part of the world; notably the Snares Snipe (*Gallinago heugeli*). These birds, though they can fly, are not strong on the wing, and several were caught by hand.



There is also the tawny Fern-bird (*Sphenœceus fulvus*), and a beautiful little jet black Wood Robin (*Miro dannefordi*) also peculiar to the Snares.

The tops of these islands, which rise to a height of several hundred feet, are clothed with coarse tussocks and other grasses. Lower down, and reaching in some places on the east coast almost to high-water mark, is bush composed of a robust shrub known to botanists as *Olearia lyallii*, which is here of a very gnarled and distorted habit of growth consequent on the exposed situation. In the bush are innumerable tracks and paths made by the furred and feathered inhabitants, and it is interesting to meet bands of Penguins on their way to and from the sea, or come upon a Sea-lion sleeping peacefully in the shelter of the bush. The soil is peaty, and there is near the depôt a small stream of dark, porter-coloured water.

Goats were turned out some years ago on the Snares with a view to affording food for shipwrecked mariners. For some time they seemed to thrive fairly well, but have since gradually died out, and Captain Bollons, the commander of the *Hinemoa*, told me he did not believe there was now a single live goat on the islands, which he attributes to the continual cold and wet of this inclement climate. The Snares were discovered by Vancouver in 1791.

#### AUCKLAND ISLANDS.

The next islands visited were those of the Auckland group about 150 miles south of the Snares,  $50^{\circ} 48' S.$  to  $166^{\circ} E.$  They were discovered in 1806 by Captain Abraham Bristow in the ship *Ocean*, belonging to Samuel Enderby, and were called after Lord Auckland. Bristow returned the following year in the *Sarah*, and took formal possession of the islands in the name of Great Britain. He turned out pigs, the descendants of which are still fairly numerous in some parts of the Main Island.

In later times sheep have been turned out but they have not thriven, though some still survive. It is believed that, not being tended and shorn, the long fleeces of several years' growth, when saturated with rain, become so heavy that the unfortunate animals have not the strength to carry them, especially where the soil is soft and boggy, and so sink and perish from exhaustion. Goats have done somewhat better, and on Enderby Island, where there was formerly a considerable whaling station, cattle and rabbits are fairly abundant.

The indigenous fauna of the Auckland Islands is very interesting and comprises several birds which are not to be found elsewhere, viz. the Flightless Duck (*Nesonetta aucklandica*) and the Auckland Island Shag (*Phalacrocorax colensoi*), both of which are numerous along the shores of some of the islands. There is also a Sea-duck called the Southern Merganser (*Mergus australis*) which inhabits bays and inlets. It is very rare, and so far as I know none were seen by any member of the expedition. It is believed by naturalists to be identical with the Merganser which inhabits the Northern Hemisphere and is also found in Brazil. It is puzzling to think how these birds got to the Aucklands when it is remembered that there are none of the species nearer than Brazil.

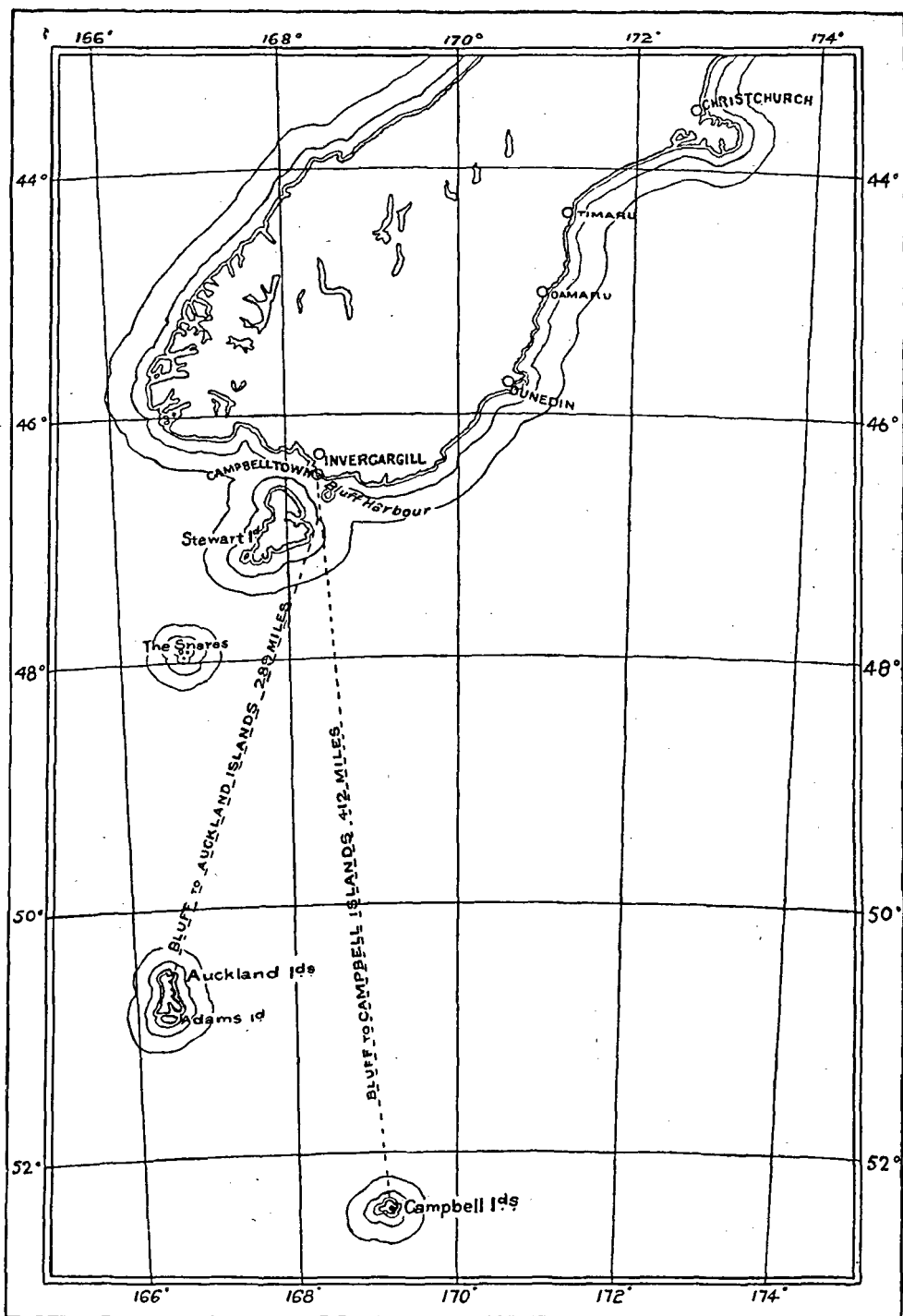
Penguins, Petrels of several kinds, and Whale-birds (*Prion banksi*) and (*P. capensis*), also two kinds of Terns and the small Gulls, *Larus scopulinus* and *Larus bullerii*, nest on these islands, and are as usual tyrannised over by their enemies the Sea-hawks. Those most magnificent of all sea-birds, the Royal Albatross (*Diomedea regia*) and the Wandering Albatross (*D. exulans*), breed on Adam's Island, the most southerly of the group. The Sooty Albatross (*Phoebastria fuliginosa*), and at least one species of Mollymauk build along the tops of the cliffs. Those most ubiquitous of sea-birds, the Black-backed Gulls of the Southern Hemisphere (*Larus dominicanus*), were met with on all the islands we visited during the trip. This bird is almost as rapacious in his habits as his northern congener (*Larus marinus*), so often seen on the British coast.

The bush which clothes the sides of the inlets from the water's edge to in some places five or six hundred feet up the hills, is composed for the most part of a kind of Rata or Iron-wood, gnarled and twisted into weird and grotesque forms by the strong winds.

In these gloomy and damp forests may be seen the Tui or Parson-bird, the Red-fronted Parrakeet, and the Yellow-breasted Tit, and occasionally one hears the sweet notes of the Bell-bird. No doubt the presence of these New Zealand land-birds is a strong argument in favour of the theory that these islands were once joined by land to New Zealand. There are also some other land-birds peculiar to the Aucklands. A snipe (*Gallinago aucklandica*), a Sand Plover (*Thinornis rossi*) and a Rail (*Hypotaenidia mülleri*). The Quail Hawk of New Zealand (*Hieracidea Novæ Zealandiæ*) is also common.

The mammalia are represented by the Fur Seal (*Arctocephalus forsteri*), which are now very scarce and shy, and the Sea-lions (*A. hookeri*), which are still fairly numerous and bold. The former were at one time very numerous, and attracted to these islands many sealing vessels whose crews slaughtered them in great numbers; from 25,000 skins and upwards was no uncommon cargo for one sealing trip, according to the records and logs of sealing vessels at the beginning of last century. The sealing ventures were mostly in the hands of Sydney merchants, and a good many of the cargoes were sent to Canton.

The Sea-lion is one of the largest varieties of seals. Some of the old males are splendid fellows with manes like lions, and look very formidable when they stand up on their fore flippers and roar at you. They are not the least afraid, and if you go too near, think nothing of charging you, when you have to be very smart in getting out of their way—as they can run nearly as fast as a man on a smooth beach and faster than a man over rough rocks or in thick bush. They bring their hind flippers forward and use them as legs, and are in this respect quite differently formed from the seals one meets with on the Scottish coast and Shetland Islands, whose only means of progression on land is by wriggling themselves along on their bellies by the aid of their fore flippers. It is really surprising how fast Sea-lions can go, as their gait on land is most unwieldy, though in the water they are most agile and swift. They also seem to travel about a great deal, as their well-worn paths show; and



MAP SHOWING POSITION OF  
AUCKLAND AND CAMPBELL ISLANDS  
RELATIVE TO THE MIDDLE ISLAND  
SCALE, 100 MILES = 1 INCH



Captain Musgrave in his *Narrative of the Wreck of the "Grafton"* mentions having found tracks of seals nearly to the tops of the mountains, and about four miles from the water. They open their mouths very wide when they roar, showing a truly formidable set of teeth. The males are of a brownish black colour, and many of the old ones are fully 12 ft. long and must weigh close on a ton, or even more, when fat. The females, called "sea bears" by the sealers, are generally timid, and are much smaller than the males and of a dirty yellow colour.

The Auckland Group consists of five islands. The largest, called Auckland Island, is 30 miles long, with an average width of 15 miles, and contains 114,200 acres. It is very rough and hilly, the highest hill, Mount Eden, at the head of Port Ross, being 1325 ft. high. The next largest island is in the extreme south, and is called Adam's Island. It rises to a height of about 2000 feet, and contains 2500 acres. The other islands are Disappointment Island to the north-west, and Enderby, 1580 acres; Ewing and Rose Islands, 415 acres, to the north-east. Like all the Sub-Antarctic islands, this group is bounded by high rugged cliffs on the western side, but on the eastern side is indented by many inlets affording safe anchorage. There are three Government depôts for castaway mariners, viz. at Port Ross, Norman's Inlet, and at the western end of the Western Arm of Carnley Harbour.

When we visited Port Ross on the 16th November 1907, we found at the depôt the 15 survivors of the four-masted barque *Dundonald*, which had been wrecked on Disappointment Island on the 7th of March previous. The captain, his son, and 10 of the crew were drowned at the time of the wreck, and the first mate, after succeeding in getting ashore, died of exposure. The survivors subsisted on sea-birds and seals and the tuberous roots of a plant known to botanists as *Stillocarpa polaris*, for seven months, and after dreadful hardships, at last succeeded in making a boat of canvas stretched on a frame of sticks, by means of which four of them eventually reached the main island, and after finding the depôt, returned in the Government boat to the rescue of their shipmates.

On Disappointment Island large numbers of Mollymauks breed. Young Mollymauks (and also young Albatross) remain in the vicinity of the nests where they were hatched for nearly twelve months, and the parent birds come at intervals and feed them, and only turn them out and desert them when preparing to lay in the early spring. It is probably to this habit that the survivors of the *Dundonald* are indebted for most of their sustenance. All through the winter there were plenty of these fat, overgrown nestlings, nearly as big as their parents, and yet unable to fly, thus falling an easy prey to the hungry mariners. Had the nestlings of the Mollymauk, like those of most other birds, become fledged and flown away a few weeks after hatching, the castaways would have fared considerably worse than they did. They seemed very glad to see us, poor fellows, though when we found them they were in good plight—living in the depôt hut, where they found clothing, stores, and a rifle and cartridges, with which they kept themselves supplied with beef by shooting the cattle on Enderby Island.

The Auckland Islands have been the scene of many shipping disasters and much loss of life:—the *Grafton* and *Minerva* in 1864; the *General Grant* in 1866, when 73 lives were lost; the *Derry Castle* in 1887; the *Campadri* in 1891, and the *Anjou* in 1905, all being wrecked there. The captain and most of the crew of the *Daphne* (a small craft sent down to search for the treasure believed to be in the wreck of the *General Grant*) were drowned when passing through Adam's Straits in a whale boat. The *Daphne* was not lost, as was at one time reported, but was sailed back to New Zealand by the cook (a Kanaka) and a boy, the sole survivors of her crew.

After leaving a band of scientists and their staff, a party of 14, at the depôt in Carnley Harbour, the *Hinemoa* proceeded on her course.

#### CAMPBELL ISLAND.

This island, the only one of those we visited which has any permanent human inhabitants, was next visited. It is sometimes called the Campbell Group, but is really one large island, with several small outlying rocks. The area is 28,000 acres, and it is taken up as a sheep run. There are at present about 10,000 sheep, which are tended by three shepherds who all hail from the Shetland Islands. There are several hills in Campbell Island over 1200 ft. high, the highest peak, Mount Honey, being 1866 feet in height. There are two good harbours on the east side, named North East Bay and Perseverance Bay, and the west coast, as in all the Sub-Antarctic groups, is rock-bound and precipitous.

Campbell Island is situated in long. 169° 09' E. and lat. 53° 34' S., and was discovered by Captain Fred. Hazelburgh in the brig *Perseverance* in 1812. There is practically no bush, only narrow belts of scrub in some places round the shores of the inlets. This scrub is a kind of grass-tree (Epacrid) known to botanists as *Dracophyllum*. The land, which is of a very peaty nature, is covered with rough tussock grass, except where the grass has been eaten out by the sheep, in which places the land is completely taken possession of by a kind of lily with a yellow flower called *Bulbinella Hookeri*. It is said that pigs are the only animals that will eat the bulbinella, so I suppose when the sheep have eaten out all the grass, they will have to be taken off, and a pig ranch started to take the place of the sheep run, unless English grasses are found to thrive there, which is doubtful.

All the sea-birds I have mentioned as inhabiting the Aucklands are to be found here, with the exception of the Wandering Albatross, and perhaps also the Mutton-bird. There is also a Campbell Island Shag (*Phalacrocorax Campbelli*), but this is so nearly allied to the Auckland Island Shag that it is doubtful if they are distinct. One member of our party reported having seen a pair of House Sparrows which had their nest in some rocks. Linnets were also reported to have been seen. How these birds got there is a puzzle. They must have got blown over from New Zealand, as it is most unlikely that they were imported by man.

The writer was also surprised to see a pair of Godwits which, from

their movements, appeared to have a nest not far off. The Godwit is a bird that breeds in Liberia, and makes annual migrations to New Zealand, where it rarely (if ever) breeds. This pair on Campbell Island must surely have lost their bearings, and gone south instead of north to find a breeding place.

A few Fur Seals and plenty of Sea-lions are still to be seen at Campbell Island, and it is stated that the Sea Elephant (*Macrorhinus leoninus*) is sometimes met with.

The French astronomical expedition stayed for some time on Campbell Island in 1874, to observe the transit of Venus. There still remain evidences of their occupation and the graves of some of the Frenchmen who died there. The ruins of the huts of some of the old time sealers and whalers are also visible. After landing another party of scientists and their camp equipage to camp in the scrub on the shore of Perseverance Harbour, about a mile from the sheep-station, the *Hinemoa* continued her journey.

#### ANTIPODES ISLAND.

This island is distant 400 miles east of Campbell Island, and lies to the SE. of New Zealand, in lat.  $47^{\circ} 44'$  S., and long.  $178^{\circ} 20'$  E. The island has an area of 1450 acres, and there are several outlying islands and rocks near it. It received its name because it is the nearest land to the true antipodes of Greenwich. As a matter of fact it is not very near, as the true antipodes of Antipodes Island is somewhere near Barfleur, in France.

There are two boat landings on the east side, and also a fairly safe anchorage sheltered from the prevailing westerly winds. The top of the island is clothed with tussock grass and other rough herbage, and cattle were turned out in 1889, and also in 1903 and 1904, but from all accounts they and nine sheep put on the island in 1888 have all died out. They evidently cannot stand the continued cold and wet of that awful climate.

A vessel called the *Spirit of Dawn* was wrecked on the Antipodes in 1893. The captain and five others were drowned, and the survivors, eleven in number, do not seem to have had the pluck and enterprise of the *Dundonald's* men. They did not explore the island, but remained near the place where they landed for eighty-seven days, living on the raw flesh of sea-birds and suffering great hardships from exposure, when all the time they were within a very short distance of the depôt, where they would have found plenty of provisions and clothes and a hut to shelter them. On the eighty-eighth day they were found by the *Hinemoa* and taken to New Zealand.

There are swarms of sea-birds nesting on the Antipodes, principally Penguins, *Catarrhactes Chrysocome*, the tufted Penguin, and *C. alateri*, the big crested Penguin, whose rookeries run down to close to high water mark. There is also a curious little bird peculiar to the island called the Antipodes Island Lark (*Anthus stiendachneri*) which flits about the penguin rookeries, picking up the insects with which they are infested. The Antipodes Island Parrakeet (*Cyanorhamphus cyanurus*) is

also unknown elsewhere. There is another bird called the Yellowish Parrakeet (*Cyanorhamphus erythrotis*), but this bird is also found in the Macquarie Islands.

Strange to say there are no Seals or Sea-lions on the Antipodes. I do not know whether they were exterminated by the sealers or whether they never existed there at all. The fact remains that they are not there—with the result that the sea round the island swarms with fish. While we were lying at anchor in the *Hinemoa* some of the crew started fishing. No sooner were the lines down than the baits were taken, and the fish hauled as fast as possible, often two at a time. The fish caught is nearly allied to the blue-cod of the New Zealand coast, and is delicious eating, and “all hands and the cook” revelled in fish for dinner and next morning’s breakfast.

#### BOUNTY ISLANDS.

These islands, which were next visited, form a group of six rocky islands, with a total area of 335 acres, and are situated in lat. 47° 44' S., and long. 179° 7' E., 110 miles north of Antipodes Island. They are a wonderful sight, as they are practically 335 acres of birds sitting nearly as close to each other as turnips in a turnip field. There are no land-birds, and practically no vegetation exists. Penguins and Mollymauks seem to be in millions, and as you wade through among the nesting birds they attack your legs viciously, and the noise and stench are appalling. The places where the Penguins can land are few. I sat for some time near one of the landings, and it was very interesting to see the bathing parties come in from the sea, land on the top of a roller, and scramble up the bank. There was a continuous stream of them, and they met a continuous stream of dirty Penguins going down for a dip. It was amusing to see how the clean ones shied off the dirty ones. They mostly kept to their right, and were a very orderly crowd, reminding one of human beings passing to and fro in a crowded thoroughfare—say Princes Street, Edinburgh, on a Saturday evening. There is something inexpressibly funny in the gait of the Penguin as he waddles along swinging his flippers like arms.

There also are considerable numbers of a beautiful little Whale-bird (*Prion Slateri*) sometimes called the Dove Petrel. When nesting these birds sit in pairs on the rocks and coo to each other just like Doves.

We saw no Sea-lions, but Fur Seals, of which a few still remain, were once very numerous, and it was the habit of the old time sealers to land a boat’s crew on the islands, and leave them to camp there for weeks, and kill seals. How they managed to exist in that clamour and stench is a marvel. They must have stretched a sail to catch rain water for drinking, for all the springs on the islands must be more or less polluted.

The Bounty Islands were sighted by Bligh and named after the British ship *Bounty*, of which he was commander when her crew mutinied in 1789 at Tahiti, afterwards settling in Pitcairn Island. The only land between the islands and the antarctic continent is the Macquarie Islands. These, though exploited in the matter of penguin and sea elephant oil

by a New Zealand firm, belong to the Tasmanian Government, so are not within the beat of the *Hinemoa*. On some of the older maps there appear the Emerald Isle to the south-west of Campbell Island, and Cornwallis Island about half-way between the Bounty and Chatham Island. The *Times Atlas*, published 1895, has Emerald Isle only. As a matter of fact neither Emerald nor Cornwallis Island exist.

The geological formation of all the sub-antarctic islands is chiefly volcanic. In many places the basalt cliffs present a very imposing and picturesque appearance. In Campbell Island, however, there are reported to be sedimentary formations of Tertiary age, and marine fossils have been found in limestone deposits.

From the Bounties the *Hinemoa* returned to Campbell, a distance of 480 miles, and had a most tempestuous voyage. After taking on board the Campbell Island contingent of the Scientific Expedition, we steamed to the Aucklands, where we picked up the scientists we had left there, and also the survivors of the *Dundonald*, and then sailed for the Bluff, New Zealand.

The whole trip round the islands, which takes from ten days to a fortnight in the month of November, is, to a lover of Nature, delightful—but the climate is almost without intermission most tempestuous. It is sometimes possible for a visitor to New Zealand, by applying to the Minister of Marine, to obtain a passage on the *Hinemoa*, but the writer would not advise any one to go but a hardy, active man, and one who does not suffer from seasickness, however rough it is. One thing, however, I can guarantee, is the greatest courtesy and kindness from the captain, officers, and crew of the *Hinemoa*.

Above all, let no one go expecting to make a haul of ornithological specimens. The New Zealand Government is most strict in its protection of the birds and their eggs. I applied for a permit to take some specimens for a museum in which I am interested in England, and received a telegram from the Colonial Secretary to the effect that I must not touch any protected birds or their eggs. The protected list includes Penguins, Petrels, and Gulls, which is pretty comprehensive. "Penguins" means all varieties of penguins, "Petrels" includes all the petrel tribe from the Albatross, Mollymauk, and Mutton-bird, down to the little Diving-petrel not much bigger than a lark, and "Gulls" comprises pretty well every other sea-bird with the exception perhaps of Shags.

The *Hinemoa* is a beautiful yacht-like vessel of 282 tons—length 220 feet, beam 25 feet. She is employed going round the coast supplying the lighthouses with stores, etc. She also makes an annual visit to the Kermadec Islands, which are also under the New Zealand Government.

The Scientific Expedition, to which I have several times referred, was under the auspices of the New Zealand Government, and composed of many of the leading scientists of the dominion. There were botanists, zoologists, geologists, entomologists, ichthyologists, magnetic observers, and photographers, and when the results of their researches, which they intend to publish in book form, is given to the world, we shall probably learn all that is to be known of the Sub-antarctic Islands.