

New London 'for Dessolation and else where' under Captain Erasmus D. Rogers, which add substantially to our knowledge of the early whaling and sea elephant industries on Kerguelen or Desolation Island, and their commencement on newly discovered Heard Island.

First, however, the early whalers and sealers known to have been active in Kerguelen waters are listed in some detail in order to show that by the time Rogers commenced his journal in 1847 the area had been well known and frequently visited for at least fifty years. From this arises the question as to how Heard, a high island often visible over long distances and only some 260 miles to the south, had remained so long undiscovered by the whalers, the sealers and the sea elephant hunters.

#### *Earliest Visitors*

Kerguelen is a high volcanic island, some 80 miles long by 20 miles wide, lying isolated in the southern Indian Ocean at latitude 49 degrees South, longitude 69 degrees East. The coast line is a series of drowned valleys and fiords, the interior has much bare rock and extensive glaciers. The climate is severe with coastal temperatures always close to freezing, though seldom below, even in winter. The biting winds never stop. The island was first discovered on 12 February 1772 by Kerguelen who with two ships revisited it from 14 December 1773 to 18 January 1774, made several landings and proclaimed its continuing French sovereignty.

In the last week of 1776, Captain Cook, unaware of Kerguelen's visits, renamed it Desolation, by which name it soon became known to American whalers and sealers. The first of these were two Nantucket whalers, *Asia* and *Alliance* which called after a voyage including a visit to the West Australian coast. Another American whaler, the *Nancy* of Bedford, Mass. cruised offshore in late 1798 or early 1799.<sup>1</sup>

The first known sealing ashore was that of Captain Robert Rhodes of the British whaler *Hillsborough*, who landed a sealing gang for eight months in 1799 while he charted the east coast. It is not known whether this gang obtained any sealskins but they took 450 tuns of excellent sea elephant oil.<sup>2</sup>

It is evident that there were many sealing visitors in the early nineteenth century. John Nunn, a British sealer who wrote an excellent narrative account of his shipwreck and his experiences ashore from August 1825 to March 1828, refers to a number of earlier British visitors, including the *Francis* (1818-20), the *Favorite* (1818-20), and the *Monmouth* (dates unknown) as well as his own ship *Royal Sovereign* (1825-26?); and his rescuers, *Sprightly* and *Lively*. Except for the latter which were Enderby ships, most of the former seem to have been owned by William Bennett, a London oil merchant just as important as the Enderby family. Judging by the number of cutters which Nunn