

Nehemiah Ames
PO Box 274
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9 Sept. 1973

George H. Balazs
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Dear Mr. Balazs,

I really appreciated your letter of June 18th with the specially autographed envelope to show it had come from Whales-Skate. I hope you enjoyed an interesting time on that and the other unusual places you visited. Thank you for taking the time to share that bit of your travels with me.

In appreciation of your help in my project, I'm happy to enclose a copy of the published article for you. (If you'd like one or two extra copies, just let me know and I'll send to you free of charge.)

Mention of your search in my article has brought the enclosed two replies, which contain some points in common and some supplementary material. The return addresses are given on both in case you wish to reply to them personally.

If you care to write again from ANY place in the world, your letters would be delightfully received. Thank you again for your letter from Whales-Skate. It is a treasured item in my collection of envelopes from islands named after wild life.

With all best wishes and kindest regards,

Nehemiah Ames

The zoo islands

Canary, Walrus and Otter Islands

By Nehemiah Ames

Las Canarias! Two Spanish words that convey mental visions of beauty in a variety of ways. Las Canarias can mean the Canary Islands, its native girls or the much-appreciated song-birds native to these islands that are now brightening lives of people in millions of homes the world over.

Strange as it may seem, these islands were not named for the canary birds, but the birds were named after the islands. The islands were named for another type of creature, the dog!



This goes back to the days of the Romans two millenniums ago. They had learned of the islands from Mauritania's King Juba in 40 B.C. It was Pliny who is credited with having first written the name "Canaria," derived from "canis," the Latin word for dog. Today, statues of these dogs can be seen in Grand Canary's capital, Las Palmas, in the Plaza of Santa Ana, between the cathedral and city hall.

While books could be written about these fascinating islands, today I'll share just a few highlights with you. Located in the Atlantic Ocean, less than a hundred miles off the African coast

Otter Island, once home of the North Pacific fur seal recently portrayed on one of the 8c US Wildlife Conservation stamps, is about one-half mile long and less than half that in width. It is located four miles southwest of St. Paul Island. There is no fresh water on the island but there is



a small lake of impure water which lies close to the northern shore. The highest point of the island is 285 feet at its west end.

During the Russian ownership of Alaska and the Pribilof Islands, many sea otter and northern fur seal were harvested from Otter Island, St. Paul and St. George Islands still have the largest fur seal rookeries in the Northern Hemisphere. The Russians put men ashore for the sole purpose of harvesting animals, mainly fur seals.

Just before the turn of the century, under US ownership, agents of the Treasury Department assigned to St. Paul Island dispatched crews of men to Otter Is. to harass the fur seals with the intent they would come ashore on St. Paul. To their dismay the seals would return from the sea to again haul up on the shore of Otter Is.

In 1909 Theodore Roosevelt issued an Executive Order proclaiming Walrus and Otter Islands as a federal reservation for the protection of native birds, and in 1910 it became law. Sea birds, Arctic fox, hair seal and Steller sea lions now frequent Otter Island. Limited visits are made to

the islands only for scientific studies.

Walrus Island, unlike Otter Island which is grass covered, is a mere low ledge of lava, and flat capped. It is just above the wash of the Bering Sea waves. During winter storms the seas will break over the island. Walrus Island is less than one-quarter of a mile long, and under one hundred yards wide. It lies 12 miles to the east of St. Paul Island and is the breeding ground for thousands of sea birds which lay their eggs on the polished lava flats and ledges. The island is not visited by fur seals although a few sea lions do breed on the island. Years ago male walrus did frequent the island in the summer. The little islet was seldom visited except in the egg season, to gather waterfowl eggs. This is no longer practiced. Periodically research groups have tagged a number of sea lion pups for mortality and migration studies.

Excellent references are Henry W. Elliott, "Seal Islands of Alaska," Special Bulletin 176 (Government Printing Office) dated 1882, and David Starr Jordan, "Seal and Salmon Fisheries," Vol. I and III dated 1898. If it is possible to borrow these rare volumes through a library loan exchange program, you will find hours of enjoyable reading.

My gratitude is expressed to William Peck of the Pribilof Islands Program and M. C. Stepetin of St. Paul Island for their interesting letters which I have shared with you in this article. Next time scientists visit Walrus or Otter Island, I would be delighted if one of them would send me an autographed envelope from there showing the dates of their visit. It could be taken back to the post office on St. Paul Island in the Pribilofs and mailed to me from there.

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Western Samoa turns turtle

A green turtle is the subject of Western Samoa's new \$2 definitive stamp which was released on June 18, according to Nelson Eastis of Adelaide, Australia.



The green turtle (*Chelonia mydas*) is one of the most common species found in Samoan waters. Other species of turtles found in the Pacific area are the trunkback (or leatherback), ridley, loggerhead and hawksbill. Large male green turtles may weigh up to 300 pounds, but they are only lightweights compared with the giant trunkbacks which may top the scales at 3,000 pounds.

Although in most of the oceans of the world turtles have been slaughtered for hundreds of years, it is only in the past fifty years that they have diminished so quickly that a general international alarm has been sounded.

In Samoa when a turtle (Samoan "laumei") is caught by the villagers, it should be given to the chiefs who will make the decisions as to its disposal.

For a feast the turtle is prepared for cooking by the removal of the intestines, heart and other organs. The turtle is then laid on its back, filled with hot rocks and cooked in an earth oven ("umu"). The shell of the turtle makes a suitable cooking container.

After the turtle is taken from the umu, the hot rocks are re-

moved so that the juice which has collected in the shell may be drunk by the chiefs.

If the turtle is ceremoniously divided, the head goes to the high chief, the forequarters to the talking chief, the hindquarters to the taupou (village maiden, usually a chief's daughter), and the back to the young men of the village who caught and prepared the turtle.

The stamp was designed by Waddington Studios and lithographed by the House of Questa on Kava Bowl watermarked paper. Each sheet contains 25 stamps.

and some 700 miles south of Gibraltar, the group contains seven principal islands, all of volcanic origin. The two largest, Tenerife (30 by 60 miles) and Grand Canary (30 by 40) hold some three-quarters of the population of 1,228,613.

Tenerife is where the snow-capped peak of Mount Teide, over 12,000 feet high, is located. A view of this mountain is seen on the stamp illustrating this article.

Grand Canary Island offers within its shores the contrasts of a continent. It has in fact been termed "a continent in miniature." Twenty minutes from the modern shopping street of Las Palmas, one can be in the subtropical Angostura Valley. It is obvious that here is found some of the island's most fertile soil for in the distance of only three or four miles is to be seen a great variety of plant life ranging from citrus, bananas, potatoes, tomatoes and corn to pine trees, eucalyptus, cactus and hundreds of others. All this with only seven inches of annual rainfall!

Within 40 minutes one can stand atop the mountain of Arucas, surveying a mammoth textured carpet of banana trees. In two hours one can be surrounded by the monstrously unreal and contorted monoliths of Tejada. One could easily imagine them as a colony of once animated rocks that have been suddenly petrified at the height of their frenzy. No wonder this has been described as the "petrified storm."

At the extreme south of the island the landscape is like the Sahara Desert. Towering dunes of golden sand stretch for several miles with an oasis and palm trees thrown in for good measure. The pure sand found here as well as at two other beaches on Grand Canary is a rarity on volcanic islands.

Walrus and Otter Islands

Keep off! You are prohibited from visiting these islands unless you have special prior permission! Both of these islands in the Pribilof Islands of the Bering Sea have a most interesting history but with little human activity on the islands themselves. It seems that no men have ever lived on them on a year-round basis.