

along to the Cape Verde Islands and thence to Rio de Janeiro, arriving in November 1838. Hobbled by the varying speeds of the different craft and the requirements of wind, the trip took twice as long as it would have if they had been able to move due south; ships of sail are at the mercy of the winds and those of summer along the Atlantic seaboard blow easterly. In Brazil the USS Peacock needed repairs thereby delaying their departure until January 1839. The group now proceeded to Buenos Aires and, not being a military expedition (the ships had been stripped of most heavy armaments before leaving the U.S.), was allowed through a French naval blockade of Argentina. They then sailed south to Tierra del Fuego and up the western coasts of Chile and Peru. It was on this leg that one of the tenders, the 110-ton schooner, USS Sea Gull, with a crew of fifteen men, was lost in a storm with all hands.

During the last month of 1839 Wilkes and his convoy left Sydney and headed south. (The scientifics were left in Australia to do their work and would assemble and re-board later in New Zealand.) The ships were far from the first to enter these latitudes. By 1823, thousands of sealers on hundreds of ships had already exterminated most of the millions of fur seals and sea lions gathered on the islands in the south Atlantic and the south-eastern Pacific. That same year Captain James Weddell pointed out that even a little sensible management of the harvest would have left sustainable populations of animals for future exploitation.

In January 1840 Wilkes' log reported "an Antarctic continent west of the Balleny Islands." Antarctic had been used loosely for a variety of places in the southern hemisphere as a place opposite the north, or Arctic. Wilkes' party were the first to semi-accurately survey hundreds of miles of the coastline. This southern continent, answering our riddle in the opening paragraph, is the size of the United States and Mexico, twice the size of Australia. It is also here that the controversies of the Wilkes Expedition began to take larger dimension. It was unfortunate. The expedition, at this point only half completed, brought home an unprecedented level of documentation on tribes and peoples, mammoth natural history collections, and world-class nautical charts and data. It also spawned a court-martial of the commanding officer and a forgotten legacy.

Read about the expedition's exciting tribal encounters and the conclusion of the voyage in the next issue of The ATADA News!

Wilbur Norman may be contacted at his blog at [www.wilburnorman.com](http://www.wilburnorman.com)

