

## Tristan da Cunha

An atlas is a book of maps. Do you have an atlas? If you do get it out now. Find a map that shows the whole earth. Look for the line called the equator. It runs right across the middle of the map. Below that line and between South America and Africa you will see the South Atlantic Ocean. Look in the middle of that ocean. Can you see a little dot? It is almost level with the bottom of South Africa. It is about half way between Africa and South America. That dot is an island. The island is called Tristan da Cunha. If your atlas is not very detailed, even the dot will not be there. But the island is there. You must imagine the dot. It is one of the loneliest places on earth.



In the picture is Edinburgh. That is, it is Edinburgh, Tristan da Cunha. It is the only town on the island.

Jonathan Lambert, an American from Massachusetts, came to the island in 1810. He had two friends with him. He called Tristan da Cunha and two tiny nearby islands, “The Islands of Refreshment”. He wanted to find peace. There were troubles and wars in America. There were troubles and wars in Europe. He wrote the rules for his Islands of Refreshment. Everyone must be kind, said the rules. He wanted a place without any troubles. He made a flag for the island. Some others joined them. Then alas, Jonathan Lambert was drowned while out fishing.

A few years later the British navy arrived. Tristan da Cunha became a British military post. Why did the British come? Look at your atlas again. Can you find another lonely island in the South Atlantic? There is one. It is called St Helena. The British had an important prisoner. His name was Napoleon. He had made a war. It went all over Europe. No country escaped his armies. The British caught Napoleon. They put him on

St Helena. They needed to stop the war. They needed to make sure no one helped Napoleon to escape. That is why they had some soldiers on Tristan da Cunha. Can you work out how far St Helena is from Tristan da Cunha?<sup>1</sup>

In 1817 the soldiers went home again. But one stayed behind, Corporal William Glass. His wife and some others stayed with him. A few more people came from passing ships.

During the second world war there was a weather station on Tristan da Cunha. Then a fish canning factory opened. This helped the people become better off. In October 1961, there were about 280 people living on Tristan. Many of them were great, great, great, grandchildren of the first settlers.



Yet on **October 10<sup>th</sup>**, 1961, the island was deserted. Two ships took off all the fishermen and farmers. They took off their families. They put them on a tiny island nearby. Tristan da Cunha was not just an island. It was a volcano! Now the volcano was going to erupt. All the people were taken safely to Britain. There they waited. What was going to happen to their island home? Most of the people had never been away from Tristan da Cunha before. Now the earth on Tristan da Cunha was shaking. Hot lava was flowing out of the volcano. Lava is boiling rock!

There is a happy ending to this story. The volcano stopped erupting. The hot lava stopped flowing and cooled down. Had it flowed all over the little town of Edinburgh? Had it set hard over the houses, the church and the town hall? No! Everything was safe. The people could go home again.

The island has a strange-sounding name, doesn't it? It is called after the man who first saw it. He did not stop there. He did not even land. He came from Portugal. His name was Tristão da Cunha (c. 1460 – c. 1507).

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<sup>1</sup> Illustration: By Brian Gratwicke from DC, USA - Tristan da Cunha Afternoon light (Panorama), CC BY 2.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=47700295>

The Bible says “man is born to trouble.” (Job 5:7) Many people think they can escape from troubles by going to an empty island like Jonathan Lambert. But they find their troubles go with them. There are troubles on an island as well as in other places. David wrote, “This poor man cried, and the LORD heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles.” (Psalm 34:6). If we have troubles we should cry to the Lord, like David. He will hear us and help us.