

THE FATE OF LA PEROUSE

Bruny Island Visited

Letters Discovered

ARTICLE 4.

(By Our Travelling Correspondent.)

There are good reasons for believing that Jean Galaup, Count de La Perouse, commander of the first French expedition to Australia, visited Adventure Bay in 1788. The author of "Early Tasmania" (J. B. Walker) wrote:—

"The instructions of La Perouse, in 1786, had directed him to explore this extreme southern point of New Holland (Australia), and the last letter written by him from Botany Bay on February 7, 1788, noted his intention to proceed there before his return—an intention there is some reason to believe he executed." The author added the following note concerning this:—

"Bent's Almanac for 1827 states that in the year 1809, Captain Bunker, of the ship Venus, found buried on the shore of Adventure Bay a bottle containing letters from La Perouse, dated one month after his leaving Port Jackson."

Touching the same subject, Ida Lee (Mrs. Charles Bruce Marriott), in her "The Coming of the British to Australia" said:—

"Labillardiere, the botanist to the Bruny (D'Entrecasteaux) expedition, in his 'Voyage in Search of La Perouse,' mentions the prodigious heights of the trees, some being 150ft., and says that during an expedition inland the fruit trees that Bligh had planted were noticed, as well as the name and date of the expedition, cut into the forest trees, but only one native was seen. They found no trace of the lost ships (Boussole and Astrolabe), or of their crews, but in the year 1809, when Captain Bunker, of the Venus, put into Adventure Bay, on Bruny Island, he noticed the stump of a tree carved with French letters, which he deciphered sufficiently to induce him to dig in the ground beneath. There he found a sealed bottle, containing three letters, left by La Perouse, one to the French Government, the others merely mentioning his voyage, all these being dated a month after their departure from Sydney in 1788."

It is interesting to add that the La Boussole and the Astrolabe were two of the finest frigates in the French service in the reign of Louis XVI., by whose orders they were equipped for maritime discovery, under the supreme command of Jean Francois Galaup de La Perouse, with crews of 119 and 113 men respectively.

MASSACRED BY NATIVES.

Cecil Allport, in "The Fate of Count de La Perouse," said:—

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"They left Brest on August 1, 1785 (La Perouse embarking on the La Boussole), called at the Madeiras, rounded Cape Horn, voyaged to the Sandwich Islands, to the west coast of North America, Kamtschatka, China, and Japan, and on December 9, 1787, anchored off one of the Navigator group, now better known as the Samoan Islands. There a number of officers and crew, including Captain De Langle, who was in command of the Astrolabe, were massacred by the natives.

"From Navigator Islands La Perouse sailed for New Holland, and after sighting Norfolk Island on his route, anchored on January 26, 1788, in Botany Bay, which Governor Phillip's expedition on the same day quitted for Sydney Cove. The French vessels remained in Botany Bay till March 19 following, when, having effected necessary repairs, and taken in wood and water, they sailed away, intending to proceed to the Friendly Islands, thence past New Caledonia and Santa Cruz, through Torres Strait, to skirt the Gulf of Carpentaria, and the west coast of New Holland, in time to reach the Island of Mauritius in the following December."

RUNAWAYS LEFT ON ISLAND.

Captain Peter Dillon, of the St. Patrick, on a voyage from Valparaiso, via New Zealand, to Pondicherry, in 1826, came in sight of the island of Tucopia, where Martin Bushart and a Lascar named Joe (runaways from ships trading to the islands) had been left by Captain Robson of the Hunter, on September 26, 1813. Captain Dillon, previously an officer on board the Hunter, had just taken charge of the Elizabeth, which was acting as tender to the Hunter. To gratify his curiosity as to the fate of Bushart and Joe, Captain Dillon called at Tucopia, to find that both were alive and well after 13 years had elapsed. Joe sold to an officer of the St. Patrick a silver sword guard, which had been brought from Mannicolo Island, two days' sail to the westward of Tucopia, in canoes, with a favourable wind. Bushart had also seen quantities of iron and numbers of other articles in the possession of Mannicolo Island natives (who, upon inquiry, had told him that many years ago two large ships had been wrecked there during a heavy gale, and that the survivors had built a vessel, and sailed away in her), evidently of French manufacture. There and then Captain Dillon decided to put in at Mannicolo, but was unable to effect a landing there; and, as his provisions were running short, and his ship in a leaky condition, resolved to continue the voyage.

RELICS DISCOVERED.

In January, 1827, after the French Government had acceded to his request to search for relics of La Perouse's ill-fated expedition, Captain Dillon, in the Research, a survey vessel, left Calcutta for Mannicolo (marked on most modern maps as Vanikoro). On the way the Research called at Hobart Town on April 5, 1827. From a brick trade carried on with Mannicolo Island natives, iron, copper, brass, glass, china, nails, guns, shot, a large bell (on which were the words "Basin m'a fait"), several articles stamped with fleurs de lis, a large piece of decayed plant with flowers de lis and other ornamental work upon it

of decayed plant, with flowers de lis and other ornamental work upon it (subsequently identified as having formed part of the stern of the *La Boussole*), a grindstone (afterwards recognized as similar to some which had been taken on board the missing ships for milling purposes), and portion of a silver candlestick (on which were engraved the arms of M. de Collignon, who accompanied the *La Boussole* as botanist) were obtained, and accepted by the French Government as conclusive evidence of the fate of the two ships, wrecked there during a raging hurricane on a dark and stormy night, as told to Captain Dillon by the natives. One vessel sank outside near the reef — only four escaped from her on some wreckage, which was driven ashore; the other struck, and was carried by the breakers over the reef into comparatively smooth water. Many escaped from this ship, but some were devoured by sharks, and a few killed by the natives, who at first mistook them for evil spirits.

The survivors constructed a two-masted vessel (from timbers from the wreckage washed ashore, and trees felled by them on the island), in which most of them sailed away. The few who remained on the island lived for many years, but during the long interval of 39 years had all passed away. Captain Dillon and several of his crew visited the spot where the trees had apparently been cut down with axes. What became of those who left the island in the boat they had made is not known. Thus, the fate of the expedition, so long shrouded in mystery, was solved.

The name of *La Perouse* has been fittingly perpetuated in a strikingly beautiful mountain, 3,800ft. high, near Catamaran, Southern Tasmania.

(To be continued.)