

MINISTRY OF POST-WAR RECONSTRUCTION

REGIONAL PLANNING DIVISION

REGIONAL STUDIES

of

DORRE ISLAND AND POINT CLOATES AREAS

WESTERN AUSTRALIA

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- REGIONAL STUDIES OF DORRE ISLAND AND POINT CLOATES AREAS, WESTERN AUSTRALIA -

Each of the areas concerned is discussed under the following headings:

1. Climate
2. Physiography
3. Anchorages
4. Vegetation
5. Water
6. Communications and Settlements
7. Food Supplies.

References: The basic material has been obtained principally from the following sources:

Aerial photographs and Defence Maps

Admiralty Charts

Military Directories as follows:

- (a) Shark Bay
- (b) Yanrey
- (c) Point Cloates, Carnarvon, and
Freycinet Estuary.

Australian Pilot, Vol. V.

- D O R R E I S L A N D -

1. CLIMATE.

Average annual rainfall is approximately 10". This normally falls during the months of April to August, although thunderstorms and other local disturbances may produce heavy falls during the summer months of December to April.

From November to March the weather is very warm, with some exceptionally hot spells when the temperature on many occasions exceeds 100°.*

In general, the prevailing winds are from southerly directions. During the months December to February strong south and south-west winds spring up in the afternoons. In the winter months, from June to August, winds in the morning come mostly from the north-east and south-east, and from the south and west in the afternoons. Strong winds varying from east to south-west occur during the period September to November. Occasionally cyclones (known locally as willy willies) occur during the months November to April. The winds accompanying these cyclones are very violent and destructive, and are usually accompanied by torrential rains. Many falls of 10" and over have been recorded in 24 hours in areas further north.

2. PHYSIOGRAPHY.

Topography. The island is composed basically of coral, limestone and sand. While no detailed information on heights is available, study of aerial photographs indicates that there are no hills of appreciable height. There are a number of low ridges, mostly with north-south axes. The average altitude of the island would appear to be in the vicinity of 100 feet.

Coastline. The western coastline is bounded by almost vertical limestone cliffs, which, from the photographs, appear to have an average height of about 40 or 50 feet. The eastern coast, although generally rocky, is not so rugged. The cliffs are not continuous, and there are several little bays with sandy beaches. The best of these is White Beach, where there is a safe anchorage in depths of from one to three fathoms.

Reefs. An almost continuous coral reef fringes the western shores of the island, and, even apart from the steep cliffs, would render the use of this side by shipping extremely hazardous. The reef is much more broken on the eastern side. There is a clear passage in to the White Beach Anchorage.

* This applies to the mainland, & island temperatures would be cooler.

3. ANCHORAGES.

From the limited data available it would seem that White Beach is the only suitable anchorage on the island. As previously noted, depths at the anchorage are from one to three fathoms. The Admiralty chart shows a good seaward approach south of the Island. There is a passage between the southermost point, Cape St. Cricq, and Dampier Reefs, with depths mostly exceeding 20 fathoms, and gradually becoming shallower as White Beach is approached.

4. VEGETATION.

From available information it appears that vegetation is largely confined to low, stunted scrub. Photographs reveal that the scrub is not dense, and the island has a comparatively bare appearance from the air.

5. WATER.

Ample supplies of good quality water are available by sinking to depths of up to 100 feet. There is no surface water on the island.

6. COMMUNICATIONS AND SETTLEMENTS.

Dorre Island has not been inhabited for many years. A native hospital was located on the Island at an early date, but this was abandoned. The two nearest settlements are Carnarvon and Shark Bay.

Carnarvon - is on the mainland north-east of Dorre Island, at the mouth of the Gascoyne River. It is distant 45 miles by sea from White Beach Anchorage, and is the nearest settlement to the Island. The passage from White Beach to Carnarvon is clear, and in deep water. Carnarvon had a population of 665 in 1941. It contains four hotels, two Banks, several stores of various kinds, a goods shed with a 1-3 ton crane, a hospital with 20 beds and an X-ray plant, and numerous other dwellings. Three oil companies have depots established. The buildings in Carnarvon are mostly of wood and iron construction. There is a good port and jetty, maximum draft alongside the jetty being 18-20 feet. The jetty is equipped with 1 - 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ ton crane and steam winch, and there is a light railway running back to the goods shed. Good anchorages in about 3 $\frac{1}{2}$ fathoms are available about one to three miles off the north entrance to the Gascoyne River.

Carnarvon is on the main coastal road, and has good road communication with ~~Onslow~~ and Perth. There are complete telephone and telegraph facilities in the town.

There is an A class all-weather aerodrome just south of the town,

and this would make Dorre Island easily accessible from other Australian centres, as the island is only 45 miles by sea from Carnarvon.

Shark Bay (previously known as Denham). - is located on the west coast of Peron Peninsula, just south of Lagoon Point. It is 60 miles by sea from White Beach Anchorage. The passage from White Beach to Carnarvon appears to be fairly satisfactory for small vessels, although there are a number of shoals west of Peron Peninsula.

Shark Bay has a population of about 100 and contains one small hotel, one small general store, and a small hospital with two beds. A second class motor road connects the settlement with the main Carnarvon-Perth road. There is a telegraph and telephone communication from Shark Bay through Hamelin Pool to Perth and Carnarvon.

Shark Bay used to be a pearl fishing centre, but owing to the war the industry has been dormant for several years.

Herald Bight Fish Canning Factory. - There is a small fish canning factory in Herald Bight on Peron Peninsula, 20 miles north of Shark Bay settlement. It ceased operations during the war owing to lack of essential materials.

7. FOOD SUPPLIES.

The logical source of food for any settlement on Dorre Island would be Carnarvon, 45 miles distant. Carnarvon is the centre for a large pastoral district, and ample supplies of beef and mutton would be available. Bananas are grown locally under irrigation, and also a limited quantity of tomatoes and vegetables. Two small dairy herds provide the local milk requirements, otherwise there is no dairy produce. There are two bakeries in the town.

POINT CLOATES AREA.

1. CLIMATE.

The Climate is very similar to that of the Dorre Island area, and reference should be made to the report on "Dorre Island" for details.

A slight modification is in the rainfall, which is approximately 11", being about an inch higher than for Dorre Island.

2. PHYSIOGRAPHY.

Topography. The Point Cloates area is a complex of low lying coastal plain and high sand ridges. Some of these ridges reach 200 feet in height. They have in general a north-south trend, and constitute quite a prominent topographic feature of the foreland.

There are no rivers in the vicinity, and very few creeks. Such water courses which do exist flow only after very heavy rain, and even then for only a few hours.

Coastline. In the immediate vicinity of Point Cloates there are no appreciable cliffs although in parts the dunes come right down to the water's edge. Further to the north however, towards Low Point, the coast is steep and rocky, and the barren country behind rises gradually to the long ridge extending southward from Vlaming Head, and terminating at Weajuggu Hill, 490 feet in height, which is ten miles north of Point Cloates.

Reefs. There is a broad fringing coral reef which extends from one to three miles off-shore. There are narrow passages through the reef in various places, and the waterway inside is largely navigable by small boats.

3. ANCHORAGES.

There is an anchorage off an old whaling station, situated nine miles north of Point Cloates. This anchorage is sheltered by the coastal fringing reef. There are three passages through the reef at this point, the most northerly of which is recommended (Point Cloates lighthouse bears 158° from this).

About 2 miles south of Point Cloates there is a wide passage through the reef, with a depth of about 4½ fathoms. Once through the reef on turning to the north there is a sheltered anchorage for small boats in about 12 feet of water between the reef and the shore.

4. VEGETATION.

The vegetation of the Point Cloates area is sparse and rather stunted.

It consists mainly of Light Wania, Wattle, Spinifex and Salt Bush.

5. WATER.

Fair supplies of good water are obtainable from wells along the coast. In the vicinity of the old Whaling Station, nine miles north of Point Cloates, large supplies of very good water can be obtained by digging in the sand. When the whaling industry was operative, sand excavations in this vicinity provided water for about 400 persons.

6. COMMUNICATIONS AND SETTLEMENTS.

The population of the area is confined to a few pastoralists and station hands. Nine miles north of Point Cloates is an old Whaling Station which was established by a Norwegian Company long ago. The Station has not been actively operated for some years. Some of the plant is still there, in charge of the manager of Ningaloo Station near Point Cloates.

The nearest settlement to Point Cloates is Onslow, 145 miles up the coast, while Carnarvon is 160 miles to the south. Onslow. with a population of approximately 200, is the chief port for discharge and shipment of cargo for consignees located in areas north of Carnarvon and west of Roebourne. It includes a post and telegraph office, police station, bond stores, two general stores, bakery, butcher's shop, and hospital. Buildings are of wood and iron construction. There is a jetty with berthing accommodation of 349 feet on each side in 22 feet of water. Light cargo handling facilities are installed.

Onslow is connected to Carnarvon by the main coastal road. This has a natural surface, and may become impassable in wet weather. There is a "B" class Aerodrome near the town. The telephone and telegraph system at Onslow is poor, and subject to delay.

Onslow is a much poorer centre than Carnarvon for general purposes, and it would appear that from Point Cloates it would be more satisfactory to deal with Carnarvon, which is only about 15 miles further away than Onslow. Carnarvon. has been described in detail under "Dorre Island."

There is a first class aerodrome on Exmouth Gulf, which may be reached from Point Cloates by a natural surface single-track road. The road distance is about 50 miles.

7. FOOD SUPPLIES.

Supplies of mutton and beef could probably be obtained from local graziers. Other supplies would be best obtained from Carnarvon, which is also the only source of fresh fruit and vegetables. Supplies of bananas, tomatoes and vegetables would be available from Carnarvon.