

Unlike Desolation where there is a meagre stunted vegetation, on Heard there is even less, with the greater part of the land entirely devoid of plant life.

As an island, Rogers' 130 square mile discovery was not much. But as a treasure trove, its wealth was staggering. He would know that the value of the sea elephants he saw (on three of the four main beaches) was worth, even if conservatively estimated with a very low contemporary price of only 70 cents per gallon,¹⁷ not less than \$US57,000. Clearly Heard Island would provide the basis for a new industry for many years. It soon became the richest sea elephant breeding ground known to the industry.

The Riddle of the Multiple Discovery of Heard Island

Before following the development of the new industry on Heard Island, however, some comment must be made as to how Heard, a high island often visible over long distances, had remained so long undiscovered by the sealers, whalers and sea elephant hunters.

The volume of visitors at Desolation, both before and after 1860, has been described at some length in order to show the frequency with which vessels cruised only a few hundred miles to the north of Heard. To those must be added the commercial and other traffic from Europe and America, to the South Pacific, Australia, New Zealand and even China.

If the curt note 'saw land' which appears on the chart of Captain Peter Kemp of the English brig *Magnet* on 27 November 1833 some two or three days after leaving Desolation, was actually the very first discovery of 'Heard' Island, it may be passed over as his premature death prevented the wide dissemination of news of his discovery.¹⁸ The first rediscovery was in November 1853 by a trading barque, *Oriental*, under Captain J. J. Heard, whilst en route from Boston to Melbourne. The island which bears Heard's name was then the subject of a bewildering number of rediscoveries, mainly by traders, only the first few of which need be mentioned here: In January 1854 Captain McDonald of the British ship *Samarang* rediscovered Heard Island and the small western group which bears his name. A Captain Young reported them at about the same time, but McDonald was the first to make them generally known.¹⁹ In December 1854 the English merchant ships *Earl of Eglinton* (Captain James S. Hutton), *Herald of the Morning* (Captain John Attwaye) and *Lincluden Castle* (Captain Rees) each independently rediscovered and renamed Heard and McDonald Islands.²⁰ As noted, Rogers' 'rediscovery' followed on 15 February 1855. As late as 1858 Captain J. Meyer of the German ship *La Rochette* renamed them 'Koenig Max Inseln'.²¹

The independent arrival of eight ships in four years where none had been before seems inexplicable. What factor which had previously