

ON THE ROCKS – A GUIDE TO THE GEOLOGY OF ST HELENA BY BARRY WEAVER

by Trevor W. Hearl

“The appearance of a volcanic island in the middle of the ocean [...] excites curiosity and attention”, declared Dr Francis Duncan in *A Description of the Island of St Helena* in 1805. Indeed it had done so ever since the Island’s discovery three hundred years before, in 1502. Charles Darwin, who followed Duncan’s footsteps thirty years later, equally astounded by its dramatic landscape and structure, studied the St Helena section of his *Geological Observations on Volcanic Islands* with superlatives -“remarkable”, “quite extraordinary”, “so grand a scale”, “extremely rare”, “I never saw equalled anywhere else”, “entirely unique”. His *Autobiography* revealed (surprisingly in the popular view today) that the scientific achievement that had given him most satisfaction was “making out the geological structure of certain islands, for instance, St Helena”. Darwin’s deductions, like those of his St Helena mentor Robert Seale, have since been superseded by the work of later geologists, notably Capt. J.R. Oliver RE, Harvard Professor R.A. Daly, and Dr Ian Baker.

Now, in Barry Weaver’s *Guide to the Geology of Saint Helena*, the layman has a first-class introduction to this remarkable legacy. Dr Weaver, who visited the Island from the University of Oklahoma in 1988 and 1989, has applied on-the-spot research to the latest theories to explain St Helena’s origins and formation. He has provided the proverbial ‘man in Main Street’ with a plain English account, enriched by effective illustrations, making it a model of clarity as well as expertise. “St Helena is a wonderful place to study volcanic geology”, writes Dr Weaver, and his interesting, instructive and inexpensive text offers residents and visitors a new dimension to their perception of the place. How “this extraordinary Island” (to use Seale’s words) miraculously came to be in the middle of the vast South Atlantic and why its remarkable landscape should have developed as it has over the ages were questions that had puzzled sailors and scientists for centuries. The answers for St Helena are now available as general knowledge, and for that we are all in Dr Weaver’s debt.

Weaver, Barry. *Guide to the Geology of St Helena*. Norman, Oklahoma: Oklahoma University, 1990.

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