

VOYAGE OF THE "MARY AND SALLY" TO MAC-
 QUARIE ISLAND FOR THE PURPOSE OF OBTAIN-
 ING SEA ELEPHANT OIL AND SEAL SKINS.

(November 16, 1813—March 13, 1814.)

By

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Plate XXI.

(Read 10th October, 1932.)

This vessel of 130 tons, Captain James Kelly, master, is noted in the "Sydney Gazette" of 18.9.32 as having left Sydney Cove for the Derwent, en route for Macquarie Island. After a stay of nearly two months at Hobart Town her voyage proper commenced on 16th November, 1813.

The brig was no stranger to the Southern Antarctic Islands, and, since her arrival from Bengal, had made voyages in the two previous years to Campbell and Macquarie Islands, under the command of Captain Feen.

At this time, two and a half years after its discovery, although the fur-bearing seal had been so depleted in numbers, Macquarie Island was still the home of large numbers of sea elephants.

The object of the voyage was primarily to obtain oil from the latter and the skins of the fur-bearing seal.

The narrative that follows is taken from a manuscript journal in the handwriting of Captain James Kelly. This came into the possession of the writer some five years ago from the widow of the late Joseph Kelly, a younger son of the captain.

Written on old hand-made paper, with ink that has kept its freshness, and bound in kangaroo-skin leather, this log is of the greatest interest.

Robert McNab, the great historian, knew of no logs bearing on sealing at Macquarie Island; and by this log, taken in conjunction with the account of the Bellinghausen Russian Expedition (¹) we are able to visualise the daily routine, with the hardship and peril of the sealing gangs and the little ships that ministered to them.

On 16th November, 1813, the master of the brig writes:

“ At 6 p.m. fresh breezes and cloudy, the extremes of the land West by South to North East. Tasman's Head bore N.N. East, distance 4 leagues. From which I take my departure for Macquarie Island I allow 12 miles set Easterly”

The last sentence is most significant. The island lies some 850 miles south and a little east of Tasmania, and the prevailing winds are westerly. Captain Kelly at that date had no instrument (chronometer) by which he could estimate his longitude; that is, his distance east or west of Greenwich.

He could estimate, however, by the sextant and by “ dead reckoning ” the distance south that he had travelled; that is, his latitude.

It was, therefore, of great importance to him to know what “ set ” he was making to the eastward, as then when he had made his proper latitude all that would be required would be for him to steer either east or west, according to his estimated position, until he made his land fall. -

Sailing steadily, with light winds and cloudy weather, he notes, five days later: “ I allow 9 miles set to Easterly this 24 hours.”

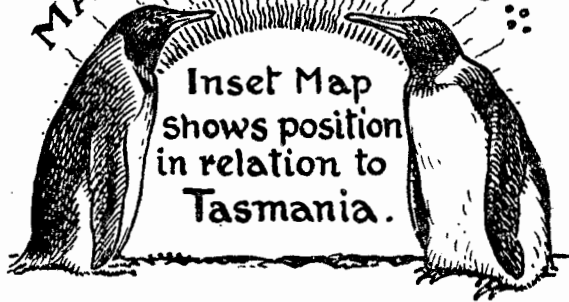
The days passed without much incident, and on the 24th the small boat is given a coat of damm, a black shag is seen, and the weather becomes worse.

Strong gales, with heavy snow and sleet, are noted on succeeding days, until 29th November, when he wore ship to the S.W., and bore up for the island. Heavy weather and poor conditions prevented land being sighted until next day, when at noon the land was seen bearing east distance 3 leagues, at a latitude of 54° 20' south.

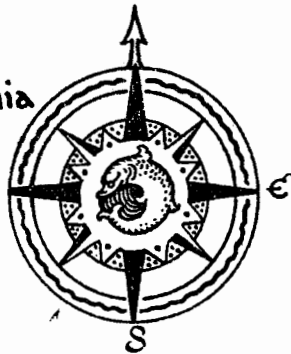
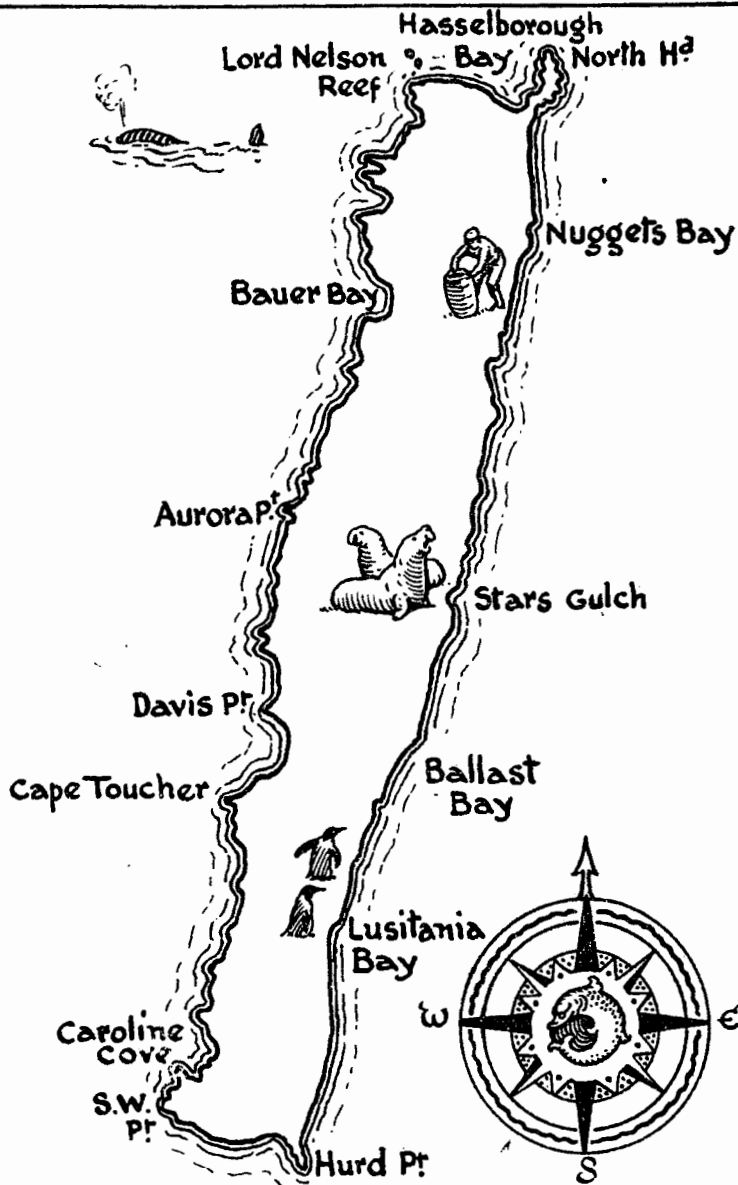
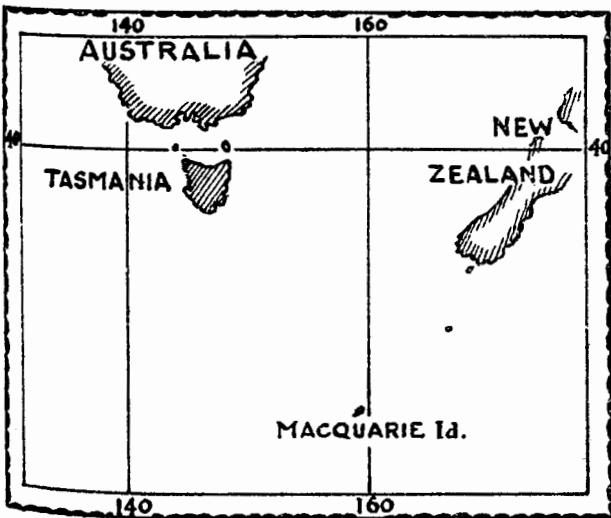
On 1st December, at half-past seven, the “ Mary and Sally ” came to with the best bower (anchor) in 13 fathoms. Her anchorage was reached by sailing past the north end and down the east coast of the island until sheltered by the land from the westerly wind. On sending a boat on shore “ to look at the place, found enough Elephant to begin oiling ”; and so “ at daylight began to land hoops and provisions and empty casks.”

On the same day nine men, with two officers, were appointed to land and procure skins and oil.

MACQUARIE ISLAND



Inset Map shows position in relation to Tasmania.



On the following day "what other stores were wanted were landed and in particular cooper's gear and stooks and hoops."

The landing party reported that they had not seen one seal (fur). Preparations were also made for landing the salt.

Here it may be said that salt was indispensable for curing the skins of the fur-bearing seal, and was mostly procured from Kangaroo Island.

It is probable that, before putting into the Derwent from Sydney, the brig may have gone to Kangaroo Island to obtain a supply.

On the ship preparations were made for rafting off the oil, and slings were made from a pair of foretopgallant stays for the same.

On shore the party was killing and procuring oil, and on the 5th ten casks, containing 630 gallons, were brought off by the boat and stowed away.

As well as killing in the neighbourhood of the works, sea elephants were being taken in Hasselborough Bay, on the western side of the north end of the island. Their blubber was rafted round by the ship's boat, which had previously landed empty casks and salt from the ship.

By the 16th of the month 70 casks of oil were stowed on board, and next day the weather changed to southeasterly, and the "Mary and Sally" had to slip her cable and run for it. The log for the day reads:

"First and middle parts light airs at N.W. Employed clearing the decks. At 4 a.m. set in fresh breezes at E. with rain. Hoisted the boat in and got a spring and slip rope on to the cable ready to run as soon as the wind should veer a little either ways, not being able to clear the land on either tacks. At 10 the wind came to S.E. by East, got all sail set, at half-past 10 cut the cable and cleared the North Head. At noon fresh gales and hazey weather, standing to the S.W. The North Head bore N.E. by E. the distance 7 miles."

After four days, the weather improving, the brig returned to her anchorage, using the small bower with 12 fathoms, but was unable to pick up the anchor she had slipped. Again the weather changed, and

"At half past 3 (a.m.) hard gales and heavy sea from the N.E. caused us to cut from our anchor and run around the South End of the Island."

Another week was passed, with hazy weather, hard gales, and continued seas, until on the 29th December the wind came to S.W., and the brig hauled round the north bluff to her anchorage.

"Hove short and got the best bower on board, hove up the small bower and secured it"—so the log reads, and it was no mean feat of seamanship either, to have secured both the anchors she had had to abandon previously.

The log makes no mention of Christmas Day for 25th December, and merely remarks on 31st December that another 34 casks of oil were got on board.

The new year (1814) commenced with weather still westerly, with the people employed on board as necessary, and on shore assisting the works. On the next day, however, came a change, and the log speaks for itself:

"Began with moderate breezes at N.W. and hazy weather at midnight wind N.N.E. Hoisted the boat in and got a slip rope and got a buoy on the cable, at 2 a.m. wind N.E. by E. Slipped the cable and ran to the S.E. At 3 strong gales, close reefed the topsails, at 5 hard gales at East, reefed the foresail. Carrying a heavy press of sail to clear the Island. With heavy rain at 6 saw the South End bearing N.W. distance 4 miles, took in all sail and ran under poles. Still blowing very hard at East, at 10 more moderate. Course W. by S. at Noon wind S.S.E. and cross sea, hove too head S.W., Latitude 54.54."

The next day, at 2 p.m., the wind chopped to the S.W., and blew with increasing force, and at midnight a heavy sea was shipped, but did no damage. The brig bore up for the anchorage, and "at noon got the end of the cable onboard and all things clear for receiving oil."

The anchorage from which the ship was forced to run at 2 a.m. of the previous day was the North-Eastern Bay of later navigators. Ainsworth (2) describes a gale there on 5th February, 1912, as follows:

"A tremendous sea worked up, and the ocean for the distance of a mile from the shore was simply a seething boil of foam. Hugh waves dashed onshore running yards beyond the usual marks and threatening to sweep across the Isthmus. The top of the waves could be seen flying over Anchor rock, seventy feet high and spray was blown right across the Isthmus."

One can picture the little brig, in the darkness and under such conditions, trying to work her way to windward, so as to clear the southern end of the island.

The responsibility of her master, who had to keep a sufficiency of sail and yet not lose her spars, and his relief when a safe offing had been effected, and he could order sail to be taken in and the ship allowed to run under bare poles.

A week of quiet followed, work going on all the while on shore, and on 10th January 10 hogsheads of salt were started into the captain's cabin ready to put oil into the casks.

The next day Captain Kelly came to a decision to try the west, or weather, side of the island, and, slipping his cable, ran round the northern end. With moderate breezes at S.S.E. he closed in to the land. His dual purpose was to obtain firewood from the wreck and look for fur seals.

This wreck, the first to occur on Macquarie Island, was of the "Campbell Macquarie," 248 tons, which, on 10th June, 1812, ran aground, and afterwards went to pieces. Her crew of 12 Europeans and 30 Lascars were all got ashore. She had nearly three suits of sails, and when the weather cleared up the crew succeeded in getting them on shore, where they were stored in a hut, which was afterwards accidentally destroyed by fire. All her stores were lost, independently of which she had taken on board 2000 prime skins, 36 tons of salt, and 118 tons of coal in lieu of ballast.

While on the island four of the Lascars died, also a seaman of the "Mary and Sally" (then lying there) named Thomas McGowen (?).

The ship's boat returned with the wood from the wreck, and at four went back to the cove, where 59 seal skins were procured. A further 296 skins were taken in the next 24 hours, when the brig returned by the northern route to the anchorage. At North-Eastern Bay the boat, having been stove, was sent on shore for repairs, and the skins salted.

No less than 69 casks of oil were taken on board in the three succeeding days, and the log for 18th January records:

"Cleaning out the fore peak and stowing oil. Latter part employed getting the things onboard ready to move to Ballast Bay as the Elephants is all killed at the N. end of the Island."

"All hands and boats employed in moving the pots and houses to the new location and the empty casks were also rafted along the coast. We find at Ballast Bay all the salt casks belonging to Geo. Howe, all moved from the place where they was left, appear to be washed away by the surf some a mile distant from each other and several stove with the rocks."

So reads the log of the 21st of January. Two days later the "Mary and Sally" weighed, and brought to in the bay, about half a mile from the shore, with the best bower in 15 fathoms.

After four days' westerly weather came signs of a change, until at 5.30 p.m. of 28th January a change of wind forced the brig to slip her cable and run. On the same day "the people" were put on a reduced ration of 1 lb. of bread (i.e., biscuit) per week.

This easterly weather continued for ten days, varying from strong to moderate winds, and in one squall the square mainsail was split all to pieces, as Kelly puts it, "the sail being very old and unrepairable." As a substitute the next day the foresail was bent for a mainsail. Some difficulty was experienced on 10th February in light, baffling winds, in regaining the anchorage in Ballast Bay. At daylight the next day some of the shore party came off to assist getting the anchor. The log records: "Ran a hawser to the cable, hove up the small bower and hauled the vessel to our anchor we left on the 28th of last month."

During this fortnight of easterly gales, whilst the brig was at sea, her shore party reported that, owing to bad weather, they had got but little oil and a small lot of 30 seal skins.

Preparations for leaving the island now commenced. Oil was rafted off, and in a blow from the north-west three casks, two hogsheads, and one 100-gallon cask were blown away and lost.

"Two boats gone to the North Head to bring a part of the old staves onboard and shooks. All the bad and broken staves we were obliged to burn for fire as our fire wood was all used for stowing the casks."

So runs the entry for 10th February.

The following four days were full of activity; 73 more casks of oil and four casks of fresh water were taken on

board, with a loss of one cask of oil and two of water on rafting from the beach.

The cooper was employed shaking out the empty casks to stow away.

All stores were off and stowed below, and the log for Saturday, 19th, read:

"Began with light airs and variable, employed getting all the things off from the shore and stowing same away, hoisted the boats in and stowed them and hove short, at half past seven p.m. light breezes at North, weighed and made sail, got the anchor on the gunnels, bound for the River Derwent."

"At midnight North End of the Island bore West 5 miles from which I take my departure."

The little brig, heavily laden, made her way slowly to the northward towards home.

Strong gales were experienced, and on the second day's run, at half-past 3, a heavy sea was shipped, which stove the boat over the stern. No other damage was received, however.

Her progress was slow, and it was not until 8th March (18 days from leaving Macquarie Island) that Van Diemen's Land was sighted. On that day, at 3 p.m.: "Saw Oyster Id. W. by N. 7-8 leagues. The brig was shipping and making a lot of water in the hard gale."

During the next two days Oyster Island was still abeam, but on 9th March, at sunset, Cape Pillar was S. by W., 10 miles, and at daylight the next day, with a course S. by E., Oyster Island bore W. by S., distance 8 miles.

Two days later the log ends with the "Mary and Sally" "running for Cape Pillar, at 4 Cape Pillar bore N. by E. distance 1 mile. Increasing breeze, clear weather."

McNab (*) reports her return to Sydney on 20th January, 1813, with a cargo of 80 tons of elephant oil, got in three months at Macquarie Island.

It is reasonable to assume that most of the intervening time was spent at Hobart Town, where no port records for so early a time remain in existence.

Of the subsequent history of this stout little brig I have no record, but Captain James Kelly from about this date must have commenced his long association with Hobart

Town and Van Diemen's Land. An association which was to bring him fame and honour as a pioneer explorer and discoverer of Port Davey and Macquarie Island, and to afford him place and power as a harbourmaster and owner of a fleet of whaling vessels, and, in his latter days, such reversal of fortune as to cause him to petition the Governor of the day for a position as wharfinger to the splendid port of Hobart Town, to the development of which he had done so much.

REFERENCES.

- (¹) MURIHIKU, Robert McNab, p. 190 *et seq.*
- (²) MAWSON, "The Home of the Blizzard," II., p. 183.
- (³) MURIHIKU, Robert McNab, p. 128.
- (⁴) *Ibid.*, p. 269.

The nomenclature of the map of Macquarie Island is taken from "The Home of the Blizzard," by Sir Douglas Mawson. The map itself is the able work of Capt. D. C. Pearse, M.C.