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The Aleutian Islands. Geological Notes of the Group-Glaciers and Volcanoes. Fauna and Flora of the Group-Agricultural Notes-The Inhabitants. (Special Correspondence of the Bulletin.) (By the Alaska Commercial Company's steamer Dora ... the following delayed letter ... came to hand:) Ounalaska, May 21, 1881.

John Muir

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THE ALEUTIAN ISLANDS.

Geological Notes of the Group—Glaciers and Volcanoes.

Fauna and Flora of the Group—Agricultural Notes—The Inhabitants.

By the Alaska Commercial Company's steamer Dora, which arrived in port last Saturday from Omalnuk, the followingdelayed letter from the Dall's special correspondent in the Arctic came to hand:

SIOULASSA, May 21, 1881.

The AeIutian chain of islands is one of the most remarkable and interesting to be found on the globe, owing to a regular curve a thousand miles long from the end of the Alaska Peninsula towards Kamchatka, and nearly uniting the American and Asiatic continents. A very short geological time ago, just before the coming on of the glacial Period, the connection of the continents was probably complete, inasmuch as the entire chain is simply a de- graded portion of the North American Coast Mountain, with its foothills and connecting ridges between the summit peaks a few feet under water. These submerged ridges forming the passage between the islands as they exist today, while it is evident that the aggregating degradation has been effected by the majestic down-grinding glaciers that lately loaded all the chain. Only a few scattered remnants of these glaciers are now in existence, lingering in the highest, snowiest mountains on the largest of the island.

"A CHOCOLATE VIEW."

The mountains are from 9,000 to 12,000 feet high, many of them capped with perpetual snow, and rendered yet more imposing by volcanoes emitting smoke and ashes—the faithful manifestations of upbuilding volcanic forces that has been active long before the beginning of the great ice winter. To the traveler from the south, approaching any portion of the chain during the winter or spring months, the view presented is exceedingly desolate and forbidding. The snow comes down to the water's edge, the solid winter-white being interrupted only by black crowning bluffs with faces too sheer for snow to lie upon, and by the backs of cluster sure and long rugged reefs beaten and overswept by heavy breakers rolling in from the Pacific Ocean to Bering's Sea, while for ten or twelve months in the year all the mountains are wrapped in gloomy, ragged storm-clouds.

ANIMAL LIFE.

Nevertheless there is no lack of warm, spring life even here. The stony shores swarm with flocks—cod, halibut, herring, salmon trout, etc.—together with whales, seals and many species of water birds, while the sea otter is the most valuable of the fur-bearing animals and their favorite homes about the only remaining wave-washed reefs. The only land animals occurring in considerable numbers are, as far as I have been able to learn, three or four species of foxes, which are distributed from one end of the chain to the other, with the Arctic grouse, ravens, snow-birds, wolves and a few fox-hounds, no deer, wild sheep, goats, bears, or wolves, though all of these are abundant on the mainland in the same latitude.

"FAUNA AND FLORA OF THE ISLANDS."

In two short excursions that I made to the top of a mountain, about 2,000 feet high, back of the settlement here, and to a barren island in the harbor, I found the snow in some places well tracked with foxes and grouse, and six species of birds, mostly solitary or in twos and threes. The vegetation near the level of the sea and on bare wind-swept ridges up to a height of a thousand feet or more is remarkably close and luxuriant, covering every foot of the ground. First there is a dense plush of mosses and lichens from six inches to a foot in depth, and out of this cloth-like blanket and over it there grow five or six species of good nutritions grasses, the tallest—shoulder-high, three species of Vaccinium, cranberry, emerald, the delightful lillies in extensive patches, the beautiful purple-flowered kayaniska, a prairie, two species of dwarf willow, three of Lyco podium, two saxifragas, a lupine, wild pea, Arctangeli um, geranium, geoomes, cran, bearberry and the little gold-thread cinquefoil, besides two ferns and a few withered specimens that I could not make out. The amaranth, draba and bearberry are already in bloom; the willows are beginning to show the ends of their silky catkins and a good many green leaves are sprouting up in sheltered places near the level of the sea. At a height of four or five hundred feet, however, it is still winter, with scarce a memory of the rich and beautiful blooms of the summer time. The tall grasses, with their showy purple panicles in flower, waving in the wind over all the lower mountain slopes, with a growth heavy enough for the oxen, must be a beautiful sight, and so must the broad patches of heath-worts with their multitude of pink bells, and the tall lupines and ferns along the banks of the streams.

Written May 21, 1881.
ABSENCE OF TREES.

There is not a tree of any kind on the Islands excepting a few spruces brought from Sitka and planted by the Russians some fifty years ago. They are still alive, but have made very little growth—a state of things no doubt due to climate, but in what respect the climate differs from that of Southeastern Alaska, lying both north and south of this latitude where forests flourish exuberantly in all kinds of exposures, on rich alluvium or on bare rocks, I am unable to say. The only wood I noticed, and all that is said to exist on any of the Islands, is small patches of willow, with stems an inch thick, and the several species of woody-stemmed heath worts; this the native Aleuts gather for fuel, together with small quantities of driftwood cast on the shores by the winds and currents.

GOOD PASTURAGE.

Grass of good quality for stock is abundant on all the larger Islands and cattle thrive and grow fat during the summer wherever they have been tried, but the wetness of the summer months will always prevent hay from being made in any considerable quantities and make stock-raising on anything like a large scale impossible.

LIMITED AGRICULTURAL POSSIBILITIES.

The agricultural possibilities of the Islands are also very limited. Oats and barley head out but never fully mature, and if they did, it would be very difficult to get it dry enough for the granary. Potatoes, lettuce, cabbage, turnips, beets, etc., do well on spots that are well drained and have a southern exposure.

POPULATION OF THE ISLANDS.

According to the census taken last year the population of these Islands is 2,451. Of these 83 are whites, 479 creoles, and 1,890 Aleuts. The Aleuts are far more nearly civilized and Christianized than any other tribe of Alaska Indians. From a third to one-half of the men and women read and write. Their occupation is the hunting of the sea-otter for the Commercial Alaska Company. A good hunter makes from $400 to $800 per annum. In this pursuit they go hundreds of miles in their frail skin-covered canoes, which are so light that they may easily be carried under one's arm. Earning so much money they are able to supply themselves with many comforts beyond the reach of most of the laboring classes of Europe. Nevertheless, with all their advantages they are fading away like other Indians. The deaths exceed the births in nearly every one of their villages, and it is only a question of time when they will vanish from the face of the earth.

John Muir.