

Soil Mapping in the Falklands

By Jim McAdam

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After many years of working on a wide range of projects in the natural and managed environment in the Falklands, I was delighted to be included in the soil mapping project team. I think this is a really worthwhile and very important project-it followed on directly from two projects I had a big part in- 1. Climate change predictions for the Falklands and southern Patagonia (this project involved sourcing all known weather records for the regions)-2. The impact of potential climate change on terrestrial ecosystems in the Falklands. From the latter project, one clear gap emerged-the lack of information on the peatland resource in the Falklands and the need for an online soil map which could be used as working tool for farmers and advisors to better manage the soil resource and prevent erosion. I have a farmer liaison role in the project and will source farmers to work with, then test and refine the digital soil maps generated to direct best practice in land management.

I have visited the Falklands at least annually since 1983 (I worked there full time from 1976-78) and this time I was especially looking forward to my visit as I had retired from my government research post in Northern Ireland (but still keep my links with Queen's University Belfast) and so was able to spend more time in the Falklands-and my wife Geraldine was able to come down with me.



Jim, Geraldine and friends, Bluff Cove

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My first task was to present a public lecture on climate change and soils in the Falklands to set the scene for the project and keep the local population involved. I have found over the years that the small community in the Falklands islands are well informed and keen to be involved in environmental matters relating to the islands-much more so than the general public would be in the UK. There is a great awareness of the importance of and risks inherent in potential climate change.

The next major task was to help organise and participate in 2 stakeholder workshops around the project. Given the logistics of transport between East and West Falkland and the busy time the short summer season is for farmers and landowners, we decided to run duplicate workshops on each of the large islands. I had been planning these with Steffi and the team well in advance and they ran really well. From them and subsequent follow-up visits we were able to interest a really good group of farmers to work with us on the project. The workshops were also really invaluable as they helped us to get to know each other and bond together as a team. We are certainly a multinational group-with members from Chile, Germany, Italy, New Zealand, UK, and Ireland- and absent colleagues in Wales and Scotland! I really enjoy the good team-spirit amongst us all. Having meals out together, travelling in the camp, a fine dinner at Steffi's with her family all helped us to contribute our individual roles to the project.



Jim, Ann, Steffi and Roberto at Port Howard

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I was also really pleased that an agronomist colleague from Tierra del Fuego, Enrique Frers was able to secure a Shackleton Scholarship to support a visit to the islands while I was there. Enrique has a lot of experience in growing Tussac grass (*Poa flabellata*) - a valuable forage resource and ground cover for soil stabilisation and erosion control-on Tierra del Fuego. He was visiting the Falklands to share his knowledge and see how Tussac is managed on farms and by Falklands Conservation in the islands. Fortunately he was able to come around with the soil project team and we all benefitted from his experience, knowledge and sheer enthusiasm! The South Atlantic region is sparsely enough populated and researched and the more collaboration we can foster between those who live, work and have experience of farming and environmental management in the region, the better.



Enrique, James, Ben, Sonja and Jim at Cape Dolphin

One of the most enjoyable parts of my visit was travelling around farms and talking to farmers -who are invariably interested in the project and in how to manage their pastures and soils. We stayed on Bleaker Island, Sealion Island and Saunders Island and visited farms at Fox Bay, Port Howard, Dunbar, Elephant Beach, Cape Dolphin, and Port Louis. A special word of thanks to my good friend Stefan Heijtz

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who has restored the Old Post Office at Fox Bay-thanks for the hospitality and for the loan of your TV to help us give our presentations in the Fox Bay Social Club! Finally I got an opportunity to present the project to senior Government officials and MLA's, all of whom expressed strong support for it. Needless to say it was also an opportunity for me to catch up with my many friends in the Islands!



James, Enrique, Steffi, Jim and Roberto in the Southern Cross Social club, Fox Bay.

Overall, I feel the project is going really well, the interaction with and support from SAERI and the Department of Agriculture are crucial in project delivery. The project team is engaging well with the stakeholders and I am really looking forward to taking the project to the next stage.

