
The Beagle Voyage



Activity 3: Unimagined sights and pleasures

Subject: English

1 hour

Suggested preparation

Presentation:

[The Beagle Voyage](#)

What do I need?

- [Letter 168: Charles Darwin to William Darwin Fox](#)
- [Diary entries for 16 January, 29 February, 1 March, 1832](#)
- [Letter questions](#)
- [Darwin's geological map of South America](#)
- [Who's who?](#)

Early letters and diary entries from Darwin on the voyage describe magical, little known landscapes. Read through his descriptions then create a word cloud or poem that reflects what he encountered.

What do I do?

1. Read through the letter and diary extracts and answer the letter questions.
2. Write a poem or create a word cloud in the shape of a map of South America using Darwin's words to describe the landscape that he sees.

Think about:

- What is the landscape like?
- What is the weather like?
- What does it feel like to be there?

Letter 168: Charles Darwin to William Darwin Fox

May 1832, Botofugo Bay, near Rio de Janeiro

My dear Fox

...My mind has been since leaving England in a perfect *hurricane* of delight & astonishment. And to this hour scarcely a minute has passed in idleness.— I will give you a very short outline of our voyage. We sailed from England after much difficulty on the 27th of December & arriv'd after a short passage to St Jago....At



St Jago my Natura Hist: & most delightful labours commenced.— during the 3 weeks I collected a host of marine animals, & enjoyed many a good geological walk.— Touching at some islands we sailed to Bahia, & from thence to Rio, where I have already been some weeks.—

My collections go on admirably in almost every branch. as for insects I trust I shall send an host of undescribed species to England...— I am entirely occupied with land animals, as the beach is only sand; Spiders & the adjoining tribes have perhaps given me from their novelty the most pleasure.— I think I have already taken several new genera.— But Geology carries the day; it is like the pleasure of gambling, speculating on first arriving what the rocks may be...— So much for the grand end of my voyage; in other respects things are equally flourishing, my life when at sea, is so quiet, that to a person who can employ himself, nothing can be pleasanter.—the beauty of the sky & brilliancy of the ocean together make a picture.— But when on shore, & wandering in the sublime forests, surrounded by views more gorgeous than even Claude ever imagined, I enjoy a delight which none but those who have experienced it can understand— If it is to be done, it must be by studying Humboldt...

Letter 168: Charles Darwin to William Darwin Fox

...I suppose I shall remain through the whole voyage, but it is a sorrowful long fraction of ones life; especially as the greatest part of the pleasure is in anticipation.— I must however except that resulting from Natur— History; think when you are picking insects off a hawthorn hedge on a fine May day (wretchedly cold I have no doubt) think of me collecting amongst pineapples & orange trees; whilst staining your fingers with dirty blackberries, think & be envious of ripe oranges.— This is a proper piece of Bravado, for I would walk through many a mile of sleet, snow or rain to shake you by the hand, My dear old Fox.

God Bless you.

Believe me

Yours very affectionately

Charles Darwin

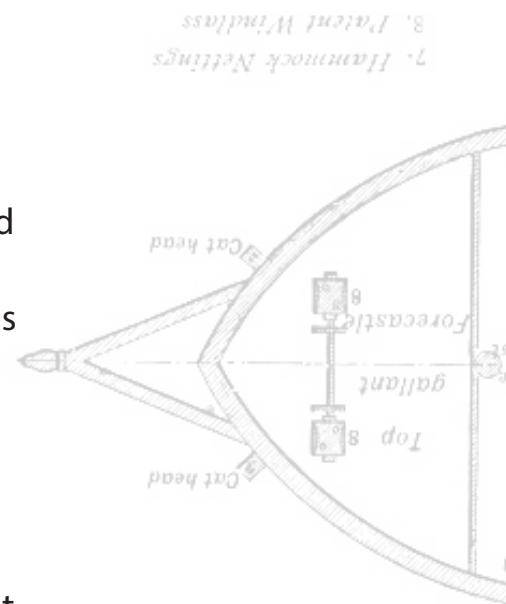
Charles Darwin



Darwin's Diary on board HMS Beagle

16 January 1832

Before returning to our boat, we walked across the town & came to a deep valley. — Here I first saw the glory of tropical vegetation. Tamarinds, Bananas & Palms were flourishing at my feet. — I expected a good deal, for I had read Humboldt's descriptions & I was afraid of disappointments: how utterly vain such fear is, none can tell but those who have experienced what I to day have. — It is not only the gracefulness of their forms or the novel richness of their colours, it is the numberless & confusing associations that rush together on the mind, & produce the effect. — I returned to the shore, treading on Volcanic rocks, hearing the notes of unknown birds, & seeing new insects fluttering about still newer flowers. — It has been for me a glorious day, like giving to a blind man eyes. — he is overwhelmed with what he sees & cannot justly comprehend it. — Such are my feelings, & such may they remain. —



29 February 1832

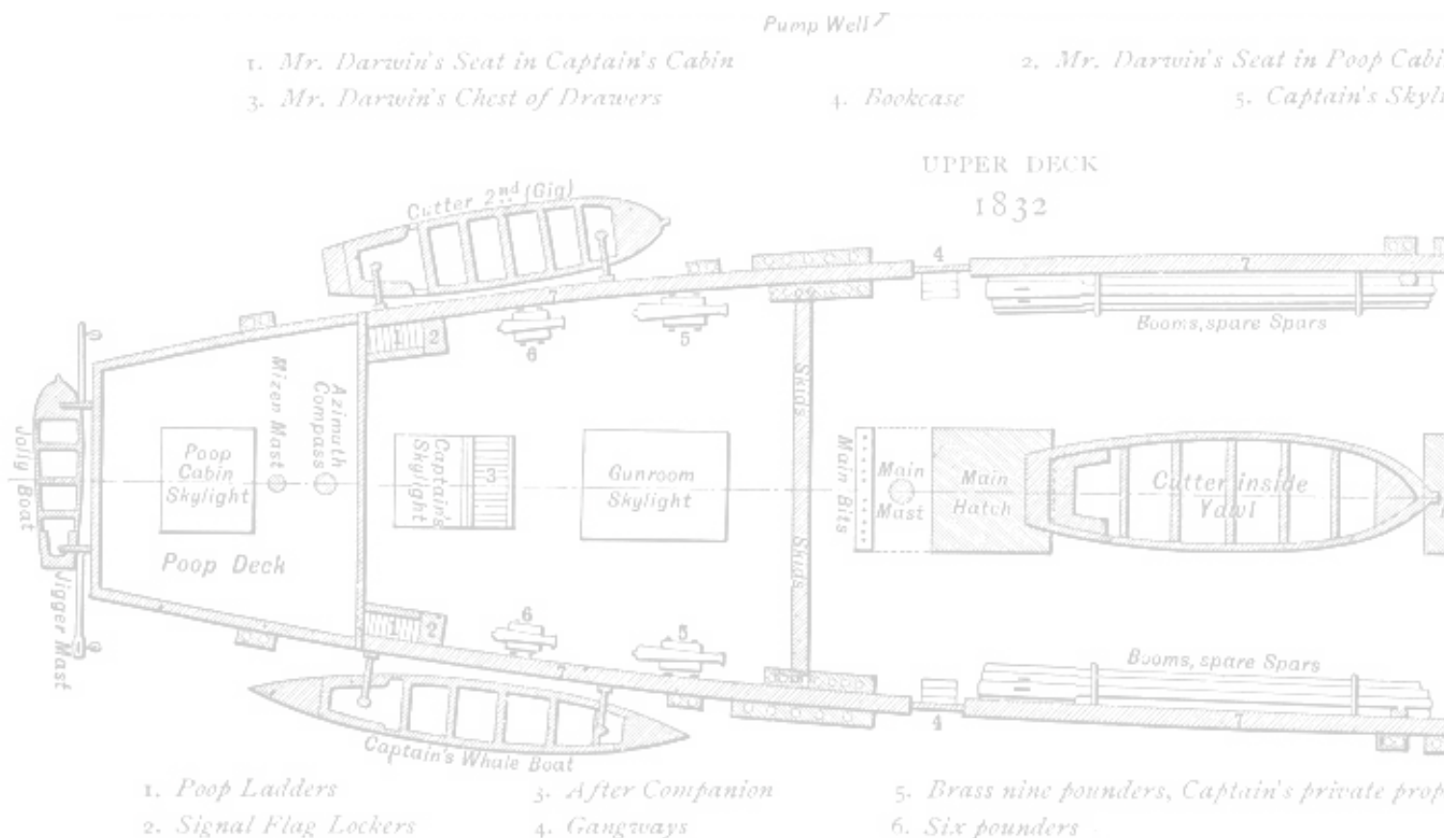
The day has passed delightfully: delight is however a weak term for such transports of pleasure: I have been wandering by myself in a Brazilian forest: amongst the multitude it is hard to say what set of objects is most striking; the general luxuriance of the vegetation bears the victory, the elegance 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 & silence pervades the shady parts of the wood. —the noise from the insects is so loud that in the evening it can be heard even in a vessel anchored several hundred yards from the shore. — Yet within the recesses of the forest when in the midst of it a universal stillness appears to reign. — To a person fond of Natural history such a day as this brings with it pleasure more acute than he ever may again experience. — After wandering about for some hours, I returned

stung behind him

to the landing place. — Before reaching it I was overtaken by a Tropical storm. — I tried to find shelter under a tree so thick that it would never have been penetrated by common English rain, yet here in a couple of minutes, a little torrent flowed down the trunk. It is to this violence we must attribute the verdure in the bottom of the wood. —if the showers were like those of a colder clime, the moisture would be absorbed or evaporated before reaching the ground.

1 March 1832

I can only add raptures to the former raptures. I walked with the two Mids a few miles into the interior. The country is composed of small hills & each new valley is more beautiful than the last. — I collected a great number of brilliantly coloured flowers, enough to make a florist go wild. — Brazilian scenery is nothing more nor less than a view in the Arabian Nights, with the advantage of reality. — The air is deliciously cool & soft; full of enjoyment one fervently desires to live in retirement in this new & grander world. —

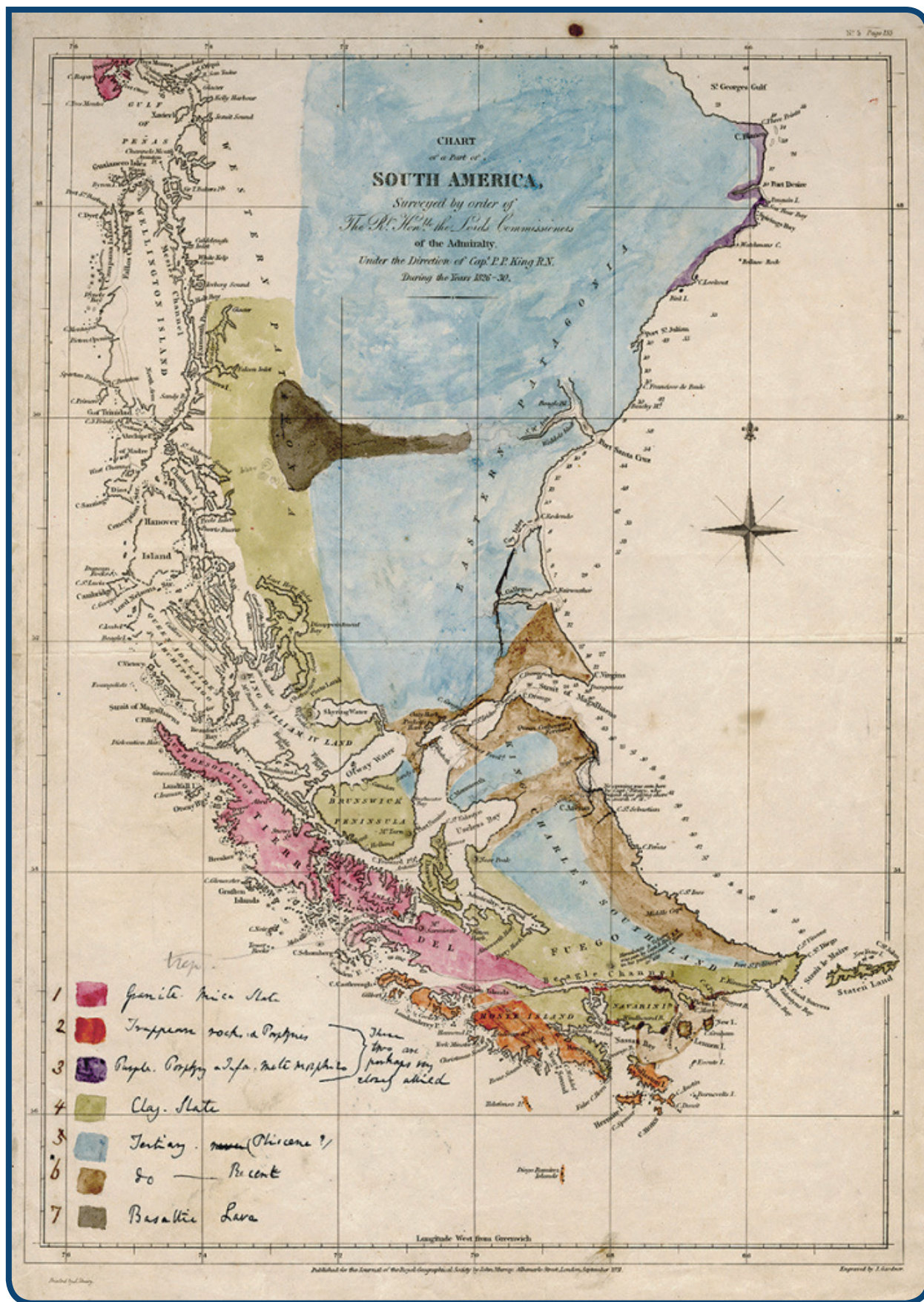


Letter questions: Unimagined sights and pleasures

Using letter 168: Charles Darwin to William Darwin Fox and the diary entries: 16 January 1832, 29 February and 1 March 1832, answer the following questions:

1. According to the letter and diary entries, list the different things that Darwin has been collecting.
2. In the letter and diary entries Darwin describes two different things that have impressed him most, what are they and what does he like about them?
3. In the letter and diary entries Darwin mentions Claude and Humboldt, who is he referring to and why?
4. In the letter, how does he try to make his friend Fox envious of him?
5. How does he show how much he misses Fox at the end of the letter?

Darwin's geological map of South America



Reference: CUL DAR 44:13

The Beagle Voyage

Who's who?

Charles Darwin

Charles Darwin (1809-1882) was a naturalist who established natural selection as the mechanism for the process of evolution. He joined the voyage of HMS *Beagle* when he was 22, a journey he described as the 'most fortunate circumstance in my life'. He wrote to around 2000 correspondents all over the world as a means to inform his research. Most famously he published *On the Origin of Species* in 1859, but he researched and wrote extensively on natural history throughout his life.



Susan Darwin

Susan Darwin (1803-66) was Darwin's sister. They wrote regularly to each other during the *Beagle* voyage. She conveyed much family news to him and referred to herself as 'Granny' in her letters as she was always giving him advice. She also corrected his grammar and spelling.

Robert FitzRoy

Robert FitzRoy (1805-65) was Vice-Admiral to the Navy, a pioneering meteorologist and hydrographer. He was made the commander of HMS *Beagle* at the age of 23. He was appointed Governor of New Zealand in 1843. He is credited with inventing several barometers and devising sea charts to forecast the weather. Despite FitzRoy's explosive temper, he and Darwin were close friends during the voyage and he supported Darwin's work. FitzRoy subsequently distanced himself from Darwin's ideas and turned increasingly to religion.



Image of Robert FitzRoy: ©National Portrait Gallery, London. NPG x128426. CC BY-NC-ND 3.0

The Beagle Voyage: Who's who?

Robert Waring Darwin

Robert Waring Darwin (1766-1848) was Charles Darwin's father and a physician. He had a large practice in Shrewsbury and resided at The Mount. He was the son of Dr Erasmus Darwin who took a great interest in botany. Robert Waring Darwin married Susannah, daughter of Josiah Wedgwood I.

Image of Robert Waring Darwin ©Shrewsbury Museums Service (SHYMS: FA/1991/033/2)



William Darwin Fox

William Darwin Fox (1805–80) was a clergyman and Charles Darwin's second cousin. He was a good friend of Darwin's at Cambridge and shared his enthusiasm for studying insects. He maintained an active interest in natural history throughout his life and provided Darwin with much information. He was the Rector of Delamere, Cheshire (1838–73) but spent the last years of his life at Sandown, Isle of Wight.



John Stevens Henslow

John Stevens Henslow (1796–1861) was a clergyman, botanist and mineralogist. He was Charles Darwin's teacher and friend. He was Professor of Mineralogy at Cambridge University from 1822 to 1827 and Professor of Botany from 1825 to 1861. He also extended and remodelled the Cambridge Botanic Garden as well as being firstly curate of Little St Mary's Church in Cambridge, then vicar of Cholsey-cum-Moulsford, Berkshire, and finally rector of Hitcham, Suffolk. Henslow recommended Darwin as an ideal candidate for the *Beagle* voyage.

Image of John Stevens Henslow courtesy of the National Library of Medicine

