

4. Climate

The Group lies within the hurricane belt and has from time to time experienced severe gales, though none have been reported during the last few years. Atafu suffered a westerly gale in February, 1941, Fakaofu a north-easterly gale of force 8 on 14th January, 1936, and a westerly gale of force 9 on the following day. Nukunono has on record a north-north-east gale in December, 1939, and a westerly gale in February, 1942, the latter being accompanied by a twenty-four-hour rainfall of 6.20 in.

Regular meteorological reports are received daily from the three Tokelau Islands, the station on Atafu having been established in 1925. The summary below is taken from observations at Atafu, which is the only station to have a complete climate table for the last year.

The time used in the islands is Samoan time, which is that of longitude 165 degrees west, eleven hours behind Greenwich Mean Time.

The prevailing winds were from an easterly direction with a tendency to north-easterly during the wet season (November–February). Wind speed averaged 5 knots, freshening at times to 6 knots in the afternoon. The mean cloud amount (taken from 7 a.m. reports) is 4.6 eighths. The total rainfall was 100.71 in., most of which fell during the latter part of the year. The maximum daily rainfall was 5.70 in. on the 1st December. Temperatures were warm with a mean of 83.3° F. for the year. The maximum reached was 95.0° F. on the 11th November, while the minimum recorded was 71.5° F. on the 1st December. The mean humidity was again 84 per cent. in the mornings dropping to approximately 76 per cent. in the afternoons.

B. HISTORY

Swain's Island was probably the first of the Tokelau Group to be discovered by Europeans. The Spanish discoverer, Quiros, landed there in 1606 in search of water, and for a time the island was known as Quiros' Island.

A record exists of the original inhabitants who were seen by Quiros when he visited the Group. They are reported to have been fair in colouring with golden hair, and are stated by Quiros to have used large double canoes some 60 ft. long. Abandoned taro pits, thought to have been used by these early inhabitants, are still to be seen around the shore of the land-locked lagoon on Swain's Island.

By the time of the next reported visit by Europeans in 1841, this population had disappeared. Survivors had apparently existed for a period on Nukunono after being driven out by a new migration of people which, settling first at Fakaofu, conquered the whole Group over a long period of years and absorbed the earlier inhabitants. Tradition suggests that this second people came from Samoa.

On 21st June, 1765, Atafu was discovered by Commodore Byron, R.N. The next visit to Atafu was on 6th June, 1791, by Captain Edwards, commanding H.M.S. "Pandora" in search of the "Bounty" mutineers. Three days later Edwards discovered Nukunono. Fakaofu was discovered in 1841 by a Frenchman, Captain Morvan, in command of the "Adolphe." In the same year Captain Hudson, of the United States Exploring Expedition, after visiting Atafu, came on Fakaofu and recorded its discovery. Sailing south from Fakaofu, Hudson rediscovered Quiros' Island and renamed it Swain's Island after his informant in Samoa. In 1856 an American, Eli Jennings, took over Swain's Island from three Frenchmen who had settled there as agents of a French trading company, and the island remained in the hands of his family until 1925, the year of its annexation to American Samoa.

From accounts of early missionaries it is apparent that the numbers of inhabitants were severely reduced by the depredations of the South American, and particularly Peruvian, "blackbirders" who operated in the Group probably between 1850 and 1870.