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F. W. Nicholas and J. M. Nicholas  
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CHARLES DARWIN  
IN AUSTRALIA



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# Charles Darwin *in Australia*



F.W. NICHOLAS &  
J.M. NICHOLAS

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS AND ADDITIONAL  
COMMENTARY FROM OTHER MEMBERS OF THE *BEAGLE*'S  
COMPANY INCLUDING CONRAD MARTENS,  
AUGUSTUS EARLE, CAPTAIN FITZROY, PHILIP GIDLEY KING,  
AND SYMS COVINGTON



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TO CHRIS AND HANNAH,  
TO THE MEMORY OF CHARLES AND MARY,  
AND TO THE ANONYMOUS DONOR  
WHO MADE IT ALL POSSIBLE.



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*A Conrad Martens watercolour showing Sydney Cove viewed from Bunkers Hill, as it appeared at the time of Darwin's visit to Australia in 1836.*



FOREWORD



Just before midnight, the red revolving beacon of Sydney’s lighthouse hove in sight, winking above the swell, welcoming the tiny ten-gun brig HMS *Beagle* to the colony of New South Wales. As the sun rose, she slipped through The Heads into Port Jackson and steered gently to the safety of Sydney Cove. It was 12 January 1836 and high summer, forty-eight years less a week since the First Fleet reached Botany Bay. Charles Darwin stepped ashore in Australia.

Half-way round the world after four years at sea, he was ‘bitterly disappointed’ to find no letters. ‘I feel much inclined to sit down & have a good cry’, he sighed, and then no doubt he did so right there in The Rocks. He was emotional: he carried Milton’s *Paradise Lost* for shore-reading and could hear Handel’s ‘Messiah’ on mountain tops as he peered down on the creation. And God was still in Darwin’s antipodean heaven. For all the enigmas posed by this oddly inverted world, the ex-ordinand confessed, ‘One hand has surely worked throughout the universe’.

He stayed for two months – six days sampling Sydney, eleven trekking into the Blue Mountains, a dozen in Van Diemen’s Land (today’s Tasmania, where he celebrated his twenty-seventh birthday), eight at King George Sound and the rest in the *Beagle* bobbing from port to port. Distracted he might be, pining for home and, frankly, a wife. ‘Two years from England | pretty daughter’, he jotted in a pocket pad after a family luncheon in the country. He looked forward, too, with ‘a comical mixture of dread & satisfaction’ to the voyage’s scientific aftermath. But no thoughts of home, or seeing ‘Convicts driving in their carriages & revelling in Wealth’, diminished Darwin’s wonder. The fauna here were beguiling, the Aborigines most ‘curious’ and the geology (he jotted in his pad) ‘magnificent’, ‘astounding & unique’. To this day, Darwin’s diary, notebooks, letters and publications radiate enthusiasm for Australia.

After studying these documents for decades and writing Darwin’s biography with Adrian Desmond, I went to see for myself. Not even Darwin’s words had prepared me for the spectacle of Terra Australis, its scents and sounds, the patterns of light and shade, the openness of spaces and of the people. One fine morning in spring 1996, the Nicholases took me into the Blue Mountains on the route of Darwin’s January 1836



expedition. I had revelled in their *Charles Darwin in Australia*, poring over the old photos and the paintings by the *Beagle* artists Augustus Earle and Conrad Martens. Strangely I now found these images *did* prepare me for the country. Carried beyond Darwin's words, I knew what to look for, what to *see*, even before my hosts' running commentary brought each place to life.

Driving up through Katoomba, we drank in Darwin's bar at the Gardner's Inn, Blackheath, and walked to the site of the Weatherboard Inn where he rested. A short hike down Jamison Creek and I was stunned as the earth fell away into the vast gulf of Wentworth Falls, a 'grand Amphitheatre' to Darwin; yet I too found Govett's Leap even 'more stupendous'. Most memorable was our crossing the Nepean at Emu Ferry to reach the site of Dunheved farm, where the *Beagle's* retired captain Philip Parker King hosted Darwin for a day and a night. The old homestead was long-gone and the land abandoned. Ignoring the signs, Frank and I slithered under the mesh fence like schoolboys and made a bee-line to the foundations where, digging with our fingers in an overgrown garden, we unearthed shards of English china. For a moment, Darwin must have felt at home here.

In England before the voyage, Darwin had longed to visit the tropics, and the scenic word-pictures in Alexander von Humboldt's *Personal Narrative* fired his imagination. But gazing on prints by Rugendas and Clarac showed him so much more, 'the infinite numbers of lianas & parasitical plants & the contrast of the flourishing trees with the dead & rotten trunks'. These subtle and intricate images prepared Darwin to *see* the New World, however much the Brazilian forests finally transcended his expectations.

This new edition of *Charles Darwin in Australia* is Humboldt, Rugendas and Clarac rolled into one for the twenty-first century Darwinian traveller – and more. Every documentary resource, every manuscript and printed text is laid out in order, with maps, and knitted together by lively commentary. Photos give a sense of then-and-now that would have astonished the young Darwin, but his 'cameramen in Australia', as the authors call them, the artists Earle, Martens and John Gould, offer the most vivid revelations. In this edition as never before, voyagers on the southern continent can see what Darwin saw, much as he saw it. All original paintings and engravings are reproduced in glorious colour.

*Charles Darwin in Australia*, new and improved, is not only a labour of love worthy of the Darwin bicentenary. It is also a richly textured study of historic science in-the-making. No finer, focussed account exists of the spaces, the places and the people who made up Darwin's world, and whose world he would remake.

JAMES MOORE  
 CAMBRIDGE, ENGLAND



CONTENTS



|   |      |
|---|------|
| <i>Foreword by James Moore</i>  | vii  |
| <i>Preface</i>  | xi   |
| <i>Acknowledgements</i>   | xvi  |
| <i>List of key references and abbreviations used for them</i>                 | xvii |
| <i>A note on the transcriptions</i>   | xix  |
| <br>  |      |
| 1 Introduction  | 1    |
| 2 Arrival in Sydney and a trip across the Blue Mountains                      | 21   |
| 3 Return from Bathurst and impressions of Sydney                              | 87   |
| 4 Hobart and environs   | 121  |
| 5 King George Sound and farewell to Australia                                 | 157  |
| 6 Postscript  | 175  |
| <br>  |      |
| <i>Appendix: Summary of documents relating to Darwin’s visit to Australia</i> | 211  |
| <i>Illustration and map acknowledgements</i>                                  | 215  |
| <i>Notes</i>  | 223  |
| <i>Bibliography</i>   | 244  |
| <i>Index</i>  | 254  |