

Ferdinand Magellan (1480 – 1521)

Ferdinand Magellan (Portuguese *Fernão de Magalhães*; Spanish *Fernando de Magallanes*) was born in 1480 in the wine-producing village of Sabrosa in northern Portugal, the third child of town mayor Rui de Magalhães and his wife Alda de Masquita. When the children were orphaned in 1490, family connections with royalty enabled the boys to become court pages in Lisbon, and be educated by some of Portugal's finest tutors. Ferdinand's early interest in maritime exploration and the spice trade was encouraged by the study of cartography, astronomy and celestial navigation.

In 1505 he joined a Portuguese fleet and during the next seven years was involved in a series of military and exploratory expeditions in India and Africa. By 1510 he had been promoted to the rank of captain. In 1511 he was with the fleet that conquered Malacca (on the Malay Peninsula) and explored east to the Moluccas (islands in Indonesia, then known as the Spice Islands). He returned to Portugal in 1512 with his slave Enrique of Malacca, and the following year was wounded in Morocco, leaving him with a permanent limp. He fell from grace for alleged irregularities, and from 1514 was denied further employment by the Portuguese.

Renouncing his Portuguese nationality, Magellan arrived in Seville in October 1517 to offer his services to the Spanish court. He befriended fellow-countryman Diago Barbosa, and married Barbosa's daughter Beatriz, who gave birth to their son Rodrigo a year later. Like Columbus, Magellan believed the Spice Islands could be reached by sailing west, and through Barbosa's connections was granted an audience with the 18 year-old King Charles (Carlos), grandson of King Ferdinand and

Queen Isabella, who had financed Columbus's expedition to the New World in 1492. As the eastward route to the Spice Islands was controlled by Portugal, an alternative was deemed advantageous to Spain, and funding for Magellan's proposal was approved. .

He set out in September 1519 with five ships and 270 men, and despite mutiny, starvation, illness, rough weather and unknown waters, crossed the Atlantic and navigated through the sea passage now called the Strait of Magellan at the southern point of South America. With his fleet down to three ships, he sailed into the Pacific Ocean and eventually reached Guam and then Cebu in the Philippines, where he was killed in a local dispute on 27 April 1521. After picking up a cargo of spices in the Moluccas, Juan Sebastián del Cano, in command of the *Victoria*, arrived back in Spain on 6 September 1522 with just one ship and 18 crew members, to complete the first circumnavigation of the globe.

The cargo of spices paid for the expedition, and a missing day in the log led to the concept of the International Date Line. Magellan's body was not recovered, his wife had died around 1521 and Rodrigo and a second son Carlos both died at an early age. Provision was made in Magellan's will for his slave Enrique's freedom.

Magellan's legacy includes knowledge of the extent of the earth's surface, the new places he named and those named for him, Magellanic Clouds in space, and plants and animals with the scientific epithet *magellanica* 'of southern South America', which have many similarities with the flora and fauna of New Zealand.



Oxalis magellanica

Oxalis (Greek *oxys* 'sharp, acid') are herbs with clover-like leaves and an acid taste. Species number 800 or more, including 15 naturalised weeds, and at least three native species. *Oxalis magellanica*, tūtae kāhu or white oxalis, is an attractive small creeping plant with trifoliate leaves and relatively large white flowers with the styles always longer than the stamens. Favouring mossy streambanks and other damp lowland to alpine sites, it is indigenous to New Zealand, Australia and, as indicated by the specific name given by George Forster around 1790 to a plant in his collection, to southern South America.