

James Clark Ross (1800 – 1862)

Born on 15 April 1800, James Clark Ross was the third son of George Ross, a prosperous London merchant, and his wife Christian Clark. At the age of eleven, following family tradition, he entered the Royal Navy. His first years of service were on surveys of the White Sea and the Arctic under his uncle, Captain (later Sir) John Ross, who tutored and watched over him. During the next eight years he returned to arctic seas on four expeditions with Captain Parry, and in 1831, as joint leader with his uncle on a privately sponsored voyage, determined the position of the North Magnetic Pole. In 1834 he was promoted Captain, and from 1835-38 he was employed on the magnetic survey of Great Britain.

Ross's dash and good looks, together with his arctic prowess, made him a popular choice to command the Antarctic expedition of the *Erebus* and *Terror*, 1839-43. Each ship was specially strengthened for the ice, and had a complement of 64 men. On board *Erebus* was 22 year-old naturalist Joseph Hooker, enlisted as assistant surgeon; David Lyall was his counterpart on *Terror*. Ross ensured the expedition was well outfitted and stocked with food supplies to reduce the risk of scurvy; he also encouraged Hooker's botanical work by providing him with extra workspace and storage facilities.

At Hobart, a magnetic observatory was built with the help of 200 convicts organised by the lieutenant governor of Tasmania, Sir John Franklin. A week later the expedition reached the Auckland Islands, where several animals brought from Hobart were released, and a variety of edible berry plants provided by Franklin from the government garden were planted – well-meaning attempts to help ease the plight of castaways. There, and on Campbell Island to the south, they became acquainted with the megaherbs, a name coined by Ross for the large size of the plants, relative to the harsh climate in which they thrive. Hooker named one of them *Chrysobactron rossii* (now *Bulbinella rossii*) in honour of his captain.

In the Antarctic, the 3,795 m active volcano Mount Erebus and smaller extinct Mount Terror were sighted and named, and the expedition reached what is now known as the Ross Sea and Ross Ice Shelf. The first antarctic sea soundings were made, and it was established that the South Magnetic Pole was much further south than predicted. After 4½ years away, the expedition reached England in September 1843. Later that year James Clark Ross married Anne Coulman, promising her father that he would end his exploring days – a pledge he kept with one exception. In 1847-48 he returned to the Arctic to search for John Franklin who had disappeared in 1845, ironically in Ross's old ships

Erebus and *Terror*, while trying to locate the Northwest Passage.

James Clark Ross received a knighthood in 1844. His account of the Antarctic expedition, *Voyage of Discovery*, was completed in 1847, and the following year he was elected to the Royal Society. In 1856 he was made a rear-admiral, but the enjoyment of his quiet retirement in Aylesbury with his wife and four children was shattered by her death the next year. Sir James never recovered from the shock, and died in Aylesbury on 3 April 1862.



Bulbinella rossii

Cheeseman, in his *Manual of New Zealand Flora* (1906) described *Bulbinella rossii* as "a most magnificent plant". Like many other species found on our subantarctic islands, it is larger and showier than its mainland relatives. The flowerheads are bright yellow, up to 15 cm long and 6 cm wide, densely crowded with numerous small flowers on stout stalks up to a metre high, male and female on separate plants, with the male inflorescence larger than the female. The bright green, fleshy strap-like leaves are strongly keeled, and die down in winter to a fleshy rootstock. Unpalatable to animals, it is so abundant on Campbell and Auckland islands that when it flowers in December and January it can be discerned from a kilometre or more from the shore.