

Chagos News

The periodical Newsletter of the Friends of the Chagos

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EDITORIAL

ISSN

The International Standard Serial Number shown at the top right hand corner of this Newsletter has been allocated to the **Chagos News**. This means that all our Newsletters are lodged in the British Library and the existence of **Chagos News** is known internationally.

AGM

The Annual General Meeting took place on 12th October and a report is included in this Newsletter.

Contents

Our Newsletter opens with a very interesting report on the British Indian Ocean Territory by Don Cairns who has been the Administrator for the last two and a half years. He was relieved as Administrator on 11th November by David Smith. We wish Don well in his new post as First Secretary in Santiago and welcome David.

Commander Ronnie Edwards has written a fascinating account of his visit to Diego Garcia in 1941. He also attended our AGM and although he doesn't look

old enough to have been a Sub-Lieutenant in 1942 he also looks very honest!

The Crown Agents Stamp Bureau have sent us a very comprehensive account of BIOT stamps. Many of these stamps are beautiful and make fine presents.

Contributions

Contributions are welcome. Many Friends are American and it would be good to hear from them. All contributions to me, please, at 20 Lupus Street, London SW1 V 3DZ.

Editor

Any volunteers? It is better if the Editor is not also Chairman especially when the Chairman is a slow one finger typist.

Finally...

There is a lot going on with the Friends and 1995 is likely to be very busy preparing for the 1996 Expedition. This will take place from 1 February for about 6 weeks and will involve about 20 first rate scientists from the UK and USA. Happy New Year.

John Topp

A FAREWELL TO BIOT

As I come to the end of my tenure (tenure not tether!) as the Administrator of BIOT it is an appropriate time to reflect on the developments which have taken place during my two and a half years on the desk. The changes have been significant and all, I hasten to add, for the good.

In line with developments, the role of the Administrator has been transformed. The job now demands a full range of skills and a steep learning curve for the uninitiated. Indeed, it has been likened to that of a Chief Secretary of a small British colony. Having suffered the experience I would not disagree. Hopefully, the following short summary of developments will give an insight into the many roles the Administrator has to play and also provide an overview of what has been happening in the Territory.

CONSERVATION

We were fortunate during my term to appoint John Topp as our Conservation Consultant and were pleased to help officially launch "The Friends of the Chagos" with a reception in the Foreign Office. Given his tireless devotion to the Territory, we could not have made a better move. John's "no prisoners" style ensures that the BIOT Administration, amongst many others, are kept well up to the mark in conserving this unique area of the Indian Ocean!

With John's assistance we produced a booklet on BIOT and its Environment which has proved extremely useful in dealing with public (and parliamentary!) enquiries about the Territory. More recently, we were able to give formal approval for the 1996 scientific expedition which will be led by Doctor Charles Sheppard of Warwick University. Perhaps more importantly, we were also able to provide funds for a Darwin initiative related project. The expedition and the project should help put BIOT on the front foot as regards our image on conservation issues - much good work has been done by my predecessors which has gone largely unnoticed.

Our fisheries consultants, MRAG Ltd, have also played a key role in conservation issues. They were responsible for a recent scientific visit to the Territory which will be the forerunner for a lagoon project in Diego Garcia. The project will concentrate on the marine environment in and around the lagoon and its reefs and it is hoped that it will be extended to include the outer islands during the 1996 expedition.

New and more carefully targeted legislation on oil pollution and conservation measures generally, have also been introduced. The latter providing the legal basis on which any part of the lagoon or "restricted area" in Diego Garcia can now be appointed a conservation area with strict control over access. Elsewhere, as can be seen from the article on this subject, the conservation theme has been a predominant feature in our stamp issues. The definitive issue on Sharks being a particular success and a "first" for any Dependent Territory.

BIOT FISHERIES

Until November 1993, BIOT received only a small amount of revenue from its 200 mile Fisheries Conservation and Management Zone. Fees from a limited number of Taiwanese longliners provided the only income as no purse seine vessels had ever applied for licences. That situation changed dramatically with the arrest and successful prosecution of a Japanese longliner for illegal fishing in our waters. The result of the subsequent court case in Diego Garcia gave a much needed fill-up to BIOT's coffers. More importantly, news spread very quickly that the BIOT fishery authorities were not to be trifled with and that severe sentences were handed out to those caught poaching. This, in turn, resulted in a meteoric rise in the uptake of both longliner and purse seine licences for the rest of the season.

Interest from Spanish and French purse seiners and Taiwanese longliners was sustained in the 1994/95 season and as a consequence the first BIOT chartered Fisheries Patrol vessel began its task of fisheries surveillance in our waters in November. BIOT scientific observers were placed aboard Spanish fishing

vessels last season and, using the patrol vessel as a floating base, the programme has been extended to cover all fishing vessels this season.

The BIOT patrol vessel will remain in the area for the main tuna season (November - February), but the prime aim must be for BIOT to have its own patrol vessel capable of monitoring both the tuna and inshore fisheries (May - September) and carrying out regular patrols of the outer islands. But much will depend on BIOT being able to sustain the level of interest/income from the tuna fishery in forthcoming seasons. There are, however, indications that the EU are interested in negotiating an EU/BIOT fisheries agreement.

The other development of interest to BIOT in the fisheries area has been the formation of the FAO sponsored Indian Ocean Tuna Commission. After lengthy negotiations it has been agreed that BIOT's interests will be represented by UK membership of this organisation. The UK being recognised as a coastal state (through BIOT) for membership purposes. As a fisheries manager in the Indian Ocean BIOT has, in common with its neighbouring states, a direct interest in all of the activities of the new Commission.

RELATIONS WITH MAURITIUS

The period under review has seen a considerable improvement in our relations with Mauritius. The Mauritian Foreign Minister has called on the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, Mr Hurd, on two occasions. He also visited Diego Garcia in May 1994.

During his last call on Mr Hurd both parties signed a Joint Statement on the Conservation of Fisheries. The Joint Statement effectively sets aside the dispute over sovereignty and agrees to the exchange of scientific and other fisheries related information through the subsequently formed British/Mauritius Fisheries Commission. The Commission will meet each year alternatively in London and Port Louis and its inaugural meeting took place in Port Louis in April. Amongst other measures, the Commission agreed a joint scientific observer programme on board Mauritian inshore fishing vessels which has since added significantly to the BIOT fisheries database.

UK/US RELATIONS

Relations with our American colleagues remain at an excellent level and the annual Pol/Mil talks have been conducted in a cordial manner. The Americans are keen to assist with the 1996 expedition and are actively encouraging US participation. They are also taking a more "hands on" attitude to conservation in the Territory through the appointment of various conservation experts.

A good example of recent UK/US co-operation involved the "Lia P", a Greek/Panamanian cargo vessel, which limped into Diego Garcia last August in severe danger of sinking. The activities related to getting the ship repaired and on her way (three months later!) had all the elements of a black comedy and would have turned many a head grey. But all those involved on the island and in Washington bore the trials and tribulations with good grace and patience.

While the dreaded "Diego disease" (rapid turnover requiring quarantine and re-education) will continue there appears to be little else on the horizon which could disturb the amicable working relationship we enjoy with the Americans.

It is now with some sadness that I leave the BIOT desk. It would have been impossible not to have formed an attachment to the Territory after all we have been through together. I shall miss it and certainly more than it will miss me. There can be few opportunities in the Foreign Office to act as a "Prime Minister" and to have the special kind of working relationships I have been privileged to enjoy with its principle players. However, all good things must come to an end so that other good things may begin. I therefore leave secure in the knowledge that "In Tutela Nostra, Limuria."

A SUB LIEUTENANTS "TREASURE ISLAND"

Joining The Royal Indian Navy in 1938, I spent my initial sea training with the Royal Navy in U.K. waters. It was not until 1940, after two years very active north sea wartime service, that I sailed round the Cape with four other Sub Lieuts of the R.I.N. to join the Indian Service.

My first appointment was to H.M.I.S. 'CLIVE', and after a 'dicey' spell sweeping Italian mines at Massawa, we sailed south to Colombo on a survey project. The Japanese were pretty active at this time, including air raids on Trinco and Colombo. In September 41 'CLIVE' sailed south to Addu Atoll, an anchorage already being used by the R.N., and then further south to Diego Garcia. Our objective was to establish suitable anchorages in the lagoon for large ships and to check depths of water in the channel at the entrance. So far Diego Garcia had not been used as a naval retreat. After knowing only U.K. ports and harbours, Bombay, Colombo and Massawa, the arrival at this isolated peaceful island was a wonderful excitement.

H.M.I.S. "CLIVE" commanded by Lt Cdr R. Caws, was a comfortable vessel, and the upper bridge had been transformed to take the large table required for the survey chart. The Surveying Officer was Commander J. Jefford R.I.N. We carried two motor boats fitted with 'kitchen' rudders for manoeuvrability. An accurate base line with three sturdy flag posts was established between Point Marianne and Eclipse Point by chain length on a straight part of the beach. Our senior survey officers established and confirmed the geographical position of this base line by astro observations. The ships two Sub Lieuts, myself and Sub Lieut Jal Cursetji then commenced taking thousands of soundings from the boats. The depths were taken by lead and line by experienced R.I.N. sailors, and the boats positions per sounding were recorded by triangulation from the base line using horizontal sextant. The incredible clarity of the water amazed me, and at the entrance one could see down the outer wall of the volcano when moving from five to twenty fathoms or more. On completion of the boats workings 'CLIVE' carried out an Oropesa sweep to make sure we had not missed any underwater peaks.

We made little contact with the inhabitants, ('no dusky maiden's") but did manage to sit and talk with the family at Marianne, where we were surprised to see quite lush vegetation, trees other than coconuts, and a good vegetable patch. I recall the family had a Hereford type cow and plenty of poultry. Their main livelihood was based on copra trading, and I understood a local steamer visited at monthly periods. There was a small wooden jetty down to the beach. The home was a wooden bungalow raised about two feet above the beach with a large verandah. They had a 'tame' (?) turtle in a staked out area of shallow water. I made one or two walks from Marianne to Eclipse, and also explored Middle Island. No treasure found. Swimming was not advised as several sharks were seen. We were unable to visit the south of the island. The ships doctor had to treat several nasty coral sores which refused to heal until our return to India.

During our visit, we saw no other ships or aircraft. I suspect our visit was probably classified as 'secret', but as young Sub Lieuts we were treated on the 'need to know' basis for our instructions. Our survey was submitted to the Indian hydrographic departments on return to Colombo.

After the north seas, and dusty towns, I was truly fascinated by this beautiful coral island, with its perfect sea winds, clear waters and peace. Thank goodness the eastern arm of the island is to be preserved as a conservation area.

Note.

After the separation of India, Commander Jefford was promoted Rear Admiral and joined the new Pakistan Navy as its initial organiser.

My fellow Sub Lieut on the survey, Jal Cursetji, eventually finished up as an Admiral in the Indian Navy. He joined the I.N. Hydrographic service, and eventually became Chief Hydrographer. I suspect that the initial introduction to survey work at Diego Garcia was the spur that encouraged his career. He was awarded the 'American Legion of Merit', amongst his other Indian decorations.

R.L. Edwards
Lt Cdr R.N. (Retd)

The second AGM

The Friends held their second AGM in a room above the bar in the Barley Mow, a pub not far from the Houses of Parliament. An encouraging number was present and also representatives of the Environment, Science and Energy Department of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) and the British Indian Ocean Territory (BIOT). Formal matters included the election of a new Executive Committee which now consists of :

John M W Topp, Chairman
John Cantor
Richard Martin
Ms Sara Oldfield
Dr Charles Sheppard
Dr John Taylor
Nigel Wells, Treasurer
Nigel Wenban-Smith
Simon E Hughes, Secretary

The Chairman, in his report, outlined the progress so far made in furthering the aims of the Friends. He noted that the finances were sound and that membership had levelled out at about 100. Three newsletters had been published.

In January 1993 he had been appointed the FCO's Chagos' Conservation Consultant. He visited the Chagos in February 1993 to write a report which included a series of recommendations, all of which were approved. Two recommendations were that a conservation plan should be drawn up, and a scientific expedition mounted in 1996 to validate the draft plan.

It was realised there would be need for a scientific support centre and so the Ecosystems Analysis and Management Group within Warwick University was selected and Dr Charles Sheppard of that group was appointed leader of the 1996 Expedition.

Dr Sheppard has since written a proposal, through the Darwin Initiative, to gain finance project and £60,000 has been made available. So far some money has been spent purchasing satellite pictures which will be ground checked by the '96 Expedition.

This expedition will last six weeks and self financing scientists, up to a maximum of 20 will be invited to take part. The expedition will be yacht based; one yacht had been identified and another was needed, with the possibility of a third being considered. Expedition members are being deliberately selected to include USA as well as UK scientists and will probably include members from the University of Florida, Cornell University, Marine Resources Assessment Group, Warwick University, and the Flora and Fauna Preservation Society amongst other UK and USA organisations.

Having described these successful activities the Chairman wondered whether we wanted an extra 1,000 American members and asked how we could channel the increasing conservation awareness in this and other countries, especially America, to get Chagos designated as a World Heritage Site.

Formal matters completed, those who had gathered repaired to the bar and, glasses filled, enjoyed an evocative lecture and slide show about the Chagos given by Dr Charles Sheppard.

The AGM was a happy meeting showing that we friends have much to be proud of. If you would like a full copy of the minutes, please contact the Secretary Tel +44 171 738 7712.

Simon Hughes

A MESSAGE FROM THE TREASURER

If you have not already paid our small subscription for 1995 - £5 or \$10-, please send to me: Nigel Wells, 12 Monks Orchard, Petersfield, Hampshire, GU32 2JJ UK. Cheques payable to Friends of the Chagos.

THE STAMPS OF BRITISH INDIAN OCEAN TERRITORY AND THE CROWN AGENTS BUREAU

A new definitive series of postage stamps from the British Indian Ocean Territory was released on 1 November. It is believed to be the first ever such series from anywhere solely to feature local sharks on its designs and is part of a tradition that stretches back to the late 1960s after BIOT was first created and administered from the Seychelles, the stamps of the Seychelles being overprinted in early 1968.

BIOT's first "own" series was released on 23 October 1968. It was designed by a very experienced postage stamp artist - Gordon Drummond- and printed in lithography by De La Rue and Sons Ltd. Some fifteen or so further issues were released until 1976, when the Seychelles achieved independence and the islands of Aldabra, Farquhar and Desroches reverted to their administration. With the development of Diego Garcia as a US Naval support facility the need for a civilian postal service receded. It was not until May 1990, with the initiative from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, that BIOT resumed the issuing of postage stamps, this time with the face values in sterling.

Once an administration has decided to issue postage stamps, how does it go about the business? There are many considerations: security, design, printing and distribution, not only to post offices but worldwide to the influential stamp collecting fraternity. Philatelic income is a not-to-be-ignored source of revenue for smaller postal authorities and unless postal use of stamps is large enough to make philatelic sales of secondary importance it must be planned for.

It is no wonder then that many postal authorities throughout the Commonwealth and elsewhere involve the Crown Agents Stamp Bureau in their work. The CASB is the world's oldest and largest stamp design and production agency in the world, in business since the 1840s. Today, the CASB is based in Sutton, Surrey and its work can be categorised into a number of basic areas: advising on stamp issuing programmes, commissioning and supervising designers, tendering stamp printing contracts to a number of specialist security printers, marketing, publicity and sales, both on a wholesale basis to stamp dealers throughout the world and in a radical departure from long established tradition, since 1993 through its retail operation Sovereign Stamps, directly to the public. The CASB is always careful to maintain its agency status however: the last word always lies with the postal authority concerned.

The new definitive issue is a case on question. The original impetus for the issue came from the Administration of BIOT which suggested a number of sharks that could be featured. (The CASB generally recommends that a definitive - as opposed to a commemorative issue - should be replaced every four years or so.) Subsequently, CASB production department approached one of the specialist artists on its books, Nick Shewring with a view to providing some rough suggestions as to how the stamps could possibly look.

Nick Shewring is a comparative newcomer to the world of stamp design but his versatility, as well as a lack of any sort of idiosyncratic "style", have made him an ideal artist for this sort of work. He has produced over fifty sets of stamps and works mainly in watercolours, sometimes using an airbrush for backgrounds, shadows and clouds. Artwork is done four times the size of the finished item, usually about the size of a postcard.

Scientific and taxonomic accuracy is essential and it was necessary to differentiate clearly between Black tip, Black tip reef and Black tail reef species for instance! It is also important to visualise what such dramatic reduction and - albeit superb quality - printing will do to one's artwork; stamp design is certainly very different from other forms of illustration!

One important asset that the CASB has is its own watermarked paper, which has existed in varying designs for over 100 years; the current one being entitled "CA Spiral". Every square inch of such paper has to be accounted for by CASB employed security control officers resident within the major UK security printers. It is essential for the reputation of client and agency alike that no watermarked paper should fall into the wrong hands.

With experience gained after a short spell in the private sector in the late 1980s, the CASB's marketing is more aggressive than at any other time in its history. Nevertheless it still maintains the notion that gross exploitation of the philatelic market is not in a client's long term interest; a phenomenon observable with lamentable frequency elsewhere.

One of the great assets of the Chagos, it seems, is the excellent condition of its reefs and marine life and this new definitive series featuring sharks certainly pays tribute to the beauty of the environment with its clear colours and sharp outlines.

For further information about the stamps of BIOT, contact Sovereign Stamps, PO Box 123, Sutton, Surrey SM1 4WH.

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