

4. 1842 – Governor Richard Moody and Joseph Hooker

Between 1841 and 1850 two men from very different backgrounds wrote extensively about the environment of the Islands and their future potential. The reports that Richard Moody and Joseph Hooker wrote have been very influential for the subsequent development of the Islands.

§ a. Richard Moody was the first Governor of the Islands, and one of his first tasks was to make an assessment of their economic potential. In his detailed reports he provides one of the earliest accounts of the natural environment of the Islands.

On 23 August 1841 Lord Stanley's Commission document appointed Moody as Governor, and gave precise instructions as to how Moody's power was to be exercised:

Influence, persuasion rather than direct authority ... It is a growing opinion among Naval and Mercantile Men that a settlement on the Falkland Islands would be of essential service to our merchant vessels on the voyage to our more distant possessions. It may be a mere guard to occupy a post in the vicinity of the best harbour is all that can be effected with advantage. It may be a more extensive occupation by British settlers would lead to increased intercourse and improved facilities for trade. These are questions that can only be answered by experience ... It is the object of the Lt.Governor to give increased protection and security to British commerce, and not to launch into large expense for the sake of mere territory contained in the Falkland Islands. Your Despatches will be framed with a view to give information, which may guide [HM Queen], in her ultimate decision. ¹

The Lt.Governor landed at Port Louis on 16 January 1842. On 5 March 1842 ² Moody reported that the climate was generally mild in winter, and also on the general

¹ CO399/2; *Colonial Office Outward Letter book; 1841-1853*; Colonial Office Records; Public Record Office; Kew; 1841.

² CO78/5; Colonial Office Records; Public Record Office; Kew; 1842.

healthiness of life on the Islands. He also reports on the discovery that Tussac Grass is of great value in feeding cattle. Bernhardson commented: 'Moody's observations on Tussac's abundance demonstrate that, despite local disturbance, before expansion of sheep grazing, even East Falkland retained significant biologically productive Tussac habitat.'³

On 1 October 1842 Moody gave a detailed report on the general environment of the Islands and also the potential of the Islands from an economic and future settlement perspective. His Despatch included a detailed report from Joseph Hooker - the botanist on the James Clark Ross expedition. Moody reports that the soil would not be very fertile without the addition of some form of ash, but the pasturage for sheep was excellent. Moody estimates that two acres would be required to feed one Southdown sheep. Moody recommended the 'firing [of] the old withered patches of grass' not eaten by the cattle to improve fertility. He commends the practice of burning by adding his personal experience supported 'the good effects of firing I have seen in many places.'⁴

Moody said that his friend Hooker:

Has given very great attention to this [Tussac Grass] useful and interesting plant which is true grass and is in very much more abundance than other grasses ... During several long rides into the country I have found the Tussac flourishing most vigorously in spots exposed to the sea.⁵

Moody commented that the Tussac would make good thatching for housing during the winter. He reports that 'the land in the Northern Peninsula was commonly called by the settlers 'The North Camp' and that there were many troops of wild horses in the area.'

³ Bernhardson, W; (1989) unpublished Ph.D. dissertation - *Land and Life in the Falkland Islands*; p245.

⁴ CO399/2; *Colonial Office Outward Letter book; 1841-1853*; Colonial Office Records; Public Record Office; Kew; 1842.

⁵ CO78/5; Colonial Office Records; Public Record Office; Kew; 1842.

It is clear from the comments and footnotes added to this Despatch of Moody, when they were later received in the Colonial Office, that the Royal Geographical Society of London was very interested in Moody's initial reports and findings.

Moody enclosed Hooker's complete report, in which Hooker stated that:

The remarkable increase and fine condition of the Cattle recently introduced to the Islands naturally call attention to the grasses in a country devoid of trees or of any vegetable production likely to prove more important.⁶

He commented that:

It might be advisable to treat this plant [Tussac] as hay as it is in Britain ... In the winter months ... were it possible to introduce grouse into the Islands it may be as well to mention that the diddle-dee belongs to the same genus as the Crowberry on which that bird feeds.⁷

Hooker's report contains detailed remarks on all the major species of plants in the Falklands, and his report concluded with the significant statement:

Considering the scanty nature of the flora of the Islands and the rapidity with which their several good qualities have been discovered by so small a number of individuals there can remain little doubt that many of them only require a little care to become eminently useful. For the most important, the grasses, nature has done almost all. The others will want a little art, and a very little I presume.⁸

On 18 November Moody reported that he had planted Southern Beech Trees (*Nothofagus* spp.) which he had brought from South America.

⁶ Moody, R. (1843) *Information respecting the Falkland Island*. London; Charles Knight & Co.

⁷ CO78/5; Colonial Office Records; Public Record Office; Kew; 1842.

⁸ CO78/5; Colonial Office Records; Public Record Office; Kew; 1842.

On 11 Feb 1843 Moody was asked to send back seeds of Tussac Grass for the Highland Agricultural Society,⁹ and on 1 March 1843 Moody sent Murrell Robinson to Montevideo to obtain Gauchos and trained horses for the purpose of domesticating the wild cattle.¹⁰ On 19 October 1843 Moody wrote:

It appears to me that the origin and continuance of this Colony are wrapped up entirely in considerations of a maritime nature whether viewed politically or with reference to shipping engaged in Commerce.¹¹

Moody wrote, on 27 December 1843, to Lord Stanley following a sea trip he had taken in the *Philomel*, reporting on his visit to Darwin's Harbour and Choiseul Sound thus:

It is the best tract of land that I have seen in the Falkland Islands. The cattle are very numerous, of a large size and in fine order ... it is important that a township be reserved on the isthmus.¹²

Moody warns against speculation that large reserves of coal can be found, but he adds:

Sheep farming for the exportation of coarse or blanket wool would meet with great success. Sheep thrive here admirably with very little attention, and the poor breed of South America fill out and improve in their flesh and weight of fleece ... A small flock of South American sheep which I purchased myself are doing remarkably well and did not feel the winter although afflicted with disease caught from [another] flock infected with scab.¹³

Moody wrote later, in this Despatch that it was his intention to frame 'an enactment' which will check the progress of the sheep scab disease. He reported that there were

⁹ CO399/1; *Colonial Office Outward Letter book; 1832-1847* Colonial Office Records; Public Record Office; Kew; 1842.

¹⁰ CO78/7; Colonial Office Records; Public Record Office; Kew; 1843.

¹¹ CO78/7; Colonial Office Records; Public Record Office; Kew; 1843.

¹² CO78/7; Colonial Office Records; Public Record Office; Kew; 1843.

¹³ CO78/7; Colonial Office Records; Public Record Office; Kew; 1843.

no competent shepherds in the Colony but that this would be ‘of course altered when sheep farming is adopted by persons proposing to make it their livelihood.’

With respect to the future prospects for agriculture Moody reports that:

The oats look very healthy ... and although during the past week we have had some very bad weather with hail, wheat would have answered this year particularly in a sheltered valley ... Many of the trees from the Straits of Magellan are doing well but I think they require more moisture in the atmosphere. They are not fit yet to transplant to England. I am, from a cause of which I am ignorant, unsuccessful with potatoes, but the ground is of a very clayey nature, and I look for better results at Port William where there is more sand.¹⁴

On 30 December 1843 Moody replied to an enquiry from London concerning the reserves of peat to be found in the Falklands and the size of the peat bogs:

Peat is in abundance and easily accessible ... it could furnish all the steamers likely to pass around Cape Horn for many years ... There are at least 56 square miles [of peat] varying in depth from two to ten feet ... about 300 million cubic yards ... When dried and stacked it would amount to, say 122 million tons.¹⁵

Moody calculated the calorific value of the peat available in the area around Stanley, and he carefully considered the possibility that peat might provide suitable fuel for steam ships rounding Cape Horn. This illustrates well a constant theme in the thinking behind the colonisation of the Islands, *i.e.* the potential of the Islands for maritime use (particularly by the Royal Navy) as an extension of British power and influence in the region.

¹⁴ CO78/7; Colonial Office Records; Public Record Office; Kew; 1843.

¹⁵ CO399/1; *Colonial Office Outward Letter book; 1832-1847* Colonial Office Records; Public Record Office; Kew; 1843.

There was great interest in Tussac Grass in Britain. Moody reported that he has forwarded Tussac seed at a cost of £2 and 10 shillings per pound.¹⁶ Moody also wrote that he was forwarding a quantity of geological specimens, and that he doubted whether coal would be discovered.

Moody foreshadowed the highly profitable whaling industry of the 20th century when he reported that five whales 50 to 60 feet in length had been captured. He observed that this event illustrated what he had previously stated:

[That] a profitable livelihood might be possible for settlers in the islands from a whale fishery ... very many whales are seen in this season in the sound and other ports of the Islands - a circumstance quite worthy of attention among a few in England.¹⁷

The Colonial Secretary commented on a report from Moody to Lord Grey on 14 November 1846 regarding the prosperous state of the Colony following the move from Anson to Stanley as the Capital of the Colony. Moody appears to have had very mixed feelings about the move, but once it had been effected he was keen to report on the advantages for the future life and growth of the Colony.¹⁸

Moody signed a contract, in March 1846, with the Lafone brothers granting them sole permission to cull the wild cattle. Samuel Lafone was a British merchant resident in Montevideo, and the Company that he and his brother Alexander owned was the forerunner of the Falkland Islands Company. Moody's Despatches reveal that he was uneasy about granting the Lafone brothers a monopolistic position in the Islands. Nevertheless, the contract gave the brothers exclusive rights to kill the wild cattle on the southern peninsula which now bears their name - Lafonia - and their arrival on the Falklands scene was a turning point in the Islands history. The future activities and ethos of the most dominant commercial company in the history of the Islands are presaged in this Colonial Office Letter book. In a letter to James Booth (a shareholder

¹⁶ CO78/8; Colonial Office Records; Public Record Office; Kew; 10 January 1844 and 26 January 1844.

¹⁷ CO78/8; Colonial Office Records; Public Record Office; Kew; 2 May 1844.

¹⁸ CO399/2; *Colonial Office Outward Letter book; 1841-1853*; Colonial Office Records; Public Record Office; Kew; 1846.

in the new Company) from Lord Grey, on 3 March 1851, reference is made to the original name of the Falkland Islands Company, when it made its request for a Charter, as being: 'The Royal Falkland Islands, Cattle, Seal, & Whale Fishery Company.' The Company has always been justly proud of its Royal Charter, and its commercial interests have never been confined to just the sheep farming industry.

§ b. Joseph Hooker was the naturalist on the expedition of Captain James Clark Ross, which arrived in the Islands in April 1842. Hooker's father, William Hooker, was the Director of the Royal Botanic Gardens at Kew. The James Clark Ross Expedition arrived in the Islands aboard HMS *Erebus* and HMS *Terror*. After a voyage of 135 days Hooker wrote, on 5 April 1842, to his father at Kew, about his less than favourable first impressions of the Falklands:

At 5pm we anchored at Port Louis having run up the Sound in a thick mist and pouring rain which had they come before would have rendered it impossible for us to get in. The stiff westerly breeze now blowing would have kept us at sea all tomorrow so that we are not a little delighted to be fast by the nose again. Such a wretched place you never saw! Keguelen's [sic] Land is a paradise to it.¹⁹

Hooker overcame his first poor impressions, and soon became good friends with Governor Moody. Hooker acted as a valuable consultant to the Governor who was making an assessment of the resources of the fledgling colony. Three weeks after his arrival in the Islands, on 25 April 1842, Hooker wrote to his aunt (Lady Palgrave):

The country appears too cold for wheat; but for turnips, oats, rye, barley, etc. it will do well and may in time become very important where ships can victual either in going round or returning from the Horn. Lt. Moody seems a very active and intelligent young man, most anxious to improve the colony and gain every information respecting its products. So he has engaged me on the botany and more especially on the grasses of the soil; he finds that his fodder grass will not make good hay; nor will the sedge do for thatching, or will either

¹⁹ Hooker, J; (1842) *Correspondence 1839-1845 Antarctic Expedition*; Royal Botanic Gardens Kew Archive.

make a bourn. As you may suppose I am very proud in being useful to him and have found excellent triticum for thatching on the rocky coasts, and also some poa and agrotidies for sheep lawns which he will try to make useful. Besides the quantity of fresh meat that we can obtain here, wild geese abound on the hills and are easily shot; when roasted they quite equal in size and flavour an English bird. Indeed of these geese and rabbits we have more than we can eat: snipes and wild duck of two kinds are also most abundant.²⁰

Joseph Hooker accompanied Governor Moody on a visit to the location of what was to become Stanley Harbour. On 26 May 1842, Hooker wrote to his sister:

I have been with on a very pleasant excursion to Port William with the Governor, who went to look out the proposed site of a town nearer the sea than Port Louis, at the head of this long harbour ... Like other parts of the Island it is quite barren of trees and the whole country covered with peat bogs or grasslands which afford excellent fodder for the herds of wild cattle and troops of horses. Near the sea coast a very fine grass grows in immense abundance called Tussac, and a very different plant from what I sent a description of to the Governor, and which is very common here, also called Tussac, but the true Tussac forms quite an extraordinary feature in the landscape, covering immense tracts of land especially on a sandy soil; round its roots it forms immense balls which stick up 5 and 6 feet on the ground and are often as much in diameter: on top the grass throws up its stems and long leaves which hang down all around and are often 6 or 7 feet long.²¹

It is not clear what species of 'fine grass' to which Hooker is referring. It could be Whitegrass, or possibly Mountain Blue Grass (*Poa alopecurus*). It is of note that Hooker commented that 'true' Tussac Grass covers 'immense tracts of land.'

Sixty years later the Swedish scientist Carl Skottsberg graphically described the effects of open range grazing on the environment which Hooker had observed thus:

²⁰ *ibid.*

²¹ *ibid.*

Several forage species had declined in abundance: Tussac was mostly confined to small unstocked islands; cinnamon grass had become very localised and was a candidate for extinction; blue mountain grass had become so rare that it was now becoming extinct.²²

But Skottsberg was not completely correct in his assertions. Tussac Grass has declined considerably, and although Mountain Grass and Cinnamon Grass (*Hierochloë redolens*) have declined, and in the case of Cinnamon Grass become localised, they have not become extinct.

Richard Moody's successor as Governor was Governor George Rennie. In one of Rennie's first Despatches to London on 28 December 1848 he continues the pattern that is seen throughout the history of the Colony of Governors of the Islands making detailed reports on the settlement and economic capabilities of the Islands. Further comment is made later in this dissertation about the fact that despite numerous Governors making observations and recommendations about the use of the natural environment of the Islands, and the Colony's economic activities, in most instances very little notice was taken of their words and little change effected.

Rennie's report elicited the following reply on 14 April 1849 from Earl Grey, the Secretary of State for the Colonies:

I have read the Despatch with much interest, and I have to express to you my acknowledgement for the ability with which it was drawn up. The opinions, which you have formed on the leading topics of interest in regard to the settlement, appear to me to be very judicious.²³

When Moody arrived, the population of the Islands on June 1842 was 78; by the time that Rennie left the Islands, in 1855, the population had risen to nearly 500.²⁴ This increase in the human population of the Islands had a major impact on its natural

²² Bernhardson, W; (1989); op.cit.; p497.

²³ CO399/2; Colonial Office Records; Public Record Office; Kew; *Colonial Office Outward Letter book; 1841-1853*; 1849.

²⁴ CO714/55 *Alphabetical Index 1841-1870*; Colonial Office Records; Public Records Office; Kew.

environment. Thus by 1850 the scene is set, and the direction of the future human and economic development of the Islands had largely been established.