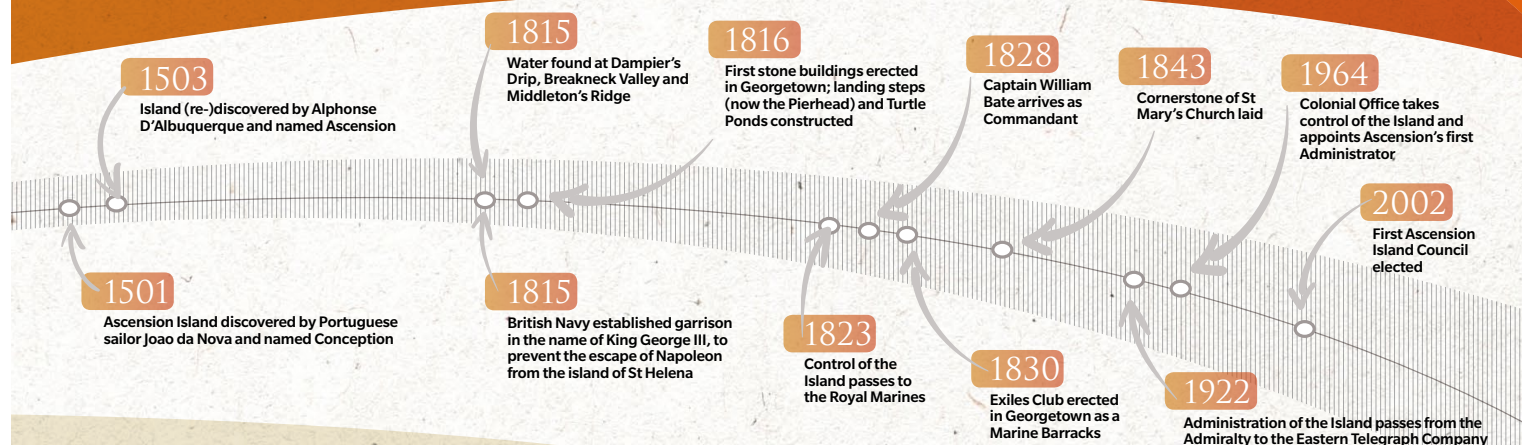




ASCENSION ISLAND

HISTORY OF ASCENSION ISLAND



DISCOVERY

Portuguese explorers came across Ascension Island in 1501 and again in 1503 while sailing from Lisbon to India.

They did not come ashore, seeing nothing on the Island that was of any use to them, and sailed on. A further Portuguese fleet returned some time later to put goats ashore. Ascension remained uninhabited until the arrival of the British in October 1815, when a garrison was established by the Royal Navy to prevent the escape of Napoleon from the island of St Helena, 700 miles to the south east.

SETTLEMENT

Ascension has been permanently inhabited since the Union flag was raised and the Island claimed for His Britannic Majesty King George III on **22 October 1815**.

Within days of British occupation construction started on a settlement in the area between the Turtle Ponds, the AIG Stores and the swimming pool in Georgetown, known then as Regent Square. The settlement did not become known as Georgetown until April 1829. The Island remained under military control until October 1922, when it became a colonial dependency. Today Ascension Island has a temporary population of approximately 800 people, including a MOD and a USAF base, as well as a small civilian population. Ascension continues to have great strategic importance and a key role to play as a staging post for British interests - both military and diplomatic - in the South Atlantic.

FOOD & WATER

The most urgent task for the men who first came ashore in 1815 was to find fresh water.

From 1815 to 1830, a very limited supply of water was available from springs or drips at Dampier's Drip, Breakneck Valley and Middleton's Ridge. Until 1830 water was transported to the settlement in Georgetown in barrels. Captain Bate was keen to secure a more reliable water supply and engaged visiting engineer Captain Brandreth to devise a plan to transfer water from the mountain using iron pipes, down through Dampiers Drip, to Georgetown.

In the early days there was a very limited supply of fresh meat, so turtles were harvested for food. Around 1823, under Commandant Edward Nicholls, the mountain farm was established to supply fresh meat, milk and vegetables to the Island's inhabitants. Additional food supplies were sent for twice a year and included such goods as bread, flour, cocoa, sugar, currants, preserved beef and pork, rice, dried peas and vinegar - plus significant quantities of rum and wine.

CONFLICT

Ascension Island has served as an important base during periods of conflict.

During WWI Ascension Island was used as a lookout for German warships attacking the cable station. In the 1940s the United States built an airfield on South West Plain - today's Wideawake Airfield. The US supplied soldiers and munitions through Ascension to support the war in North Africa. In 1982 Ascension's location in the South Atlantic made it a crucial military staging post for the British in the Falklands War.



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