

# A journalist's DIARY

# Southward ho! to the real Blikkiesdorp

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## BLEAK AND LONELY

Gough Island is a bleak, rocky dot in the vast South Atlantic about 1,400 miles from the Cape.

Eight miles long and four miles broad, its nearest neighbour is Tristan da Cunha, 250 miles to the north-west.

An island of steep cliffs and chuckling hill streams, it supports coarse, hardy brush and stunted trees, scores of insect and bird varieties, penguins, seals — and a permanent settlement of South African meteorologists.

EVER heard of a place called Blikkiesdorp? No? Well, then you better brush up your geography. For today I am able to disclose that there is a place called Blikkiesdorp. And it isn't even in South Africa.

If you study a map of the South Atlantic, you'll see a dot marked Gough Island. Well, the "capital" of Gough Island is Blikkiesdorp — and if you look carefully at the picture on this page you'll see the name on the hut in the centre.

Blikkiesdorp is the old South African meteorological base on the island. A new base has now been built but the name will probably remain.

## With son

A Port Elizabeth man, 66-year-old Mr Jim T. McNish, had the chance recently to visit this barren, remote island way down south.

Captain Ken McNish, his son, is master of the R.S.A., the Government research and supply ship aboard which Mr McNish journeyed to the South Atlantic.

by Adam  
Brand

Mr McNish kept day-to-day notes—20,000 words of them—during his 20-day trip to Gough Island and back. The notes give fascinating glimpses of this strange little world in the South Atlantic. Gough Island is actually the top of a massive mountain rising about 23,000 feet from the ocean bottom.

The island itself is mountainous with Edinburgh Peak (named after the Duke of Edinburgh, who tried to climb it during a visit there) about 2,900 feet high.

Wind-swept and storm-battered, the island's heavy rainfall (22 inches a year) provides hundreds of waterfalls

The Government research ship R.S.A. lying at anchor off rugged Gough Island.

and chattering streams of cold, crystal-clear, sweet water. The island is covered with dense vegetation which includes 12-foot tall ferns and weird trees slanted by the wind.

There are scores of bays and inlets along the island's rugged coastline and the huts that make up Blikkiesdorp on the shore at Transvaal Bay are painted bright yellow to make the settlement easily visible from the sea.

## Many seals

No cats and dogs are allowed, and there are no rats. Seals there are in their thousands, says Mr McNish, from tiny black furred babies to the giant male elephant seal.

"I've always respected the female of the species but never more than a female seal. Of temperament too uncertain to be trifled with, baring great teeth at the least provocation, they were best left alone.

"The males, however, like most males, were tame and timid, only asking to be left alone in the sun to sleep.

"There are millions of birds by day and when they returned from their feeding grounds at night they wheeled in their thousands about the ship, the noise of their beating wings quite indescribable."

He says the South Africans stationed on the island are tough fellows. Fit and well, their only grouse was that they hadn't a cook to chore for them — preferably female.

The men take four-day turns

## So they say ...

THE faults of others are like headlights on a motor-car. They only seem more glaring than our own.

at cooking. Most of their food is tinned, of course, but considerable variety is not possible. The voyage to Gough and back, Mr McNish describes as "20 halcyon days of perfect bliss — no heavy noises, no screaming headlines, no war-like mutterings — just peace, perfect peace, with lots to eat and lots of sleep."

## Wonder

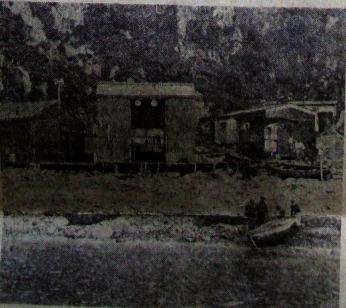
What impressed him most during the voyage? "The wonder of radar, I think. I spent many night hours with my eyes glued to the set while we were off the island.

"The night we returned to Table Bay was foggy but I watched our passage to the anchorage for many hours, clearly seeing in the screen nearby ships and even cars moving about the peninsula.

"In the chill of early morning we dropped anchor off the Woodstock beach, Address Street, close to the light and the great hills of the sky. For me it was the end of a wonderful experience."

## Tailpiece

THE only reason some people get lost in thought is because it is unfamiliar territory.



Gough Island's capital—the world's one and only genuine Blikkiesdorp.