

ASCENSION ISLAND

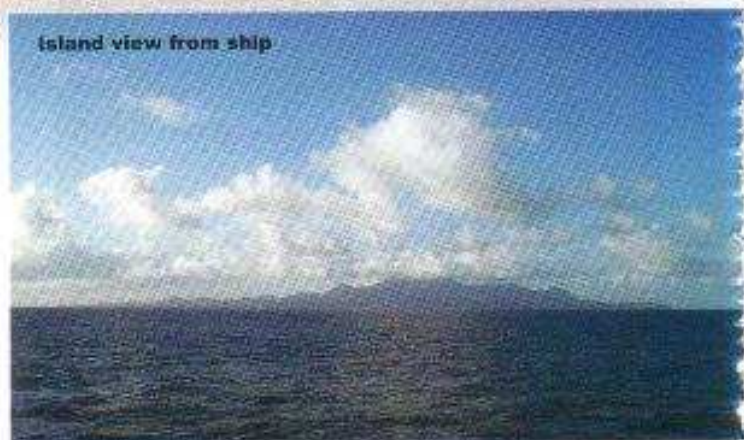
by Ted Cookson

Discovered in 1501 by the Portuguese navigator Juan da Nova Castella, today Ascension Island is a dependency of the British overseas territory of St. Helena, which lies about 1,280 km (800 miles) to the southeast. The 91 square kilometer (35 square mile) island of Ascension lies just west of the Mid-Atlantic Ridge, 1,600 km (1,000 miles) from West Africa. The top of a volcanic peak, most of the island consists of basalt lava flows and cinder cones, of which there are at least 44.

Governed by a resident British administrator, Ascension supports a population of some 1,100 people, most of whom are workers from St. Helena.

Rugged and dry, Ascension was of little interest to the East Indies fleets. The island only acquired significance when in 1815 Britain sent a garrison to Ascension to prevent the island from being used in any attempt to rescue Napoleon from his exile on St. Helena.

In succeeding years Ascension was used for resupplying ships used for



Island view from ship

suppressing slavery along the coast of West Africa.

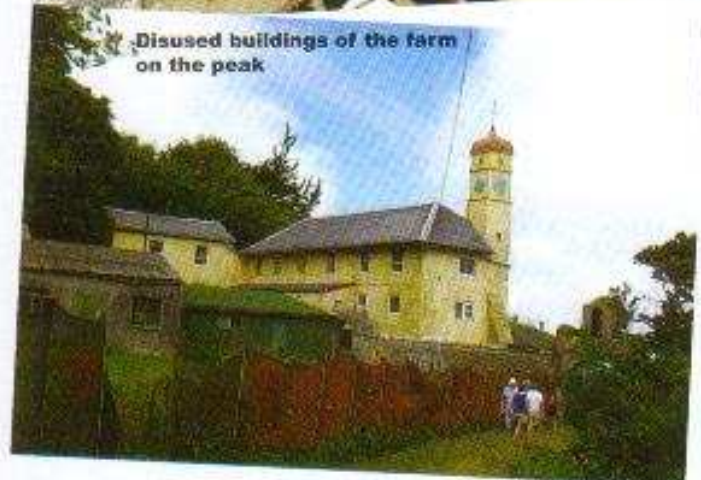
Then in 1898 a submarine telegraph cable was laid from England to South Africa via Ascension. During World War II the U. S. constructed Wideawake Airfield. Following the war, Ascension was used exclusively by Cable and Wireless. Later, beginning in 1957, Ascension again proved useful to the U. S., which employed the island in connection with the testing of missiles launched from Florida. In 1965 NASA began

building a tracking station on Ascension, and in 1966 the BBC built a shortwave relay facility for broadcasts aimed at both Africa and South America.

From 1982 Ascension became a staging post for the British Task Force in connection with the Falklands War, and RAF Vulcan bombers were deployed at Wideawake Airfield. Not only were the jets which fired the opening shots of the Falklands War launched from Ascension, but Wideawake became the world's busiest airfield for



Stepping onto pier from ship's tender



Disused buildings of the farm on the peak



Teeing off on One Boat Golf Club's lava course