

Book Reviews

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Four Antarctic Years in the South Orkney Islands

Jose Manuel Moneta

Translated by Kathleen Skilton and Kenn Back

Edited by R K Headland

Bernard Quaritch, 2017

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There is a plethora of diaries and expedition narratives published from the Heroic Age expeditions describing the life of those early Antarctic explorers, but most are in English, and were staffed by national participants. Despite making a claim to a sector of Antarctica, Argentina took very little part in that early exploration and consequently there was little published giving a South American experience of Antarctic life. The one major contribution Argentina made was to take over responsibility for the Orcadas station on Laurie Island in the South Orkney Islands from the Scottish Antarctic Expedition headed by William Bruce. It is for this reason that the account by Moneta of life at the station assumes considerable significance in providing the Argentine public with some insight into what the Antarctic was really like.

Orcadas station has played an unusually significant role in the history of Antarctic governance. Originally established by the *Scotia* Expedition, it was formally handed over to the Argentine Government when the expedition left the Antarctic in 1904 to ensure that it remained open and active. The British Government had shown a complete lack of interest in the expedition, which competed for attention with that of Scott, and Government files show that they saw no value at all in these worthless rocks of the South Orkneys. The Argentine response was quite the reverse, and they set about both supporting the station and using it as a geopolitical tool, in due course, to support their sovereignty claim to Antarctic territory.

The original account in Spanish has been through twelve editions since it was first published in 1939 and is well known in Argentina but little known elsewhere. This is an excellent translation with many added footnotes as well as appendices on place names, a brief biography of the author, a bibliography and an index, and the photographs are much better quality

than in the original Spanish editions. This finally makes Moneta's account of his almost five years spent at Orcadas Station widely available to the non-Spanish speaking audience.

Staffing Orcadas immediately after its handover to Argentina was characterized by a lack of suitable Argentinians and so the station complement had an almost international character with men from Sweden, Norway, Denmark, UK, Russia, Hungary, Uruguay and the occasional token Argentinian. Gradually the Argentine Meteorological Service, which was then part of the Ministry of Agriculture, established a better recruitment system and by the time Moneta first went there in 1923, as Meteorological Assistant, there was always at least one Argentinean wintering. After 1927, Argentineans became the majority although foreigners were also employed up to 1936. Moneta's period covered 1923–30 and included three winters.

Moneta's first visit was via South Georgia where he provides an interesting account of the whaling activities. The party continued to Laurie Island aboard the whale catcher *Rosita*, which proved a testing journey. It appears that the Argentine Government normally used *Compania Argentina de Pesca* ships, as the Argentine Navy had no ship suitable for use in ice. He discovers within the first day the importance of penguin meat in the diet and quickly learns that gentoos taste better than chinstraps or Adelies. The scientific work they undertook was hourly meteorological measurements, sea temperature and magnetic measurements. Since there was no radio initially available to send the data out, it was compiled for its historical climate value. Argentina had built a new wooden hut for the station in 1905 that remained in use for another 34 years and was extended several times. His account however makes it clear that, even by 1923, the space per man was still extremely limited and with only five men there was much to do simply to stay alive. His narrative captures the tedium of the winter, the tensions that arise from living so closely with just a few people for a long period, and his interests in the natural history and exploring his surroundings.

He returned for a second winter and installed the new radio station that failed to work, and also made a cine film which was unfortunately destroyed by fire in Buenos Aires. He was keen to reshoot the film and so he went back again in 1927, this time as leader for the first expedition of only Argentines. A major task was

the installation of a functioning radio system, which proved to be technically difficult and, although Moneta does not mention it, a major source of concern to the British Government who had now decided that the South Orkneys belonged to the UK and that Orcadas should be using a Falkland Islands radio licence. Argentina Day, on 25 May, was celebrated by a radio programme devoted to the men at Orcadas and a forerunner of the BBC World Service annual winter link many decades later to the British stations. He was also successful in remaking his film which became a great success around Argentina but from which he made no money as the contract had deliberately been drawn up to ensure that!

After his four winters south, Moneta was something of a celebrity and spent the following years writing articles about the Antarctic. In 1946 he became the Secretary General of the newly established *Comision Nacional de Antartico* and the Argentine delegate to the International Whaling Commission. He was ambassador in four countries between 1949 and 1954, and he did finally return to Laurie Island in 1973, dying on 30 March that year.

This is a major volume in Argentine Antarctic history, easy to read in this sympathetic translation and fascinating in the details Moneta chose to record.

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A Wise Adventure II – New Zealand and Antarctica after 1960

Malcom Templeton
Victoria University Press, 2017
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We have plenty of academic books about the Treaty, the associated Conventions, the international laws arising from this, etc. What we have largely lacked is detailed insight into the way negotiations actually took place, the positions taken and abandoned by Parties and the reasons for the compromises finally reached. This is, at least in part, due to the secrecy associated with diplomacy and its written records, as well as the reluctance of diplomats to air details of discussions in public. There is then a great deal to welcome in Malcom Templeton's efforts since he retired from Foreign Affairs in New Zealand. Reading through what must have been hundreds of files to establish not only the New Zealand position but insights into those of other Parties, where in

many cases the governments have not made the detailed papers available, he has made public some fascinating insights. Given the reluctance that Foreign Affairs has always shown in clearing Antarctic files for public access, Templeton's position as a previous employee gave him unfettered access in a way that others could only dream of!

This volume follows on from Templeton's first book in which he described New Zealand's activities in Antarctica from the early 1920s through to the negotiations leading up to the Antarctic Treaty in 1959. In this new book he records, often in forensic detail, the arguments over the Agreed Measures on Fauna and Flora, the rapid development of the Convention for the Conservation of Antarctic Seals (CCAS) and that for the Convention for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR), as well as the tortuous negotiations for the Convention on the Regulation of Antarctic Mineral Resource Activities (CRAMRA). With almost 25 pages of references, including many unreleased files, there are plenty of leads to take up in other archives to investigate the positions that other Parties brought to the table.

CCAS was not a contentious discussion as all Parties recognised that there could be no repeat of the historical indiscriminate slaughter of seals, and since it was thought that countries outside the Treaty, like Canada, might want to participate, it was agreed to have a Convention. Rather different is his account of the negotiation of CCAMLR where I feel he rather ignored the efforts of SCAR from 1968 onwards to highlight Russian activities in establishing a krill fishery, then closely followed in 1973 by Japan's commercial fishery. Interestingly, he does not cite either of the FAO reports on krill (Everson 1977) or on the krill fisheries (Nicol & Endo 1997). In fact, if there is one significant drawback to this view of the way the Treaty has worked it is that Templeton almost never leaves official Government files to relate the discussions to the rest of the world!

The majority of the book (almost 200 pages) is devoted to the CRAMRA negotiations, not surprisingly since they were led by the New Zealander Chris Beeby. Whilst some of these details have appeared in other places, Templeton provides for the first time a continuous narrative of the negotiations, admittedly from a New Zealand viewpoint, but with considerable insight into the drivers for other key states. Minerals appeared to show the long-term prospect of real financial gain and the claimant states were generally keen to establish that they needed to be treated differently to the other non-claimant Parties. Whilst Joyner (1996) has examined some of the compromises and frailties of CRAMRA, Templeton's narrative explains why and how these compromises were reached. The chapter devoted to the failure of CRAMRA and the reasons for it, especially in Australia and France, is illuminating with quotations