



HAL
open science

Islands of abandoned projects: The checkered history of the French Southern Islands

Sebastian Vincent Grevsmühl, Vincent Monnoir

► To cite this version:

Sebastian Vincent Grevsmühl, Vincent Monnoir. Islands of abandoned projects: The checkered history of the French Southern Islands. *Polar Record*, 2026, 62, pp.e2. <10.1017/S003224742510020X>. <hal-05474416>

HAL Id: hal-05474416

<https://hal.science/hal-05474416v1>

Submitted on 29 Jan 2026


HAL is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire HAL, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.



Distributed under a Creative Commons CC BY 4.0 - Attribution - International License

Islands of abandoned projects: The checkered history of the French Southern Islands

Sebastian Vincent Grevsmühl¹  and Vincent Monnoir²

¹CNRS/EHESS/Paris 1, Centre de recherches historiques, Paris, France and ²EHESS, Centre de recherches historiques, Paris, France

Research Article

Cite this article: Grevsmühl SV and Monnoir V. Islands of abandoned projects: The checkered history of the French Southern Islands. *Polar Record* 62(e2): 1–12. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S003224742510020X>

Received: 7 April 2025

Revised: 16 December 2025

Accepted: 27 December 2025

Keywords:

environment; history; TAAF; France; patrimonialisation

Corresponding author:

Sebastian Vincent Grevsmühl;

Email: sebastian.grevsmuhl@univ-paris1.fr

Abstract

This article attempts a first historical periodisation of the checkered history of the French Southern Islands in the Indian Ocean. Beginning with early extractive activities during the 18th and 19th centuries and followed by colonial ambitions during the first half of the 20th century, the article also discusses the more recent efforts of the French government to reinforce sovereignty in the form of permanent bases, especially during the 1950s and 1960s. The most recent period covered of scientific affirmation and ecological restoration (1970s–2006) introduces a solid historical perspective on the still ongoing efforts (from 2006 onwards) of reinforced patrimonialisation and environmental protection of the French Southern Islands. Throughout all periods, our main attention is directed towards various forms of projects. Indeed, the project perspective allows to uncover largely forgotten ambitions and shows that the history of the French Southern Islands is closely connected to larger historical developments in the entire Antarctic and sub-Antarctic region.

Introduction

Much of the historical polar literature is devoted to the Antarctic continent, and relatively few works deal with the history of the French Southern Islands in the Indian Ocean (notable exceptions are Raymond Arnaud et al., 2007; Cousenon, 1989; Couesnon & Guyader, 1999; de Brossard, 1971; Delépine, 1976, 1995, 2002; Duhamel, 2023; Galteland, 2013; Vanney, 1986; Verdenal, 2004). Admittedly, some important events have attracted the attention of historians in the past, such as the 1874 transit of Venus observed by scientific expeditions to Kerguelen and Saint-Paul (Aubin, 2006; Hingley & Launay, 2000; Sicard, 1998). Indeed, scientific activities are the focus of many historical studies (Fogg, 1992; Roberts, 2011), and this is particularly true of Antarctica where science has become the main “bargaining chip” (Elzinga, 1993; Herr & Hall, 1989) since the successful negotiation of the Antarctic Treaty in 1959. However, over the past two decades, the polar regions have also attracted increasing attention from environmental historians (for an overview, see Grevsmühl, 2016; Grevsmühl, 2024), and several recent monographs are tangible evidence of a renewed interest in historical research on the Antarctic region (Antonello, 2019; Howkins, 2016, 2017; Jouvenet, 2022; Martin-Nielsen, 2023; McCann, 2019). These new perspectives paint a much more nuanced picture of what is often referred to as the “greening” of the poles (Antonello, 2019), going well beyond the stories of miraculous conservation successes that tend to permeate not only popular historical accounts but also public discourses of the institutions that administer these territories. Indeed, as argued here, the patrimonialisation of nature is by no means a recent phenomenon, nor is it the inevitable “natural” destiny of the Southern polar regions.

By focusing on the French sub-Antarctic islands in the Indian Ocean, that is, Kerguelen, Crozet, Saint-Paul and Amsterdam, the aim of this paper is twofold. First, we provide a detailed historical basis for a first general periodisation. Second, we thus intend broadening our historical knowledge of the strategic value of the French Southern Islands, their perceived geographical and economic importance in the context of rapidly expanding globalisation and decolonisation, and above all of the abundance of projects of all kinds that, by and large, were no successes or never saw the light of day. Indeed, the project perspective makes it possible to bring to light a history that has remained largely obscured. It takes some of its inspiration from what historian Kathryn Oberdeck has called the “unbuilt environment,” further developed by Peyton’s study of unrealised projects in northern Canada (Oberdeck, 2005; Peyton, 2011). Peyton argues that by examining projects that were cancelled or rejected, one can trace the multiple unintended effects these unfulfilled development schemes exerted over time on the natural and human environment (Peyton, 2011, 2017). The French projects which often remained in the drawers of administrators, scientists or the military for decades have been unjustly overlooked so far because they constitute in many ways the very essence of the history of the French Southern Islands. In many respects, they also serve as an invitation to write a history of possibilities and projections, of imaginaries and unrealised aspirations.

© The Author(s), 2026. Published by Cambridge University Press. This is an Open Access article, distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution licence (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits unrestricted re-use, distribution and reproduction, provided the original article is properly cited.



Prior periodisation efforts and early extractive activities

Polar historians are familiar with periodisation efforts that usually highlight successive phases in the exploration of the Antarctic continent (Headland, 2009). The “Heroic Age” of Antarctica (late 19th century – 1920s) is undoubtedly the most studied period in Antarctic history (Chaturvedi, 1996; Hayes, 1932; Kirwan, 1959; Mills, 2003; Sullivan, 1957). It is generally followed by the “Mechanical Age” (1920s–1950s) closely linked to the technological advances of the First World War (Belanger, 2006; Bertrand, 1971). Finally, the third period, the “Scientific Age,” was profoundly shaped by the International Geophysical Year held in 1957–58 (Collis & Dodds, 2008; Dodds, 2010; Launius, Fleming, & DeVorkin, 2010; Sullivan, 1961). Complementary efforts were conducted in order to better understand the economic history of the Antarctic region. For instance, Robert Headland has proposed three successive extractive periods (Headland, 2009, pp. 36–37), characterised by fur seal and elephant seal exploitation, combined with whaling voyages conducted during the 18th and 19th centuries, followed by the era of the modern whaling industry introduced in 1904. This second extractive period was finally replaced by the age of krill, fish and squid exploitation which began intensively in the late 1960s. Admittedly, these periodisation efforts are of limited value for the history of the French Southern Islands as the French territories have experienced very diverse historical trajectories, even though Headland’s extractive periods give a very good idea of the general evolution of the exploitation of living resources in the polar regions.

As Marthe Emmanuel, secretary to Jean Charcot, has shown, France’s leaders of the *Ancien régime* as well as those who followed stayed out of Southern affairs until the end of the 19th century (Emmanuel, 1959, p.342), reflecting “a broader lull in exploration at the time” (Martin-Nielsen, 2023, p.50). Although it is possible to identify an initial period linked to the great geographical discoveries, it remains problematic to speak of a true “Heroic Age.” As Delépine has argued with regard to the most emblematic French figure of this early period, naval officer Yves-Joseph de Kerguelen de Trémarec “posterity agrees neither on his glory as a great discoverer nor on the infamy of his downfall” (Delépine, 1998, p.7; Emmanuel, 1959). Nevertheless, the toponymy of the Kerguelen archipelago, from Roland Island in the north to Gros Ventre Cove in the south, still preserves the memory of Kerguelen’s two pioneering voyages in 1772 and 1773, making the archipelago a French territory. However, Kerguelen’s victory was short-lived as it was already “lost to him during his lifetime” (Delépine, 1998, p.203) to the point where even he himself no longer mentioned it in his writings.

In its rivalry with the English, Kerguelen directly inspired other voyages of its time, notably James Cook’s famous third circumnavigation voyage (1776–1780) (Emmanuel, 1959). This voyage, during which Cook discovered in 1776 that the Kerguelen archipelago was rather modest in size, also put an end to the fabrications about the supposed southern continent and its fanciful economic wealth that Kerguelen claimed to have found and which he had named “France australe.” Cook did not hesitate to underline his disappointment by naming the archipelago for its austere character “Desolation Island or Kerguelen’s Land” (see Delépine, 1998, p.171). Unlike several early French expeditions, Cook’s voyages considerably improved our scientific knowledge of the fauna and flora of the French sub-Antarctic islands. For example, we owe to the surgeon on his expedition, William Anderson, the first scientific description of the famous Kerguelen cabbage

(*Pringella antiscorbutica*) known for its antiscorbutic benefits (Hartely, Guy, & Lord, 2024). Historians also generally agree that the account of Cook’s second circumnavigation (1772–1775), which reported at the time of its publication in 1777 that “sea lions [i.e. fur seals], or sea bears, were quite numerous” (Cook, 1777, p.213) on South Georgia, must be considered a founding moment. It opened up a new historical period for the French Southern Islands, drawing almost immediately the attention of American and British sealers and whalers to the region (Bertrand, 1971; Burton, 2007). At the time, many hunters were active on the coasts of South America, and they were looking for new hunting opportunities. South Georgia, the first hunting ground in the South Atlantic located within the Antarctic Convergence, thus became the first major site for hunting fur and elephant seals in the Antarctic region (Bonner & Laws, 1964).

The abundant historical iconography on seal and whale hunting reveals the grim reality of these activities (see Busch, 1985; Hart, 2020). Many historians have identified the absence of rules and control as one of the main problems of the seal hunting industry in its early days, and massive over-exploitation of stocks was the rule (Basberg & Headland, 2008; Grady, 1986). As a result, by 1820, there were no seals left in South Georgia and hunters had to turn to other islands and archipelagos where peaks and collapses followed a similar pattern throughout the 19th century. The seal populations of the South Shetland Islands (1820s), the Iles Crozet and Prince Edward Island (1840s), and the Iles Kerguelen and Heard Island (1850s and 60s) thus all suffered the same fate (Headland, 2009, pp. 60–62). In Saint-Paul and Amsterdam, hunters primarily targeted fur seals, while elephant seals were the main target in Crozet and Kerguelen. Although some populations showed signs of recovery during the second half of the 19th century, allowing for new hunting missions, catches never reached the high figures seen in the late 18th and early 19th centuries.

The colonial period: the time of concessions (1893–1945)

The French State stayed out of Southern affairs throughout the first period of living resource exploitation. In fact, apart from an initial taking of possession of the islands of Saint-Paul and Amsterdam in 1843 (Procès-Verbaux des prises de possession, 1843) but never ratified by the government (Lettre du ministre de la marine, 1844), the islands remained ownerless throughout the 19th century and were freely frequented by fishermen and hunters on a regular basis. It was only in 1892 that the French government finally decided to send a ship to officially take possession of these remote islands. Amsterdam and Saint-Paul were visited for this purpose in 1892 (Copies des procès-verbaux des prises de possession, 1892) and Kerguelen in 1893 (Rapport du commandant Lieutard, 1893).

The taking of possession of Kerguelen was immortalised in photographs taken by Ensign Charles Etienne Mercié. These documents bear witness to an important performative act of sovereignty, and they mark a turning point in the history of the French Southern Islands as concessions were granted by the French state at the same time as possession was taken (Monnoir, 2025). During the early 1890s, the French Colonial Party launched a vigorous lobbying campaign that ultimately led to the granting of concessions to private firms in many of France’s colonies. With the backing of several employers’ organisations and pressure groups, its parliamentarians championed French expansion across Africa and other colonies, insisting that colonial development should proceed without expense to the state (Coquery-Vidrovitch, 1972; Lagana, 1990). As a consequence, in French Equatorial and

Oriental Africa, concessions for caoutchouc exploitation (Fabre & Labardin, 2024) but also industrial fishing and whaling (Locher, 2025) were issued during the first decades of the 20th century.

In much the same spirit, a decree issued by the French President Sadi Carnot on 31 July 1893 granted Henry-Émile Bossière the right to exploit Iles Kerguelen and its surrounding waters for a period of 50 years (Ministère des colonies, 1893), even though it was his brother, René, who had conducted the negotiations with the authorities (Lettre de René Bossière, 1893). While the contract authorised the concessionaire to set up fishing establishments, it also allowed him to exploit its natural resources. The brothers' plan was to effectively occupy Iles Kerguelen, and their priority was to establish a sheep farm in the archipelago that would form the basis of a "family population centre" (Lettre de René Bossière, 1912).

The Bossière brothers based their project on firsthand observations in Patagonia of pastoral capitalism. In the Falkland Islands especially, the rise of sheep farming had turned the territory into a veritable "sheepocracy," supporting both economic growth and permanent settlement. By invoking this parallel, the concessionaires situated their enterprise within a wider imperial framework of colonial development. In their vision, sheep were to fulfil in the French sub-Antarctic the same functions they had in South America: to populate the land, to exploit its resources, and thereby to secure its possession.

The colonisation project of the Iles Kerguelen thus was mainly based on reasoning by analogy which the Bossière brothers adopted also from contemporary authors who defended the idea that the climate and natural environment of Iles Kerguelen were very similar to those of the Falklands and Tierra del Fuego because they are located at similar latitudes (Etude de l'amiral Layrle, 1885; Milne-Edwards, 1893). However, René Bossière established this analogy well before actually setting foot on the archipelago. First doubts arose after his brother, Henry, returned from the first of his two trips to Kerguelen in 1908–1909. While he explained to the press (Bossière, 1909) that his brother's projections were justified, he was far more cautious in his report to the minister (Rapport de M. Henry E. Bossière, 1909). In any case, unable to set up a sheep farming station in the archipelago in 1895 and 1901, the two brothers had to turn to an immediately lucrative activity, namely whaling and elephant seal hunting. They thus signed several leasing contracts for their concession, the main one with a Norwegian company, *Storm, Bull & Co.* (Contrat passé entre René et Henry Bossière et Storm, Bull et Cie, 1908). The latter created a dedicated subsidiary, *A/S Kerguelen*, which set up a whaling station at Port Jeanne d'Arc in 1908 and began hunting marine animals, with mixed success, before its interruption caused by the outbreak of the First World War.

The whaling company paid 5% of the sale of oil to the concessionaires which enabled them in 1911 to form a *Société concessionnaire des îles Kerguelen*, rebaptised the following year as *Compagnie générale des îles Kerguelen, Saint-Paul et Amsterdam*. The two brothers then decided to set up a study mission to finally develop their sheep farming project. In December 1911, René Bossière sent a young nobleman, Baron Pierre Decouz, who had just returned from five years in Patagonia, accompanied by a young Savoyard guide, Valérien Culet, to Kerguelen. The two were to winter in the archipelago, settling in a location of their choice with a small flock of 20 Merino ewes and 3 Romney Marsh rams transported from Durban in South Africa. The two Frenchmen settled for the winter in Observatory Bay, and before setting sail again in February 1913 on a Norwegian ship, they had their sheep transported to Howe Island, in the north of the archipelago, which

they had judged to be suitable for breeding but which was a long way from the Norwegian centres of operation. Whereas Culet saw no great future for livestock farming (Carnet de route, 1911–1913), Decouz produced an enthusiastic report, claiming that 200,000 sheep could live in the archipelago (Decouz, 1914).

Even before reading Decouz's report, René Bossière launched a new expedition project and acquired two boats. The first ship, the steamer *Yves de Kerguelen*, was to leave Le Havre in December 1912, explore the archipelago methodically, choose the most favourable sites for breeding and wait for the arrival of a second ship, the sailing ship *Jacques*, which left Swansea in February 1913 and aboard which was René Bossière, conveying more than 1600 sheep purchased in the Falklands. However, the *Jacques*, delayed in South America, only arrived in Kerguelen in August 1913, after a trying crossing in the middle of winter, so that the first ship, which was supposed to be waiting for it, had already left for South Africa two weeks earlier. Lacking the information and resources he thought he would have, René Bossière hastily unloaded the 1150 animals that had survived the crossing on the Bouquet de la Grye peninsula which he named *Port-Couvreux* in honour of his company's main financial backer, Abel Couvreux. The location turned out to be not at all suitable for sheep farming as it is very hilly. The four shepherds recruited in Montevideo were left on site from 17 August 1913, in temporary installations with very little equipment or supplies (Procès-verbal de l'Assemblée Générale, 1914). Less than two years later, when the three remaining settlers were repatriated, only 200 sheep were left.

After the interruption caused by the First World War, the Bossière brothers sent Alfred Alaverry back to Kerguelen to check on the condition of the flocks. He found only two Icelandic sheep born in the archipelago on Ile Longue, belonging to the flock left by the Norwegians. Everything had to be redone. In addition, in 1922, three or four sheep were seen alive on Howe Island, and in 1924, two Falkland sheep imported in 1913 were found near Port-Couvreux. René Bossière used the very few sheep found alive to justify his breeding project and its likelihood of success, even though almost all of them had been decimated (Note de la Compagnie Générale, 1927). He based his argument on the fact that in the Falklands, it was the multiplication of a small flock of sheep left to fend for itself and forgotten that made the Falkland Islands Company realise the possibility of developing livestock farming.

Aware of the inappropriateness of the location, and despite plans to settle on Howe Island, René Bossière was constrained by his dependence on Anglo-Norwegian ships. As a result, he once again sent shepherds to Port-Couvreux from 1922 onwards with only 53 new Merino and Romney Marsh sheep from Cape Town, a sign of the concessionaire's caution after the previous failures. In reality, most of the shepherds were either sailors who spent the winter looking after a ship left behind or hunting sea elephants, or people from Le Havre recruited by the two brothers with no real knowledge of the shepherding trade, such as Paul Aubé, a neighbour of Alfred Alaverry's in Le Havre, who stayed at Port-Couvreux between 1922 and 1925. By 1924, the small flock had been largely decimated, with only 18 sheep remaining, including three rams (Procès-verbal de l'Assemblée Générale, 1924). René Bossière blamed this on the shepherds and thus seemed incapable of questioning the presuppositions of his project. From 1927 onwards, he even decided to give new impetus to his breeding enterprise and, above all, to its underlying objective, that is, the creation of a family population centre. He sent three families from Le Havre to Port-Couvreux: Georges and Louisa Le Galloudec and their daughter Odette (aged ten), Pierre and Ernestine Petit, and

Léon and Renée Ménager and their daughter Léone (aged twelve). Georges Le Galloudec was appointed head of the station but died during an expedition in the archipelago in early December 1927. He froze to death and was only found on 23 December by the doctor of the French ship *Lozère* while hunting elephant seals for the concessionaires (Le Povremoyne, 1929).

The two remaining heads of the family, Petit and Ménager, got on very badly, as can be seen from the diary kept in Port-Couvreux by Pierre Petit (Journal à terre, 1929–1930). Petit decided to return to Le Havre after three years, despite all the effort he had put into looking after the animals, especially the pigs, which had also been introduced and were also struggling to survive. The small station laboriously produced a few hundred kilos of wool from a sheep population that was constantly declining without any new supply. The settlers also produced a few dozen tonnes of elephant seal oil from the small factory. The last wintering of the Port-Couvreux station, in 1930, saw the deaths of two new sailors left in charge probably from severe thiamine deficiency (also known as beriberi). The Ménager family and the last surviving sailor were themselves affected by serious symptoms when supplies from the *Austral*, the concessionaires' last elephant seal hunting vessel, arrived in Port-Couvreux in early December 1930. On 28 March 1931, the last four inhabitants of Port-Couvreux re-embarked on the *Austral*, as the concessionary company ceased its elephant seal hunting activities due to the rapid decline of oil prices. After almost two decades of human and animal settlement, the Port-Couvreux station was definitively abandoned, and with it the project to colonise Kerguelen through sheep farming. Several thousand sheep died on the archipelago, and a few dozen were born there. Although its definitive evacuation was initially linked to the end of elephant seal hunting, the breeding station had never managed to prove its success during the four decades since the concession was granted, as it was unable to survive without any other activity in the archipelago. The dream of family settlement imagined by the Bossière brothers had definitely come to an end.

In comparative perspective, the Kerguelen case illustrates the limits of transferring successful colonial models across ecological and geopolitical frontiers. While the Falklands and Tierra del Fuego were transformed by pastoral capitalism, the Kerguelen remained refractory to such schemes. This failure also highlights the speculative nature of the concessionary regime: projects of *mise en valeur* were often initiated less for their economic viability than for their potential to materialise sovereignty. Colonial “failures” thus are as historically significant as successes because they reveal the assumptions, networks and imaginaries that underpinned imperial ambitions (see also Locher, 2025).

The sheep farming venture of the Bossière brothers thus embodies the contradictions of colonial capitalism in the sub-Antarctic. At once a development scheme, an imperial assertion of grandeur and a speculative gamble, it never overcame the structural constraints of environment, distance and limited state investment in the logic of an “empire on the cheap” (Cogneau, 2025). What remains, however, is the project’s symbolic role: to anchor France’s claim to possession through the language of settlement and improvement, even where the material basis for such a project was absent. The failure of colonisation through sheep farming gave the Kerguelen archipelago a strong trajectory: it would not become the new Falklands or French Patagonia.

The period of permanent bases (1945–1973)

After the failures of the colonial period, a new period began for the French Southern Islands in the immediate aftermath of the Second

World War. During the war, German privateers had used the Iles Kerguelen as supply points for their missions to disrupt Allied shipping (Delépine, 1964; Logan, 1979; Martin-Nielsen, 2023; Roskill, 1954). To prevent further military use, the Australians even mined Kerguelen waters with 18 magnetic deep-water mines (Emplacement des mines mouillées aux îles Kerguelen, 1959; Mouillage de mines aux Kerguelen, 1959; see also Martin-Nielsen, 2023, p. 72). These military activities helped to reevaluate the importance attached to the geostrategic value of the French Southern Islands. Indeed, their strategic location halfway between South Africa and Australia motivated the French government under the Fourth Republic to fundamentally reconsider its limited involvement in the region, aiming now well beyond mere concessions.

The renewed interest in remote islands in the Indian Ocean was simultaneously driven by a revival of long-standing territorial ambitions. The British government had unsuccessfully requested at the end of the 19th century the cession of the islands of Saint-Paul and Amsterdam, followed by demands of Australia during the first decades of the 20th century to obtain Iles Kerguelen. As soon as the Second World War ended, Australia showed again interest in Kerguelen, in particular because of its proximity to the islands of Heard and MacDonal (Sebillé, 1901). The renewal of this request followed the cession of Heard and MacDonal Islands to Australia by the British government in 1947 in order to help Australia set up its own polar research programme known as ANARE (Australian National Antarctic Research Expedition) with the installation of their first polar scientific base at Atlas Cove on Heard Island in December 1947 (McGonigal & Woodworth, 2003; Présence et activité australienne à l’île Heard, 1980). Within this new geographical and geopolitical configuration, the French archipelago would have represented a considerable geostrategic and scientific asset to Australia. In 1949, several deputies thus pressed the French government to prevent the loss of these territories, even though the colonial administration lacked any means of control (Martin-Nielsen, 2023, p. 88).

So in order to prevent annexation, the French government decided to reassert its territorial sovereignty. As in the case of many nations at the time, this was expressed through the implementation of a polar scientific programme, which was accompanied by the construction of permanent infrastructures to enable permanent occupation of the territory. To this end, a preliminary government mission was sent to Kerguelen in December 1949 in order to prepare the terrain for the construction of the first permanent French administrative establishment, as well as a meteorological station (Nature et étendue de la présence française à Kerguelen, 1980). Thus, from January 1951 onwards, the French archipelago was permanently occupied, thanks to the continuous presence of (mainly military) personnel at Port-aux-Français (Note de service, 1951). Since its installation, this permanent settlement, which remains the only one in the archipelago, was gradually expanded, and its population tripled in just 20 years. Communications also significantly improved during the first post-war decades. Whereas there was only one relief a year during the preparations for France’s participation in the IGY, the French Southern Islands subsequently became better connected to the other French territories, with a gradual increase in the frequency of annual rotations. Until 1973, the sub-Antarctic bases were relieved by cargo ships, in particular the *M/S Gallieni* chartered from *Messageries Maritimes*, usually for six months a year, before the *Marion Dufresne* was made available throughout the year. The new boat marked in 1973 the transition to a new frequency of an average of four logistical rotations a year

(as is still the case today), as well as a new period of scientific affirmation and ecological restoration.

Since the reassertion of territorial sovereignty at the end of the 19th century, and especially since the establishment of permanent settlements first in Kerguelen and later in the Crozet archipelago, geostrategic considerations were at the heart of reflections on the *raison d'être* of the French Southern Islands. In their analyses, many authors combined economic potential and scientific interest with the geostrategic importance of these islands, and it was the geostrategic argument in particular that was put forward for much of the 20th century to justify the considerable resources required for the various colonisation projects (Fournier, 1909; Genty, 1955; Lettre du Général Guérin, 1957; Sébille, 1901; Un avenir pour les terres australes françaises, n.d.).

However, just as during the colonial period, most of these projects failed or never saw the light of day. Such is the case of a large-scale infrastructure project that was never carried out and that illustrates very well some key characteristics of the period of permanent bases: the project for a “Class A airfield” designed to accommodate long-haul carriers in Kerguelen. Born in conjunction with the establishment of the first permanent base at *Port-aux-Français*, whose site had been chosen on the basis of aeronautical factors, this project was the subject of many discussions over several decades. Its origins can be traced back to 1949, when the French Overseas Ministry was allocated 20 million AF to finance a study mission to Kerguelen and Crozet (Rapport sur les projets de liaisons aériennes avec l'île de Kerguelen, 1970). The key objectives of this endowment included economic prospecting in the Kerguelen archipelago, as well as a study into the establishment of a permanent settlement that would constitute a relay on major intercontinental airline routes. To this end, an initial technical study was carried out by the government public works engineer Olivier. His report from 1950 was the first in a series of technical reports that would span the long history of this project (Rapport de mission de L. Olivier, 1950). Charged with finding a suitable location for an airfield, the engineer took interest in the Courbet peninsula, a region “reputed to be flat” but whose map was still “practically blank.” However, lacking the necessary means, the mission proceeded only with a rough topographical survey of the peninsula and proposed an initial airfield. Although this site was later rejected, another area, at the south-western end of the same peninsula, was proposed in 1953 by Bitodeau, another French overseas public works engineer.

These preliminary studies were followed by the military taking over the project under the aegis of the *Comité d'Action Scientifique de la Défense Nationale* (CASDN) that was responsible for coordinating during the Cold War all scientific and technical research of direct military interest. The military studies were directed by Air Force Colonel Robert Genty, seconded to CASDN at the time to oversee its geophysical studies department. Firmly convinced from the outset of the need for a world-class airport (Rapport Genty, 1956, p.3), he made it a personal affair, campaigning for the project's realisation well into the 1970s. His first mission in 1954–1955, the “Genty mission” to Kerguelen and Amsterdam islands, had several aims. First, it was to draw up an inventory of the technical and scientific resources of the French Southern Islands in preparation for the French participation in the IGY. To this end, Genty was asked to inspect several ionospheric stations in the Indian Ocean. An additional objective was to examine the possibility of setting up an air base in Kerguelen, as well as the use of alternative aerial means of transportation within the archipelago. Finally, Genty was also tasked with studying the

“general climatological, geographical and strategic conditions” (Rapport d'ensemble sur les terres australes, 1955). His first mission was followed by two other technical military missions in 1956 and 1957 that also produced lengthy reports on “the establishment and construction of a world-class air base in Kerguelen” (Ordre de mission de colonel Genty, 1955).

The institutional framework of the Genty missions is important because they were all oriented towards military and national defence needs. This applies also to the scientific aspects of these missions, confirming a more general trend during the Cold War when the geostrategic argument dominated also in France. Robert Genty's own career confirms this (see Dollfus, 2009): for instance, in 1954, he was tasked with geoenvironmental studies in order to disrupt the Viet Minh's supply lines during the Battle of Diên Biên Phu, the last major confrontation of the Indochina War (Genty, 1994) that marked France's defeat. Although the tests carried out by the Colonel were more or less conclusive and succeeded in triggering hailstorms, they remained experimental in nature. Even though the US weather modification operations during the Vietnam War are better known today (Fleming, 2010, pp. 179–180; Hamblin, 2013, pp. 202–203), the CASDN experiments show that at the beginning of the Cold War, several nations were involved in developing cloud seeding techniques. In this sense, the Cold War was a period in which the geophysical sciences occupied a strategic role, confirming other studies on the general rise of the geophysical sciences during the first decades of the Cold War, spurred by strategic and military interests (Doel, 1997, 2003; Turchetti & Roberts, 2014) especially in the context of the IGY (Belanger, 2006; Collis & Dodds, 2008; Dodds, 2010). Taken together, these studies show that the polar and subpolar regions were, in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War, crucial regions for scientific investigation where the earth sciences, geopolitics and military patronage were closely linked.

This general trend is clearly visible in the reports issued by Colonel Genty. Indeed, Genty helped introduce old wartime technologies in the Southern Islands that brought about lasting change in logistics, cartography and geodesy. For instance, the systematic use of helicopters as a means of locomotion was generalised (Rapport Genty de la Mission technique militaire Kerguelen, 1956). Coupled with wartime technologies, such as radar, but also photographic devices for vertical and oblique photography, these technologies found new applications in geodesy and topography during the Genty missions. For example, a particular type of radar display invented in Britain for aerial bombing missions, the Plan Position Indicator (PPI) (Jones, 1978), proved very useful for mapping the coastlines of Crozet and Kerguelen (Rapport général du colonel Robert Genty sur l'archipel des Crozet, 1957). Throughout this period, helicopter photography became an essential tool for all cartographic surveys conducted within the French Southern Islands.

The CASDN was also interested in all geophysical parameters more or less directly related to military aviation in the Southern Islands, such as climate and meteorology, but also geology (in particular, local deposits likely to facilitate construction projects), as well as the precise nature of the soil that was to accommodate the airfield. All these results, which appear in detail in the various reports and appendices written by specialists, considerably advanced the scientific knowledge of the islands, and some of them were used by the French Air Force engineers to carry out the first major infrastructure projects on site (Humbert, 1958).

A second large-scale infrastructure project was intended to make life on Kerguelen more self-sufficient in terms of energy

supply, but it too remained in the administrators' drawers: the construction of a dam in a valley named Val Studer, together with a hydroelectric power station. Indeed, the presence of numerous waterfalls, rivers and lakes had already attracted the interest of scientists visiting Kerguelen in the early 20th century (Fournier, 1909). In 1956, Électricité de France (EDF) mandated to oversee the project wished to make progress on the subject and asked Genty to carry out water flow measurements to estimate the hydroelectric capacities of the rivers. The technical report concludes that for one of the main rivers, the Rivière du Sud, the flow "lends itself to the installation of a micro-power station of around 200kVA" (Rapport du Capitaine Hotton, 1956). Although this was a long way from the 700 to 1000 kVA deemed indispensable to the life of a world-class air base, potential solutions were already in the drawers of EDF and the French Army at the time. Indeed, Warrant Officer Raymond Vernet and his team had already begun exploring the islands' hydroelectric potential, taking into account the information provided by the previous reconnaissance missions to Kerguelen since 1949. Vernet's ambitious proposal involved reversing the flow direction of the four lakes with the help of a dam, thereby considerably increasing the overall flow capacities (Etude des possibilités hydro-électriques, 1955). Despite the difficult terrain, Vernet expressed a certain optimism in his report submitted in 1955 concluding that "if we take into account that at present, the kWh in Port aux Français costs 500 Francs, it seems to us that sacrifices can be made" (Etude des possibilités hydro-électriques, 1955). The economic argument put forward by Vernet is by no means insignificant. After all, the Kerguelen airfield was also intended to save money. In his report, Colonel Genty was very optimistic on this subject: "If Kerguelen had an air base, it would be possible to link South Africa to Australia via the South [...] which represents an average saving of 5 hours on the air journey, or around 1,500,000 French francs. There is therefore no doubt that airlines will use the Kerguelen stopover" (Rapport d'ensemble sur les terres australes, 1955).

If Genty thus placed Kerguelen at the centre of French interests in the Southern Hemisphere, this was also because in 1955, the French National Assembly voted the creation of a new French overseas territory named *Terres australes et antarctiques françaises* (TAAF), which brought together under a single administrative authority Saint-Paul and Amsterdam Islands, Crozet Archipelago, Iles Kerguelen and Terre Adélie in Antarctica. This decision was greatly influenced by the context of the Algerian War (1954–1962) and France's defeat in Indochina, thus reflecting a strong determination to consolidate France's remaining overseas territories and to reassert sovereignty over them (Martin-Nielsen, 2023, p.104). It also reflected the urgent need to reshape their administration and to detach the islands from Madagascar, given Madagascar's rapid movement towards independence (Martin-Nielsen, 2021, p.3). Moreover, post-war Antarctic activity led especially by the United States, Argentina, Chile and Britain renewed attention to the Antarctic continent's unsettled sovereignty claims. By the mid-1950s, Norway, Sweden, Australia, the USSR, South Africa and New Zealand had also joined in. France, having reaffirmed its claim to Terre Adélie through the *Expéditions Polaires Françaises*, founded in 1947 under the leadership of polar explorer and anthropologist Paul-Emile Victor, sought to strengthen its hold on the territory, a goal advanced by the creation of the TAAF (Martin-Nielsen, 2021, p.5; see also Martin-Nielsen, 2013).

While the creation of the TAAF must of course be seen as way of "asserting France's rights in this area," as the new chief

administrator Richert put it while addressing the French Assembly, he also insisted that it should stimulate interest in regional development (Construction d'un aérodrome, 1955). However, according to the military, this development would imply inaugurating a new "state of defence" that would only be possible with the creation of a military base. The imagined tourist stopover thus conceals in reality the dream cherished by the military of a new French strategic and defensive base in the Indian Ocean, fuelled by diffuse fears of a possible militarisation of the region, most notably a "very strong Asian push towards the South-West (Mauritius, Madagascar, South Africa) against which the Australian authorities fear a foreign settlement in the uninhabited islands of the South, thus asking France to preserve them, by putting the Kerguelen in a state of defence" (Construction d'un aérodrome, 1955). In the eyes of the military, France holds with Kerguelen the key to all sea and air routes in the entire region. In fact, according to Genty's analysis, "[f]rom a military point of view, Kerguelen's geopolitical situation gives it direct control over the Atlantic – Pacific lines of communication, bypassing Africa from the south and Australia from the south or north. However, in the event of a global conflict pitting the West against the East, it would be out of the question to consider going via Suez to get from the Atlantic to the Pacific via the Mediterranean, the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean" (Construction d'un aérodrome, 1955).

These fears, which were particularly acute during the second half of the 1950s, stemmed not least from the fact that the Soviet Union had publicly announced its intention to continue its Antarctic activities after the IGY (Roberts & van der Watt, 2019, p.172; Turchetti et al., 2008 for Soviet engagement in Antarctica, see Khandozhko, 2024). At the time, many analysts saw this as an imminent danger to the West, since the USSR could use the region to hide intercontinental ballistic missiles (Baar, 1959). In France, too, the possibility of military action in Antarctica, requiring for instance the "neutralization of opposing bases," was regularly raised, most notably at meetings of the Working Group on the Strategic Interest of the French Southern and Antarctic Lands (Procès-verbal de la reunion du groupe de travail, 1959).

The Antarctic Treaty negotiations were designed to tackle these fears head-on. During this period, the airfield project revealed the problem of how to resolve this crisis politically, that is, diplomatically, without sacrificing the question of sovereignty. The solution found for the Antarctic continent is well known, namely the pacification of the continent by "freezing" territorial claims and introducing science as the main "currency of exchange" (Herr & Hall, 1989). Less well known is the fact that in the wake of the Antarctic Treaty negotiations, France feared the inclusion of its Southern Islands, and above all Iles Kerguelen, in the Treaty's area of application – along the lines of the "zone of interest" (note: Intérêt stratégique de l'île Kerguelen, 1959) of the Special Committee on Antarctic Research. Not only would this have directly threatened France's economic and sovereignty interests (Négociations préliminaires, 1958–59), but it would also have sabotaged the concomitant project to establish a nuclear testing centre in Kerguelen (Regnault, 2000). Indeed, in view of Algeria's foreseeable accession to independence (in 1962), this was yet another controversial project in the making at the time, and that the press began to speculate about as early as 1959 (Bombe 'H' française aux Kerguelen?, 1959). Now declassified, top-secret military correspondence and research reports show that Kerguelen, as well as Tromelin, Reunion Island, Corsica and even metropolitan sites in the Alps and Pyrenees, were considered early on as alternative nuclear testing sites (Fiche sur la sélection des sites

nucléaires possibles, 1962; Reconnaissance de sites fortement protégés, 1958), but they were ultimately rejected since only the isolated atolls of French Polynesia met the meteorological, technical and political imperatives that France under de Gaulle was seeking (Regnault, 2003).

But why did these numerous, large-scale infrastructure projects – the dam, the hydroelectric plant, the airfield and the nuclear testing centre – never see the light of day? Fernand Lot, writing for *Le Figaro Littéraire* already foresaw in 1953: “Planes won’t stop over in Kerguelen and industry won’t go there to gather seaweed – so much the better for the scientists . . . And for the penguins!” (Lot, 1953). The prohibitive cost of the airfield, initially estimated at around ten billion francs, was deemed too high, as the funds made available in 1958 to both the Territory and the Air Force for new works in Iles Kerguelen did not allow for an effort of this nature. The budgetary restrictions at the end of the 1950s were undoubtedly the result of major expenditures incurred by the Algerian War, restrictions that were only briefly loosened during the IGY (Lettre du Général Guérin à l’Administrateur Supérieur des TAAF, 1959). The geostrategic argument, which might have attracted further military funding, carried little weight in the end, since the argument of an increasing militarisation of the region clearly ran counter to “the very clear trend towards demilitarisation of the Antarctic region” (Intérêt stratégique des îles Kerguelen, 1959) from the late 1950s onwards, of which the Antarctic Treaty was an important driving force.

In any case, the French Air Force did not see this as a priority project, and the desire to pacify the region through science was only strengthened later, most notably in the form of Franco-Soviet cooperation agreements, which led to several joint missions to Terre Adélie and Kerguelen, to study geophysical phenomena linked to the magnetosphere and ionosphere using rockets and balloons (Berthelier, 2007; Grevsmühl, 2021). As historian Katie Sinclair has shown, the Antarctic and sub-Antarctic region, together with Algeria and French Guiana, thus became “key sites in the French experimental rocketry programme that grew to define the French space agency” (Sinclair, 2024, p.53). Maybe more importantly, they became part of a truly global Cold War strategy to help spread and reaffirm, with the help of science and technology, France’s colonial power across the globe. Indeed, French imperial “grandeur” as promoted by Charles de Gaulle’s Fifth Republic was highly dependent on these small and remote possessions, allowing France to sustain a worldwide presence in all major oceans, to recover international prestige and to assert its autonomy vis-à-vis the United States (Martin-Nielsen, 2023, p.6). A nuclear testing centre in Kerguelen would have served to advance this imperial geopolitical agenda also in the sub-Antarctic islands, facilitated by the absence of Indigenous populations. However, although the military reports indicate that meteorological factors were significant in the site’s rejection (Fiche: Sites lointains d’expérimentations nucléaires, 1962), it is also evident that the nuclear test site project conflicted sharply with the new, emerging Antarctic geopolitical regime.

In the end, the long list of failed or abandoned French ventures mirrors similar Cold War failures in other parts of the world, such as in Greenland (Petersen, 2008) but also other remote sub-Antarctic islands, such as Bouvetøya, where political, economic but also physical geographical factors similarly shaped attempts to extract value from these remote territories. Indeed, the island of Bouvetøya refracted a series of interests during the 1950s despite its highly valuable location (in particular for weather observations) in the Southern Ocean (Roberts & van der Watt, 2019). There as well,

for a long time the “benefits were outweighed by the considerable – but by no means insurmountable – costs that establishing a presence entailed” (Roberts & van der Watt, 2019, p.175).

The setting of the period of permanent bases saw the airfield project put aside, but it came back to the fore in the late 1960s in the form of the *Association d’Études et d’Encouragement pour la Réalisation d’une Aire d’Atterrissage à Kerguelen* (AERAKER) created in 1968. Co-chaired by the now retired Colonel Genty, it was sponsored by an impressive cast of leading figures from the military, political and civilian worlds. AERAKER promoted a 3,000 m East-West runway, now estimated at a cost of around 22 million francs, not including labour and transport costs of the Air Force staff that would be in charge of building it (Etude AERAKER, 1971). However, the project was never approved. Indeed, the Ministry of Overseas France suspected that the real costs were “unconsciously minimised” because Genty was “eager to obtain the agreement of the public authorities at all costs” (Fiche a/s Terrain d’aviation, 1975). In his preface to the AERAKER proposal, Laclavère, who chaired the French Committee of Antarctic Research (CNFRA), clearly grasped the changes that were already underway, conjuring the advent of a new historical period: “Since the first permanent mission in 1950 and on the occasion of the International Geophysical Year (1957–1958), scientific laboratories, at first very modest, have gradually developed [. . .]. But the time for scientific epics is over, and it is becoming urgent to increase the scope of research, to organise regular work and to enable the various specialists to get to their laboratories more quickly” (Etude AERAKER, 1971). However, it was not the airfield that would bring about this change in the 1970s, but a new research vessel known as the *Marion Dufresne*.

The period of scientific affirmation and ecological restoration (1973–2006)

The arrival of the *Marion Dufresne* in 1973 marked a significant break with the past in several respects. It considerably increased the range and frequency of intervention for all major actors involved and made the islands in the Indian Ocean a safer workplace. Moreover, it provided a new tool for scientific research, particularly in oceanography, a powerful branch of the Earth sciences in the sub-Antarctic region at the time. Indeed, a report written at the end of the previous period as part of the 1969/70 mission of the General Inspector of Overseas Affairs, Jacques Ponchelet, already criticised the pressure oceanographers frequently exerted in defining the priorities of the previous vessel, the *Gallieni* (Rapport sur les projets de liaisons aériennes, 1970). The arrival of the *Marion Dufresne* certainly reinforced this perceived imbalance of power.

Once again, this can be observed in the case of the Kerguelen airfield project that resurfaced during the 1970s as part of the establishment of the new Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs) delimitating the territorial waters of the French Southern Islands. An interministerial meeting held in 1978 shows that administrators wanted to give new impetus to fishing activities, but to do so, they had to be better monitored (Compte rendu de la réunion interministérielle, 1978). For instance, foreigners were now no longer allowed to fish in the EEZ unless prior agreement had been reached, and strict quotas were imposed. The airfield project would have facilitated French presence in Kerguelen and in large parts of the Indian Ocean, and it certainly would have improved the monitoring of fishing activities, which at the time were marked by frequent illegal catches (Duhamel, 2023). While all participants

agreed on the need to improve access to the islands, some scientists began to object the project strongly. They feared that an airstrip would jeopardise the necessity of further deploying the *Marion Dufresne*. In their eyes, losing an important research vessel would have a considerable negative impact not only on oceanography but also on polar scientific research as a whole (Une piste aérienne à Kerguelen, undated).

The main problem was that the *Marion Dufresne* marked a major budgetary break. Indeed, from 1973 onwards, TAAF administration was going through a serious budgetary crisis that lasted until the early 1980s (Martin-Nielsen, 2021). With no increase in government revenue to help administration cope with the explosion in costs directly associated with the supply and research vessel, major restrictions were imposed (Les problèmes du loyer du Marion Dufresne, 1978). Since more than half of the annual budget was now absorbed by transport, the budget crisis was even more acute in the most remote French territories, above all in Terre Adélie, where the closure of the Dumont d'Urville base was considered. Faced with these serious problems, some senior officers within administration regretted that the airstrip project had never been carried out. However, since only large aircraft could make the long journey to Kerguelen, many scientists feared that a runway would finally limit the total number of scientific campaigns carried out, and that there would thus be no relief anymore for the summer campaigns. Moreover, for oceanographers, the airfield project represented an immediate threat. In an indictment of CNES written probably during the 1990s, an anonymous author asked the rhetorical question: "What's the point of an airstrip in Kerguelen?". His answer was unequivocal, as the author saw the whole oceanographic programme in perdition: "[B]uilding a runway in Kerguelen will do nothing for the logistics of the sub-Antarctic islands. It will sclerotise scientific research. It will make high-latitude oceanography disappear" (Une piste aérienne à Kerguelen, undated).

The airfield controversy thus shows that this type of infrastructure does not automatically lead to improved accessibility, as it also induces exclusionary effects. Indeed, large-scale infrastructures often materialise arbitrations between competing social groups, where some are marginalised, and others prioritised. In the case of Kerguelen, oceanographers had a vested interest in perpetuating their only means of access to the field, whilst other social groups, such as CNES scientists, medical staff, the military, fish farmers and even tourists, could probably all have benefited from more rapid access to Kerguelen. The airfield issue also took on a different tenor from the late 1960s onwards, in the wake of new scientific cooperation agreements, notably with the Soviet Union, which were to be followed by fishing agreements to accommodate the new EEZs (Rapport sur les projets de liaisons aériennes, 1970). Indeed, while geostrategic and economic considerations still dominated the early stages of the project, it was scientists who finally won the day. The anonymous note sums up this evolution very well: "Over the past 40 years, maritime services to the southern districts of the TAAF have proved their flexibility and safety. It has enabled French scientific research in all disciplines of Earth and environmental sciences to develop in the sub-Antarctic region, both on land and at sea. It implies the existence of a specialised vessel, the cost of which may appear high for the State, but which, if managed well, can prove exceptionally profitable. The construction of an airstrip in Kerguelen will not provide the Territory or the Institute with any significant new facilities for asserting sovereignty or advancing research. To do otherwise would require a change of scale in the Territory's activity, which would justify regular flights, giving management a new

flexibility. At present, only CNES can justify such an investment. It will have to pay the price." (Une piste aérienne à Kerguelen, undated).

To fully understand the historical significance of the airfield project, it must be read in conjunction with its Antarctic corollary, the controversial *piste du lion*. Built in the French Antarctic territory in the Pointe Géologie archipelago, the airstrip was hotly contested from its very inception. Conceived in the 1960s and planned during the 1970s to intensify the French presence and extend the temporal and geographical scope of polar research, the construction of an Antarctic airstrip was proposed. However, the project was subject to massive public protests due to its controversial environmental consequences (May, 1988). Nonetheless, construction work continued in 1983 and in the end, several islands were dynamited in order to build the runway. The airstrip was thus built at great economic (FF 110 million) and environmental cost. However, just before its official inauguration, severe weather conditions partially destroyed the runway, and it was declared closed in 1996 (Kehrt, 2022). Although more recently, the airstrip has come back into use for logistics, the *Cours des Comptes* publicly denounced "the carelessness with which this operation was carried out, confirmed in retrospect by the ease with which the destruction of this work seems to have been accepted" (La piste aéroportuaire de Terre Adélie, 1996).

However, whilst environmental issues largely dominated the discussions surrounding the airstrip in Terre Adélie, they were largely absent from the Kerguelen airfield discussions. Indeed, since the Kerguelen airfield never went beyond the project stage, and since many of its basic aspects, such as the cost of managing the airfield, were never seriously addressed, the project failed to occupy public debate in the same way as its Antarctic corollary. In the end, TAAF administration was able to surmount the crisis and thanks to the *Marion Dufresne*, scientists were able not only to assure the continuity of their research programmes, but scientific research in general saw a great diversification over the following decades.

The budget crisis was followed by the introduction of new economic development projects, in particular in Kerguelen, where TAAF administration now planned to set up an experimental salmon-farming station through a partnership with the Reunion-based company SAPMER (Convention de recherche expérimentale, 1985). SAPMER had already been farming lobsters around Saint-Paul and Amsterdam since the early 1950s, and marine fish in Kerguelen waters since the late 1970s. The introduction of salmonids into the previously fish-free rivers of Kerguelen, dating back to the early 1950s, provided new economic perspectives (Devaine & Beall, 1997; Tentative d'acclimatation, undated). The project aimed at developing commercial farming based on the "sea ranching" principle. SAPMER saw this as an opportunity to diversify its activities at a time when commercial fishing in Kerguelen was still in its infancy, and loss-making. Moreover, the company was also considering the economic exploitation of seaweed. For the public authorities, salmon ranching represented a unique opportunity to reduce the trade deficit (Demande d'aide à l'innovation, undated). However, despite close scientific monitoring over several decades, and numerous new introductions throughout the 1980s, fish farming never proved economically viable and the experimental station was shut down in 1993. There was no profitability for the project at a time when the cost of farmed salmon in Europe was falling sharply. Despite partial dismantling, most of the Armor site remains still in place, testifying to the umpteenth failure to develop Kerguelen economically.

The rather surprisingly late existence of this project – at a time when ecological restoration projects were being put forward and consideration was being given to setting up a nature reserve in the French Southern Islands (Proposition en vue de classement en réserve naturelle, 1996) – can be explained by the special place given to fisheries development. Indeed, fishing is the only major economic activity (besides philately) of the territory that has been able to maintain itself over the long run. During the 1990s, commercial toothfish stocks were identified in the waters surrounding Iles Kerguelen and Iles Crozet, and in alternance with long-established lobster fishing around Saint-Paul and Amsterdam, fishing activities thus remain until today a crucial economic activity for the territory and many families in La Réunion (Duhamel, 2023). Close collaboration with scientists of the Natural History Museum in Paris (MNHN), such as Guy Duhamel, enabled SAPMER to put in place sustainable fishing practices, ensuring at least in part that resources remain available for future generations of fishermen.

Finally, the fishing activities were developed in conjunction with new environmental measures that came to the forefront in the form of a new biopolitical project put in place by TAAF administration shortly after the budget crisis. Indeed, as early as 1983, the first ecological restoration projects began to emerge, and with them, environmental restrictions increased significantly (Jouventin & Roux, 1983; Micol & Jouventin, 1995). These projects, of which most were focused on the eradication of non-native terrestrial species, helped pave the way towards the creation of the National Natural Reserve (*Réserve Naturelle Nationale*) of the French Southern Territories introduced in 2006, marking at the same time the beginning of the most recent, and still ongoing period of reinforced environmental protection and patrimonialisation (most notably the inscription of the French Southern Islands as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2019, not further discussed here). What is noticeable in the French case is the fact that in the emerging restoration efforts, the marine environments were separated from the terrestrial environments, as only terrestrial animals were targeted for the removal programmes, thus allowing fishing activities to continue. The restoration projects form at the same time part of a larger transnational historical development, initiated during the 1970s and 80s, towards ecological restoration of uninhabited insular territories in the entire sub-Antarctic region (Headland, 2012). For instance, New Zealand carried out multiple restoration projects on Campbell Island, completely eliminating feral cattle in 1987. On Enderby Island, cattle introduced in 1894 experienced the same fate in 1993, together with the mice and rabbit population. In the French Southern Islands, the complete eradication, in 2010, of the feral cattle of Amsterdam Island is only one of many more recent controversial examples (Flori et al., 2025; Gautier et al., 2024).

Conclusion

The project perspective provided here shows that history never resembles a straight line, and that is made up of many contingencies and, in the case of the French Southern Islands, a myriad of failed and abandoned projects. Indeed, the linearity that the dominant narrative of a supposedly natural, “green” destiny of the French Southern Islands implies is invalidated by the diverging perspectives of the projects presented here. What is more, the notion of “ecological restoration,” fully embraced by current TAAF administration, appeals to an idealised past, largely neglecting the fact that the so-called “natural” environment of the Southern

Islands is the result of massive and almost continuous human interventions since the 18th and 19th centuries (Headland, 2012). It therefore bears the mark of past events, uncounted and forgotten projects, and divergent forms of political and social organisation. All the projects presented here show that this history is made up of arbitrations, of various decisions that, at times, had long-term consequences that were very difficult to fully anticipate, and that certainly cannot be simply undone today. The resulting periodisation outlined here highlights broader trends unfolding over several decades. While each phase bears clearly some novelties, there are no sharp ruptures to be observed. Long-standing imperial geopolitical visions persist alongside the emergence of the contemporary Antarctic geopolitical regime, and the economic exploitation of the living resources of the TAAF remains a pressing issue to this day. The history of the French Southern Islands thus highlights in important new ways how France came to be recognised as the world’s second maritime power – a position rooted in its long-standing commitment to maintaining a global maritime presence, sustained and legitimised for over a century through economic development schemes and more recently science and technology.

Financial support. This project has received funding from the Terres australes et antarctiques françaises (TAAF) administration.

Competing interests. None.

References

- Antonello, A. (2019). *The Greening of Antarctica: Assembling an International Environment*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Arnaud, P., & Beurois, J. (1996). *Les armateurs du rêve, les concessions Bossière et les sociétés françaises d'exploitation des îles australes de l'océan Indien (1893-1939)*. Vachères: Éditions F. Jambois.
- Arnaud, P., Beurois, J., Couesnon, P., & Le Mouël, J.-F. (2007). *Phoquières de la Désolation, la chasse aux éléphants de mer aux îles Kerguelen par les navires-usines français (1925-1931)*. Vachères: Éditions F. Jambois.
- Aubin, D. (2006). L'événement astronomique du siècle? Histoire sociale des passages de Vénus, 1874-1882. *Cahiers François Viète*, 1(11/12), 3–13.
- Baar, J. (1959). Red threat from Antarctica. *Missiles and Rockets*, 5(22), 15–16.
- Basberg, B., & Headland, R. K. (2008). The 19th Century Antarctic Sealing Industry: Sources, Data and Economic Significance. *NHH Department of Economics Discussion Paper no. 21*.
- Belanger, D. O. (2006). *Deep Freeze: The United States, the International Geophysical Year, and the Origin's of Antarctica's Age of Science*. Boulder: University Press of Colorado.
- Berthelmer, J.-J. (2007). L'étude de l'ionosphère polaire. Expériences Terre Adélie à l'aide de fusées Dragon (FU 151). In Institut français d'histoire de l'espace (Ed.), *Les débuts de la recherche spatiale française: Au temps des fusées sondes* (pp. 266–270). Paris: E-dite.
- Bertrand, K. (1971). *Americans in Antarctica, 1775-1948*. New York: American Geographical Society.
- Bombe, H. (1959, February 13). française aux Kerguelen? *Libération*.
- Bonner, N., & Laws, R. (1964). Seals and sealing. In R. Priestley, R. J. Adie & G. du Q. Robin (Eds.), *Antarctic Research: A Review of British Scientific Achievement in Antarctica* (pp. 176–177). London: Butterworths.
- Bossière, H. (1909). Une terre française inconnue. Les îles Kerguelen. *L'Illustration*, 3472, 186–187.
- Burton, R. (2007). Sealing: History of. In B. Riffenburgh (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of the Antarctic* (pp. 875-877). New York: Routledge.
- Busch, B. C. (1985). *The War Against the Seals: A History of the North American Seal Fishery*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press.
- Chaturvedi, S. (1996). *The Polar Regions: A Political Geography*. New York: J. Wiley.

- Cogneau, D.** (2025). *Empire on the cheap: History and political economy of French Colonization, 19th-11st centuries*. (D. Broder, Trans). Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Collis, C., & Dodds, K.** (2008). Assault on the unknown: The historical and political geographies of the International Geophysical Year (1957-8). *Journal of Historical Geography*, 34(4), 555–573.
- Cook, J.** (1777). *A Voyages Towards the South Pole, and Round the World*, 2. London: Stahan & Cadell.
- Coquery-Vidrovitch, C.** (1972). *Le Congo au temps des grandes compagnies concessionnaires, 1898-1930*. Paris: Mouton & EPHE.
- Couesnon, P.** (1989). *Histoire postale des îles Kerguelen: 1772-1945*. Paris: Éditions Bertrand Sinais.
- Couesnon, P., & Guyader, A.** (1999). *Histoire postale des terres australes et antarctiques françaises: des origines à 1955*. Le Faou, Self-published.
- De Brossard, M. R.** (1971). *Kerguelen, t. 2: le découvreur et ses îles*. Paris: France Empire.
- Decouz, P.** (1914). Un hivernage aux îles Kerguelen. *Le Tour du Monde*, 20, 241–252.
- Delépine, G.** (1964). Les Allemands aux Kerguelen durant la Deuxième Guerre Mondiale. *Revue TAAF*, 26, 8–29.
- Delépine, G.** (1976). Les Voyages aux îles Kerguelen depuis la découverte jusqu'à la constitution du territoire d'après les sources écrites (1772-1949). *Revue TAAF*, 68(69), 5–20.
- Delépine, G.** (1995). *Les îles australes françaises: Kerguelen, Crozet, Amsterdam, Saint-Paul*. Rennes: Ouest-France.
- Delépine, G.** (1998). *L'amiral de Kerguelen et les mythes de son temps*. Paris: L'Harmattan.
- Delépine, G.** (2002). *Histoires extraordinaires et inconnues dans les mers australes*. Rennes: Ouest-France.
- Devaine, P., & Beall, E.** (1997). Introduction de salmonidés en milieu vierge (Iles Kerguelen, Subantarctique): Enjeux, résultats, perspectives. *Bulletin Français de la Pêche et de la Pisciculture*, 344(345), 93–110.
- Dodds, K.** (2010). Assault on the unknown: Geopolitics, Antarctic science, and the International Geophysical Year. In J. R. Ryan & S. Naylor (Eds.), *New Spaces for Exploration. Geographies of Discovery in the Twentieth Century* (pp. 148–172). London: I.B. Tauris.
- Doel, R. E.** (1997). The earth sciences and geophysics. In J. Krige, & D. Pestre (Eds.), *Science in the Twentieth Century* (pp. 361–388). London: Harwood Academic.
- Doel, R. E.** (2003). Constituting the postwar Earth sciences: The military's influence on the environmental sciences in the USA after 1945. *Social Studies of Science*, 33/5, 635–666.
- Dollfus, A.** (2009). Robert Genty (1910-2001): Le père de l'orbite héliosynchrone. *Espace & Temps, Bulletin d'information de l'Institut Français de l'Espace*, 5, 15–17.
- Duhamel, G.** (2023). *Les îles Saint-Paul et Amsterdam (océan Indien sud) - Environnement marin et pêcheries*. Paris: Publications scientifiques du MNHN.
- Elzinga, A.** (1993). Antarctica: The construction of a continent by and for science. In E. Crawford, T. Shinn & S. Sörlin (Eds.), *Denationalizing science: The contexts of international scientific practice* (pp. 73–106). Dordrecht: Springer.
- Emmanuel, M.** (1959). *La France et l'exploration polaire*. Paris: Nouvelles Éditions Latines.
- Fabre, A., & Labardin, P.** (2024). Les sociétés concessionnaires françaises et le secret des affaires: le cas de l'Afrique-Equatoriale française lors de la crise du caoutchouc de 1913. *Histoire & Mesure*, XXXIX(1), 19–50.
- Fleming, J.** (2010). *Fixing the sky: The checkered history of weather and climate control*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Flori, L., Gautier, M., Druet, T., Colas F., & Micol, T.** (2025, February 27). Retour à l'état sauvage: l'étonnante histoire des vaches de l'île Amsterdam perdue dans l'océan Indien. *The Conversation*.
- Fogg, G. E.** (1992). *A History of Antarctic Science*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Fournier, L.** (1909). Les îles Kerguelen. *La Nature*, 1898, 295–298.
- Galteland, O.** (2013). *A/S Kerguelen 1908-1921: The Optimism, The Dreams - and the Dull Working Day*. Sandefjord: Vestfoldmuseene IKS.
- Gautier, M., Micol, T., Camus, L., Moazami-Goudarzi, K., Naves, M., Guéret, E., Engelen, S., Lemainque, A., Colas, F., Flori, L., & Druet, T.** (2024). Genomic reconstruction of the successful establishment of a feralized bovine population on the subantarctic island of Amsterdam. *Molecular Biology and Evolution*, 41(7), msae121.
- Genty, R.** (1955). Le rôle stratégique de l'île Kerguelen. *Revue de défense nationale*, 128, 166–175.
- Genty, R.** (1994). *Ultime secours pour Diên-Biên-Phu (1953-1954)*. Paris: L'Harmattan.
- Grady, D.** (1986). *Sealers and Whalers in New Zealand Waters*. Auckland: Reed Methuen Publishers.
- Grevsmühl, S.** (2016). Réacteurs nucléaires mobiles en régions polaires: le cas controversé de 'PM- 3A en Antarctique. In A. Beltran, L. Laborie, P. Lanthier, & S. Le Gallic (Eds.), *Electric Worlds/Mondes électriques: Creations, Circulations, Tensions, Transitions* (pp. 397–414). New York: Peter Lang.
- Grevsmühl, S.** (2021). Le lancement de l'âge spatial en Antarctique: une perspective visuelle. *Revue Strate(s). Photo+graphies de l'aventure spatiale*, 1, 182–189.
- Grevsmühl, S.** (2024). The Environmental History of the Antarctic. *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Environmental Science*, <https://oxfordre.com/enviromentalscience>.
- Hamblin, J.** (2013). *Arming Mother Nature: The Birth of Catastrophic Environmentalism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Hart, I.** (2020). *Austral Enterprises*. Herefordshire: Pequena.
- Hartley, K. H., Guy P. L., & Lord, J. M.** (2024). A tale of two species: *Pringlea antiscorbutica* and *Azorella Polaris*, sub-Antarctic scurvy remedies. *Polar Record*, 60(e7), 1–11.
- Hayes, J. G.** (1932). *The conquest of the South Pole: Antarctic exploration 1906–1931*. London: Butterworth.
- Headland, R. K.** (2009). *A Chronology of Antarctic Exploration*. London: Quaritsch.
- Headland, R. K.** (2012). History of exotic terrestrial mammals in Antarctic regions. *Polar Record*, 48(245), 123–144.
- Herr, R., & Hall, H.** (1989). Science as currency and the currency of science. In J. Handmer (Ed.), *Antarctica: Policies and policy development* (pp. 13–24). Canberra: Australian National University.
- Hingley, P., & Launay, F.** (2000). Passages de Vénus, 1874 et 1882. In Q. Bajac (Ed.), *Dans le champ des étoiles: Les photographes et le ciel 1850–2000* (pp. 119–121). Paris: Réunion des Musées Nationaux.
- Howkins, A.** (2016). *The Polar Regions: An Environmental History*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Howkins, A.** (2017). *Frozen Empires: An Environmental History of the Antarctic Peninsula*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Humbert, J.** (1958). Travaux d'équipement des îles Kerguelen pour l'Année Géophysique Internationale: les réalisations du Génie de l'Air. *Revue TAAF*, 4-5, 41–47.
- Jones, R.** (1978). *Most Secret War*. London: Hamilton.
- Jouvenet, M.** (2022). *Des glaces polaires au climat de la Terre*. Paris: CNRS Éditions.
- Jouventin, P., & Roux, J.-P.** (1983). *Projet de réhabilitation écologique de l'île Amsterdam*. TAAF, Mission de recherche, unpublished report.
- Keht, C.** (2022). Landing strips and penguins: Ecological oppositions to the scientific exploration of Antarctica. In E.-C. Heiner & M. Meiske (Eds.), *Beyond the lab and the field: Infrastructures as places of knowledge production since the late nineteenth century* (pp. 196–214). Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press.
- Khandozhko, R.** (2024). Antarctic minerals for the Soviet Bloc? Imagining the South Pole frontier of extractive socialism. In P. Roberts, & A. Mancilla (Eds.), *Colonialism and Antarctica* (pp. 30–52). Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Kirwan, L. P.** (1959). *A History of Polar Exploration*. New York: W.W. Norton.
- Lagana, M.** (1990). *Le Parti colonial français. Éléments d'histoire*. Sillery: Presses de l'Université du Québec.
- Launius, R., Fleming J. R., & DeVorkin, D.** (2010). *Globalizing Polar Science: Reconsidering the International Polar and Geophysical Years*. New York: Palgrave.
- Le Povremoyne, J.** (1929, August-September). Les rudes gars de Kerguelen. *Le Petit Havre*.

- Locher, F.** (2025). Poissons et baleines de l'empire: Concessions, conservation et souveraineté maritime en AOF et en AEF (1900-1940). In T. Le Roux & R. Morera (Eds.), *La nature sous contrat: Concessions, histoire et environnement (XVIe-XXIe siècle)* (pp. 97–115). Rennes: PUR.
- Logan, H.** (1979). *Cold Commitment: The Development of New Zealand's Territorial Role in Antarctica, 1920-1960*. Master thesis, Christchurch: University of Canterbury.
- Lot, F.** (1953). Les avions ne feront pas escale aux Kerguelen. *Le Figaro Littéraire*.
- Martin-Nielsen, J.** (2013). *Eismitte in the Scientific Imagination: Knowledge and Politics at the Center of Greenland*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Martin-Nielsen, J.** (2021). Undecided dreams: France in the Antarctic, 1840-2021. *Polar Record*, 57(e32), 1–14.
- Martin-Nielsen, J.** (2023). *A Few Acres of Ice: Environment, Sovereignty, and Grandeur in the French Antarctic*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- May, J.** (1988). *The Greenpeace book of Antarctica: A new view of the seventh continent*. London: Dorling Kindersley.
- McCann, R.** (2019). *Wild Sea: A History of the Southern Ocean*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- McGonigal D., & Woodworth, L.** (2003). *Antarctica: The Complete Story*. London: Frances Lincoln.
- Micol, T., & Jouventin, P.** (1995). Restoration of Amsterdam Island, South Indian Ocean, following control of feral cattle. *Biological Conservation*, 73, 199–206.
- Mills, W. J.** (2003). Heroic era of Antarctic exploration. In W. J. Mills (Ed.), *Exploring Polar Frontiers: A Historical Encyclopedia* (p. 299). Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO.
- Milne-Edwards, A.** (1893). *Enseignement spécial pour les voyageurs. Leçon d'ouverture faite le 25 avril 1893*. Paris: Imprimerie nationale.
- Ministère des colonies** (1893). Décret portant concession du droit d'exploiter les îles Kerguelen. *Bulletin officiel de l'administration des colonies*, 7, 605–607.
- Monnoir, V.** (2025). Les concessions aux îles australes françaises (1893-1939): Prédation des ressources, protection de la nature et manifestations de la souveraineté. In T. Le Roux & R. Morera (Eds.), *La nature sous contrat: Concessions, histoire et environnement (XVIe-XXIe siècle)* (pp. 117–135). Rennes: PUR.
- Oberdeck, K.** (2005). Archives of the unbuilt environment: Documents and discourses of imagined space in twentieth-century Kohler, Wisconsin. In: A. Burton (Ed.), *Archive stories: Facts, fictions, and the writing of history* (pp. 251–274). Chapel Hill: Duke University Press.
- Petersen, N.** (2008). The iceman that never came: 'Project Iceworm', the search for a NATO deterrent, and Denmark, 1960-1962. *Scandinavian Journal of History*, 33(1), 75–98.
- Peyton, J.** (2011). *Unbuilt Environments: Unrealized Geographies of Energy and Enterprise in the Stikine*, PhD thesis. Vancouver: University of British Columbia.
- Peyton, J.** (2017). *Unbuilt Environments: Tracing Postwar Development in Northwest British Columbia*. Vancouver: UBC Press.
- Regnault, J.-M.** (2000). La France à la recherche de sites nucléaires (1957-1963). *Cahiers du Centre d'Étude d'Histoire de la Défense*, 12, 29–54.
- Regnault, J.-M.** (2003). France's search for nuclear test sites, 1957-1963. *The Journal of Military History*, 67(4), 1223–1248.
- Roberts, P.** (2011). *The European Antarctic: Science and Strategy in Scandinavia and the British Empire*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Roberts, P., & van der Watt, L.-M.** (2019). An environment too extreme? The case of Bouvetøya. In J. Herzberg, C. Kehrt, & F. Torma (Eds.), *Ice and Snow in the Cold War: Histories of Extreme Climatic Environments* (pp. 163–188). New York: Berghahn.
- Roskill, S. W.** (1954). *The War at Sea, 1939-45, vol. 1*. London: Stationery Office.
- Séville, G.** (1901). Notice sur les îles Marion et Crozet. *Revue coloniale*, 1, 239–246.
- Sicard, M.** (1998). Passage de Vénus : Le revolver photographique de Jules Janssen. *Études photographiques*, 4, 45–63.
- Sinclair, K. M.** (2024). Imperial rockets, colonial geographies: Algeria, Antarctica, Guiana and the French space programme, 1959-74. In P. Roberts, & A. Mancilla (Eds.), *Colonialism and Antarctica: Attitudes, Logics, and Practices* (pp. 53–75). Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Sullivan, W.** (1957). *Quest for a Continent*. London: Secker & Warburg.
- Sullivan, W.** (1961). *Assault on the Unknown*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Turchetti, S., Naylor, S., Dean, K., & Siegert, M.** (2008). On thick ice: Scientific internationalism and Antarctic affairs, 1957-1980. *History and Technology*, 24, 351–376.
- Turchetti, S., & Roberts P.** (Eds.) (2014). *The Surveillance Imperative: Geosciences during the Cold War and Beyond*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Vanney, J.-R.** (1986). *Histoire des mers australes*. Paris: Fayard.
- Verdenal, Y.** (2004). *Saint-Paul & Amsterdam, Voyage austral dans le temps*. Paris: Gérard Lois éditeur.

Archival Sources

- Carnet de route manuscrit de Valérien Culet** (1911–1913). IJ 510, SDA: Savoie Departmental Archives.
- Compte rendu de la réunion interministérielle du 2 mai 1978 relative aux questions de pêche dans la zone économique des terres australes françaises** (1978). 19940344/44, NAF: National Archives of France.
- Construction d'un aérodrome aux îles Kerguelen, rectificatif du procès-verbal** (1955, September 26). TAAF 7, NOA: National Overseas Archives.
- Contrat passé entre René et Henry Bossière et Storm, Bull et Cie** (1908, March 14). 4101COL127, NOA.
- Convention de recherche expérimentale entre le territoire des TAAF et la SAPMER** (1985). 20160645/20, NAF.
- Copie des procès-verbaux des prises de possession des îles Saint-Paul et Amsterdam par le capitaine de l'avis La Bourdonnais** (1892). 20010098/1/1, NAF.
- Demande d'aide à l'innovation: Mise en valeur des Iles Kerguelen (TAAF) par la production extensive de salmonidés migrateurs selon la technique du 'pacage marin': étude expérimentale d'une station pilote en vraie grandeur** (undated). 20160645/20, NAF.
- Emplacement des mines mouillées aux îles Kerguelen**, (1959). AN 20160686/83, NAF.
- Étude des possibilités hydro-électriques, rapport de R. Vernet** (1955). 20010098/89, NAF.
- Étude de l'amiral Layrle sur l'île de Kerguelen** (1885). BB4 1449, DHS: Defence Historical Service.
- Étude AERAKER** (1971, August). 19940221/38, NAF.
- Fiche a/s Terrain d'aviation de Kerguelen** (1975, May 30). 20160645/15, NAF.
- Fiche: Sites lointains d'expérimentations nucléaires** (1962, January 3). GR 13 R 132/1, folder 2, DHS.
- Fiche sur la sélection des sites nucléaires possibles** (1962, July 11). GR 13 R 132/1, folder 4, DHS.
- Intérêt stratégique des îles Kerguelen, P. Rolland** (1959, May 22). 20070432/8, NAF.
- Journal à terre de Port-Couvreux tenu par Pierre Petit** (1929-1930). Private archives.
- La piste aéroportuaire de Terre Adélie** (1996). Cours de Comptes, 20170348/19, NAF.
- Les problèmes du loyer du Marin Dufresne** (1978), TAAF report no.2, Bernard Vinay, 19942018/70, NAF.
- Lettre du Général Guérin à l'Administrateur Supérieur des TAAF** (1959). 1755/O/GY/MMA, GR 11 Q 49, DHS.
- Lettre de René Bossière à M. le sous-secrétaire d'État aux Colonies** (1893, April 17). 4101COL128, NOA.
- Lettre de René Bossière au ministre des Colonies** (1912, March 31). 4101COL128, NOA.
- Lettre du Général Guerin au Secrétaire Général Permanent de la Défense Nationale** (1957, April 3). GR 11 Q 49, DHS.
- Lettre du ministre de la marine et des colonies au gouverneur de Bourbon** (1844, April 8). 20010098/1/1, NAF.
- Mission technique militaire Kerguelen, 1956, colonel Genty** (1956). GR 1 R 134/1, DHS.
- Mouillage de mines aux Kerguelen** (1959). GR 8 H 258, folder 3, DHS.
- Nature et étendue de la présence française à Kerguelen** (1980, September). 20010098/19, NAF.

- Négociations préliminaires au traité et avant-projets** (1958-1959). 20010098/19, NAF.
- Note de service de Sicaud** (1951). 20010098/89, NAF.
- Note de la Compagnie Générale des Iles Kerguelen, Saint-Paul et Amsterdam sur l'élevage du mouton aux Iles Kerguelen** (1927, June 2). 4101COL127, NOA.
- Note: Intérêt stratégique de l'île Kerguelen, J. M. Rolly** (1959, April 29). 20070432/8, NAF.
- Ordre de mission de colonel Genty pour janvier 1956** (1955, December 30). GR 1 R 134/1, DHS.
- Présence et activité australienne à l'île Heard** (1980, September). 20010098/19, NAF.
- Procès-verbal de la réunion du groupe de travail sur l'intérêt stratégique des Terres Australes et Antarctiques Françaises** (1959, July 3). 200700432/8, NAF.
- Procès-verbaux des prises de possession des îles Amsterdam et Saint-Paul par le capitaine Martin Dupeyrat et Adam Mieroslowski** (1843, July 1-3). 20010098/1/1, NAF.
- Propositions en vue de classement en réserve naturelle des terres australes françaises** (1996). 20100098/77, NAF.
- Procès-verbal de l'Assemblée générale des actionnaires de la Compagnie générale des îles Kerguelen, Saint-Paul et Amsterdam** (1914, April 7). 4101COL127, NOA.
- Procès-verbal de l'Assemblée générale des actionnaires de la Compagnie générale des îles Kerguelen, Saint-Paul et Amsterdam** (1924, August 13). 4101COL127, NOA.
- Rapport du Capitaine Hotton sur les travaux concernant la base aérienne** (1956, May 16). GR 1 R 134/1, DHS.
- Rapport d'ensemble sur les terres australes par le colonel Robert Genty, CASDN** (1955). TAAF 16, NOA.
- Rapport Genty de la Mission technique militaire Kerguelen** (1956). GR 1 R 134/1, DHS.
- Rapport général du colonel Robert Genty sur l'archipel des Crozet** (1957). GR 1 R 134/2, DHS.
- Rapport sur les projets de liaisons aériennes avec l'île de Kerguelen de J. Ponchelet** (1970, May 31). 20080663/17, NAF.
- Rapport de mission de L. Olivier** (1950, June). 20070432/9, NAF.
- Rapport sur les projets de liaisons aériennes avec l'île Kerguelen, J. Ponchelet** (1970, May 31). 20080663/17, NAF.
- Rapport du commandant Lieutard sur la mission aux Kerguelen, St. Paul et Amsterdam** (1893, February 21). 20010098/1/1, NAF.
- Rapport de M. Henry E. Bossière à M. le ministre des Colonies sur son voyage aux îles Kerguelen** (1909, July 5). 4101COL128, NOA.
- Reconnaissance de sites fortement protégés** (1958, September 23). GR 1 R 132/1, folder 6, DHS.
- Tentative d'acclimatation du saumon aux îles Kerguelen (TAAF)** (undated). 20160645/20, NAF.
- Un avenir pour les terres australes françaises, capitaine Jean-Claude Josselin** (undated). 20070432/8, NAF.
- Une piste aérienne à Kerguelen: pour quoi faire?** (undated). Note, 20160645/15, NAF.