

LETTER

The Editor,

Henderson Island

Sir,

Since the publication of our account of Henderson Island in *Notornis* 30: 233-252, Nelson Dyett, who established the radio and meteorological station on Pitcairn Island during World War II and has kept in touch with the island ever since, has provided further information which deserves to be placed on record, together with some additions and corrections.

It appears that the island was visited between 12 April and 24 May 1944 by a surveying party of five from the "PAN" Expedition under the late Flight Lieutenant A. M. Fletcher, together with six Pitcairners, to appraise its suitability for an airstrip. According to a report in the National Archives, Wellington, they found that it was difficult to land and that the island was covered with impenetrable scrub up to 30 ft high and was short of water. They cut and pegged 13¼ miles of survey lines behind the main landing place and another 3½ miles long the coast before the project was abandoned. The most interesting information about the natural history is that the largest trees were tunia with boles up to 30 ins in diameter (which is 75 cm, not 500 cm as reported in our account). There were also cabbage, pandanus, highwhite, jesmy, punney, sharkwood and occasional sandalwood trees on the plateau, and miro and tow, used by the Pitcairners for carving, along the northern coastal strip, with a few coconuts at the landing places.

In our account it should be noted that the castaways from the whaler *Essex* arrived in 1819, not 1820, that the subsequent naval observations are taken from ship's Remark Books at the Hydrographic Department, Taunton (a rich and unexploited source of such information), and that the figures for Oeno and Ducie Islands have been transposed in Table I. A full review of other information about the island has now been published by F. R. Fosberg, M. H. H. Sachet and D. R. Stoddart in *Atoll Research Bulletin* 272, although it may be remarked that since several visitors have reported the presence of shells and corals on the plateau the island may have been uplifted more recently than they suggest.

While it has been announced that settlement on the island will not be permitted, we understand that agitation for it continues and that, in addition to Pitcairners in search of wood, the island is currently being visited by at least one yacht annually, and probably a tourist ship in the future, with no sort of supervision. Clearly more satisfactory arrangements are needed both for the support of the Pitcairners, who have suffered several medical emergencies recently, and for the protection of the wildlife and environment of the rest of the Pitcairn group. It seems increasingly doubtful whether much can now be expected from Britain, where such places now appear increasingly remote, so that much may depend on people living nearer to the area.

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