

*"I hope to set out on a short ride of 3 or 4 days, to get a few glimpses of African landscape, or rather I should say, African deserts"*

Darwin set off on Saturday 4 June, 1836 for a 170 kilometre circular journey that took him to Paarl, Franschoek, and across the Franschoek Pass. It is likely that he stayed one night at the Houwhoek Inn and then went over the Sir Lowry Cole Pass, across the Cape Flats back to Cape Town.

He went on his travels into the Cape hinterland accompanied by an English-speaking Khoi groom.

The nameless groom wore a long coat, beaver hat, and white gloves! Darwin continued in the observational anthropology of the time to say that 'to my eye' the Hadmodod 'look like partially bleached Negroes; they are of small stature. They have most singularly formed heads and faces.' (Darwin referred to 'Hottentots' as 'Hodmadods', colloquial but highly perjorative expressions, the latter used by a 17-18th C English buccaneer and navigator, William Dampier.)

He hoped to see some large animals. He made a number of observations in the Voyage of the Beagle about large animals surviving in areas devoid of vegetation such as the Pampas of Argentina and the Karoo of South Africa.

Cape sugar bird (*Promerops cafer*)

## PAARL

DARWIN described the Paarl Valley as grey and brown – not the conclusion one would come to today. But a rainy cold winter, strong winds, hazy days caused by temperature inversion over the Cape Flats and vast stretches of brown and grey fynbos covering geographies that were sandy, would have made for a miserable Cape. Darwin's dolorous language used to describe the environment was apt. Today you look across beautiful vineyards towards the mountains with the town and Paarl nestled in the valley below. The town's lovely oak-lined Main Road is crowded with fine examples of Cape Dutch architecture.

### TODAY DARWIN MIGHT VISIT:

- ▶ Paarl Rock is located in the Paarl Mountain Nature Reserve. Open 08h00 to 17h00; Weekdays free, Weekends R23.20 per vehicle plus R6.00 per person.
- ▶ Walk along the historic Main Road and admire the architecture or enjoy a coffee or lunch break.
- ▶ Visit an historic wine estate.
- ▶ Paarl Tourism, Tel: 021 872 0860 or visit [www.paarlonline.com](http://www.paarlonline.com)



An early chalk drawing of Charles and his sister Catherine drawn by the artist Sharples shows him clutching a pot with a flowering fynbos plant the Cape Crowslip (*Lachenalia*) growing in it. The South African National Botanical Institute confirmed that it is a *Lachenalia*, a flowering fynbos. Darwin's father Robert Waring Darwin was a physician, businessman and amateur horticulturalist. The Cape Crowslip was a favourite in his garden and this explains why it is part of the picture.

## FRANSCHHOEK



"AFTER RIDING ABOUT three hours, we came near to the French Hoeck pass. This is so called from a number of emigrant protestant Frenchmen, who formerly settled in a flat valley at the foot of the mountain: it is one of the prettiest places I saw in my excursion. The pass is a considerable work, an inclined road having been cut along the steep side of the mountain: it forms one of the principal roads from the low land of the coast, to the mountains and great plains of the interior. We reached the foot of the mountains on the opposite, or S. E. side of the pass, a little after noon. Here, at the toll-bar, we found comfortable lodgings for the night."

### SOUTH AFRICA'S OLDEST PASSES

Franschoek Pass is South Africa's oldest professionally engineered pass. This route was initially established by the annual migration of elephants that came across the mountain to calve in the Franschoek valley. Traces of this path can still be seen today. The original pass built in 1818 followed this track. After the British occupation the pass was upgraded by professional engineers and the work completed in 1825.

Sir Lowry's Pass was a crossing known by the indigenous Khoi people as the Gantouw or Eland's Pass. In 1828 construction started on the pass following the current route. Opened in 1830 it was named after the Governor of the Cape Colony, Sir Lowry Cole.

### TODAY DARWIN MIGHT VISIT:

- ▶ Victor Verster Prison is where Nelson Mandela took his first steps to freedom in 1990. Situated on the R301 between Paarl and Franschoek, the site is marked by a statue of the iconic hero and statesman.
- ▶ Enjoy the culinary delights of Franschoek, dubbed 'the gourmet capital of South Africa'.
- ▶ Amble down the trendy main street with its open air coffee bars and laid back shopping options.
- ▶ Visit an historic wine estate.
- ▶ Franschoek Tourism, Tel: 021 876 3603 or visit [www.franschoek.org.za](http://www.franschoek.org.za).

The HMS Beagle was a surveying vessel and Captain Fitzroy's orders were to complete the 'charting of the far southern coast of South America', and to 'measure meridian distances on a westward navigation of the southern hemisphere and, as part of the process, to calibrate a battery of 22 new chronometers, which the Beagle took on board for eventual use in the Royal Navy.'

## HOUWHOEK

"I SAW THE E & W RANGES South of Caledon, the mountains in the curved road to the Palmiet River is a & Zonderend do perfect chaos – country very desolate solitary mountainous, few animals, farm houses in valleys – no trees, wild deer large white vultures like condors – Band of mountains, When we arrived in evening at Mr Gadney's found party of five men Boer – runaway rascals spirited fellows..."

Darwin suspected that all modern human beings came originated in Africa. He also suspected that we were all variations on a single theme. In 2009 it was revealed that Mossel Bay is a likely site of modern human origins. Darwin was within 200 miles range of the site when he visited in 1836.

He spent 4 days in close contact with one of the oldest populations of human beings – his guide. Interestingly, nowhere does he record the name of this guide. One wonders what Darwin and his professional tour operator spoke about. They spent a special time together, in each other's company for four days. They shared a language – English – so communication was possible. They shared an adventure. Darwin trusted the man with his life, but nowhere does Darwin record his name.

"In 2009 it was revealed that Mossel Bay is a likely site of modern human origins. Darwin was within 200 miles range of the site when he visited in 1836."

- Dr Wilmot James



## SIR LOWRY COLES PASS – CAPE FLATS

MY INTENTION WAS to return by Sir Lowry Cole's pass, over the same chain of mountains as before, but a little further to the south. Following unfrequented paths, we crossed an irregular hilly country until we joined the other line of road. During the whole long day, I met scarcely a single person, and saw but few inhabited spots, or any number of cattle. A few reobucks were grazing on the sides of the hills, and some large dirty white vultures, like the condors of America, slowly wheeled over the place where probably some dead animal was lying. There was not even a tree to break the monotonous uniformity of the sandstone hills: I never saw a much less interesting country. At night we slept at the house of an English farmer; and at an early hour the next day we descended by Sir Lowry's pass, which, like that of the French Hoeck, has been cut, at a great expense, along the flank of a steep mountain. From the summit, there was a noble view of the whole of False Bay, and of the Table Mountain, and, immediately below, of the cultivated country of Hottentot Holland. The flat, covered with sand-dunes did not appear, when viewed from this height, of the tedious length which we found it before we reached in the evening Cape Town.

### RETRACE CHARLES DARWIN'S VISIT TO THE CAPE

31ST MAY – 18TH JUNE 1836

- Simons Bay | Wynberg | Claremont | Observatory
- Cape Town | Sea Point | Paarl | Franschoek
- Franschoek Pass | Grabouw | Houwhoek
- Sir Lowry Cole's Pass | Cape Flats | Cape Town

## CHARLES DARWIN

VISITED THE CAPE BETWEEN 31 MAY AND 18 JUNE 1836 ABOARD THE HMS BEAGLE



THE DARWIN TRAIL takes you on a wonderfully scenic journey into history. The establishment of the route and publication of this Darwin Trail map is the first time that this important journey has been marked out and reclaimed as a part of our South African heritage.

Darwin had been enlisted to provide gentleman's company, enhanced by the fact that he was a Cambridge graduate with a natural science background. His father, who had to foot the bill for his passage, was persuaded that this circumnavigation of the southern hemisphere on HMS Beagle would be an exceptional opportunity for the young graduate and a sound career move. Darwin's monumentally refined powers of observations and analytical mind ensured that this experience set him on a remarkable personal journey of scientific discovery.

You will discover how the people Darwin met and what he saw at the Cape influenced on his work and ultimately on modern science. The Darwin Trail also suggests places that Darwin might have visited along the route if he arrived in Cape Town today.

Darwin was 27 years old at the time. Of the thirteen ports where HMS Beagle called on its homeward voyage from South America to England, it stayed longer at Simon's Bay than anywhere else except for the Galapagos Islands. For Darwin, it was a wonderful opportunity for some geologizing. The Beagle's crew of 76 was probably not pleased by the length of the stay. The Atlantic Ocean was the last lap home and they were anxious to complete the voyage, which had taken 5 years.

### DARWIN'S COLLECTION STRATEGY

Darwin's intellectual preparation for the visit to the Cape – as for anywhere else – was thorough and meticulous. This was his habit. Duncan Porter wrote an extensive article on Darwin's collection strategy titled 'The Beagle collector and his collections'.

Darwin had a well-finessed collection strategy. He voraciously read everything there was to read on a subject. As time was precious, he would not repeat what others had already done. Although

he was immensely interested in a wide range of subjects, he would not revisit previously covered subjects.

It is important to recall that, from the Galapagos onwards, all of the specimens collected by Darwin had to be kept on board the The Beagle. Limitations on space forced Darwin to be selective about what he collected. Though he was interested in everything, his passion at the time was geology.

Darwin collected geological specimens from Simon's Town, the road to Cape Town, the road to Paarl, the sand flats between Peninsula and Cape Town, Paarl, 'French

Hoeck' Pass, the 'Lion's Rump' as well as a specimen taken from the junction of granite and clay slate on 'Lion's Back'. The specimens may be viewed at the Sedgwick Museum, Cambridge.

He collected a few entomological and zoological specimens. After the visit, Darwin corresponded with South African plant specialists. These specimens are to be found in different collections, including the botanical ones at Kew Botanical Gardens, the zoological ones being at London's Natural History Museum and the University of Cambridge.

### PICTURE CREDITS

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## SIMON'S TOWN

HMS BEAGLE CAME to anchor at Simon's Bay on 31 May 1836 and Darwin was not overwhelmed. 'The little town of Simon's Bay offers but a cheerless aspect to the stranger' he records in his diary.

The berthing in Simon's Town was common during winter as the harbour offered protection from the north westerly winds and swells associated with the winter weather.

Darwin set off for Cape Town on 1 June 1836.

Simon's Town is a very different 'little town' today. Home of the South African Navy, it retains a distinct charm, with many relics of its historic British naval connections. The main road is called St George's Street and is referred to as Simon's Towns Historic Mile. Besides taking in the architecture, you can enjoy the pleasantly buzzy ambience of shops, coffee shops and restaurant options.



"There being nothing worth seeing here, I procured a gig and set out for the Cape Town...the country is very desert; & with the exception of the pleasure which the sight of an entirely new vegetation never fails to communicate, there is very little of interest."

Cape bulbul (*Pycnonotus capensis*)

### TODAY DARWIN MIGHT VISIT:

- ▶ If Darwin had arrived in the summer months, he might have enjoyed the safe swimming at Seaforth beach or gone swimming with the penguins at The Boulders. The African Penguin colony is a favourite destination today, especially for children. There is also no evidence that he visited the most southerly point of the Peninsula. Cape Point is only 20km away in the Cape of Good Hope Nature Reserve.

- ▶ Visitors Information Centre, Tel: 021 786 8440 or visit [www.capetown.travel.co.za](http://www.capetown.travel.co.za)

## WYNBERG

DARWIN TRAVELLED ALONG the base of the eastern part of Table Mountain. The first fourteen miles were 'desert' like, punctuated by the 'pleasure' that the sight of fynbos brought. The word 'desert' in this instance relates to the area being deserted.

Darwin admired Wynberg because "a grand wall of mountains that gives the scene a degree of uncommon beauty" overwhelmed it.

Wynberg Village still retains many reminders of the British Camp that was established there at the turn of the 19th Century.

### TODAY DARWIN MIGHT VISIT:

- ▶ Wynberg Village with 19th C relics and English references such as Laundry Cottage, Wellington Avenue, Wellington Green and the oak trees Darwin referred to.

- ▶ Maynardville Open Air Summer Theatre, Tel: 021 410 9800

"a grand wall of mountains that gives the scene a degree of uncommon beauty"

## CLAREMONT



HE PASSED THROUGH Claremont on his way to the city. On 4 June he visited Lord John and Lady Herschel and on 15 June, with Capt Fitzroy, went for dinner at their home Feldhausen in Claremont. Darwin described this as "the most notable event that, for a long period, I have had the good fortune to enjoy". Herschel was resident in Cape Town at that time to document southern hemisphere stars, clusters and nebulae

To his sister Catherine on 3 June he wrote: "Tomorrow morning I am going to call with Capt. F.R. on the Sir J. Herschel. I have already seen the house which he has purchased; it is six miles from the town & in a most retired charming situation. I have heard so much about his eccentric but very amiable (sic) manners, that I have a high curiosity to see the great Man."

In his autobiography Darwin writes that, 'during my last year at Cambridge I read with care and profound interest Humboldt's Personal Narrative. This work and Sir J. Herschel's Introduction to the Study of Natural Philosophy stirred up in me a burning zeal to add even the most humble contribution to the noble structure of Natural Science.'

Although there is no record of the dinner, it must have left a significant impression, as it had to do with what Herschel and Darwin both referred to as the 'mystery of the mysteries', which is the question of heredity and how a new species comes about.

"Of course, I allude to that mystery of mysteries – the replacement of extinct species by others. Many will doubtless think your speculations too bold but it is as well to face the difficulty at once." – John Herschel to Charles Lyell.

It could be that Herschel was led to the idea of evolution by his fynbos bulb collection: 'this is a beautiful country for studying

the graduation of Botanical species – the families are so rich in species. I am little or nothing of a Botanist – but with one feature it is impossible not to be struck – viz that when you find a species which fills up as you fancy a wanting link between two others – it does not merely fill it, but does so with the superaddition of some new characters.'

Herschel it seems had arrived at a pre-Mendelian hypothesis on heredity. If this was the dinner conversation with Darwin, it added undoubtedly to his own earlier thoughts on the vehicle of evolution. As John Rourke has commented: "The depth of his insight as revealed by these comments is surprising especially when one considers they were conceived several decades before the principles of inheritance were established and 23 years before Darwin's theory of evolution had been published."

Feldhausen Avenue, which today is a rather insignificant road in suburban Claremont, is all that remains to record this gracious home and its beautiful gardens with avenue of trees sweeping through the extensive property to the homestead.

*Lachenalis tricolor* 5

### TODAY DARWIN MIGHT VISIT:

- ▶ Kirstenbosch National Botanical Gardens to enjoy the Cape Floral Kingdom, Tel: 021 799 8783 or visit [www.sanbi.org](http://www.sanbi.org)

- ▶ Vineyard Hotel for tea or a drink on the terrace to enjoy the view of Table Mountain that the Herschel's had from Feldhausen, Tel: 021 657 4500, or visit [www.vineyard.co.za](http://www.vineyard.co.za)

"The diversity of plant life in this relatively small zone rivals that of the Amazon for sheer numbers of endemic species per square mile – 5,800 of the 8,600 known species in this kingdom are found nowhere else in the world – and 2,256 species are found on Table Mountain alone."

– Nancy Seaton Director of the Brooklyn National Botanical Gardens

## OBSERVATORY



FOR CAPT ROBERT FITZROY, the Captain of HMS Beagle, the priority at the Cape was to visit the Royal Observatory. The first scientific institution established in South Africa, it was on its way to become the most important observatory in the southern hemisphere and was well placed and equipped for calibrating chronometers. Darwin met Thomas Maclear, the Astronomer Royal at that time.

### TODAY DARWIN MIGHT VISIT:

- ▶ SA Astronomical Observatory, Tel: 021 447 0025 or visit [www.saao.ac.za](http://www.saao.ac.za)
- ▶ Heart Transplant Museum at Groote Schuur Hospital, Tel: 021 404 1967 or visit [www.heartofcapetown.co.za](http://www.heartofcapetown.co.za)
- ▶ University of Cape Town, Tel: 021 650 9111 or visit [www.uct.ac.za](http://www.uct.ac.za)
- ▶ Africa Genome Education Institute, Tel: 021 683 5814 or visit [www.africagenome.com](http://www.africagenome.com)



Map taken from: The Dutch Colony of the Cape of Good Hope [cartographic material] / By L. S. De La Rochette (1731-1802; engraved by W. Faden, London: W. Faden, 1782.

## CAPE TOWN

IN HIS LETTER TO HIS SISTER CATHERINE: "This <is> a pretty and singular town; it lies at the foot of an enormous wall, (the Table mountain), which reaches to the clouds, and makes a most imposing barrier.— Cape Town is a great inn, on the great highway to the east; an extraordinary number of houses are occupied as boarding houses, in one of which I am now settled..."

The next morning he 'walked to a neighbouring hill to look at the town. It is laid out with the rectangular precision of a Spanish town city'.

A walk into the Bo-Kaap, on the slopes of Lion's Head, would provide a visitor with a contemporary view of the city. You would also be in an area that became inhabited by the emancipated slaves of Malay descent and the location of Tanu Baru, the oldest Muslim cemetery in South Africa.

"In several trifling particulars the town has a foreign air, but daily it is becoming more English."

### TODAY DARWIN MIGHT VISIT:

- ▶ Iziko SA Museum, founded by Andrew Smith (see below) and the adjacent Planetarium, Tel: 021 481 3800 or visit [www.iziko.org.za](http://www.iziko.org.za)

- ▶ Iziko Slave Lodge, Tel: 021 460 8200 or visit [www.iziko.org.za](http://www.iziko.org.za)

## SEA POINT

DARWIN KNEW OF Andrew Smith's Illustrations of the Zoology of South Africa and was delighted to receive a personal copy from him. Darwin befriended and came to like the Army Officer and Naturalist Andrew Smith who accompanied him on two excursions at the Cape, including the important one to what became known as the Sea Point Contact.

The catastrophic geological event that produced the melting and fusion of rocks at the Sea Point Contact left a deep impression on Darwin. It posed a question that geological orthodoxy could not convincingly answer.

The manner in which the granite intruded the siltstone posed a 'great difficulty' on the 'ordinary theory, of granite having been injected whilst liquefied' Darwin observed. Instead, 'we must conclude, that it has been here formed by the metamorphic action, a circumstance doubted, under nearly similar circumstances, by some authors' he concluded. The granite had actually intruded and thermally metamorphosed.

Obvious today, it was one of those remarkable general laws of nature that Charles Lyell always encouraged Darwin to formulate.' Indeed, it confirmed Lyell's new theory of geological change.

More than that, it dawned on Darwin that catastrophic geological events would alter the ecological habitats in which species reproduced and evolved. It was key to the understanding of how habitat change would encourage the evolution of new variants from old ones and how speciation – the emergence of new species – itself occurred.

"The catastrophic geological event that produced the melting and fusion of rocks at the Sea Point Contact left a deep impression on Darwin."

Charles Darwin is a giant in the history of the natural sciences. He was not the first person to think of life in evolutionary terms. He was the first to establish the mechanism of evolution, which he called 'natural selection.'

Commemorative medal struck in 1909