

The 150th anniversary of the HMS Challenger Expedition (1872 – 1876)
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On December 21st 1872, 150 years ago, HMS Challenger set off from Portsmouth, UK for a four year voyage around the world. She was heavily modified from her former role as a small warship into a floating laboratory to scientifically explore the oceans. With a small complement of scientists in addition to her crew the Challenger travelled almost 69 000 nautical miles between 1872-76.

All the stamps that have come across to date which present aspects of the expedition are illustrated but would welcome information on other issues not presented. Some of the stamp designs were based on engravings from the over fifty Reports and related books published on the voyage

(Right, 65% full size). An attractive stamp sheet issued in 1973. The sailing ship was fitted with a propeller driven by steam engine which was required especially to hold the ship in position at the over 300 sampling stations. A variety of depth sounding and bottom sampling methods were tried to develop best practice and a selection of samplers are shown. The chemical laboratory shown was where seawater analyses were made. The ocean depths and nature of the sediments in addition to their scientific interest were becoming key to the successful laying of submarine telegraph cables, a recently new technology being widely adopted.



The stamp on the sheet (left above, 80% full size, 1997) shows Charles Wyville Thomson, the chief scientist on the Challenger expedition. The rope tassles modification to the dredge was made when it was noticed that some organisms were found clinging to the dredge ropes when brought to the surface.

The set of four stamps (above right) issued in 1989 celebrate the life and work of Sir John Murray. He was a naturalist on the voyage and key to the preparation and publication of the remaining Challenger Reports after Wyville Thomson died.



The cover left (60% full size, 1979) was postmarked on Crozet Island which Challenger visited as well as Tristan da Cunha (above right, 1967) and Christmas Island where the other stamps were issued. The expedition laid many of the foundations of the new discipline at that time of oceanography.