Reading for Pleasure

Fact, fiction, and fury over the Falklands

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When the news came of the Argentinian landings on the Falklands and South Georgia on 2 April, it recalled my considerable interest in Antarctica and the sub-Antarctic islands. For in 1970-5 I had organised medical studies on the South African National Antarctic Expedition members who overwinter annually at SANAE base in Dronning Maud Land, Antarctica, immediately east of Coats Land and the United Kingdom base at Halley Bay. Recollection of the books and articles on the Falklands and Scotia Sea that I had read was a profound experience, adding to the empathy one felt for the island kelpers, their sheep, and penguin friends; and no less to the warriors doing their duty according to their respective consciences.

East and West Falklands are surrounded by some 200 smaller islands within a radius of 40 miles (64 km), a not inconsiderable hazard for ships. The Falkland Island dependencies include the more frigid South Georgia, where the cold Antarctic waters merge with the not-so-cold South Atlantic ocean, and flora and wild life become very sparse (N Rankin, *Antarctic Isle: Wild Life in South Georgia*, 1951*). Also included, and south of 60°S, are South Orkneys, 750 miles (1200 km) south of Port Stanley, the South Shetlands, and Graham Land of the Antarctic Peninsula, which are ecologically and environmentally protected by the 1959 Antarctic Treaty, to which the United Kingdom, Argentina, Chile, and nine other nations were the original signatories.

Early Falkland days

It is fitting to place at the top of the book list Charles Darwin's *Voyage of the Beagle* (1845), or in a more readable form, granddaughter Nora Barlow's *Charles Darwin and the Voyage of the Beagle* (1945), or Alan Moorhead's *Darwin and the Beagle* (1969). This year we commemorate the centenary of the death of Darwin, whose radical theory of the process of natural selection as a main driving force in evolution was distilled on the voyage. No one would cavil at some modification of Darwin's original concept in the light of the exponential increase in scientific knowledge over the past century. His pre-eminence as one of science's immortals remains undiminished.

At the Falklands in March 1834, barely a year after Britain formally took possession, Darwin describes the habits of the Magellanic penguin, "the jackass brayer," one of the four southern penguins common to the Falklands. Species of flora collected here by Darwin are included in *Flora Antarctica* (1847) by Joseph Hooker, later to succeed his father as director of

Kew Gardens. Darwin has a fine coloured plate, and description, of *Canis antarcticus* in *The Zoology of the Voyage of HMS Beagle, Mammalia* (1839, plate iv)—this is the loup-renard of Bougainville, the Falkland Island fox (hence Fox Bay, West Falkland). They were really big foxes, a scourge on the sheep farms, and are now virtually extinct. One of the characteristic features of the Falklands are the stone-rivers; Darwin described one such stream of stones near Berkeley Sound, just north of present-day Stanley, and now known to be one of the largest in the Falklands.

Within the same decade one of the greatest explorers of the nineteenth century came to the Falklands. In *A Voyage of Discovery and Research in the Southern and Antarctic Regions during the years 1839-43* (1847), Captain Sir James Clark Ross (with Joseph Hooker as naturalist) commented on one of the striking features of Falkland vegetation, "tussac grass." Tussock grass (W Davies, *The Grasslands of the Falkland Islands*, 1939) was a prominent aspect of the coastal and upland vegetation in the Falklands but has now been grazed out by the sheep and cattle on the main islands.

The heroic era

The early years of this century were witness to the heroic period of Antarctic exploration. In 1902 the Scottish National Antarctic Expedition (led by W S Bruce, director of the Scottish Oceanographical Laboratory) carried out physical, botanical, and zoological studies in the Falklands and the Weddell Sea. In 70°S they became iced in and decided to overwinter on the unclaimed Laurie Island in 61°S and some 800 miles (1280 km) south of Port Stanley. *Voyage of the Scotia* (1906) by R N R Brown (botanist), R C Mossman (meteorologist), and J H H Pirie deals with their explorations and experiences. Pirie, who was geologist, bacteriologist, and medical officer (an intriguing combination), makes this, the only comment on medical matters: "found them all with their heads buried like the proverbial ostrich, crocked with snowblindness; their eyes felt as if hot sand were in them and the tears simply streamed over . . . darkness and cocaine indicated." Later Shackleton, on South Georgia in May 1916, was to use adrenaline for this distressing, albeit minor, condition.

When the spring of 1903 came, the naturalists explored the Falkland and South Orkney Islands, while the *Scotia* sailed to Buenos Aires for repairs and brought back Argentinian meteorologists, who took over their winter hut to set up a weather station (OrCADAS). The expedition reached the Antarctic Continent early in March 1904, naming the area Coats Land after their major sponsors, and reached the Clyde via Gough Island and Cape Town in July. Their scientific results appeared in 10 massive volumes during the years 1907-20 (W S Bruce, *Report of the Scientific Results of the Voyage of S Y "Scotia"*), and includes Pirie's *Notes on Antarctic Bacteriology* (vol 3, 1912, pp 137-48).

The Argentinian Orcadas station has been manned on this Falkland Dependency island uninterruptedly to this day, the

*Date given is that of the first and original publication. Some of the books quoted have been reprinted, and could have been the book actually read.

longest habitation in Antarctica (J M Moneta, *Cuatro Anos en las Orcadas del Sur*, 1954).

The epic climb and account (*South*, 1919) by Shackleton over the mountains of South Georgia in May 1916 to bring rescue to the men remaining on Elephant Island has few peers for sheer grim, unrelenting effort and single-minded determination (A Lansing, *Endurance: Shackleton's incredible boat journey*, 1959). Only twice, 1955 and 1976, have British survey expeditions retraced Shackleton's crossing of South Georgia; the 1955 leader commented: "I do not know how they did it, except they had to!" Frank A Worsley (*Shackleton's boat journey* (1940)) was one of two men who accompanied Shackleton all the way. His racy account, full of humour despite the circumstances, but without any illustrations or maps, should be read in conjunction with Sir Ernest Shackleton's *South*. Both Dr L D A Hussey's *South with Shackleton* (1949) and Frank Wild's *Shackleton's Last Voyage* (1923) depict inspirational endurance by men who remained on Elephant Island until rescued by Shackleton on the *Yelcho* loaned by the Chilean Government.

Naval battle at Falklands

The previous major war episode affecting the Falklands was entirely a naval affair in 1914. Vice-Admiral Count Maximilian von Spee came raiding in the south Pacific and Atlantic. After sinking two British warships off Chile, the German squadron met swift retribution when it appeared off the Falklands, hoping to capture the strategically important islands. The British South Atlantic Squadron had, however, been secretly reinforced (R H C Verner, *The Battle Cruisers at the Action of the Falklands*, 1920), and on sighting two of the German ships came out from Port William in full force at 9 am on 8 December 1914. A running engagement ensued to the south-east for nearly 200 miles (320 km), with the sinking of four of the five German cruisers and their supply ships by 9.23 that evening. The two British battle-cruisers fired over 1200 12-inch shells and the supporting three armoured cruisers nearly 2000 6-inch shells at 12 000-15 000 yards range to achieve this, and took nearly 80 hits without major damage. Shades of modern missiles, unseen at 25-50 km away—other days, other ways. Spencer Cooper's *The Battle of the Falklands* (1919) summed up the outcome aptly—"a brilliant British victory, carried out with determination and verve."

Flame and the "furious fifties"

Writing this on the weekends of 22 and 29 May, the manifold sounds of flame and fury echo over East Falkland, with notable help from the "furious fifties." Impressions of sea and weather came best from fictional works, such as Hammond Innes's *White South* (1949) and Wilbur Smith's *Hungry as the Sea* (1978) set in the Scotia and Weddell Seas; or the agony of David Lewis (*Ice Bird*, 1975), whose single-handed return voyage from the Antarctic Peninsula took him to the South Orkneys and past South Georgia. They were more meaningful than cold statistics, "93% cloud and 49 h sunshine per month in summer" (S Orkneys); "with deep snow in winter, ice-cream in many flavours figured prominently in winter menus" (South Georgia); and "roaring blizzard with visibility less than a yard" (Falklands).

Life and times of the Falklanders

A succession of illustrated books, all titled *Falkland Islands*, form a time sequence. V Boyson (1924) deals extensively with the early history from 1592 to 1914, and was the one that really held my attention. This was followed by J M Ellis (1934) and Cawkell *et al* (1960), who consider mainly the development and administration of the islands. Strange (1972) presents the current position, and has a map excellent for following land

activities. Ian Strange, a Falklander and biologist, has written several books on Falkland birds, seals, marine mammals, etc.

Nan Brown's *Antarctic Housewife* (1971) has a witty and refreshing look at life on South Georgia from 1954 to 1956—a time when over a thousand whalers occupied Norwegian, British, and Argentinian whaling stations during the summer season. Who would have thought that the Interflora agency at Grytviken (Pot Bay—for the thousands of pots originally there for rendering whale oil) could be a success? Nan Brown took orders of £1000 for Christmas flowers for home delivery, and even persuaded the Argentinians, notorious for their meanness, to chip in with an additional quota.

The doctor at nearby Leith harbour had a busy time with an unprecedented number of appendicectomies. The reason was obscure, "some believed that the patients underwent the operation as a relief from boredom, while others considered the doctor was bored." None the less, appendicitis is probably the major medical emergency in young fit men who overwinter in Antarctic and sub-Antarctic bases.¹⁻³

Margaret Taylor wrote *Focus on the Falkland Islands* (1971) after a short visit in 1970. In addition to encounters with sheep, sea-lions, and penguins she casts a rather critical eye on the way of life in Stanley. Stanley did not seem to have changed much from Shackleton's impression over 50 years previously: "Stanley is a place of one street with the slaughter-house at one end and the cemetery at the other."

Outside Stanley virtually the only occupation is sheep farming. It is difficult to speculate how the sheep and their shepherds are coping with the Argentine invasion and British reoccupation. Although comparisons are unhelpful, mutton of the finest quality was 2d and 4d per lb 80 years ago (R N R Brown *et al*, *Voyage of the Scotia*, 1906).

While the Falklanders have been traditionally called kelpers because of the vast beds of seaweed they harvested around their shores, this is now a misnomer. In recent years liquid extracts of brown algae have been marketed, and the United Kingdom brand has been exported to 26 listed places, including the Falkland Islands (V J Chapman and D J Chapman, *Seaweeds and their Uses*, 1980). The Chapmans mention Falkland seaweed only very briefly.

World of penguins and others

Who will save the penguins? The Falklands are home to some of the largest penguin rookeries in southern waters. They include the inquisitive, roly-poly, and quarrelsome gentoo; the rockhopper, using bill and toe-claws for rock climbing "footholds"; the macaroni with characteristic orange plumes; the Magellanic with his raucous jackass bray; and a single colony of the majestic and dignified kings, snobs to their wing tips. *Penguins* (1967), by J Sparks and T Soper, contains superb illustrations of all types of penguin, making identification at London and other zoos a simple matter. E R Pettingill's *Penguin Summer* (1960), O S Pettingill's *Another Penguin Summer* (1975), and many of Bernard Stonehouse's illustrations in *Penguins* (1968) were all photographed, mainly in colour, in the Falklands or South Georgia.

Their numbers are a fraction of what they were. But how will those remaining fare with oil spills? Nan Brown describes oil tankers discharging fuel oil at South Georgia, and the oil residues and muck were pumped overboard before tank-cleaning and taking on whale oil. The oiled-up penguins could not preen their feathers with resultant starvation and death. She set up a penguin rehabilitation centre, treating a motley crew of 25 penguins, most of whom were eventually returned to their natural environment. With the vast number of oil tankers rounding Africa at the Cape for many years now, oil spills of varying degree have occurred, and thousands of Cape Jackass penguins have been treated at a conservation centre near Cape Town.⁴ Rescuing oiled-up penguins is a low priority, but one hopes that they will not be forgotten entirely.

And the same ecological disaster has been spelt out for the seals (*Seals of the World*, by Judith King, 1964, and Gavin Maxwell, 1967). Only the sea-lion has been seen on the Falklands for many years past. The southern fur-seal, the elephant seal, and leopard seal of the nineteenth century have been killed out, or no longer come to the islands.

Antarctic whaling was born at Grytviken, South Georgia, where Shackleton lies buried in the whalers' graveyard, says Douglas Liversidge (*The Whale Killers*, 1963) and F D Ommaney (*Lost Leviathan*, 1971), two books that complement one another in an all-embracing survey and scientific analysis of whales and whaling stations. But the whaling of Nan Brown's times is all gone now, and Herman Melville's classic *Moby Dick or the White Whale* (1851) is but a memory. Incidentally, it was the scrap dealers at the Argentinian Pesca station early this year who, intentionally or in a moment of foolishness, raised the Argentine flag there that is the proximate and symbolic cause of the conflict.

Will man, not the whales and birds, harvest out the krill? Already Chileans, Norwegians, Russians, and Japanese are processing the shrimp-like krill into fish sticks, fish paste, and cattle feed (T Suzuki, *Fish and Krill Protein: Processing Technology*, 1981).

Many doctors have now been to the far south, some to study man's response in the frozen continent⁵ and others as medical officers on island or continental bases in isolation—for instance, in the Falkland dependencies⁶ or nearby.⁷

May I commend this list as an hors d'oeuvres for interest and enjoyment before the avalanche of military, political, and other 1982 reports of matters Falkland come flooding into the bookshops and on to your home bookshelves.

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MATERIA NON MEDICA

Rural retirement

Nine-thirty, rain or shine, two eager figures stand by the roadside—me and my terrier. Shortly, a land rover arrives with Jim (builder), Joe (transport manager), Ernie (wayleave officer for the Electricity Board), John (bank manager), and Dave (on community service). After a few miles we arrive to be met by Mike (paediatrician, now smallholder and cabinet maker). Soon arrive Charles (engineer), Frank (industrial accountant), and Steve (municipal architect). Apart from Dave we are all retired and some over 70. Our business is nature conservation and most will be out on Saturday as well.

On the path up are several kinds of Silurian coral nearly 400 million years old. This is one of my favourite reserves, only 12 acres, predominantly oak and yew but with a substantial open area where hazel, birch, bramble, and especially old man's beard (*clematis*) need to be kept in check. There is a butterfly walk and this summer I hope we will see again the silver-washed and both pearl-bordered fritillaries, four types of skipper, the wood white, and the marbled white. The stinking hellebore is nearly in bloom, and soon we shall see coltsfoot, primroses, violets, cowslips, and then marjoram, the different vetches. The common spotted and pyramidal orchids will be there and perhaps once again the bee orchid. Jim suggests who does what. He is thinning the oaks to let in more light and to provide fence posts for other reserves and cordwood. We spare the honeysuckle, the food plant of the white admiral, which was seen only a mile away last year. The posts, and cordwood which we shall sell for firewood, have to be taken down 100 yards to be neatly stacked. In summer when the ground is firmer it will be taken out. At the same time the smaller branches have to be burnt.

Meanwhile, Charles and I are assigned the task of dividing the reserve with posts for future rotation of maintenance. Hard crinoidal limestone only a few inches below the surface requires much use of the crowbar before hammering in the oak posts which Charles will later paint a distinctive colour. When we have finished our marker posts we set about repairing some of the steps on the steeper parts of the reserve. Joe splits off some short oak posts and cross pieces for us. Concealed by a yew tree I see a fallow deer bounding past only 10 yards away.

Dusk is falling and we discuss how to cut and bundle branches from the silver birch felled last week, and get the bundles down the quarter of a mile to where Jim can pick them up and deliver them to the race-course for the jumps. Five more bundles of 25 will make up the 100 we have arranged to sell. Making tight bundles is a skilled technique which Joe has taught us. It has been a good day with little rain. We say goodbye to the local contingent. The Land Rover takes us home pleasantly tired from the physical exertion. Dave asks, "Do you do this

for nothing?" I had been going to say that if pressed we would pay for the privilege, but a likely future treasurer might have overheard.—B E MILES, retired physician, Hereford.

Sunrise from Maternity

"I'm sorry I got you up so early." "Oh, no. It was marvellous." It had been, too. The night had brought rain and the sharp scent of resin rose from the conifer as I passed under it. The birds had just started their dawn song, and the bats were taking their last pre-roost flight. "Ah," said Elizabeth, when I told her all this, "but have you seen the sunrise from Maternity?"

No doubt I shall have the opportunity. Maternity is the most frequent source of the night summons, but also of our more unnerving experiences, so there is seldom much time or inclination for admiring sunrises. But our conversation left me wondering once again why the rural hospitals of developing countries, always desperately short of funds, do not exploit their assets. The idea originated in the Transkei when I had returned from my customary evening stroll in the wood behind the hospital. "There are people who would pay £100 or more a week to see the birds here," I mused. "Why not start a small pension? Run on the health farm principle you wouldn't need to give visitors anything but carrots." Which would be just as well, as carrots were about the only vegetable we had.

Here in Zambia the adventure holiday element could be added, the only transport being the bus, which runs its unscheduled way from Lusaka to Chipata untroubled by any consideration of the needs of its passengers. Intending travellers may, and often do, wait up to five hours only to find that it is full. Once here, though, you can see fantastic birds on your doorstep. Imagine watching our own dear familiar garden warbler consorting with weavers, mannikins, and the raucous tropical bou-bou. A sparrow hawk spent the afternoon on a nearby branch, and the same day a Livingstone's Trogon took off from the tree outside my window with a spectacular flash of scarlet wings. For those interested in insects the scene is equally absorbing. I found a grasshopper that looked as if it had been designed by a mad cubist artist, even its minute matchstick legs blocked out in a geometric pattern of primary colours. Add tropical sunsets and tropical storms and all the passing show of African life, and it could be the holiday of the year.

And one day I, too, may rise of my own volition and watch the sun rise from Maternity.—ANNE SAVAGE, Zambia.