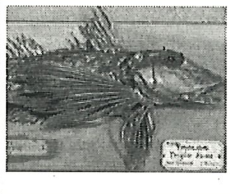




Today in History

30 December



1835 Charles Darwin leaves NZ after 9-day visit

Darwin's visit to the Bay of Islands on HMS *Beagle* was brief and unspectacular from his viewpoint. The *Beagle's* captain, Robert FitzRoy, would later serve as Governor of New Zealand.

New Zealand was just a short stopover on FitzRoy's five-year expedition, the main aims of which were to carry out charting work in South America and run a chain of chronometric readings around the globe. The trip was an ideal opportunity for a scientist to collect specimens from around the world, and after some enquiries Charles Darwin, a promising young naturalist and recent Cambridge graduate, was recommended for the job. The *Beagle* set sail in December 1831, arriving in the Bay of Islands four years later.

The story of Darwin's nine-day visit is told in Lydia Monin's *From the writer's notebook* (Reed, 2006). On 21 December 1835 the *Beagle* anchored in a harbour flanked by the 'hell-hole' of Kororareka on one side and the Church Missionary Society settlement at Paihia on the other. After a few uncomfortable days visiting the local settlements, Darwin and FitzRoy were invited by the CMS missionary William Williams to visit the Waimate mission station, 21 km inland from Paihia.

The journey was made on foot and by boat, with the guidance of a Maori chief whose services were paid for by James Busby, the British Resident. At Waimate, FitzRoy and Darwin were pleased to find an oasis of English civilisation, complete with cups of tea and cricket on the lawn. Darwin approved of the Maori labourers and maids, whose 'clean, tidy and healthy appearance, like that of the dairy-maids of England, formed a wonderful contrast with the women of the filthy hovels in Kororadika [Kororareka]'.

During his stay in New Zealand Darwin collected insects, shells, fish, rocks and a gecko. His detailed observations were carefully recorded in his journal of the *Beagle* expedition, published to much acclaim in 1839. He later wrote that the voyage had been 'by far the most important event in my life, and has determined my whole career.' New Zealand was not remembered so fondly; he found the country unattractive. Its English inhabitants, apart from the missionaries at Waimate, were 'the very refuse of society', while Maori lacked the 'charming simplicity which is found in Tahiti'.

Image: This red gurnard was collected by Charles Darwin when the *Beagle* visited the Bay of Islands. (Te Ara)

Internal links

Robert FitzRoy

External links

Robert FitzRoy biography (DNZB) Crossing the Pacific Ocean (aboutdarwin.com)

Timeline Section

Month Calendar View

Today in History

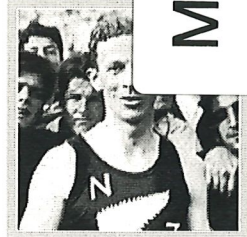
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Kiwi of the Week



Jack Lovelock

One of our greatest athletes, Berlin Olympic gold medallist Jack Lovelock led a remarkably full life before his tragic death in 1949, just a few days shy of his 40th birthday.

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This Week in History



13 June 1866  
Murder on the Maungatapu track



14 June 1984  
Muldoon calls snap election



15 June 1935  
Lovelock wins 'Mile of the century'



16 June 1923  
Baby-farmer Daniel Cooper hanged



17 June 1843  
The Wairau incident



18 June 1895  
Minnie Dean goes on trial



19 June 1940  
Niagara sunk by German mines off Northland

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