Charles Darwin’s *Beagle Diary*
1831–1836
I had been wandering about North Wales on a geological tour with Professor Sedgwick\(^1\) when I arrived home on Monday 29th August. My sisters first informed me of the letters from Prof. Henslow\(^2\) & M'r Peacock\(^3\) offering to me the place in the Beagle which I now fill. — I immediately said I would go; but the next morning finding my father so much averse to the whole plan, I wrote to M'r Peacock to refuse his offer. — On the last day of August I went to Maer,\(^4\) where everything soon bore a different appearance. — I found every member of the family so strongly on my side that I determined to make another effort. — In the evening I drew up a list of my Fathers objections, to which Uncle Jos wrote his opinion & answer.\(^5\) This we sent off to Shrewsbury early the next morning & I went out shooting. — About 10 o'clock Uncle Jos sent me a message, to say he intended going to Shrewsbury & offering to take me with him. — When we arrived there, all things were settled, & my Father most kindly gave his consent. —

I shall never forget what very anxious & uncomfortable days these two were. — My heart appeared to sink within me, independently of the doubts raised by my Fathers dislike to the scheme. I could scarcely make up my mind to leave England even for the time which I then thought the voyage would last. Lucky indeed it was for me that the first picture of the expedition was such an highly coloured one. —\(^2\)

In the evening I wrote to M'r Peacock & Cap'\(^6\) Beaufort & went to bed very much exhausted. On the 2nd I got up at 3 o'clock & went by the Wonder coach as far as Brickhill, I then proceeded by postchaises to Cambridge. I there staid two days consulting with Prof. Henslow. At this point I had nearly given up all hopes, owing to a letter from Cap. FitzRoy to M'r Wood,\(^7\) which threw on every thing a very discouraging appearance. On Monday 5th I went to London & that same day saw Caps. Beaufort & FitzRoy. The latter soon smoothed away all difficulties & from that time to the present has taken the kindest interest in all my affairs. — On Sunday 11th sailed by Steamer to Plymouth in order to see the Beagle. I returned to London on 18th.\(^8\) On Monday the 19th by mail to Cambridge, where after taking leave of Henslow on Wednesday night I got to St Albans & so by the Wonder to Shrewsbury on Thursday 22nd. — I left home on October 2nd for London, where I remained after many & unexpected delays till the 24th on which day I arrived at Devonport & this journal begins. —\(^3\)

(16th December)
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1 Almost CD’s entire field experience as a geologist before the voyage consisted in a tour of North Wales with Adam Sedgwick from 5 to 20 August 1831 (see Autobiography pp. 68–71, and letter from Sedgwick of 4 September 1831, Correspondence 1: 137–9). After staying with friends at Barmouth he returned to Shrewsbury on 29 August.
3 Home of his uncle Josiah Wedgwood II.
4 See Correspondence 1: 132–5.
5 See Correspondence 1: 135–6.
6 Alexander Charles Wood, Robert FitzRoy’s cousin.
7 This date should be the 17th (see letters to Susan Darwin and Henslow, Correspondence 1: 153–7).

Monday, October 24th  Arrived here in the evening after a pleasant drive from London.

25th  Went on board the Beagle, found her moored to the Active hulk & in a state of bustle & confusion. — The men were chiefly employed in painting the fore part & fitting up the Cabins. — The last time I saw her on the 12th of Sept she was in the Dock yard & without her masts or bulkheads & looked more like a wreck than a vessel commissioned to go round the world.

26th  Wet cold day, went on board, found the Carpenters busy fitting up the drawers in the Poop Cabin. 1 My own private corner looks so small that I cannot help fearing that many of my things must be left behind. —
1 See plan on p. 63 and sketch labelled in CD’s hand (CUL DAR 44), Beagle Record p. 103.

27th  Went on board.

28th  A fine day. — M’ Earl1 arrived from London after having had a most stormy passage. — It blew a SW gale for the whole week, & the Steam Packet during this whole time was pitching about. I think if I had gone by it, this journal book would have been as useless to me as so much waste paper.
1 Augustus Earle was the Beagle’s first official artist, serving in this capacity until ill health forced his resignation at the end of 1832.

29th  A beautiful day, dined at 5 oclock with Gun-room officers. — They amused themselves with giving most terrific accounts of what Neptune would do with me on crossing the Equator. — Mr Earl mentioned, that some years ago when after having crossed the Line, they fell in with a ship, all her sails set. — Not a man could they see on deck, but on boarding her & going below, they found every body, even the Captain & his wife, so very drunk4 that they could not move. — They had been making merry after Neptune’s revels. —
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30th Dined at one o'clock with the Mids—after that had a sail, & landed at Millbrook. — Stokes, Musters & myself then took a long scrambling walk. —

Monday 31st Went with M' Stokes to Plymouth & staid with him whilst he prepared the astronomical house belonging to the Beagle for observations on the dipping needle. The gardens belonging to the Athenaæum were fixed upon as being a place well known & easily described. 1

Nov 1st A very wet day, staid in the house in consequence. Captain King & his son arrived in the evening & dined with us. — The latter is going out in Beagle as Midshipman.

2nd Went on board.

3rd Walked to Plymouth with Cap'n King & FitzRoy.

4th Cap FitzRoy took me in the Commissioners boat to the breakwater, where we staid for more than an hour. Cap. FitzRoy was employed in taking angles, so as to connect a particular stone, from which Cap King commenced for the last voyage his longitudes, to the quay at Clarence Baths, where the true time is now taken. — Sir J. Rennie, the architect, was on the Breakwater, & gave some interesting accounts of the effects of various severe gales. — In 1826 several blocks of stone weighing 10 tuns each, were considerably displaced. — It now offers a much better resistance to a heavy sea than it formerly did. — It is now constructed of the shape of a roof of a house placed on the ground; before this alteration, it was that of a roof on a low wall, so that the sea acted on a perpendicular [?] surface. — Every body agrees in the Breakwater being as useful as it is a most stupendous work of art. — In the evening dined with M' Harris, (the author of several papers on Electricity) and met there several very pleasant people. — Colonel Hamilton Smith, who is writing on fishes with Cuvier. — Cap'n King & Locker. The former mentioned an anecdote showing how completely civilization & dram-
drinking were synonymous things in New S. Wales. — A native asked him one day for some rum; which being refused & wine offered, he seemed discontented. Upon Cap King remonstrating with & asking him what he did before the English came there; he answered Oh! we were not civilized then. —

5th Wretched, miserable day, remained reading in the house.

6th Went with Musters to the Chapel in the Dock-yard. — It rained torrents all the evening. — It does not require a rain gauge to show how much more rain falls in the Western than in the Central & Eastward parts of England. —

Monday 7th Staid at home.

8th In the morning, marked the time whilst Stokes took the altitude of the sun. — Went on board the Beagle; she now begins for the first time to look clean & well arranged. — Was introduced to Cap FitzRoy’s two brothers, who have come down from London to wish him farewell. —

9th Walked to Plymouth with Cap’ Fitz & Videl & called on Mr Harris.

10th Assisted Cap. FitzRoy at the Athæneum in reading the various angles of the dipping needle, after that [6] heard the Russian horn band. And in the evening dined at the Admirals, Sir Manley Dixon: everybody there except myself was a naval officer & of course the conversation was almost exclusively nautical. — This made the evening very pleasant to me, but I could not help thinking how very different it would have been under different circumstances.

11th Breakfasted with Mr Harris & went again to the Athæneum & spent the whole day at the dipping needle. — The end, which it is attempted to obtain, is a knowledge of the exact point in the globe to which the needle points. The means of obtaining it is to take, under all different circumstances, a great number of observations, & from them to find out the mean point. — The operation is a very long & delicate one. —

12th Breakfasted with Col. Hamilton Smith & spent some pleasant hours in talking on various branches of Natural history. Took a walk to some very large Limestone quarries, returned home & then went on board the Beagle. — The men had just finished painting her & of course the decks were clear & things stowed away. — For the first time I felt a fine naval fervour; nobody could look at her without admiration; & as for the Poop Cabin it would [be] superfluous to wish for anything more spacious & comfortable. — The day has been an excellent one for the paint drying, so calm & so truly Autumnal that it gives one hopes that
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the Westerly gales have tired themselves with blowing. — It is a[7] great consolation to know, that even if we had sailed at the beginning of October, it is probable we should have scarcely reached Madeira. —

13th  Walked to Saltram & rode with Lord Borlinton to Exmoor to see the Granite formation, the road passed through very extensive oak woods situated on the side of hills at the bottom [of] which were running very clear & board brooks. — Exmoor geographically is the same as Dartmoor & extends to Exeter. It has a desolate appearance, the tops of the hills only showing the mossy forms of the Granite. — In the evening the Fuegians[7] arrived by Steam Packet together with their school master M Jenkins. Their names are York Minster, Jemmy Button & Fuegia. — Matthews the missionary arrived also at the same time. —

1 Four natives from Tierra del Fuego named York Minster, Boat Memory, James Button and Fuegia Basket, had been brought back by Robert FitzRoy on the Beagle in October 1830 (see Narrative 1: 391–444 and 2: 1–16; and Beagle Record pp. 4–5). Boat Memory died of smallpox, but one of the objectives of the Beagle’s second voyage to South America was to repatriate the other three.

Monday 14th  Cap. FitzRoy removed the Chronometers on board & placed the books in the Poop Cabin. — Went on board, the paint is not yet fixed, so that nothing can be done. — In the evening the Instructions from the Admiralty arrived. — They are in every respect most perfectly satisfactory, indeed exactly what Cap Fitz himself wished. — The orders merely contain a rough outline. — There could not be a greater compliment paid to Cap FitzRoy than in so entirely leaving the plans to his own discretion. —

15th  Went with Cap FitzRoy to Plymouth & were unpleasantly employed in finding out the inaccuracies of Gambey’s new dipping needle.

16th  Went on Board & spent the whole day in idly but very agreeably wandering up & down the streets with Cap FitzRoy.

17th  A very quiet day.

18th  Cap FitzRoy has been busy for these last two days with the Lords of the Admiralty. —

19th  I have now a regular employment every morning taking & comparing the differences in the Barometers. In the evening drank tea with Cap’ Vidal. He has seen a great deal of the same sort of service that we are going to be employed on; he was eight years surveying the African coast. — during this time he buried 30 young officers; a boat never was sent up a river, without its causing the death of some of the party. —
20th. Went to Church & heard a very stupid sermon, & afterwards took a long walk in a very picturesque country, between Mount Edgecombe & Mill Brook.

Monday 21st. Carried all my books & instruments on board the Beagle. —
In the evening went to the Athaeneum & heard a popular lecture from M’ Harris on his lightning conductors. By means of making an Electric machine, a thunder cloud — a tub of water the sea, & a toy for a line of battle ship he showed the whole process of it being struck by lightning & most satisfactorily proved how completely his plan[9] protects the vessel from any bad consequences. This plan consists in having plates of Copper folding over each other, let in in the masts & yards & so connected to the water beneath. — The principle, from which these advantages are derived, owes its utility, to the fact that the Electric fluid is weakened by being transmitted over a large surface to such an extent that no effects are perceived, even when the mast is struck by the lightning. — The Beagle is fitted with conductors on this plan; it is very probable, we shall be the means of trying & I hope proving the utility of its effects.

About six o’clock, a Marine, being drunk & whilst crossing from the Hulk to another vessel slipped overboard & was not seen again. His body has not been found. —

22nd. Went on board & returned in a panic on the old subject want of room. returned to the vessel with Cap FitzRoy, who is such an effectual & goodnatured contriver that the very drawers enlarge on his appearance & all difficulties smooth away. — In the evening dined & spent a very pleasant afternoon with Cap’ Vidal. —

23rd. This has been a very important day in the annals of the Beagle; at one o’clock she was loosed from the moorings & sailed about a mile to Barnett pool. Here she will remain till the day[10] of sailing arrives. This little sail was to me very interesting, everything so new & different to what one has ever seen, the Coxswains piping, the manning the yards, the men working at the hawsers to the sound of a fife, but nothing is so striking as the rapidity & decision of the orders & the alertness with which they are obeyed. — There remains very little to be done to make all ready for sailing. All the stores are completed & yesterday between 5 & 6 thousands canisters of preserved meat were stowed away. — Not one inch of room is lost, the hold would contain scarcely another bag of bread. My notions of the inside of a ship were about as indefinite as those of some men on the inside of a man, viz a large cavity containing air, water & food mingled in hopeless confusion. —
24th A very fine day & an excellent one for obtaining sights. — Every body hailed the sun with joy, for until the time is well taken, we cannot leave harbour. — I went on board several times in the course of the day; but did not succeed in doing any good, as they were changing the place of anchorage & that is not the time for a Landsman to give trouble about his own lumber. —

25th Very busily employed on board in stowing away my clothes & after that in arranging the books, did not leave the vessel till it was dark. —[11]

26th Again employed all day long in arranging the books; we (Stokes & myself) succeeded in leaving the Poop Cabin in very neat order. After having finished this & bringing on board some things of my own, King & I walked on the sea shore & returned home through a part of Lord Mount Edgcumbe's park. — The day has been a very fine one & the view of Plymouth was exceedingly striking. The country is so indented with arms of the sea that there is a very new & different scene from every point of view. —

27th An idle day, had a pleasant sail in Captain FitzRoy boat & then called on several people.

Monday 28th Cap. FitzRoy gave a very magnificent luncheon to about forty persons: it was a sort of ships warming; & every thing went off very well, in the evening a Waltz was raised which lasted till every body went away. —

29th To day the Captain has had another large party, but not being very well, I have not gone to it. — In the evening dined with Sir Manley Dixon.

30th Cap King was here the whole morning & I had with him some very interesting conversation on Meteorology, he paid great attention to this subject during the last voyage. — Afterwards I took a very pleasant walk to Corsan, all my thoughts are now centered in the future & it is with great difficulty that I can talk or think on any other subject;[12] When I first had the offer of the voyage I was in the same state & a very uncomfortable one it is; but this present time has the great & decided advantage of everything being fixed & settled. —

December 1st Breakfasted with Cap King. — The Commissioner took Lord Graves party to see the Caledonia & offered me a place in the Yatch. — The Caledonia is generally considered one of the finest vessels in the world, she carries 120 32 pounders. — So large a vessel is an astonishing sight, one wonders by what contrivance everything is governed with such regularity & how amongst such numbers such
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order prevails. On coming near her the hum is like that of [a] town
heard at some distance in the evening.—

2nd Worked all day long in arranging & packing my goods in the
drawers. — Erasmus¹ arrived in the afternoon & I spent with him a very
pleasant evening. —

¹Erasmus Alvey Darwin, CD’s elder brother.

3rd Incessantly busy in ordering, paying for, packing all my numberless
things; how I long for Monday even sea-sickness must be better than
this state of wearisome anxiety. — Erasmus being here is a great
pleasure, but I do not see much of him.

4th I am writing this for the first time on board, it is now about one o’clock
& I intend sleeping in my hammock. — I did so last night & experienced
a most ludicrous difficulty in getting into it; my great fault of the
jockeyship was in trying to put my legs in first. The hammock being
suspended, I thus only succeeded in pushing it away without making
any progress in inserting my own body. — the correct method is to sit
accurately in centre of bed, then give yourself a dexterous twist & your
head & feet come into their respective places. — After a little time I
daresay I shall, like others, find it very comfortable. — I have spent the
day partly on board & partly with my brother: in the evening, Cap King
& son, Stokes, my brother & myself dined with Cap FitzRoy.

In the morning the ship rolled a good deal, but I did not feel
uncomfortable; this gives me great hopes of escaping sea sickness. — I
find others trust in the same weak support. — May we not be con-
ounded. — It is very pleasant talking with officer on Watch at night—
every thing is so quiet & still, nothing interrupts the silence but the half
hour bells. — I will now go and wish Stuart (officer on duty) good night
& then for practising my skill in vaulting into my hammock. —

Monday 5th It was a tolerably clear morning & sights were obtained, so
now we are ready for our long delayed moment of starting.—it has
however blown a heavy gale from the South ever since midday, &
perhaps we shall not be able to leave the Harbour. The vessel had a
good deal of motion & I was as nearly as possible made sick. I returned
home very disconsolate, but mean to treat myself with sleeping, for the
last time, on a firm flat steady bed.— In the evening dined with
Erasmus. I shall not often have such quiet snug dinners.— I take the
opportunity of mentioning a very curious circumstance which the
watermen here have observed.— When building the walls of the
Victualling office in 6 fathom water, the men made signals by tapping
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on the inside [of] the diving bell. — This the Watermen used every where to hear, even at Torpoint, a distance of two miles. — it sounded like a person hitting the boat with a small hammer, & for a long time it quite puzzled the men, so much so that they hauled the boat up, thinking it was a crab or some animal. —

6th Again sailing has been deferred. In the morning the wind was SW, but light; afterwards it increased into a gale from the South. Stokes & myself arranged the Poop Cabin, after which I was forced to beat a hasty retreat on shore. I could not even for a short time have stood the motion, had I not been hard at work. Dined in the evening with Erasmus. — [15]

7th It is daily becoming more wearisome remaining so long in harbour; at least I have nothing more to do. Every thing is on board & we only wait for the present wind to cease & we shall then sail. — This morning it blew a very heavy gale from that unlucky point SW. — The Beagle struck her Top Gallant masts & veered her yards to the wind. —

8th I am writing this & the two last days journal in my own corner. — The cabin begins now to look comfortable, but yet very much crowded. — It is a miserable wet day & no hopes of the wind changing; my first question every morning how is the wind? Oh for the lucky day, when the answer is NE. —

9th Finally arranged the Poop Cabin. — Erasmus & myself then took a long & very pleasant walk on Mount Edcombe. the view from it is of a most striking & uncommon kind, a birds eye view of three large towns, Devonport Stonehouse & Plymouth, situated on arms of the sea, seen from a most beautiful & picturesque hill. In the evening, dined for the last time with my brother. —

10th Early in the morning torrents of rain; the sky then became very clear, with a light wind from SW. We all thought we should have settled weather. — The Captain said last night, that if[17] it was possible he would sail to day; accordingly at 9 oclcock we weighed our anchors, & a little after 10 sailed. — Erasmus was on board & we had a pleasant sail till we double the Breakwater; where he left us & where my misery began. I was soon made rather sick, & remained in that state till evening. when, after having received notice from the Barometer, a heavy gale came on from SW. The sea run very high & the vessel pitched bows under. — I suffered most dreadfully; such a night I never passed, on every side nothing but misery; such a whistling of the wind