

DARWIN QUEST: Journey to Darwin-Land

In this year of the Bicentennial of Charles Darwin's birth, and the Sesquicentennial for the publication of his *Origin of Species*, teachers and students of evolution may want to give serious consideration to making a voyage to at least one of the sites where Darwin made his mind-changing observations and thought his "dangerous ideas." The Galapagos Islands might be an obvious goal, and would certainly provide useful inspiration and first hand experiences to share with students and colleagues. But the Islands are becoming increasingly impacted with tourists, perhaps threatening their value as living labs of evolution.

On the other hand, there are numerous points of interest along the east and west coasts of South America – points where Darwin spent weeks and months ashore, discovering many new fossils and experiencing earthquakes, the evidence of massive uplifts, and the fauna and flora unique to the continent. Reading Darwin's *Voyage of the Beagle* and doing a little internet searching could point to many potential target sites to explore.

A somewhat less ambitious, but no less fulfilling journey, would be a trip to Darwin's homeland. In this year of special Darwin anniversaries, you will find numerous events and exhibitions to visit. You could explore his birthplace home on "**The Mount**" in **Shrewsbury** north of the Cotswolds, to his long-term home in Downe, about an hour and a half south of London (by train and bus). For Shrewsbury events, map, activities, see <http://www.discoverdarwin.co.uk/>

And don't overlook some of those off-the-beaten-path sites connected to the Darwin story. The building where he lived for two years after returning from his 5-year voyage, at **#36 Great Marlborough Street** is still standing. It's just off Regent St., a couple of short blocks south of the Oxford Circle tube station, in the Soho district of London. You can see it at: <http://www.aboutdarwin.com/pictures/London/Pictures.html> While living here, he started his "Notebook B" on transmutation (=evolution), and on page 36 wrote "I think..." with a sketch of a little branching bush with lettered branches, and comments about different degrees of relationship between different branches. When I was there in mid March, 2009, there was no street number or blue plaque honoring Darwin at this site, and the ground floor store there on the corner (now O'Neil's) looked freshly painted a beige color (not the deep red shown in the photo on the About Darwin site). But the windows and designs above the store give it away. Perhaps they just hadn't replaced the plaque. If you visit this site, be sure to ask people at O'Neil's and/or adjacent stores about the Darwin plaque, and the street number, and let me know what you learn. A photo would be great.

Following his marriage to Emma Wedgewood in January of 1839, they moved to a residence on "Upper Gower Street" in the nearby Bloomsbury district. That building was destroyed in 1941 by German bombers, but the University College of London built its Darwin Building for Biological Sciences directly on that site (located at about 107 **Gower St.**, somewhat north of the British Museum). While living there, Darwin began to develop his ideas on how evolution could occur – the mechanism of natural selection and in 1842 even wrote out a lengthy 34-page manuscript "sketch" of what would become his *Origin of Species*. See pictures at the About Darwin site given above, but note that the "1838" date on the blue plaque should be "1839"; the Darwins moved in after January, 1839). This is also where his precious Annie was born, who died from scarlet fever about eight years later. There is another blue plaque shown for this building at <http://www.shadyoldlady.com/location.php?loc=1583> - but it isn't clear just where this plaque is posted. It would be interesting to know this. Is it inside the building? Let me know if you find it.

With a growing family, and a distaste for the hectic life of London, the Darwins moved to what became their family home in Downe, in the Kent area south of London. This is where he did much of his research, studying pigeon-breeding, classifying barnacles, doing various botanical studies in his gardens, and writing his *Origin of Species* and many other books and reports. The English Heritage organization has extensively renovated the Darwin home and estate to a condition much like it was during his life (except for all the visitors!). It is generally open Wed.-Sun., 10-5, offering audio tours, an excellent gift shop, and a delicious lunch with tea.

Photography is not allowed inside the house, which includes, upstairs, a new full scale replica of Darwin's living quarters in the poop cabin of the Beagle. In the gift shop, be sure to get a copy of the most informative (and low cost) English Heritage publication *Charles Darwin at Down House*. It is very thorough, including details of his botanical studies. Also, be sure to ask someone at Down House about who, from the Darwin family, is buried in the graveyard at St. Mary's Church in the village of Downe, and where that gravestone is located. Clue: it's close to the point, near the southwest fence, from where this picture was taken:

<http://www.cofe.anglican.org/darwin/downe.html> The church is a short walk, only about 1/4 mile from Down House, and well-worth visiting. Something else to notice: look for a plaque on the church dedicating something in memory of Charles Darwin. What was that something, and where is it? And finally, what are the walls of the church made of?

To find alternatives and timing for public transportation to Down House, consult Transport Direct online at:

<http://www.transportdirect.info/Web2/JourneyPlanning/JourneyPlannerInput.aspx?DoorToDoor=true>

Info about **Down House**: <http://www.english-heritage.org.uk/server.php?show=nav.14922> and

<http://www.darwinatdowne.co.uk/>

When I visited Down House in mid March 2009, I found the audio tour devices to be rather distracting – frequently bumping against my clothing, causing its touch screen to shift to different modes. I pointed this out to the English Heritage people in an email after returning. It would be interesting to know if they have replaced those with less-distracting audio tour devices (more like the ones at Westminster Abbey or Stonehenge).

A DOWN HOUSE QUEST:

Of course, you will want to walk in Darwin's footsteps, taking his Sandwalk at the far end of his 18 acres. When you do this, notice three things: 1) the composition of the footpath (what are you actually walking on?), and 2) look for a row of four fist-sized flint stones placed under the white bench in the "resting shed" at the far end of the Sandwalk. I placed those there on 18 March 2009, symbolizing "ENSI". Let me know if they're still there, and the date of your visit. Finally, 3) why was it called a "*Sandwalk*?" (check the audio tour, or ask a docent). You might also ask if there is a DVD or CD with the narrative of the audio tour available.

While in London, you may want to also visit the main branch of the post office on William IV Street, just off Trafalgar Square (near Charing Cross tube station) to get their special **Presentation Packet of Darwin stamps**. Go to the stamp-collector window for these. See <http://www.allinlondon.co.uk/directory/1256/5158.php> for information. Or order from Royal Mail at

http://www.royalmail.com/portal/rm/shop?catId=9300091&pageType=Others&pageId=shp_prddetails&product=prod73530024

or Packs & Cards: <http://www.packsandcards.com/products/showitem.asp?ID=4108&start=351>

The **Natural History Museum** has been featuring an outstanding special exhibition (from the American Museum of Natural History) called "Darwin's Big Idea" – but it is scheduled to close 19 April. In September, they will open a new **Darwin Centre** for the museum (see <http://www.nhm.ac.uk/about-us/darwin-centre/>). In the meantime, you can enjoy the large marble statues of Darwin and T.H. Huxley there, along with their excellent human evolution exhibit nearby in the mezzanine, and their exhibit of whale evolution (though a bit dated – nothing about the DNA evidence for hippos as their closest cousins) can be seen in the great Mammal Hall. See NHM Darwin 200 info and links to related Darwin sites at: <http://www.darwin200.org/> and... Darwin Gifts at the NHM: <http://www.nhmshop.co.uk/darwin/category.html?pageNo=2>

A visit to Darwin's England would not be complete without paying homage at his grave in **Westminster Abbey**. <http://www.westminster-abbey.org/our-history/people/charles-darwin>

Photos are not allowed inside, but this diagram on the About Darwin site should help you navigate to his tombstone embedded in the floor not far from Newton's elaborate memorial in the Nave:

<http://www.aboutdarwin.com/darwin/burial.html> (Note that the reference there for memorial stone #3 to "Howard Walter" should be to "Howard Walter Baron *Florey*" – co-recipient of the Nobel Prize (with Fleming) for Penicillin.) Also interesting is that astronomer John Herschel is buried right beside Darwin. They were

good friends, but creationist Herschel thought Darwin's ideas about evolution were totally wrong! And notice above their graves, on the wall next to Newton's memorial, are several memorial plaques, including one for Darwin and an adjacent one for Alfred Russel Wallace. Below those round plaques, on the left, there is a plaque honoring Darwin's good botanist friend Joseph Hooker. The geologist who was so influential to Darwin, Charles Lyell, is also buried in Westminster, but his location is not obvious. If you visit there, be sure to ask someone to show you where he is buried, (and please let me know where that is).

Finally, on the lighter side, a visit to **Madame Tussaud's Wax Museum** on Marylebone Rd. will give you a chance to be photographed with Darwin while you two discuss the latest findings in DNA studies of evolution. Newton, Einstein and Stephen Hawking will be listening in, nearby!

A little-known link of Darwin with the town of **Bath** was his friendship with fellow beetle-collector Leonard Jenyns (from his college days at Cambridge). Jenyns was also considered for the position on the Beagle that Darwin got, but it didn't happen. He became a clergyman, and eventually moved to Bath for his wife's health. Darwin couldn't find anyone in London to identify the many preserved fish that he collected on his Beagle voyage, so he asked his friend Jenyns to do this. It turns out that Darwin collected more than 200 new species of fish. Jenyns left his papers to the British Royal Literary & Scientific Institution in Bath, and the BRLSI has adapted these to a free exhibition they offer at 16 Queen Square in Bath: "**Darwin and Beyond.**" Darwin and Beyond (BRLSI: Jenyns in Bath): <http://www.brlsi.org/darwin2009/index.html>

SUMMARY GOALS FOR YOUR DARWIN QUEST TO ENGLAND

If you go there, please send your findings to the ENSI webmaster to share with others... along with any new goals or questions for future visitors:

1. **Shrewsbury:** A picture of the building where Darwin lived as a child
2. **London: #36 Great Marlborough St.:** A picture of the building at this address, showing address and blue Darwin plaque; and/or why was the plaque missing in mid March, 2009?
3. **London: #107 Gower St.:** A picture of the Darwin Building, showing the location of the blue Darwin plaque in relation to its nearest entrance. Also, where is the "Shady Old Lady" blue Darwin plaque located?
4. **London Post Office:** Are the special Presentation Packet Darwin stamps still available?
5. **Downe:** Who (in the Darwin family) is (are) buried in the St. Mary's Church graveyard in Downe?
Location of the gravestone(s)?
What was installed in memory of Darwin (on the church)? Where is it?
What are the walls of the Church made of?
6. **Down House** – Audio tour devices: are the touchscreen devices replaced?
Is there a DVD or CD of the audio tour for sale in the gift shop?
Sandwalk: What are you actually walking on?
Why was it called a "*Sandwalk*?"
Are there four large flintstones still arranged in a row under the resting shed bench?
7. **Natural History Museum:** Highlights of their new **Darwin Centre**?
8. **Westminster Abbey:** where is the gravestone for Darwin's geologist friend Charles Lyell (relative to Darwin's grave)?
9. **Bath and BRLSI:** Why did Darwin ask Jenyns to identify the fish collected on the Beagle voyage?