

# Louis-Claude Desaulses de Freycinet (1779 – 1842)

Louis-Claude Desaulses de Freycinet was born on 7 August 1779 at Montélimar, Drôme, and entered the French navy as a young teenager in 1793. In 1800, after taking part in several engagements against the British, he joined Captain Nicholas Baudin's expedition to the south and southwest coasts of Australia as cartographer-surveyor. Two vessels, *Le Géographe* and *Le Naturaliste* (Captain Hamelin) were used, and with them were also a number of scientists, including naturalist François Peron.



## ***Freycinetia banksii***

*Freycinetia* are mostly climbers with aerial roots, and long, linear, sheathing leaves. The unisexual flowers lack sepals and petals and are borne on separate plants, where they are crowded on a fleshy short stem tip called a spadix. About 175 species are found in Australasia, Southeast Asia and the Pacific. Kiekie (the plant), tāwhara (the flower) and pātangatanga (the fruit) of *Freycinetia banksii* were important to pre-European Māori. From the long shiny leaves, often a metre or more in length, were woven mats and kits. The beautiful flowers, the largest of the New Zealand flora, appear on separate male and female plants, but the sweet bracts and fruit that were relished as food are seldom seen nowadays as rats and possums usually find them first. Kiekie scrambles over the undergrowth, or climbs by means of its aerial roots or rope-like stems high up into the forest trees. It is common in North Island lowland forest, but less plentiful further south.

Although the expedition repeated some work already done by Flinders, Freycinet's charting was of a very high standard, and several Australian geographic features still bear his name. In 1802 Baudin sent *Le Naturaliste* to Europe with the results of the voyage and Freycinet was put in command of the 20-ton schooner *Casuarina*, which had been purchased for inshore exploration. When Baudin died in Mauritius in September 1803, Freycinet left the *Casuarina* there and returned to France, reaching Lorient on 25 March 1804.

For the next three years he used his artistic talents in cartographic work, and also wrote, with François Peron, the narrative of Baudin's voyage. In 1814 he married 20 year-old Rose Marie de Pinon, and in 1817 was given command of *L'Uranie*, to circumnavigate the globe and conduct scientific research. His request to take his young wife with him was denied, but just before the vessel sailed from France she secreted herself on board, causing great indignation in official circles. *L'Uranie* visited Australia, New Guinea, the Mariana Islands and Hawaii, before being wrecked off the Falkland Islands on 13 February 1820. The scientific records and notes were saved before the vessel foundered, but over half of the 4,175 plant specimens were lost. An American whaler was purchased and renamed *La Physicienne* for the expedition's return to France, in December 1820.

The results of this voyage were published under Freycinet's supervision between 1824 and 1844, in thirteen quarto volumes and four folio volumes of fine plates and maps. Freycinet was admitted into the Academy of Sciences in 1825, and was one of the founders of the Paris Geographical Society. Rose's lively journal of the voyage, *Campagne de l'Uranie* (1817–1820), was published posthumously in Paris in 1927, and an English translation, *A Woman of Courage*, by Professor Marc Serge Rivière, was published by the National Library of Australia in 1996. Rose died in 1832, and Louis-Claude de Freycinet on 18 August 1842, at Freycinet, Drôme.

An inlet on the coast of Western Australia and a cape near the extreme southwest of the same coast, a peninsula and national park in Tasmania, and a genus of tropical to subtropical plants, are named after him. *Freycinetia banksii*, kiekie, the single endemic New Zealand species, is the most southerly.