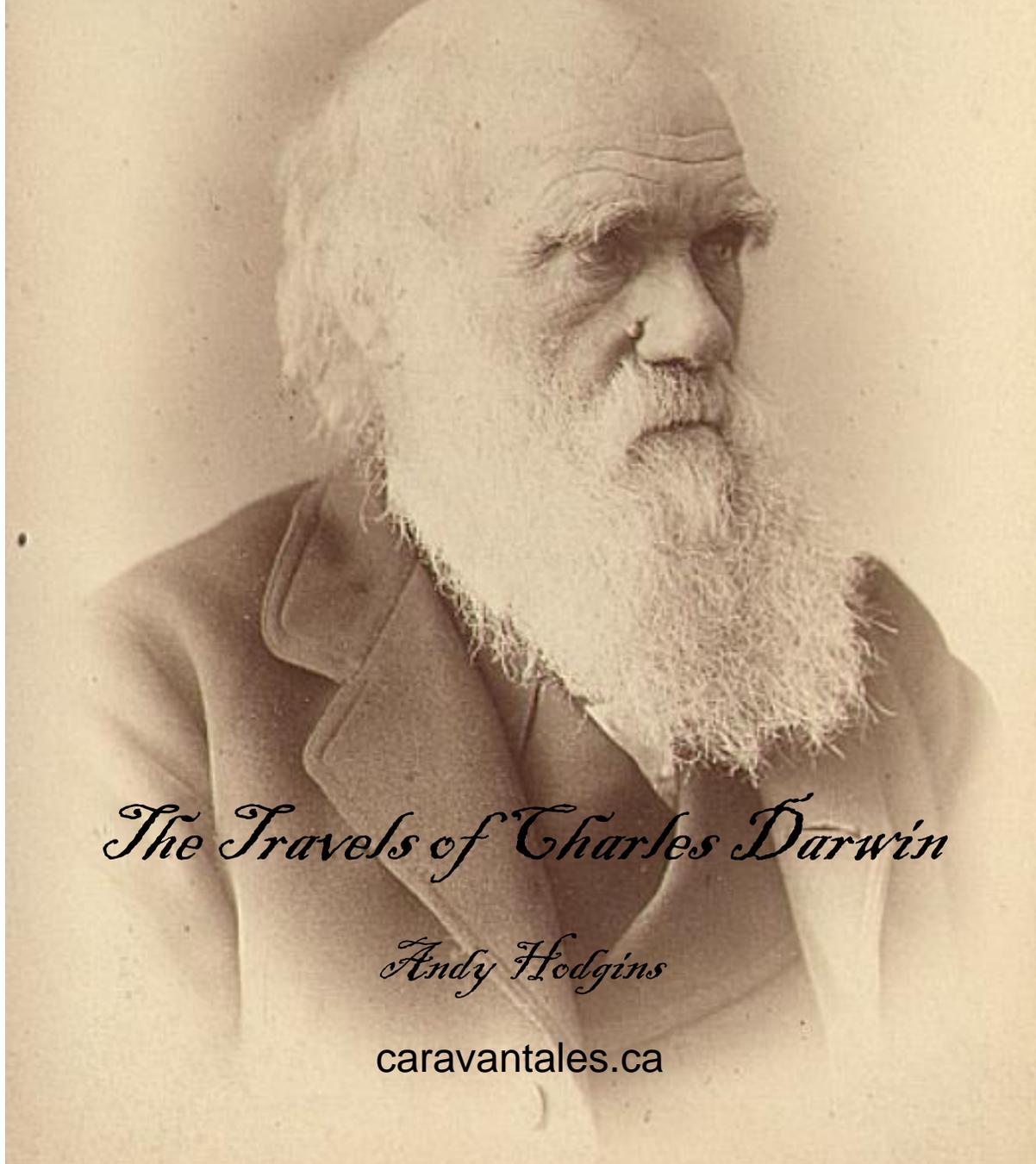


I hate every wave of the ocean...

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*'I hate every wave of the  
ocean...'*



*The Travels of Charles Darwin*

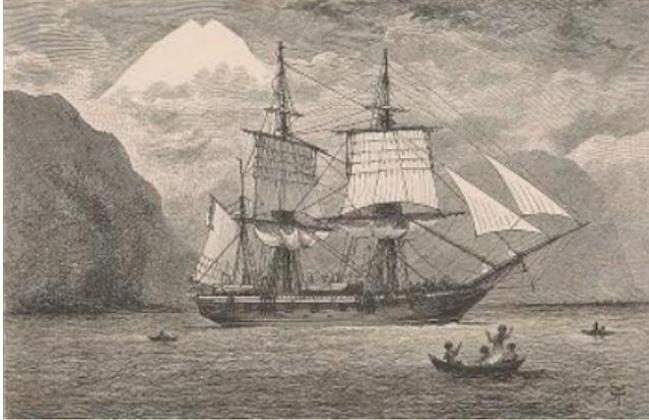
*Andy Hodgins*

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## I hate every wave of the ocean...

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It is one of the great sea voyages of pre modern travel. From Plymouth England the HMS Beagle departed in the waning days of 1831 with its most famous passenger, Charles Darwin. Only a couple of days into the circumnavigation of the world the ship encountered a storm north of France of which Darwin would declare ‘...the misery I



endured from sea-sickness is far beyond what I ever guessed at...I will give you all my dear-bought experience. Nobody who has only been to sea for twenty-four hours has a right to say that sea-sickness is even uncomfortable. The real misery only begins when you are so exhausted that a little exertion makes a feeling of faintness come on. I found nothing but lying in my hammock did me any good.’ His seasickness did

not pass and for near five years Darwin would suffer illness whenever he was on the sea ‘I hate every wave of the ocean...with a fervour, which you who have only seen the green waters of the shore can never understand.’ ‘I loathe, I abhor the sea and all ships which sail on it...’

Darwin, at twenty two years, had not previously been to sea nor tested by its conditions. His role on the ship was as companion to the Captain Robert Fitz-Roy was not only unpaid, but Darwin had to fork out for his own expenses; it is probable that he did not face stiff competition for the position. His studies as a naturalist no doubt played a part in his selection, however this was not his official role on board. Not bound by any contract Darwin could have bailed any time that the ship touched land. He could have caught the first ship back to England when the Beagle put in at the Cape Verde islands less than a month in, but the man tarried on despite his seasickness and completed the voyage of almost five years.

Certainly not the first circumnavigation, the Beagle made quite a remarkable journey. The ship touched in at the mid Atlantic Islands of Cape Verde, Ascension and St. Paul’s. They made Brazil in less than two months and spent the next three and a half years roving about the coasts of South America including Argentina and the Falkland or Malvinas Islands, Uruguay, Chile and Peru. It was during this time that Darwin was able to leave the ship and wander about the continent.

It seems that after this time in South America and making it only a third of the way around the globe the crew had had enough. The balance of the journey seems to be little more than courtesy calls at ports for supplies and letters in a rushed effort to get home. They spent thirty five days on the Galapagos Islands then made for Tahiti, New Zealand, South Australia and Tasmania, on to the Cape of Good Hope, the Atlantic

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Island of St. Helena, touched in at Brazil before reaching Falmouth early October 1836, three months short of a five year voyage. The original voyage was expected to take two years.

The main assignment of the Beagle was to continue in the survey of South America which, based on previous voyages, was inexact and incomplete. The ship was equipped with the latest of technology to measure longitude more accurately than previous. Darwin's functions were few but as the original naturalists fell off the voyage his knowledge in nature, geology and all the other ...ologies came into play and the roles became his responsibility although still unofficially.

In addition to Darwin there were seventy three others, officers, men and passengers. There was Captain Robert Fitz-Roy, twenty six years old who Darwin described as a man with an unfortunate temper, severe and 'unsparing in his blame.' But Darwin presented him with a more complex personality as respected and magnanimous with regards to the crew.

Other than Fitz-Roy most of the crew were unnamed in Darwin's account however we can find some of their names in Fitz-Roy's report. There was Augustus Earle, the ship's artist and to ensure the many chronometers on board would function and be maintained there was included a mechanic, George James Stebbing. George Rowlett as purser handled the financial matters and administrative tasks and Edward H Hellyer, a clerk. Philip Gidley King was a junior ranked officer known as a Midshipman, Charles Musters assisted the master as a Volunteer 1<sup>st</sup> class. Benjamin Bynoe and Robert McCormick served as surgeons. There was the first lieutenant Captain Wickham who would become the Governor of Queensland and James Sullivan the second lieutenant. The assistant-surveyor was Lort Stokes. There were also the riff-raff of the crew, carpenters, clerks, boatswain, eight marines, thirty-four seamen and six boys.

Unmentioned by Darwin but included was an unnamed servant that personally served Darwin. And hardly referred to at all were the three natives of Tierra del Fuego who had returned to England with Fitz-Roy on his first voyage to South America, there was a fourth who had died of smallpox. They were accompanied by a missionary, Richard Matthews who had hopes of setting up an Anglican mission.

That someone as unsuitable for the sea as Darwin was able to endure and survive a voyage says much for his character, for others with experience, did not fare so well. Mr. Mac-Cormick the Surgeon and Mr. Derbshire the Mate both returned to England only four months in. Augustus Earle, the artist was in such ill health that he was left at Montevideo where he took months to recover before returning to England. Mr. Martens departed at Valparaiso and Mr. King a midshipman chose to stay with his

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father in Australia. But they were the lucky ones, Mr. Musters succumbed to fever caught at Rio de Janeiro, Mr. Rowlett, the purser died at sea of an ailment that had long plagued him. A clerk, Mr. Hellyer drowned in the Falkland Islands attempting to retrieve a bird that he had shot.

The Beagle being a small ship, conditions were tight but Darwin himself seemed to fair well. Not part of the regular crew but travelling more or less as a guest, he was given half of the space normally allotted to the Captain where they slept in hammocks. The space was filled with equipment and books making for rather cramped quarters.

Meals on board seem to have been simple affairs, breakfast at eight, lunch at one and tea a five. There was little formality meals taken quickly and in silence. They did not survive solely on salt meat, the ship carried with them various antiscorbutics, pickles, dried apples and lemon juice presumably to ward off scurvy. There was a large supply of preserved meat, Fitz-Roy was to specify the brand as Kilner and Moorsom's and there were vegetables and soup. Darwin talked of rice and peas and calavanses and good bread 'who could want more.' Fitz-Roy specified that the ship carry a stove with an oven in place of a common galley fireplace.

During Darwin's time at sea England, in 1834, abolished slavery. This would have been an act to which Darwin would have responded with favor for he stated of the condition of slavery: 'It is impossible to see a negro and not feel kindly towards him; such cheerful, open, honest expressions and such fine muscular bodies. I never saw any of the diminutive Portuguese, with their murderous countenances, without almost wishing for Brazil to follow the example of Hayti; and, considering the enormous healthy-looking black population it will be wonderful if, at some future day, it does not take place.' The slaves of Haiti revolted against their masters and France and established an independent republic in 1804. His Captain of the Beagle, Fitz-Roy, was an advocate of the practice and he and Darwin found themselves in such a row that Fitz-Roy stated that he felt Darwin was not a suitable travelling companion and stated that he would be compelled to leave the ship. Fitz-Roy relented and Darwin continued. But oddly Darwin seemed to find a romantic side in Brazil where the slaves were allowed two days of the week to work for themselves where 'the slaves pass a happy and contented lives.'

Darwin also found sympathy towards the native or aboriginals of the world. 'Wherever the European has trod, death seems to pursue the aboriginal.' He refers to this encroachment throughout his travels, how the New Zealanders had resigned that their land would not pass to their children and he also called out the Malays who had driven before them the natives of the Indonesian Archipelago. While in Argentina he detailed the incursions of the Europeans into the lands of the natives and the ongoing wars that had been taking place. He met with General Rosas who was in charge of the

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forceful removal and systematic destruction of the native and of the Governor of Santa Fe, Lopez, whose 'favourite occupation is hunting Indians: a short time since he slaughtered forty-eight, and sold the children at the rate of 3 or 4 pounds apiece.' These wars continued and saw slaughter on both sides, both Natives and Europeans, Darwin was weary of the natives during his wandering about Argentina. We know who won in the end and Darwin's prophecy proved accurate.

As progressive as Darwin may have been he had the annoying habit of classifying people throughout his travels. He found Uruguayans to be polite and hospitable but the Brazilians disagreeable. He found the Native Fuegians of the southern tip of the continent to be 'the most abject and miserable creatures I anywhere beheld' and that nowhere did man live in a 'lower state of improvement.' The Tahitians passed muster, the New Zealanders failed to make the grade.

Darwin had an eye for all things English. In New Zealand it was the sight of an English farm house and its well tended fields. Cape Town, although settled by the Dutch and French, was becoming more and more English. And he admired the Welshness of St. Helena in the mid-Atlantic. 'It is impossible for an Englishman to behold these distant colonies, without a high pride and satisfaction. To hoist the British flag, seems to draw with it as a certain consequence, wealth, prosperity, and civilization.' He had similar sentiments with regards to Christianity, 'so excellent is the Christian faith, that the outward conduct even of the unbelievers is said to have been decidedly improved by the spread of its doctrines.'

Of the near five years that Darwin was on the voyage he spent only about a third of it on the sea. The rest of the time he spent on land wandering and collecting experiences and information that would contribute to his knowledge as a naturalist and it was these fits of wandering that Darwin recalled most fondly of his entire voyage. His land excursions started mid Atlantic when the ship landed at Cape Verde and did not subside when he reached the South American mainland. At Bahia, San Salvador in



Brazil he was awed by the

Brazilian forest and the 'the general luxuriance of the vegetation bears away the victory. The elegance of the grasses, the novelty of the parasitical plants, the beauty of the flowers, the glossy green of the foliage, all tend to this end. A most paradoxical mixture of sound and silence pervades the shady parts of the wood. The noise from the insects is so loud, that it may be heard even in a vessel



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anchored several hundred yards from the shore; yet within the recesses of the forest a universal silence appears to reign. To a person fond of natural history, such a day as this, brings with it a deeper pleasure than he ever can hope again to experience.'

He spent some time wandering in Uruguay but it was in Argentina that he had extensive opportunities to hike through the landscape. He was dropped by the Beagle at the Rio Negro and he determined to walk to Bahia Blanca and thence to Buenos Aires 400 miles distant. Once arrived at Buenos Aires Darwin set out for Santa Fe some 300 miles to the north west of the city. He passed, but did not join, a train of wagons on their way to Mendoza at the foot of the Andes Mountains in western Argentina 580 miles distant, a trip that would take the caravan about fifty days.



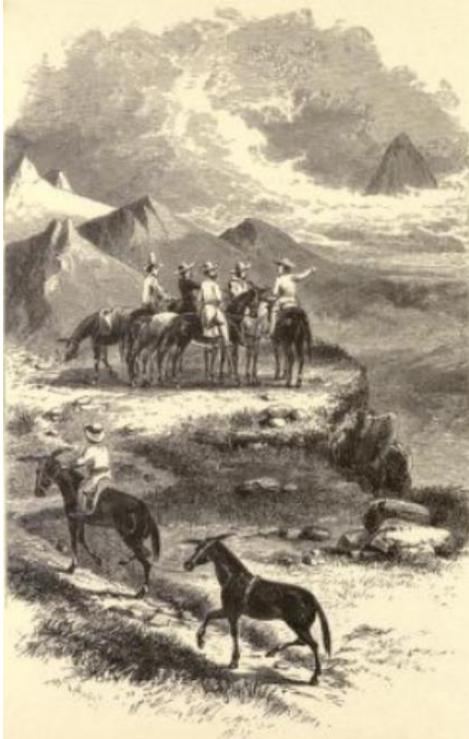
Darwin spent two days in the Chilean port of Valparaiso before setting on an excursion to the west to cross the Andes Mountains into Argentina. His small party arrived south of Mendoza then followed the foothills of the Andes to the north of the city for the return pass. He took twenty four days to return to Santiago. Further north he managed to spend a short time wandering in Peru. On the Galapagos, where Darwin witnessed the natural life that would provide him with thoughts towards his theories, he spent more time on land, he found further but shorter opportunities for wandering on Tahiti and while at New Zealand, Australia and South Africa, on the Island of St Helena he spent all of his four days there wandering.

It was this hiking or wandering life that appealed most to Darwin, while on the move in Uruguay he reflected upon this life, 'About two leagues beyond this curious tree we halted for the night: at this instant an unfortunate cow spied by the lynx-eyed Gauchos. Off they set in chase, and in a few minutes she was dragged in by the lazo, and slaughtered. We here had the four necessities of like 'en el campo', - pasture for the horses, water (only a muddy puddle), meat, and firewood. The Gauchos were in high spirits at finding all these luxuries; and we soon set to work at the poor cow. This

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was the first night which I had ever passed under the open sky, with the gear of the recado for my bed. There is high enjoyment in the independence of the Gaucho life – to be able at any moment to pull up your horse, and say, “Here we will pass the night.” The deathlike stillness of the plain, the dogs keeping watch, the gipsy-group of Gauchos making their beds round the fire, have left in my mind a strongly marked picture of this first night, which will not soon be forgotten.’



And he offered similar sentiments while in Chile, ‘The setting of the sun was glorious; the valleys being black, whilst the snowy peaks of the Andes yet retained a ruby tint. When it was dark, we made a fire beneath a little arbour of bamboos, fried our charqui (or dried strips of beef), took our mate, and were quite comfortable. There is an inexpressible charm in thus living in the open air. The evening was calm and still; the shrill noise of the mountain bizcacha, and the faint cry of the goatsucker, were only occasionally to be heard. Besides these, few birds, or even insects, frequent dry, parched mountains.’

This desire for the wandering seems always to have been with Darwin for as a child he would often wander in solitude for only the joy of it, unaware of his thoughts. On his return to England he would manage sojourns through the country, ‘Many of my excursions on horseback through wold countries, or in the boats, some of which lasted several weeks, were deeply interesting; their discomfort and some degree of danger were at that time hardly a drawback, and none at all afterwards.’ He made trips to Shrewsbury and Maer, the Isle of Wight, Glen Roy and Scotland.

But the observant Darwin did not just wander blindly for he was constantly on watch for all things of the natural world, plants, animals, geology, archeology, insects, meteorological observations and dinosaurs. While in Patagonia he was able to leave us with the following review of the geology, ‘With respect to its origin, I may observe that the well-rounded pebbles all consist of various felspathic porphyrics; and that, from their prolonged attrition, during the successive remodellings of the whole mass, much sediment must have been produced.’ Whatever he means by this, I’m sure that at one time it was of use to someone. It was his chance to wander and use his skill of observation which provided him with the knowledge to produce his wide volume of writing.

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While on land Darwin had to find accommodations where he could. In riding in the Uruguayan countryside it was not a problem to approach the home of local land owners but great care must be taken with regards to etiquette. In approaching the house of Don Juan Fuentes Darwin's party remained on their horses until given permission to dismount and then upon entering the house it was necessary to converse with the head of the household for several minutes before permission could be asked to stay the night. The request is not refused, nor does it seem it ever was, and the travellers were given their rooms and invited to have their meal with the family. In Buenos Aires Darwin was able to stay with an English merchant, Mr. Lumb. Darwin, when he could, would stay with Englishmen and while at Valparaiso had the good



fortune of meeting up with and being accommodated by Mr. Richard Corfield and old friend and former school mate.

While crossing the Andes from Chile to Argentina they found a cottage at which they could stay 'Our manner of travelling was delightfully independent. In the inhabited parts we bought a little firewood, hired pasture for the animals, and bivouacked in the corner of the same field

with them. Carrying an iron pot, we cooked and ate our supper under the cloudless sky, and knew no trouble.' Higher up in the mountains they found a shelter of rock where they met a party travelling in the opposite direction 'who made anxious inquiries about the state of the road.' In Argentina they stopped at a solitary hovel which 'bears the imposing name of Villa Vicencio, has been mentioned by every traveller who has crossed the Andes.' On the return to Chile they slept at the custom-house, the only inhabited spot in that region of the mountains.



The food while wandering was sometimes unique and often eclectic. In Argentina he fed on goat and on another occasion the unfortunate cow which his companions had come across and managed to kill. But there were times in which the fare would make those with weaker stomachs hesitate. In Argentina he feasted on Armadillo 'although a most excellent dish when roasted in its shell, did not make a very

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substantial breakfast and dinner for two hungry men.’ While in the Galapagos he survived mostly on tortoise-meat which was usually roasted with the meat in the breast plate and the young tortoises made excellent soup, but Darwin was somewhat indifferent to the meat. If one could overcome the revulsion Darwin recommended the lizards found on the island. In Uruguay there were options added to the little bit of pumpkin offered, roast beef or boiled beef and that was it, no vegetables nor even the presence of bread.

In the hills of Tahiti Darwin’s hosts wrapped meats, fish and fruit in leaves which were placed amongst the hot stones of the fire and covered in soil. In fifteen minutes



the meal was ready the ‘choice green parcels were now laid on a cloth of banana-leaves, and with a cocoa-nut shell we drank the cool water of the running stream; and thus we enjoyed our rustic meal.’ Darwin had with him a flask of whiskey which he shared but the Tahitians drank cautiously, ever aware of possible censure from the missionaries.

Darwin encountered moments of contentment, some as simple as the absence of fleas in Peru. But he has left us one scene which would appeal to the modern tourist. On a beach in Tahiti bonfires had been lit at night in which local songs and dances were performed, exclusively for the visitors. ‘The whole scene made us unequivocally aware that we were seated on the shores of an island in the South Seas.’

But not all was fun and naturalizing and geologizing throughout the voyage. He was held up more than once from illness, near Buenos Aires for a couple of days he was confined to his bed. In Chile he came down with an illness, he does not say what, but it remained with him for six weeks. And there were the bugs in a village south of Mendoza ‘At night I experienced an attack (for it deserves no less a name) of the Benchuca (a species of Reduvius) the great black bug of the Pampas. It is most disgusting to feel soft wingless insects, about an inch long, crawling over one’s body. Before sucking they are quite thin, but afterwards become round and bloated with blood, and in this state they are easily crushed.’ Of altitude sickness in the mountains of Chile, Darwin got off easy, feeling only a tightness of the head and chest, others suffered more.

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In February of 1835 an earthquake rattled and devastated parts of Chile and there resulted a tsunami. The towns of Valdivia, Quiriquina, Concepcion and seventy villages, as per Darwin's sources were destroyed, not a house in Cencepcion or Talcuhanu were left standing. The beach was strewn with the goods that had a day previous furnished the homes of the local inhabitants. Modern estimates are that 40,000 perished and Darwin was affected the loss of life and the destruction that ensued. This event gave Darwin much cause for thought on the origins and causes of earthquake and tsunamis.

On the 25<sup>th</sup> of September 1836 the Beagle departed the mid Atlantic Island of St Michael's and headed home for England arriving at the port of Falmouth a mere eight days later. This event of the Beagle and the ending of Darwin's near five year journey seems so inconsequential to the writer that he give it merely a couple of lines. There are no emotions or sentiments, no fanfare, no discussion of the processes and procedures that a returning citizen needs to endure, no mention of his first meal at home or meeting up with his sisters or parents. The journey was over and was he glad to be home, we get little reflection on his return.

Was Darwin a contented traveller? The evidence is varying, when making a short stop in Brazil on the return home the scientist mused: 'In my last walk, I stopped again and again to gaze on these beauties, and endeavoured to fix for ever in my mind an impression, which at the time I knew, sooner or later must fail. The form of the orange-tree, the cocoa-nut, the palm, the mango, the tree-fern, the banana, will remain clear and separate; but the thousand beauties which unite these into one perfect scene must fade away; yet they will leave like a tale heard in childhood, a picture full of indistinct, but most beautiful figures.' He identified the voyage of the Beagle to be the most significant event to influence his future successful career. And although he could have abandoned the enterprise at any time, for he was a paying passenger, he choose to continue to the end even the time away from home, originally intended as two years, slowly escalated to a full five years. Of course near the end staying on the Beagle was his fastest ticket home.

But in his own words 'I never was intended for a traveller' and he was careful of the potential pitfalls that one could miss 'such as that of the society of all old friends, and of the sight of those places, with which every dearest remembrance is so intimately connected.' Most telling of all is that upon his return he never again left the British Isles, he did make some journeys to the English country side as well as to Scotland and took a vacation on the Isle of Wight. But we hear none of the laments or desires of the open road that we hear from those chronic venturers who never seem to know when to quit, he did not seem to have a plan for those places that he had missed. He was certainly no Sinbad who had returned and barely recovered from his first disaster before he

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started planning his next on the waters of the Indian Ocean, Sinbad had a total of seven disasters, perhaps he did not survive the eighth.

There is possibly a more telling reason why Darwin did not venture off again, that of his health. He returned, somewhat a broken man, with various ailments throughout the remainder of his life; vomiting, shivering, his hands trembled and his 'head was often swimming. I was not able to do anything one day out of three, and was altogether too dispirited to write you' and he had great disorders of the stomach. He became something of a recluse, moving to the countryside and at times avoiding all company.

In the seclusion of the countryside without significant disruption Darwin reflected upon his research and studies while on the *Beagle* and was able to put many of these thoughts to paper. He provided two works (other than the *Voyage of the Beagle*) of which most of us are familiar, *The Origin of the Species* and *The Descent of Man* and wrote numerous less known works of which we should not forget his 1881 publication of *The formation of Vegetable Mould through the Action of Worms* which in two and a half years sold 8500 copies, a number that most travel writers and bloggers can only dream of.

It is not Darwin's science that interests me, it is his voyage on the *Beagle*, his circumnavigation of the world, his view of parts of the world that were experiencing their last state of pre European expansion and his experience of pre modern travel. It is also the five years in which he was able to venture and explore, adventures that the modern traveller with limited time and resources will ever be able to experience.

