

# The Science Observer

A Journal of Stories About Scientists on Macquarie Island

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## Hamilton, Blake & Mac

Leslie Blake and Harold Hamilton spent two years walking around Macquarie Island station, mapping its contours and researching its geology, plants and wildlife. On most of these trips, they were accompanied by their spaniel, Mac.



'Mac' left with H. Hamilton carrying Mac's pup.  
From J.S. Cumpston, *Macquarie Island*.

### *Working around the island*

Macquarie Island radio operators, Ainsworth, Sandell and Sawyer were largely confined to Wireless Hill by the need to send and receive radio messages. The geologist and cartographer, Blake and biologist, Hamilton, however, spent much of 1912 and 1913 walking around Macquarie Island. Although they had a small tent, they generally camped in caves or abandoned sealers' huts. Because they had to carry heavy equipment such as cameras and a theodolite that Blake used for mapping, they used boats whenever possible to get around the island.

They also set up supply depots at various locations around the island. In the two years Hamilton and Blake lived on Macquarie Island, they suffered many dunkings in the rough surf. They started their field operations on 5 January 1912, after building a dark-room, laboratory and outhouses to the expedition hut (King George Villa). Blake was a geologist and cartographer, and made the first thorough map of the island. Both these scientists kept journals, and these provide interesting insights into their life on Macquarie Island between 1911 and 1913.

## SNAPSHOTS OF DAILY LIFE

### Blake - Catching a Weka the sealers' method



A weka. Photo Geof Copson.

*A bird is captured either by shooting or stunning with a stone; the person operating then takes the bird in his hand and lying on his stomach shakes the bird, at the same time emitting a cry like the cry of the bird (or if the bird be alive it will call itself). The hens being curious birds*

*immediately peep around the tussocks to see if they can diagnose the row, and seeing a bird with ruffled plumage and apparently dancing up and down, they come to the conclusion that the captured bird is looking for a fight and being descendants of a breed of fighting birds, they immediately attack the captured bird, only to be grabbed by the free hand of the operator'. (29 Feb 1912)*

### Hamilton - Wreck Raiding



Whaleboat and wreck of the Clyde. Photo F. Hurley, courtesy Mawson Institute of South Australia.

After lunch we went along to the wreck and I got timber for a door to my laboratory. Made a door out of ruberoid to keep out the predatory rats. Put into bottles the material from the elephants stomach (10 March 1912).

### Hamilton - Taking a Bath, Macquarie Island style

*Began the day by a bath in a cut down tub with steam heated water from the creek traversed by the penguins! (14 March 1912)*



### Hamilton - Following his Father's Footsteps

*Just 18 years ago today, my paternal relative was traversing the ground that I went over this afternoon. I should imagine the weather conditions were similar also as today was extremely windy and cold. This morning Mr Ainsworth, Blake and myself had an eventful rat-hunt and after moving sundry boxes and innumerable boot we at last laid the skulker low. I then had the satisfaction of bottling the inquisitive rodent in strong alcohol. In the early afternoon I went along to the wreck and helped Tom break up the old Clyde. Had afternoon tea with the elephant hunters and then carried a load of timber home. My week of domesticity commences tomorrow. (22 Mar 1912).*

### Hamilton - Cave Camping

*.. on reaching Green Gorge we decided to camp for the night and make Lusitania the next day. Fortunately we carried all the scraps of timber we could find and had a good fire in our cave at the Green Gorge. Roasted Maori hen and baked beans comprised our evening meal with cocoa ad lib. Passed a fairly comfortable night although Mac would roam round and knock things over besides trying to share our beds. (23 April 1912)*

### Hamilton - Meeting Professor Flynn

*Blake and self went to the Aurora and Prof Flynn and Denney came ashore. The Prof had a look at my collection in the afternoon. I took him round to my collecting ground. That evening we all went off to the Aurora and had tea-followed by a "musical" evening. (23 November 1912)*



Blake surveying Macquarie Island. Photo C.A. Sandell.

*By* May 1913, the Expedition's supplies were low. The sealers were in a similar position, as they had been waiting for some time for the *Rachel Cohen* to collect them from the island. At this stage, Mac had pups, and was unable to contribute to the menu. The paternity of these pups is not recorded, but the sealers had been in the habit of bringing their dog over to the expedition hut while they yarned with the scientists.

*The biologist, Hamilton, had shown a surprising lack of observation skills, when he referred to Mac as 'he' in his biological diary (21/4/12).*

*H*amilton became fond of the sealers. The sealers use to save bits of the elephant seal for him to make scientific recordings and brought him interesting specimens such as albino or hybrid penguins. In return, Hamilton would tell the sealers where elephant seals had come ashore. Sealers and scientists had come to rely on each other for company, and even traded their food when provisions became low for both parties.



At the end of 1913, Hamilton, Blake, Ainsworth and Sandell sailed south to Antarctica on the *Aurora*. Only a few days earlier, the sealers left for Hobart on the *Rachel Cohen*.

*We are not sure what happened to Mac or her puppies - perhaps they went to Hobart with the sealers!*

### References

- Hamilton, H, 1911-1913, 'Biological Diary', Mawson Papers, Australian National Library, Canberra.
- Mawson, D, 1996 reprint, *Home of the Blizzard*, Wakefield Press, pp335-398.
- Cumpston, J, 1968, *Macquarie Island*, Australian Antarctic Division, Melbourne, pp245-260.
- Waite, E.R., 'Macquarie Island - The Tutanekai's Cruise - an Island Calling. - Sea Elephants and Penguins', 1913, n.d., clipping supplied by J. Massey, Southland Museum, Invercargill.

### Further Reading

Other stories about the Australasian Antarctic Expedition can be found in:

[Building Wireless Hill - The AAE](#)

[Hurley's 'Juvenile Trick'](#)

[The Wireless Crew](#)