

THERE WAS A THIRD EXPEDITION TO ST PAUL'S ROCKS

by Trevor W. Hearl

A third major expedition, with philatelic relevance, linking St Paul's Rocks with St Helena, can be added to those of Darwin's *Beagle* (1832) and Moseley's *Challenger* (1873), quoted by Ted Cookson in "A Cruise to Brazil's Atlantic Islands" in the July issue of the *South Atlantic Chronicle* (Vol. XXIX, No. 3, pp. 5-11). It is James Ross's Antarctic expedition of 1839-1843, modestly commemorated by St Helena in 1986 on the one-pence value of the Explorers 13-stamp set, issued on September 22 and featuring James Ross and HMS *Erebus*.

Ross's two ships, the *Erebus* and *Terror*, anchored off St Paul's Rocks on their way south at the end of November 1839. Among those keen to scramble ashore were the botanist Joseph Hooker, later Director of Kew Gardens, whose fascination with St Helena had already been aroused by Charles Darwin; Lt. John Lefroy, on his way to establish a meteorological and magnetical observatory at Longwood; and Lt. Eardley Wilmot, who faced a similar task at the Cape. In his privately printed autobiography (London, 1895), Lefroy described the Rocks as "swarming with birds so unaccustomed to man that we caught them with our hands [...]. Wilmot got washed off his feet by the surf ... (and was) much hurt in ultimately struggling ashore by treading on echini". On December 17, they reached the island of Trinidad, uninhabited and almost inaccessible, where Lefroy climbed halfway up a "magnificent column of basaltic rock" where, to Hooker's delight, he found a fern unknown to science. They then sailed for St Helena, "the most tedious part of the voyage [...] nearly in the teeth of the Southern Trade-wind", making a mere 23 or 24 knots a day, arriving off Jamestown on January 31, 1840.

On the expedition's return from the Antarctic in 1843, the *Erebus* and *Terror* reached St Helena on May 13, staying a week, allowing Hooker a second opportunity to botanize. For one member of the crew of HMS *Terror*, this visit was to prove fatal, however. Lt. Archibald McMurdo, one of the most gifted young officers, developed "lockjaw" after the ships left on May 20, and he died on the voyage, "the effect of an apparently trivial accident at St Helena". He was, in fact, the expedition's only fatality after four years of exploration around the Antarctic! Today, fortunately, residents and visitors are protected by anti-tetanus inoculations.

On his return to London, Ross gained a well-earned knighthood, and in 1847 published a two-volume account of the expedition: *A Voyage of Discovery in the Southern and Antarctic Seas*.

South Atlantic Chronicle, October 2005, Vol. XXIX, No. 4, p. 5.

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