

= New South Greenland =

New South Greenland , sometimes known as Morrell 's Land , was an appearance of land recorded by the American captain Benjamin Morrell of the schooner Wasp in March 1823 , during a sealing and exploration voyage in the Weddell Sea area of Antarctica . Morrell provided precise coordinates and a description of a coastline which he claimed to have sailed along for more than 300 miles (480 km) . Because the Weddell Sea area was so little visited , and hard to navigate due to ice conditions , the alleged land was never properly investigated before its existence was emphatically disproved during Antarctic expeditions in the early 20th century .

At the time of Morrell 's voyage , the geography of the then unnamed Weddell Sea and its surrounding coasts was almost entirely unknown , making the claimed sighting initially plausible . However , obvious errors in Morrell 's voyage account , and his general reputation as a fabulist , created scepticism about the existence of this new land . In June 1912 the German explorer Wilhelm Filchner searched for but found no traces of land , after his ship Deutschland became icebound in the Weddell Sea and drifted into the locality of Morrell 's observation . A sounding of the sea bottom revealed more than 5 @, @ 000 feet (1 @, @ 500 m) of water , indicating no land in near proximity . Three years later , trapped in the same waters with his ship Endurance , Ernest Shackleton was able by similar means to confirm the land 's non @-@ existence .

Various explanations for Morrell 's error have been suggested , including intentional deception . However , Morrell describes his find briefly and prosaically , evidently seeking no personal credit or glory from the discovery . In his narrative he assigns the honour to his fellow sealing captain , Robert Johnson , for finding and naming the land two years earlier . Morrell may have been honestly mistaken , through miscalculation of his ship 's position or by misremembering detail when writing the account after nine years . Alternatively , he may have made the common error of confusing distant icebergs with land , or been misled by the distorting effects of Antarctic mirage . In 1843 the distinguished British naval explorer James Clark Ross reported possible land in a position close to Morrell 's ; this land , too , would eventually be proven not to exist .

= = Voyage of the Wasp , 1822 ? 23 = =

= = = June 1822 to March 1823 = = =

In the early 19th century the geography of Antarctica was almost completely unknown , though occasional sightings of land had been recorded . In 1822 Benjamin Morrell , who had sailed to the South Sandwich Islands the previous year , was appointed commander of the schooner Wasp for a two @-@ year voyage of sealing , trading and exploration in the Antarctic seas and the southern Pacific Ocean . In addition to his sealing duties Morrell had , as he put it , " discretionary powers to prosecute new discoveries . " He proposed to use this discretion to investigate the Antarctic seas " and to ascertain the practicality ... of penetrating to the South Pole . " This would be the first of four extended voyages that would keep Morrell at sea for most of the following eight years , although he would not revisit the Antarctic after the initial voyage .

Wasp sailed south from New York on 22 June 1822 . She reached the Falkland Islands late in October , after which Morrell spent 16 days in fruitless searches for the nonexistent Aurora Islands , before heading for South Georgia , where the ship anchored on 20 November . In his account Morrell wrongly records the position of this anchorage , giving a location in open sea about 60 miles (97 km) south @-@ west of the island 's coastline . According to Morrell 's account , Wasp then headed eastwards to hunt for seals , and reached the remote Bouvet Island on 6 December . The polar historian H.R. Mill notes that Morrell 's description of this island 's physical features fails to mention its most singular characteristic ? the permanent ice sheet that covers its surface . Morrell then attempted to take the ship southwards but , reaching thick ice at around 60 ° S , turned northeast towards the Kerguelen Islands where he anchored on 31 December .

After several days of exploration and evidently profitable sealing , Wasp left the Kerguelens on 11

January 1823 , sailing south and east to record her furthest eastern position at $64^{\circ} 52'S$, $118^{\circ} 27'E$ on 1 February . From this point , according to his own account , Morrell decided to take advantage of strong easterly winds , and made passage westward back to the Greenwich meridian , 0° . His subsequent account of this voyage has been disputed , particularly his assertion that a distance of more than 3 @, @ 500 miles (5 @, @ 600 km) was covered in 23 days . The writer Rupert Gould points out that , according to Morrell 's record , this journey included a stretch of 900 miles (1 @, @ 400 km) in four days , a rate of progress that even Gould , generally sympathetic to Morrell , is inclined to doubt . Morrell quotes various positions during the voyage at southerly latitudes which later proved to be at least 100 miles inside the then undiscovered Antarctic continental mainland . One possible explanation for this discrepancy , offered by the writer W.J. Mills , is that since Morrell 's account was written nine years after the voyage he may not have had access to the ship 's log , and hence " felt constrained to invent details that appeared plausible " , in order to sustain his narrative .

On 28 February Wasp reached Candlemas Island in the South Sandwich Islands . After a few days spent in a search for fuel to feed the ship 's stoves , Morrell sailed southwards on 6 March , into the area later known as the Weddell Sea . Finding the sea remarkably free of ice , Morrell advanced to $70^{\circ} 14'S$ before turning north @-@ westward on 14 March . This retreat , Morrell says , was due to the ship 's lack of fuel ; otherwise , he claims , in these open waters he could have taken the ship to 85° , or perhaps to the Pole itself . These words are very similar to those used by the British explorer James Weddell to describe his own experiences in the same area , a month earlier , which has led historians to suspect that Morrell may have plagiarised Weddell 's experiences .

= = = Sighting of land = = =

From the earliest navigations of the Southern Ocean in the 16th century , lands which subsequently proved to be nonexistent had from time to time been reported . Robert Headland of the Scott Polar Research Institute has suggested various reasons for these false sightings , ranging from " too much rum " to deliberate hoaxes designed to lure rival ships away from good sealing grounds . Some sightings may have been of large ice masses that were carrying rocks and other glacial debris ? dirty ice can appear convincingly similar to land . It is also possible that some of these lands existed , but later became submerged after volcanic eruptions . Other sightings may have been of actual land , the position of which was wrongly fixed through observational errors arising from chronometer failure , adverse weather or simple incompetence .

At 2 pm on 15 March , as Wasp cruised north @-@ eastwards , Morrell records : " Land was seen from the masthead , bearing west , distance 3 leagues " (about nine miles , 14 km) . He did not at the time consider that he had made a new discovery ; he seems to have assumed that he was seeing the east coast of the Antarctic Peninsula , the western coast of which had been explored and given the name " New South Greenland " in 1821 , by Robert Johnson , a former captain of the Wasp . Johnson 's name for this land was never adopted ; in 1831 it was named Graham Land . At the time of Morrell 's voyage the geographical character and dimensions of the peninsula were unknown ; Morrell 's recorded position was in fact far to the east of the peninsula . Morrell 's account reads : " At half past 4 pm we were close on with the body of land to which Captain Johnson had given the name of New South Greenland " . The next few days were spent exploring this supposed coast , which was apparently rich in seal . Some 75 miles (120 km) further south , Morrell thought he could see snow @-@ covered mountains .

After three days , Morrell called a halt " because of shortage of water and season far advanced " . Wasp turned north , from a position Morrell calculated as $67^{\circ} 52'S$, $48^{\circ} 11'W$, and on 19 March , the ship passed what he assumed was the northern cape of the land , at $62^{\circ} 41'S$, $47^{\circ} 21'W$. " This land abounds with oceanic birds of every description " , wrote Morrell . He also records seeing 3 @, @ 000 sea elephants . At 10 o 'clock Wasp " bade farewell to the cheerless shores of New South Greenland " , and sailed for Tierra del Fuego , then through the Magellan Strait into the Pacific Ocean , reaching Valparaiso , Chile , on 26 July 1823 .

= = Searches for Morrell 's land = =

In 1838 , the French explorer Jules Dumont d 'Urville sailed over the position of Morrell 's " north cape " , but saw no indication of land . This , together with the obvious errors in Morrell 's voyage account , and his general reputation as a braggart , led most later geographers to doubt his story . This scepticism remained even after Sir James Clark Ross reported an appearance of land in 1843 , not far from Morrell 's alleged observation ; Ross 's sighting was occasionally proffered as support for Morrell 's claim . After Ross there was no further exploration of the Weddell Sea until 1903 , when William Speirs Bruce took Scotia to 74 ° 1'S , but in a sector of the sea which did not bring him close to Morrell 's or Ross 's supposed sightings . Bruce was , however , did not dismiss Morrell 's claims , writing that they should not be rejected until absolutely disproved .

The first determined search for New South Greenland came during the Second German Antarctic Expedition , 1911 ? 13 , under Wilhelm Filchner . The expedition 's ship , Deutschland , became trapped in heavy sea ice while attempting to establish a shore base at Vahsel Bay . Her subsequent north @-@ westerly drift had , by mid @-@ June 1912 , brought her to a position just 37 miles (60 km) east of Morrell 's recorded sighting . Filchner left the ship on 23 June and , with two companions and sufficient provisions for three weeks , sledged westward across the sea ice in search of Morrell 's land . Daylight was limited to two or three hours a day , and temperatures fell to ? 31 ° F (? 35 ° C) , making travel difficult . They found no signs of land ; a lead weight dropped through the ice reached a depth of 5 @,@ 248 feet (1 @,@ 600 m) before the line snapped . The depth confirmed that there was no land in the vicinity , and Filchner concluded that Morrell had probably seen a mirage .

On 17 August 1915 Sir Ernest Shackleton 's ship Endurance , trapped in the ice like Deutschland three years earlier , drifted to a point 10 miles west of Morrell 's sighting . Here , a depth sounding recorded 1 @,@ 676 fathoms (10 @,@ 060 feet , 3 @,@ 065 m) , leading Shackleton to write : " I decided that Morrell Land must be added to the long list of Antarctic islands and continental coasts that have resolved themselves into icebergs " . On 25 August a further sounding of 1 @,@ 900 fathoms (11 @,@ 400 feet , 3 @,@ 500 m) gave Shackleton additional evidence of the non @-@ existence of New South Greenland .

Although Filchner 's and Shackleton 's investigations and observations were accepted as conclusive proof that New South Greenland was a myth , there remained the question of Sir James Ross 's reported appearance of land in a position around 65 ° S , 47 ° W. Ross 's reputation was sufficient for this possibility to be taken seriously , and for his alleged sighting to be recorded on maps and Admiralty charts . In 1922 Frank Wild , leading the Shackleton @-@ Rowett Expedition aboard Quest after Shackleton 's death early in the expedition , investigated the location of Ross 's sighting . Nothing was seen ; prevented by ice conditions from reaching the exact spot , Wild took a sounding at 64 ° 11'S , 46 ° 4'W , which revealed 2 @,@ 331 fathoms (13 @,@ 986 ft ; 4 @,@ 263 m) of water . This showed that no land was near .

= = Opinions and theories = =

Hugh Robert Mill , writing in 1905 before the non @-@ existence of New South Greenland had been finally established , concluded that because of Morrell 's blunders , and his habit of incorporating the experiences of others into his story , all his claims should be treated as unproven . Nevertheless , he conceded that " a man may be ignorant , boastful and obscure , and yet have done a solid piece of work " . The Canadian geographer Paul Simpson @-@ Housley , although sceptical about much of Morrell 's account , suggests that the speeds claimed for the derided western journey , though fast , were not impossible , and Morrell 's farthest south in the Weddell Sea , queried by Mill , is entirely plausible , given that James Weddell had sailed four degrees further south just a month earlier .

The writer Rupert Gould , in a lengthy essay on New South Greenland published in 1929 , queries the assumption that the sighting was simply invented by Morrell , partly on the grounds that very little weight is given to the discovery in Morrell 's 500 @-@ page account . Gould writes : " If Morrell

wished to gain an undeserved reputation as an Antarctic explorer , one would think he could have gone a better way about it than to bury his pièces justificatives , after he had forged them , in an undistinguished corner of so bulky a book . " Nor would he have credited it to Captain Johnson two years earlier , rather than to himself .

Gould also discusses the possibility that what Morrell sighted was the eastern coast of Graham Land , the so @-@ called " Foyn Coast " , despite its being 14 ° further west from position of the New South Greenland sighting . Gould asserts that the features of the peninsula 's eastern coast corresponds closely with Morrell 's description of Nw South Greenland . This theory supposes that Morrell miscalculated the ship 's position , perhaps because he lacked the chronometer necessary for proper navigational observation . In his account Morrell writes that he was " destitute of the various nautical and mathematical instruments " , although other parts of his narrative seem to indicate that the occasional dead reckoning calculation was the exception to the norm . A longitudinal error of 14 ° is very large , and the additional distance of about 350 miles (560 km) to the Foyn coast seems too great to have been covered within the ten @-@ day voyage from the South Sandwich Islands , where the ship 's position is recorded accurately . Even so , Gould suggests that a " balance of evidence " shows that what Morrell saw was the Foyn coast .

Filchner 's view that the supposed sighting of New South Greenland could be explained by a mirage is echoed by Simpson @-@ Housley . He suggests that Morrell and his crew saw a superior mirage . One form of superior mirage , sometimes described as a Fata Morgana , distorts distant flat coastlines or ice edges both vertically and horizontally , so they can appear to have tall cliffs and other features such as high mountain peaks and valleys . In his expedition account South , Shackleton gives a description of a Fata Morgana observed on 20 August 1915 , coincidentally as his ship Endurance drifted close to the recorded position of New South Greenland : " The distant pack is thrown up into towering barrier @-@ like cliffs , which are reflected in blue lakes and lanes of water at their base . Great white and golden cities of Oriental appearance at close intervals along these cliff @-@ tops indicate distant bergs ... The lines rise and fall , tremble , dissipate , and reappear in an endless transformation scene " .

= = Afterwards = =

Morrell 's four voyages finally ended on 21 August 1831 , with his return to New York . He then wrote his Narrative of Four Voyages , which was published the following year . He attempted to resume his seafaring career , seeking employment with the London @-@ based shipping firm of Enderby Brothers , but his reputation had preceded him and he was rejected . Charles Enderby stated publicly that " he had heard so much of him that he did not think fit to enter into any engagement with him . " Morrell also sought to join Dumont D 'Urville 's expedition to the Weddell Sea in 1837 , but his services were again declined . He reportedly died in 1839 , and is commemorated by Morrell Island , 59 ° 27'S , 27 ° 19'W , an alternative name for Thule Island in the Southern Thule sub @-@ group of the South Sandwich Islands . Robert Johnson , who coined the name New South Greenland , disappeared with his ship in 1826 , while investigating the Antarctic waters in the vicinity of what would later be known as the Ross Sea .