

# ROCKHOPPER COPPER

The life and times of the people  
of the most remote inhabited  
island on Earth



TRISTAN DA CUNHA

in the words of their policeman  
and former Chief Islander

CONRAD GLASS

© Conrad J. Glass 2010

All rights reserved, no part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without permission from Conrad J. Glass or the publishers. The copyright of photographers whose work has been used is reserved and its inclusion here does not imply any claim on copyright or permission by others to reproduce such work.

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

All maps within this publication are reproduced by permission of the Government of Tristan da Cunha and may not be reproduced by others without their permission. Images of postage stamps are by permission of the Tristan da Cunha Post Office and are their copyright and may not be reproduced under any circumstances.

First published 2005  
Second Edition 2011

Published by Polperro Heritage Press  
Clifton-upon-Teme  
Worcestershire WR6 6EN  
United Kingdom

ISBN 978-0955364877

Printed by Orphans Press,  
Leominster  
Herefordshire HR6 0LD  
United Kingdom

## CONTENTS

Editor's Notes to the Second Edition	5
Foreword	7
Acknowledgments	9
A Brief History of Tristan da Cunha	13
The 1961 Eruption: Through the Eyes of my Family	18
The 1961 Eruption: The Outside World and Home Again	27
All in a Day's Work	32
A Saturday at The Patches	36
Conservation Patrol and Policing the Penguins	41
A Day on the Mountain Herding Sheep	57
Search & Rescue Reports	63
Rescue Attempt on Gough Island	72
Tourism and Immigration	79
Visiting Cruise Ships	86
Crewing a Longboat to Nightingale	91
The Canton's Last Voyage	102
Legends of Tristan	111
The Hurricane of 2001	127
Stamps, Coins and Handicrafts	135
Personal Glimpses	138
Appendix: Visiting Tristan da Cunha	157
Glossary	161

## Editor's Notes to the the Second Edition

When Conrad Glass published the first edition of *Rockhopper Copper* in 2005 it was an instant success: it soon became apparent as passengers on cruise liners, visitors, residents and people around world bought the book (and patently enjoyed it), that another edition was needed.

That it has taken so long is as Conrad recounts in this updated edition, as much the result of the pace of change on Tristan da Cunha as anything else and also in the intervening time, Conrad served three years as Chief Islander.

Now at last there has been time to bring the work up to date and to include new information, in the hope of satisfying the continuing demand for Conrad's book. I hope this new edition will answer questions about Tristan from those intrigued by this, the most remote inhabited island on our planet and introduce it to those just becoming aware of it.

Life is never quite the same after an encounter with Tristan da Cunha: my interest dates back to childhood (even before the eruption of 1961) when I can recall looking at a photograph taken on the island, which appeared in the *Daily Telegraph*. That interest developed through a fascination with its stamps and with remote places generally. Work at the BBC and the Royal Norwegian Embassy in London occasionally involved Tristan and kindled friendships which flourish today. They led to work on Conrad's first edition and thus to an invitation to visit in 2006. Two years later, I became the Tristan Government's Representative in the UK though I should stress that what appears in this book does not in any way reflect the opinion of that (or any other) Government.

My admiration for the islanders and their way of life continues to grow and I would like to record my thanks to them, to Conrad and his family in particular, for their many kindnesses, generosity and friendship. In giving thanks for help with editing this edition, I would like to thank my wife Julie for her extraordinary patience; my son Rob for his wise counsel; to publisher Jerry Johns of the Polperro Heritage Press for his kindly guidance and practical help and to Michael Swales and Richard Grundy of the Tristan da Cunha Association, for support and guidance. Involvement with the project and with Tristan has enriched my life and enabled me to visit many places of which I could once only dream: in the process, it has introduced me to many extraordinary people.

I hope Conrad's book enables you to share the lives of the people of Tristan da Cunha and similarly, to be enriched by their experiences, philosophies and way of life.

CHRIS BATES  
Selly Park, Birmingham  
November 2010

## Foreword

We may live in a shrinking world, due to increasing ease and lower cost of travel, yet relatively few people have ever visited the world's most isolated inhabited island – Tristan da Cunha. Of those who have, a number have written about the island and its people, mostly from relatively short acquaintance. Now, for the first time, the reader can learn what it is really like to live there from a direct descendant of one of the founders.

This book reveals how the isolation and the ever-present forces of nature have moulded the psyche of Tristan islanders. Through communal effort and teamwork, they not only survive but thrive; they use natural resources for the common good, with a concern for the weak and elderly to whom they also show respect. An important part is played by communication within the community and home has priority, as does their heritage, of which they are justly proud. Yet these are ordinary people, albeit living in an extraordinary place, whose lifestyle is not out of touch with the modern world. They do, however, face the elements, which, in isolation, would be unbearable to many living in a more pampered way. These people show respect for the environment and acknowledge a creative force beyond themselves, which gives them an envied dignity.

The publication of this book (the first edition was published shortly before the islanders celebrated the quincentenary in 2006 of the discovery of Tristan da Cunha), is timely and thoroughly endorsed.

Michael Swales  
Co-founder, President and Chairman of the Tristan da Cunha Association.

## Acknowledgements

When I first decided to write this book, I did not envisage the amount of work it would take to complete it. Without the help of the following people, my task would have been more difficult. To them, I offer my heartfelt thanks and appreciation. That it sold out completely, enabling me to prepare this updated and re-edited second edition, makes it possible to also thank those who helped with it and so enabled me to achieve an ambition. To all, I offer my heartfelt thanks and appreciation.

To my wife, Sharon, for typing most of the original manuscript, and Marlene Swain for helping her; to my son Leon for his help and advice on computer and IT matters; to Chris Bates for his advice, input and for editing both editions and to his wife Julie, for her endless patience and support while he did so and for their hospitality in Birmingham; to Richard Grundy, James Glass, Gerry Repetto and David Mackenzie for supplying photographs – a special thank you to Brian Rogers, for the photos and use of his facilities; to Michael Swales, co-founder, president and chairman of the Tristan da Cunha Association for his foreword and his help and unwavering support for the project (and for all things to do with Tristan); to Jerry Johns of the Polperro Heritage Press for arranging the first edition for publication and for publishing this second edition; to the late Allan Crawford OBE for supplying maps; to Sir Martin Holdgate CB and Andy and Lorraine Repetto for help and support and to Lars Repetto for help with checking facts, dates and names; to my family past and present who gave me the insight and scope to write this book; to Christine Stone OBE, my teacher and friend, who gave me the inspiration to fulfil a dream and my thanks to the people of Tristan da Cunha who made this dream possible.

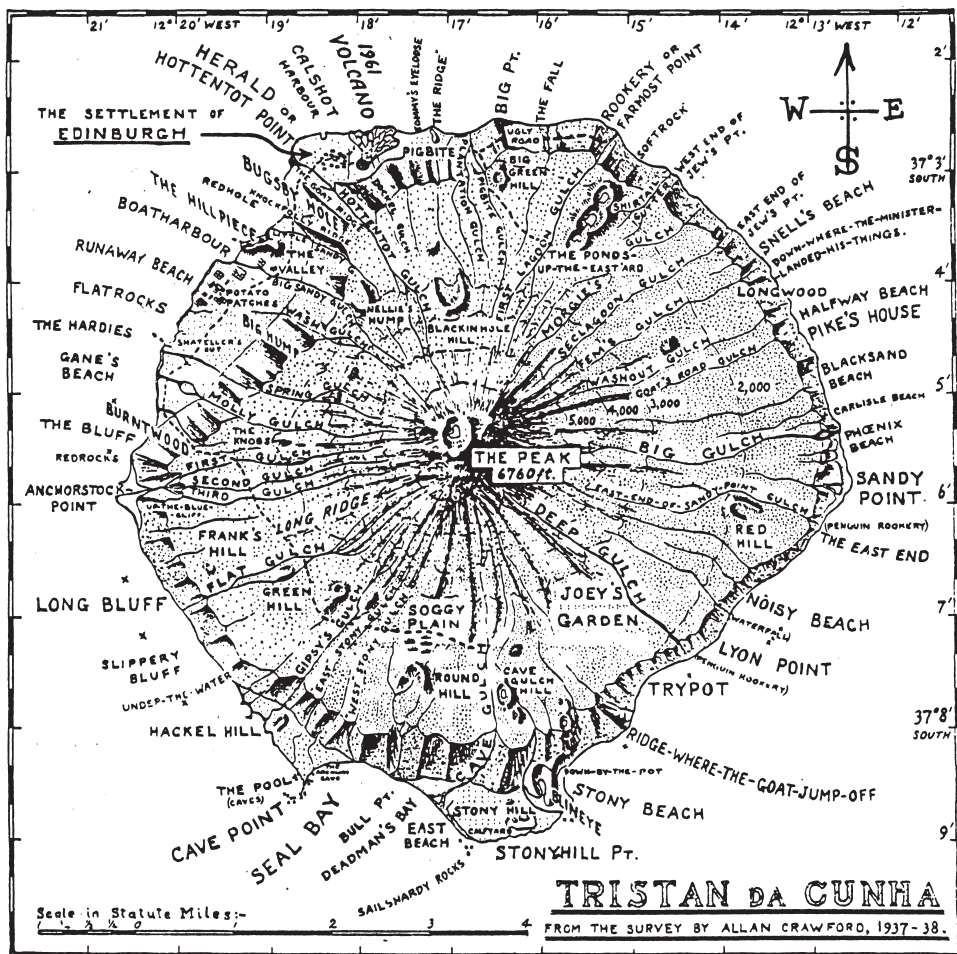
To all who have helped make this book possible but who are not named individually for reasons of space or otherwise – thank you: I am deeply grateful for your contribution.

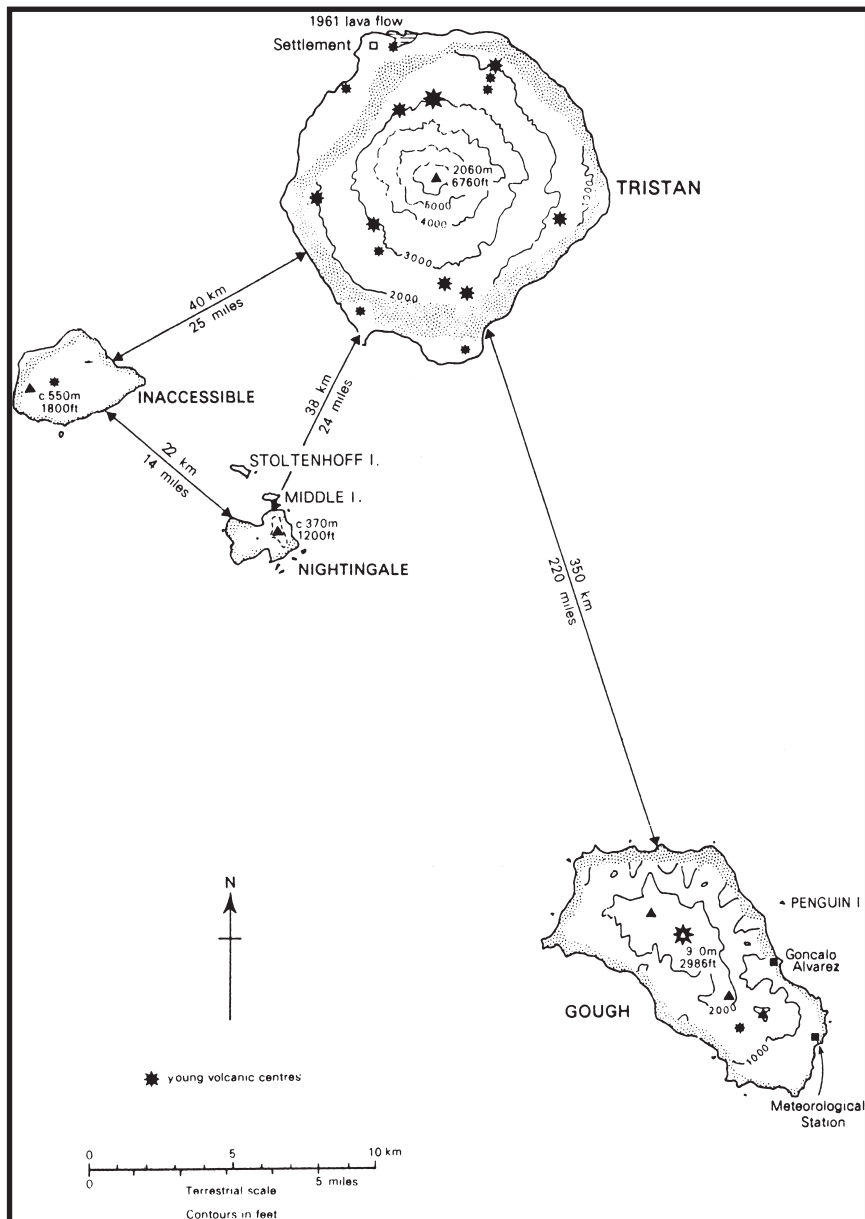
Events in this book are based on my personal experience and hearsay ('oral history' I ought to call it) from other Tristanians. However, in some chapters I had to interweave personal experiences with hearsay from the past and present, to make the story readable.

To the people of Tristan da Cunha: be steadfast to your livelihood. For in it, you have a unique God-given lifestyle, of unprecedented freedom over your destiny, that many people envy but may never have.

Conrad J. Glass MBE







## A BRIEF HISTORY OF TRISTAN DA CUNHA

The most remote inhabited island on our planet is Tristan da Cunha.

It's a speck on the map: a very small island in the middle of the South Atlantic Ocean, at 37°6'44"S 12°16'56"W; about 37 square miles, the largest of a group of islands. Inaccessible Island lies (from Anchorstock Point) 18 miles to the west and Nightingale Island 20 miles to the south west. Nightingale is the oldest of the three, and Tristan is the youngest. Gough Island, another of the Tristan group, is located 220 miles to the south of Tristan.

Tristan da Cunha is an active strato-volcano formed above a magma hot-spot some 250 miles east of the Mid-Atlantic Ridge. The volcano first erupted three million years ago from the 11,483 feet deep ocean floor. Successive eruptions have built a cone of 18,044 feet with the summit, Queen Mary's Peak, 6,758 feet above sea level, overlooking a heart-shaped crater lake. On a map, they appear to be part of a chain of islands including St Helena, Ascension, The Azores and Iceland, but the popular supposition that they're part of the Mid-Atlantic Ridge is incorrect. The Hawaiian Islands are similar 'hot-spot volcanoes' in which magma comes from deep within the Earth's mantle, not from gaps between the tectonic plates. The Tristan volcano has many parasitic cones on its flanks, each representing a separate eruption of the main volcano. Around 1750, Stony Hill erupted, producing an extensive black lava field on the southern part of the island.

Cape Town in South Africa is the nearest major port: 1,743 miles away, or six days sailing by ship. St Helena is the nearest inhabited island: 1,510 miles to the north. To Rio de Janeiro, it's 2,083 miles; to Port Stanley in the Falkland Islands, 2,424 miles; to London, 6,140 miles – and there is no airport. The nearest is in Cape Town. There is a timetabled bus service on the island (the most remote scheduled

bus service in the world) linking the village or 'The Settlement' of Edinburgh-of-the-Seven-Seas, with The Patches, complete with a bus shelter and bus stops. There has never been a railway on Tristan.

Tristan was first discovered in 1506 by the Portuguese explorer Tristao da Cunha, while en route around the Cape of Good Hope, bound for India. There is no record to say that he landed, but he gave his name to the largest of the three islands before sailing on.

Ships of many European nations visited Tristan over the next century, the greatest number recorded were from Dutch ports. We know the *Buninvis*, bound from Amsterdam to the East Indies in 1601, anchored off Tristan and landed crew on the island.

The first British ship to visit was in May 1610, *The Globe*, an East Indiaman from London. The ships bound for India used Tristan to check their navigation. The first recorded landing by the Dutch was from the *Heemstede* in mid February 1643 (though as noted, men from the *Buninvis* are known to have been on Tristan briefly 42 years before). From 1650 through until the early 1800's, ships continued to visit Tristan, and for several years from 1810, Tristan was used as a base by pirates and buccaneers of American and French vessels, roaming the seas between St Helena and the Cape of Good Hope, lying in wait to raid British merchant ships from the East India Company.

The first people to settle on Tristan were three expatriates, Jonathan Lambert, Andrew Millet, (both American) and Thomas Currie (Irish Italian, also known as Tomasso Corri). Lambert was their leader and they renamed Tristan 'The Island of Refreshment' and invited passing ships to trade with them.

They landed on Tristan on 27th December 1810 and set about clearing land to grow vegetables, rearing chickens, ducks and pigs, with which to barter and trade with passing ships. There is a legend to say that they had an iron chest of treasure with them that formed the proceeds from their wild affrays on the Spanish Main.

The British Government sent a garrison to Tristan just after Napoleon was captured at Waterloo and exiled to St Helena, to prevent Tristan being used as a base by the French to rescue Napoleon. There were also worries about the Americans using the island to attack British shipping. This garrison arrived on 14th August 1816. They established a base

called Fort Malcolm and one of its cannons can be seen today outside the Island Museum. When they landed they found only Currie, with a young Spaniard named Bastiano Comilla. Currie told the garrison that Lambert and Millet and another sailor, Williams, had been drowned when their boat overturned whilst out fishing. However, before he died, he hinted, when drunk, of revenge and triumph. He boasted of his treasure of pearls, of diamonds and gold coins, which he produced to pay at the garrison canteen.

The trio were known to have quarrelled but before Currie could reveal the secret of the source of his gold coins, he died and never revealed his secret to the soldiers. No one has ever found his treasure, even to the present day, no matter how much they searched. Legend has it that it was buried somewhere between the two waterfalls. If this is so, then it could be lost forever, buried under tons of lava as a result of Tristan's most recent volcanic eruption.

One of the soldiers was my great-great-grandfather of seven generations, Corporal William Glass, a Scotsman who, when the garrison left, asked for permission to stay behind with his wife (who, as Maria Leenders, he had married before she was 16 in The Cape) and two children, accompanied by two stonemasons, John Nankiel and Samuel Burnell, both Englishmen. He eventually became the island's first governor, and forefather of the present day community.

Over the years, many sailors from passing and wrecked ships have added their mark to the community. Five women from St Helena arrived to become wives of these pioneers. Some sailors married into the community and stayed for a couple of decades, then emigrated to Cape Town, and New Bedford (Massachusetts) in the United States.

There are only seven surnames making up the population of Tristan: Glass (Scotland), Swain (England), Rogers and Hagan (Irish American), Green (Holland), Repetto and Lavarello (Italy). The surnames Riley, Beetham, Taylor, Cotton, Peterson, Pert and Johnson were once represented on the island and so while the names may have gone, their blood still runs in the families that are living on Tristan today.

Over the generations, the islanders have faced many incursions into their way of life beginning from 1937-38, with the arrival of a Norwegian Expedition, which carried out a sociological, environmental and

biological survey. It was led by Dr. Erling Christophersen who persuaded a young Englishman, Allan Crawford to join. He produced the first island map, recording unique local place names, such as 'Down Where The Minister Lost His Things', 'Ridge Where The Goat Jump Off' and 'Deadman's Bay'. (Later he became instrumental in helping the island's economic and social development, promoting the development of the fish processing and export industry and the introduction of Tristan's now-famous postage stamps – the early samples were denominated in potatoes!)

On 9th October 1942 during the Second World War, the Royal Navy built a radar wireless station on Tristan and a hospital. This brought about improvements to the lifestyle of Tristanians. For the first time, they had a doctor to care for them. It was also the first time they had worked for a daily wage, helping the Navy to construct their accommodation.

1948 brought about the biggest change in the lifestyle of the island, with the arrival of the MS *Pequena* on a fishing expedition. A private firm, from the South African Government, with the help of the British Colonial Office, organised this venture. The fish they found were endemic to the Tristan archipelago, variously known to the islanders as crawfish, crayfish or Tristan rock lobster – *Jasus tristani*: usually spoken of now as 'crayfish'. They found them in abundance in the waters around Tristan, Nightingale, Inaccessible and Gough. (The fish found off Tristan is sometimes referred to also as 'spiny lobster' but that creature lives in the Mediterranean and the Caribbean and is exported from the Bahamas – it does not live in Tristan waters).

The prospects for the island had never looked so good. A canning factory was built at Big Beach staffed by an expatriate manager. The company also employed an expatriate Agricultural Officer who started a small shop. The men were employed as fishermen to fish from Tristan and on the fishing vessels. The women were also employed on fishing days, processing the crayfish. It was the first time they earned a regular wage. Money started to play an important role in the islanders' lives, as important as their potato patches and their livestock.

By 1950, all the houses in the village had running water. A new sanitary system was laid with outside flush toilets. The British Government had

sent a resident administrator, a doctor, a nursing sister, a schoolteacher and a padre (Anglican clergyman): all from the UK. All the children between the ages of five and 15 had to attend school.

A new Community Centre was built, and an Island Council was elected. The fishing ships brought stores, clothes, shoes, soft drinks, milk, sugar, flour, tea, candles, biscuits, paraffin for oil lamps and many other groceries. People ordered stores and were able to maintain their houses to a higher standard. Nails, paint, and wood were brought for houses; canvas for the longboats and a lucky few even had radios and record players.

In all the islanders had never known life to look so rosy. That was, until the eruption of the volcano in 1961...





The sign that says it all!

*Photo: author's collection*



The sun picks out the snowy peak of Tristan's volcanic profile which soars dramatically from the depths of the South Atlantic.

*Photo: Chris Bates*



## THE 1961 ERUPTION OF THE VOLCANO: THROUGH THE EYES OF MY FAMILY

Friday 11th August 1961 was a typical day of life on Tristan, with the wind south-west. The gong had been rung and it was a fishing day. The island fishermen were off early in small rowing dinghies to fish for crayfish. The weather was mild, although partly overcast, the sun shone through the breaks in the cloud, shining a greenish grey on the waves. A few families were at The Patches planting the first crop of potatoes for the season. At 9 o'clock, the children went to school as usual. Several men were away fishing on the fishing ships (MFV *Francis Repetto*, and MFV *Tristania I*); a few were at Stony Beach checking on their cattle.

With the children in school, the women were busy washing before going to the factory at Big Beach to process the fish when the boats arrived back. During this time the crayfish were cooked and packed into tins to sell abroad. This was the only employment for islanders during this era.

It was as peaceful and as tranquil a scene that one could have viewed. The quiet village of stone thatched cottage roofs with smoke spiralling lazily from the chimneys as the islanders cooked their lunch: chickens, cows, and sheep grazed amongst the houses.

Suddenly the peace was shattered as the earth shook, causing small landslides and rocks to crash down the sides of the mountain towards the rear of the village. Inside the houses, walls shook and the crockery and cutlery rattled on the shelves. People ran outside to see what was happening. At the school, several of the young children screamed in terror and held onto their elder brothers and sisters, while the teachers tried to calm them, wondering themselves what was happening. After a few moments, all was quiet. The people three and a half miles away working at The Patches, and the people at Stony Beach, carried on with their tasks, unaware of what was happening back at the village.

People began to gather outside their houses in small groups, talking to each other, and asking the same question. What had caused the village and houses to so suddenly shake, so that rocks crashed down the mountain? The older people reflected and shook their heads in bewilderment; they had not heard or experienced anything like this in the history of Tristan.

The resident Administrator from the UK, Peter Wheeler and the rest of the expatriates conversed: what had happened? Mr Wheeler sent men to the school, the factory at Big Beach and throughout the village to see if there was anyone injured, or property damaged. He sensed in the back of his mind that something sinister was afoot.

Word came back to him that a small landslide had covered some 44 gallon drums of oil near the factory and that some boulders had crashed into the rear wall of the factory, but no one had been injured. Don Binnedell, the factory manager at the time, sent Joe Repetto out with the motor boat to call the fishing boats earlier, informing them of what had taken place.

People who returned from The Patches were amazed when they were told of the events. The village settled down into an uneasy peace: people carrying out their routine chores, the children still attended school, waiting for the earth to start shaking again

That night, after their evening meal, the families sat around their open fires, the interior of the rooms dimly lit by candle or oil lamps. The topic of discussion was the earth suddenly shaking earlier that morning. Word had already spread throughout the village that the people at The Patches had not heard or felt anything. Realising that what they had taken as rumours from a few people in the days before, saying that they had experienced items shaking on shelves on Monday 6th August, had now become facts.

Martha Rogers (known as Auntie Martha), was in one of the groups, and had told some friends that she had experienced cups shaking on the shelf in her kitchen. She was a lady with considerable influence on Tristan and anything she said was not to be taken lightly, so this led to a feeling of concern among many island families.

At this time in its history, the Tristan community had contact with the rest of the world only through the wireless station that kept contact

with Cape Town (marine) Radio. Peter Wheeler sent a message to London explaining the facts, seeking advice. The answer came back that there was nothing to be alarmed about, 'it was probably just the earth settling, given that Tristan is a volcanic island', but he was instructed to keep monitoring the situation and keep London informed.

As the days and weeks passed, the 'tremors', as they were called, occurred often on a daily basis, sometimes a couple of times within 24 hours. They became almost part of the lifestyle, but for the fact the quakes were starting to become more violent in their ferocity.

Peter Wheeler told the islanders what London had said. He sent a few teams of men to camp on the mountain to the east of the village, and above the village and at Burntwood. They were to stay up on the mountain for a few days recording the strength of the quakes. The Anglican priest, Father Jewell, went with the men to keep a record of the quakes. They were measured on a scale of one to five: 'one' being only noticeable by items shaking; 'three' the ground shaking; 'five' the whole village shaking, causing rocks and landslides on the sides of the mountain.

The islanders were growing more concerned as August passed into September. The island men fishing on the MV *Francis Repetto* and MV *Tristania* came back to Tristan to see the results of the tremors for themselves. The ships' captains, who were in daily radio contact with Tristan Radio, had informed them.

My father was fishing on the MV *Tristania* at Nightingale and Inaccessible Islands. At home was my mother, with me being eight months old; my sister four and a half years old; my grandmother, Rose Rogers (who was crippled and could not walk unaided after a stroke years earlier) and my uncle, Gus Rogers. Next door was my mother's sister Aunt Winnie, her husband Nelson Green and nine-year-old son, Jack.

My parents at this stage of the 'tremors' had two travel bags packed with clothes, food, drinks and other items ready to take with them at a moment's notice. Like many people on Tristan, they believed that something worse was about to come. Twice during very heavy quakes at night, when rocks were heard crashing down the mountain causing landslides, my father and Uncle Nelson had both families, with Gran in

her wheelchair, at the bottom of the garden. Our houses were built at the rear of the village, near the foot of the mountain, but as it turned out, the quake stopped. All was quiet and they returned to their homes.

The teams of men that were up the mountain monitoring the quakes returned after a few days to report that they had not heard or felt anything. The area of the activity seemed to be concentrated in the village. This was rather disturbing news. Peter Wheeler sent this information back to London, and received an answer to “keep a close eye on things” and he established daily radio contact.

August passed into September. Life on Tristan carried on, with people going about their daily tasks. During the last week of September the tremors increased in ferocity, now at the rate of three to four each day. People found it difficult to shut their doors; the doorposts seemed out of alignment, caused by the shaking of the ground. On Sunday 6th September, the congregation for evensong in St. Mary’s Church felt an earthquake: Peter Wheeler describing later how ‘the walls heaved, the floors trembled, and for a sickening second, the roof threatened to cave in’. There was a landslide behind the canning factory.

At the first week in October, cracks started to appear in the ground, some closed up again in the east part of the village near the reservoir built at the foot of the mountain. A few days later, some four inch water pipes were pushed out of the ground and bent. Peter Wheeler informed London, and contingency plans were made to evacuate the island if needed. Peter Wheeler also sent men to measure the cracks in the ground. They were growing bigger. During the second week in October cracks started to appear among the houses in the east of the village.

After another earthquake on Sunday 8th October, again during the evening service when there was a massive fall of rock behind the village, Peter Wheeler ordered all families living in the east of the community, to move in with the families whose houses were on the west. During this period a mound appeared in the earth; rising on the sloping terrain of the plateau in the shape of a bubble cone, just 100 metres east of the reservoir, at the top east side of the village. This mound started to grow up to the height of ten feet or more. On top, was a rather large boulder, that had previously fallen down from the cliff above. Fresh soil and small stones tumbled down its sides.

A few hundred yards away, Peter Wheeler and a group of island men watched in horror and awe at these strange phenomena. What unseen force was putting pressure on the earth to create such a mound? As they looked on, a large crack suddenly appeared on the ground close to the mound. Several sheep were grazing nearby. As the crack opened up underneath, the sheep fell into it. Minutes later, the crack closed up again, sealing the sheep's fate forever. This was the moment for action.

Peter Wheeler turned to the group of men and said: "I think it's time to call a meeting of all heads of the families. We will meet in the Prince Philip Hall" [which is the village hall]. The group turned and headed for it. Willie Repetto, the Chief Islander [head councillor] hit the village gong that is used to announce fishing days, deliveries of mail and emergencies.

The word had been spread through the village that a meeting was going to be called. As the gong was rung, men in groups of twos and threes made their way to the Prince Phillip Hall in the centre of the village. There, Mr Wheeler told the men that according to events, he was expecting the mound that was pushing up, to be a new volcano, about to erupt. It would be the safest if the whole community moved out to The Patches for the night. Two tents would be erected at Below The Hill for the sick and people who did not have any huts. The elders and sick people would be taken to The Patches on the tractor, the only vehicle on the island at that time. He also had radioed the Royal Navy for help. HMS *Leopard* had been dispatched from Simons Town (South Africa) to come to their aid.

Around three o' clock on that eventful afternoon, the men left the hall to break the news to their families. Armed with warm clothes, blankets, and food, which was hastily gathered, the entire community trudged the three and a half miles down to The Patches amid light showers of rain from the south west. Many were getting rather wet on the way. My family shared the tents at Below The Hill with Mr Wheeler and many others, because of my grandmother's handicap and my mother and father had to tend to her. My Aunt Agnes took care of me, while my Granny, Liza Glass, took care of my sister during the evacuation. The parents of my wife, Sharon, who were then engaged, later to be married in England, spent the night at Bills Hill in two huts, with their families.

Wet, cold and weary, the islanders settled down to wait the dawn with mixed feelings. The two fishing ships [MV *Tristania* and the MV *Francis Repetto*] were standing offshore, their crews watching the cone of earth through binoculars, keeping radio contact with Mr Wheeler and Cape Town. There were plans made to evacuate the community aboard the two fishing ships and take them to Nightingale. All would depend on the weather and what happened to the cone of earth. Sharon's grandfather, Cyril Rogers, recalled while at The Patches, he went to collect water from the stream near the bank at Second Watron, only to find that it was hot. He was sharing a hut with my uncle, Sidney Glass, Thomas Glass and their families. A few young island men, Ches and Basil Lavarello, Adam and Soggy Swain, did not sleep that night but spent the time walking around the huts.

No one really slept that night, being wet and uncomfortable, worrying what was going to happen to them. My uncle, Nelson Green, said while most of the people in the tent tried to sleep, he and Peter Wheeler sat having a cup of coffee. Mr Wheeler confided in him, telling him that there was a Dutch liner headed this way to take the islanders off if needed. At three thirty, one of the island men called Mr Wheeler, saying that the ships were trying to contact him on the radio. Rubbing the sleep from his eyes Mr Wheeler grabbed the radio as Captain Scott's voice came through: "It's finally happened, Peter," he said. "The bubble has burst, throwing up cinders of burning rock and belching clouds of smoke."

All the men were sent for again. The news of the eruption was received with a gloomy silence by most. A few exclaimed they heard something that sounded like an empty drum being hit. At first light, it was planned that some men would go back to the village and launch some longboats. They would take the people off from Boat Harbour Bay near the Hill Piece. They would be put onto the ship and taken to Nightingale. Those who were too old or too sick to walk across the beach to Boat Harbour, would be lowered down the cliff face at Big Sandy Gulch; also, most of the islanders' belongings were lowered.

The men dispersed to inform their families of the plan. As most of the younger island men set off back to launch some boats, the rest of the community headed for Boat Harbour. When the men entered the

village, they saw the looming cone of a new volcano, where the mound had been, smoking and throwing red glowing cinders down its side. Not stopping to stare, the men continued to Big Beach, to get their boats. As they crossed the main stream at the east of the village called Big Watron, they saw that the water had turned to the colour of milk and was quite hot to touch. The *Canton* and *British Flag* were the first two longboats launched, with Lawrence Lavarello and Thomas Glass at the helm.

On reaching Boat Harbour, they found most of the community watching from the beach and cliffs. On approaching the beach, they found a heavy swell running. While *Canton* stood off, Lawrence took the *British Flag* into the edge of the breaking surf. Timing the moment right, Lawrence ordered his crew to row for the beach, catching a breaking wave. *British Flag* surfed onto the beach with Lawrence standing up straight and solid at the steering oar. When the boats hit the beach, many willing hands grabbed and pulled her up, away from the surf, quickly turning the boat around for launching. It was loaded with women and children. Sharon's grandmother, Helen Rogers, with most of her family, were amongst them. Her mother, Catherine Glass, had carried her brother Colin Rogers all the way across the beach, only to find that she then had to carry him all the way home to the village, to be put into the boats there.

As the volcano did not seem that dangerous, and because of the huge swell at Boat Harbour, it was not ideal for many of the community to access. It was decided that it would be quicker for the rest of the people to return home, where they would be taken off at Little Beach to the waiting MV *Tristania* and MV *Francis Repetto*. As the *British Flag* was launched into the surf, the rest of the people turned and walked wearily back to the village. The elderly were put on to the tractor. Cyril was on his way back from Boat Harbour, having put Helen and most of his children in the boat. When he met Sidney at Old Pieces, he was helping to put people on to the tractor. The news reached them that Annie Swain [my great-great-grandmother] who was in her eighties, had been on her way to Boat Harbour, when she was told that she had to turn back. Her daughter, Agnes Swain, assisted her. (She also died later in England). On reaching Runaway Beach, she could get no further.

Without hesitation, Sidney and Cyril caught a donkey and set off to help. Between them, they got her up from the beach, on to the donkey and back to the village.

My Granny Lisa had told me that on her way back to the village, she stopped at her house to collect some clothes. As she got to Big Watron, she was so tired that she dragged the bag of clothes, when suddenly my Uncle Joseph appeared shouting, "Mum! Where have you been?" Seeing the clothes he grabbed them from her saying "You must be mad to worry about clothes". He had missed her from not being amongst the group of people and returned to look for her. Around them the dogs ran barking, the cattle grazed on the field, not the least disturbed by the rush and activity around them.

With the wind still south-west and calm weather conditions, the people were evacuated around 12 o'clock. Amid blue skies, the ships sailed for Nightingale with a tired and crestfallen community aboard, towing a few longboats astern. The ships reached Nightingale around three o'clock. Most of the islanders went ashore, they were going to stay in the 40 or so shacks the islanders had built when they travelled there for the guano and fattening trips.

The expatriates stayed aboard the ships, along with the sick and elderly islanders. My Granny Rose, Mabel Glass (who had just undergone an operation) were among them. Gordon Glass (Mabel's husband) stayed on board to look after them. The wind was south-west and the ships anchored in the lee of Alex Island. Ashore, the islanders sorted themselves into groups of six to 10 per hut. The men caught and killed dozens of shearwaters to cook. There was also fresh water, flour, tea, coffee, biscuits and potatoes that they had left behind from the previous fattening trip. But this would only last for a few days.

As the people ate their evening meal, they were comforted by the news that the Dutch passenger liner, *MV Tjisadane* was coming to their rescue and would be at Nightingale next morning to take the islanders to Cape Town. Although rather cramped in their small huts, the islanders slept soundly, tired out by the events of the past 48 hours. Next morning, they awoke to find the *MV Tjisadane* at anchor. After a debate concerning whether some island men should stay to see to the livestock, it was decided that all the community would go to Cape



Town on her, while the Administrator would stay behind on the MV *Tristania* to await the arrival of the HMS *Leopard*.

The islanders boarded the MV *Tjisadane*, going up the rather steep, swaying, gangway. My grandfather George was among the last party to board, having had to put his dog down. He had brought the dog all the way from Tristan. He was always very fond of his dogs, as any islander will vouch for.

With the islanders settled into their cabins, which were more luxurious than their own homes, the MV *Tjisadane* sailed for Cape Town, passing Tristan on the way. The islanders stood on deck when the ship passed and stared in silence at the familiar landmarks of The Patches, Hill Piece, Herald Point and Big Beach, with the volcano still spewing out clouds of grey smoke and red chunks of hot lava. As the settlement slid from sight there were tears in many eyes. They were facing an uncertain future in a world, which none of them had seen or knew.

# ROCKHOPPER COPPER

## THE LIFE AND WORK OF THE POLICEMAN ON THE WORLD'S MOST REMOTE INHABITED ISLAND, TRISTAN DA CUNHA

Conrad Glass MBE is the Police Inspector with the loneliest beat in the world. He patrols the remote island of Tristan da Cunha, a UK Overseas Territory in the middle of the South Atlantic Ocean. No aircraft fly overhead and none can land. Few ships pass this way. Just 267 people live here, earning their living from farming, fishing, conservation, handicrafts and the sale of coins and colourful postage stamps. Much of his work is involved in the conservation of some of the world's rarest species in this fragile and remote environment. It's as much about penguins as people.

*Rockhopper Copper* is the story of the Tristan islanders, told through the police notebook and anecdotes of Conrad Glass, a former Chief Islander and Conservation Officer, who is a direct descendant of the first settler and governor, William Glass, one of a garrison landed in 1816 to prevent any rescue of Napoleon from St Helena. It is the first book to be written by a Tristan islander; stories of rescue from wild Atlantic islands; volcanic eruptions; the protection of penguins, seals and albatross; of chase by a whale; escape from violent hurricanes and the keeping of the peace in this most remote of British Territories. There's a glimpse of the island's past too – hidden pirate treasure, a shipwrecked lion, ghostly apparitions, of slave ships and abduction. For those who have visited this extraordinary outpost this book is an essential souvenir: for those who have not, it will fuel a lasting fascination with the world's most remote inhabited island –



TRISTAN DA CUNHA

ISBN 978-0955364877

UK £9.95



Polperro Heritage Press