

AGENT'S REPORT FOR 1989

1989 was one of the busiest years on record for Lundy; we had a great number of staying visitors and the M.S Oldenburg carried some 17,000 trippers to the island.

The weather during the summer was some of the best I have known here; little rain was experienced causing some difficulty with water supplies. However, in July a water diviner made contact and offered to help us find any hidden reserves. She quickly located two sources, one behind the Black Shed and one just north of the water tanks. We made use of our resident quarry workers and drilled a hole 50m deep at each site and found water. Small pumps were lowered and we pulled out 150 gallons per hour, enough to keep us going for the rest of the summer.

Due to the lack of financial support the jetty scheme has been shelved for the time being; however, we have decided to complete the road to the cove beach. The road looks very grand cutting its way through the cliff below the South Light and providing our denuded beach with a wonderful surface of fine stone. It is hoped that once we have completed the road we will make a start on a small extension to the cove jetty enabling the launch to come alongside at all stages of tide.

A few members of staff left during the year including Stirling Melhuish, our farmer. Although he has been replaced, farming on the island is always a struggle and stocking levels have been greatly reduced allowing staff to concentrate on other duties.

The aerogenerator was out of action for much of the year due to a gearbox failure. A new unit took us almost five months to acquire and the machine was back in use just before Christmas when, of course, the wind failed to blow.

J. PUDDY
April 1990

WARDEN'S REPORT FOR 1989

I was appointed Warden at the end of May. For the two years prior to that, I had been the first Warden of the island of Flat Holm, 50 miles further up the Bristol Channel. The lighthouse was made automatic a few months after we moved to the island and once the keepers were withdrawn, my wife Lorna and I were the only residents. The island is owned by Trinity House and leased as a nature reserve by South Glamorgan County Council. It has an area of 50 acres and is only half a mile in diameter. The appointment was for a fixed term of two years, as South Glamorgan were convinced that the isolation would make us go 'funny'. Towards the end of our stay, the island was beginning to feel very small, however a management policy of keeping visitors to a minimum, coupled with some excellent weather, gave me the opportunity to complete many of the projects I wanted to finish before leaving.

A fairly major change has occurred in the farming on Lundy since last year. Aggressive farming has not proved viable and in consequence the stocking levels have been reduced. There are now only 200 breeding ewes instead of 400 and the beef herd has also been reduced. It is hoped that all the beef cattle will be pure Devon from now on. The reductions will affect the grazing and we are closely monitoring the situation with regard to the numbers of Soay sheep, deer, goats and rabbits, to see whether they can cope with the extra grazing available, particularly in areas such as Middle Park. There is already a marked increase in bracken and we are having to take steps to check its spread.

1989 proved to be the driest summer on record and the hot dry weather certainly contributed to an excellent number of summer visitors. The Oldenburg is well established as the island's main link and she carried some 17,000 passengers to Lundy during the year.

The new roadway to the Divers Beach is nearly complete and we shall soon be able to drive around to the breakwater at all states of the tide. Some of the material moved to create the roadway has been used to surface the track to North End, the remainder has gone down onto the beach, where the tide has levelled it and the Landing Beach now looks exactly like it did in photographs taken thirty years ago. The recent storms caused a landslide which took away the steps leading up to the South Light and the Keepers are now having to use the wooden steps by the Divers Beach if they want to visit us.

In September, the BBC Timewatch team used Lundy as a location for the film 'Napoleon's Last Flight' which was screened in February. The film showed a number of shots of island scenery and even included a native or two, however the rather fraught scene of Napoleon trying to ride a Lundy pony was obviously consigned to the cutting room floor, having been considered unsuitable for family viewing.

The Marine Nature Reserve is working well and most diving groups are happy to accept the 'Code of Conduct'. There have been exceptions and one group in particular were responsible for removing some of the portholes of the wreck of the Robert. Treasure hunting within the MNR is no better than plundering and looting, it is not likely to be financially rewarding and spoils the sites for future divers to enjoy. Because of the risk of damage, one of our wrecks has been designated under the 'Protection of Wrecks Act 1973'. This is the Iona II, which is only 100 feet from the Robert, and can now only be visited by licence holders carrying out genuine research. The Iona II was a paddle steamer which sank in 1846 and was suspected of being a blockade runner to American Confederate ports.

There are several local diving groups who have expressed an interest in helping with monitoring and this season all divers are being asked to fill in a questionnaire about the marine life they see. Some of the sub-littoral monitoring begun by Keith Hiscock, was not carried out in 1989, but I am hopeful that it will all be fully updated during the current year.

The plankton in the sea was late clearing this year, which made the visibility for diving poor at times, but in compensation and probably as a result of the plankton, some twenty sightings of Basking Sharks (*Cetorhinus maximus*) were recorded — some were very close to the shore and the whole animal was clearly visible. There were also reports of Dolphin and Porpoise being seen from the Oldenburg. Large numbers of Common Jellyfish (*Aurelia aurita*) and Compass Jellyfish (*Chrysaora hysoscella*) were present throughout the summer and there were also several sightings of the large Rhizostoma Pulmo Jellyfish — these looked like white carrier bags floating off the west side of the island.

Over the years the main track to the North End of the island, particularly the area from Three Quarter Wall onwards, has become poor with a tendency to get wider at all the marshy points. With the help of volunteers, I hope to resurface all the bad sections and bring it back to a single track once more. About one third of the work has already been completed and the stone removed from the new beach road has proved a useful source of material.

There are many conservation jobs on the island, which would be difficult to undertake without the help of volunteers. During the year we have benefitted from a number of enthusiastic and hard-working groups. The last two LFS parties completed all the tasks I asked them to do, despite some appalling weather. In the autumn a combination of National Trust Acorn Camp and LFS work party, removed the area of rhododendron below Tibbetts — this now only leaves the large area above Brazen Ward, which I hope will be tackled towards the end of this year.

I have carefully monitored the animals on the island and the Sika Deer appear to be holding steady at 4 stags and 14 hind. The goats, on the other hand, are reducing and after a recent accident, when a billy fell from the Logan Stone, it now looks as though we only have 6 left.

Of all the animals on Lundy, the one I have become most familiar with, is the one I would have most wished to ignore. Towards the end of the summer it became obvious that there had been a tremendous increase in the number of Brown Rats. We even had occasions when they entered some of the properties and as a result I have spent a considerable time during the winter reducing the population. Whilst the operation will have to be run down as soon as the bird breeding season starts, I am confident that visitors will not be worried by rats from now on. It will be interesting to see if the reduction in rats has any effect on the breeding habits of the birds — rats have been thought responsible for the decline in the Puffin numbers in recent years.

Some of the sea birds did not do well last year and the Guillemots in particular had very few chicks. It would be easy to put this down to disturbance caused by climbers, or diving boats coming too close to the shore in places such as Jenny' Cove, however these disturbances appear to be minimal. The same trend was also repeated at other breeding sites around the country and it is more likely that the distress caused by the unusually hot weather played a large part in the low breeding figures.

Climbers seem to have their own language — many of the names given to climbs bear no relationship to the established names which appear on maps. In order to clarify the climbing restrictions imposed during the breeding season, I have listed all the faces by the climber's names and this, together with named access routes for those climbs remaining open, should ensure that the birds have the least amount of disturbance possible.

Interpretation is an important part of my duties and during the summer I was able to take a number of guided walks around the south end of the island and also gave evening slide shows in the Linhay. The display boards in the Linhay are excellent as a quick reference to the history and life on Lundy, but they do not help visitors identify their flora and fauna finds or sitings. During this year I hope to extend the information available to make identification easier. Hopefully this material will be displayed in the open area at the back of the church, in place of the present bookshelves.

I was beginning to get quite paranoid about the rarer birds being seen on the island; almost without exception, the bird had disappeared by the time I got to the reported sites. However, my confidence has been partially restored, as within minutes of saying goodbye to the last LFS work party, we found a Great Spotted Cuckoo in the Black Shed. This followed several days of strong southerly winds, which must have blown the bird off course. It is a first for both Lundy and Devon.

Let's hope that 1990 proves to be as interesting and exciting as last year and that as many LFS members as possible have the opportunity to visit the island and share its magic. For my part, I would like to say how much I appreciate all the help and encouragement I have already received from the Society.

A. M. GIBSON
Spring 1990.