

THE REDISCOVERY OF THE ASCENSION ISLAND PARSLEY FERN

In 1843 on the return journey of Sir James Clark Ross' voyage of exploration to the Antarctic his two ships, HMS Erebus and HMS Terror, visited the island of Ascension in the South Atlantic Ocean. One of the scientists aboard was Joseph Dalton Hooker (later Sir Joseph Hooker, who would become the director of Kew Gardens). He discovered a large number of small ferns on the slopes of Green Mountain on Ascension Island, which he drew and described and which he named *Anogramma ascensionis* - the Ascension Island parsley fern (after the parsley-like leaf).

The fern was recorded as seen again several times over the next century, the last occasion was when a British scientist collected a specimen in 1958. It was not seen again and was declared extinct in 2003, probably forced out of its normal habitat by the more aggressive, introduced, maidenhair ferns.

By chance on 27th July 2009 a team of conservationists spotted four minute fern plants on the knife-edge ridge of Green Mountain on Ascension, which they recognised as the lost parsley fern. The scientists decided that relocating the plants was not possible, so they nurtured the tiny plants twice a week until two plants survived long enough to produce spores. The spores were harvested and, within twenty four hours, were rushed by air to Kew Gardens. Kew was able to rear a large number of sporophytes (young fern plants), which are flourishing well and a further number have been grown on Ascension. The intention is that in time the ferns will be reintroduced to their former wild habitat on Green Mountain.



Erebus & Terror in 1843
off Ascension Island



Sir James Clark Ross
With Erebus & Terror



Sir Joseph Dalton Hooker
as a young man



Sir Joseph Dalton Hooker



The Ascension Island
Parsley Fern



The Parsley Fern on
Green Mountain



Fern seedlings grown
on Ascension Island



Fern cultivation at
Kew Gardens