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Note of a meeting held in the Colonial Office
at 11.30 a.m. on Tuesday, the 29th December, 1936.

Present:-

Colonial Office.

- Mr. R. V. Vernon, C.B. (in the Chair).
- Mr. A. J. Dawe, O.B.E.
- Mr. K. O. Roberts-Wray.
- Mr. G. A. Jones, O.B.E.
- Mr. G. H. Creasy.
- Mr. W. J. Bigg.
- Mr. J. G. Hibbert, M.C.
- Mr. R.H.D. Arundell.

Admiralty.

- Captain F. A. Reyne.
- Commander St. J. A. Micklethwait.
- Commander Lord Louis Mountbatten, K.C.V.O.
- Mr. E. A. Seal.

Air Ministry.

- Mr. C. J. Galpin, D.S.O.


Dominions Office.

- Mr. C.G.L. Syers.
- Mr. W. G. Head.

Foreign Office.

- Mr. C.A.E. Shuckburgh.

1. The ^{meeting} ~~Committee~~ had before them ^{it} a memorandum which had been prepared in the Colonial Office regarding certain islands in the Pacific which might be of value in connection with the proposed trans-Pacific air service to New Zealand



2. In opening the meeting Mr. Vernon suggested that the best course would be to decide which of the islands in question would be of value in connection with the proposed air service and then to consider the present position as regards ownership and title. In response to his inquiry Mr. Galpin explained that the route at present contemplated for the air service from New Zealand to Honolulu would be via Fiji (with a possible halt at Minerva Reef) and thence via either Nukunono or Hull Island and either Christmas Island or Kingman Reef to Honolulu.

It was then decided to consider in order the various islands included in the proposed route.

3. Christmas Island. Mr. Galpin explained that from the point of view of the air service Christmas Island was more attractive than Fanning Island, where considerable demolition of coral would be required. A further point of some importance was that Christmas Island was the nearest British territory to the North American Continent, and if for any reason United States territories were closed to Great Britain it might still be possible to reach Mexico direct from Christmas Island.

The past history of Christmas Island showed that it had been claimed by the United States prior to 1882 but that it had been evacuated by that date. It had subsequently been visited by several British ships ^{and claimed as British territory} and in 1888 a note had been addressed

to

It was actually included
in the Gilbert & Ellice Isds
Colony by Order in Council
under the Colonial Boundaries
Act in 1919.

Christmas Island
is already "occupied"
- with foreigners,
under a British
Occupation licence.
Spence
21/12/46

N.P.

to the United States Government indicating that the island was ~~now~~ claimed as British. No reply had been received to that note, and the view taken at the Foreign Office was that the British claim to ownership of the island was absolutely watertight. It was considered, however, that early steps should be taken to secure an active exercise of sovereignty on Christmas Island and to provide for effective ~~occupation~~ ^{administration}, and after discussion it was decided to recommend that, in view of the importance attached to Christmas Island from the point of view of the proposed air service, ~~His Majesty's Government's~~ ^{British} title to the island should be established by effective ~~occupation~~ ^{administration}. The only sure means of securing this end was the appointment of an administrative officer to reside on the island and such an appointment would naturally be made by the Government of the Gilbert and Ellice Islands Colony, of which Christmas Island formed part. The cost of this appointment, which would be made purely in order to consolidate a civil air route, could not properly be assigned to Colonial funds, ^{however,} and should be met from home sources. The Committee were informed that it would be difficult for the Gilbert and Ellice Islands Government to spare an officer for this purpose in the near future, but that the High Commissioner for the Western Pacific might be able to secure an officer temporarily from Fiji. The Committee recommended that before considering other sources, e.g. New Zealand or this country, the position should be explored with the High Commissioner.

Mr. Galpin explained that it was possible that a flying-boat would be sent out to survey the area in the spring of 1937, and it was desirable, therefore, that the appointment of an officer to Christmas Island should be treated as a matter of urgency, although there was little prospect that any of the permanent establishments required for the complete air service could be started before 1938.

4. Nukunono Island. ^{meeting} The ~~Committee~~ were informed that this island was now a Dependency of New Zealand, having been transferred from the jurisdiction of the High Commissioner for the Western Pacific under the Union Islands Orders in Council, 1925. The island was ~~adequately~~ administered by the Government of New Zealand from ^{Western} Samoa, and there appeared to be no doubt as regards British title to it.

5. Hull Island. Mr. Galpin explained that Hull Island ^{might} ~~would~~ be regularly used as a normal port of call for the Pacific air service, and it was desirable to establish a good title to it.

It appeared to the ^{meeting} ~~Committee~~ that ~~His~~ ^{the} ~~Majesty's~~ ^{British} ~~Government's~~ title to the island would be strengthened if it, and the neighbouring islands in the Phoenix Group, were added to the Gilbert and Ellice Islands Colony, but that effective occupation ~~which might have~~ ^{was required} if the position was to be fully safeguarded. ~~the position~~, ^{was impracticable.}

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The question of recommending the formal addition to the Gilbert and Ellice Islands Colony of the Phoenix Group was discussed, and in this connection Mr. Seal suggested that His Majesty's Government should address a note to the Government of the United States, calling attention to the action taken by the United States in connection with Jarvis, Baker and Howland Islands and asking the United States Government to inform His Majesty's Government if they proposed to claim any other islands in the Pacific area.

After further discussion ^{it was} ~~the Committee~~ decided to recommend that Canton, Hull, Sydney, McKean, ^{or} Endbury, Phoenix, Birnie and Gardner Islands in the Phoenix Group should be formally included in the Gilbert and Ellice Islands Colony, but that no steps should be taken at present to administer them or to post officers to them. If such a step became necessary later it would be necessary, as in the case of Christmas Island, to ask that the cost involved should be borne by United Kingdom funds.

6. Flint, Caroline, Vostock, Starbuck and Malden Islands. The ^{meeting} ~~Committee~~ considered the position of these islands, but did not ^{? consider it necessary} find it possible to recommend that any action should be taken regarding them. ^{at this stage}

7. Pitcairn Island. It was decided that consideration of any action regarding Pitcairn Island, ^{and the neighbouring} ~~including its Dependencies,~~ Oeno, Henderson and Ducie Islands,

No action concerning these islands was recommended at this stage.



Islands, should be deferred pending the report by the administrative officer who, it is hoped, will pay a visit to ^{Pitcairn} the island in 1937.

8. Telegram from the New Zealand Government regarding Christmas Island. It was ^{recommended} ~~decided~~ that a reply to the telegram from the New Zealand Government of the 30th of November regarding Christmas Island should be deferred until information could be given regarding the action to be taken in accordance with the recommendation in paragraph 3 above.