

# William W Stewart (fl. 1806 – 1815)

The European name for Stewart Island/Rakiura originated in a chart of Southern Port, now known as Port Pegasus, produced by the first officer of the sealer *Pegasus*, William W Stewart, in 1809. For about 150 years it was thought that William Stewart, the mapmaker, was synonymous with the sealer, trader and entrepreneur William Stewart, who is reasonably well documented.

Born in Scotland in 1776, William Stewart the sealer left the Royal Navy in 1797, and basing himself at Port Jackson (Sydney), became part of the lucrative sealing operations in southern waters. Undoubtedly an able captain, he was also a scheming but plausible rogue, and in 1828, to enhance his reputation and gain backing to establish a shipbuilding colony at Port Pegasus, he claimed to be the Stewart Island map's author. Recent research by maritime historian John O'Connell Ross showed that he could not have been.

Nothing is known of William W Stewart, the cartographer, until his arrival at Port Jackson in November 1806, probably on the Spanish prize *Santa Rosa*, which had been captured by the British privateer *Port au Prince* and dispatched to Port Jackson, sold and refitted for sealing. Within a month Stewart was employed by John McArthur of Paramatta to command the sloop *Venus* on a routine trading voyage to Norfolk Island. The next year he commanded the brig *Elizabeth* for the sandalwood trade and a survey of the Fiji islands, but the first voyage was aborted when she put into the Bay of Islands for repairs – William Stewart's first visit to New Zealand. On the second voyage, amidst the drama and industry of the burgeoning sandalwood

trade, he drew up his 1808 chart of Sandalwood Bay, which was later published by the London mapmaker, Aaron Arrowsmith. When the *Elizabeth* was dispatched with her cargo to Canton, Stewart left McArthur's employ and stayed at Port Jackson.

With the rapid decline in seals, and news released by Governor Foveaux about a recently discovered strait in southern New Zealand, there was a rush to find new sealing grounds. The *Pegasus* was fitted out for sealing, and under Captain Eber Bunker arrived back in Port Jackson in March 1809 with 12,600 skins. William W Stewart joined her second voyage as first officer under Captain Samuel Chase, his cartographic skills coming to the fore as they sailed on to the Chatham Islands, across to Banks Island (discovered to be a peninsula) and back to Port Pegasus for repairs. Eventually, they rounded Cape Horn and arrived in England early in 1810.

Thereafter, the only trace of William W Stewart is a note by John Purdy, editor of the *Oriental Navigator*, in 1815, acknowledging receipt from him of two charts, with copious notes and observations. Commenting on the "Sketch of Southern Port", which was subsequently published, Purdy referred to the unnamed island Stewart described, as "Stewart's Island".

In 1881 Joseph Beattie Armstrong at the Christchurch Botanic Garden singled out a new species from living plants brought back from Stewart Island by the Reverend James West Stack of the Christchurch Māori Mission. He named it *Senecio* (now *Brachyglottis*) *stewartiae*.

## ***Brachyglottis stewartiae***

*Brachyglottis stewartiae* (of Stewart Island) is a large, spreading shrub confined to the Stewart Island area: the Snares/Tini Heke, Solander Island and other islets in Foveaux Strait, but not Stewart Island proper. Branches are pale, the twigs brittle and marked with leaf scars. Large elliptic pointed leaves (7-18 cm long), shiny, dark grey-green above and white underneath, are clustered at the branch ends. Often prostrate for half its length, anchored by adventitious roots, the densely branching habit produces a tight, leafy canopy bearing from December to February showy, dense panicles of yellow flower heads.



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