

1768

*To William Philip Perrin F.R.S.*[New Burlington Street]  
16 August 1768

My Dear Perrin,

I am now on the Brink of Sailing on the Expedition you hinted at in your Last.<sup>1</sup> I shall therefore send as ample an account of the Expedition as I dare trust to paper, hoping it will be some satisfaction to you to guess at the Station of a freind from whom, or of whom, you will not hear any more for three years at least.

In march Last the Goverment, at the Instance of the Royal society, resolved to send out a ship to any part of the world which should be found most Convenient for an observation on the Transit of Venus,<sup>2</sup> which the Latter was to Supply with Proper instruments & observers. The Place was soon fix'd upon somewhere in the South Sea, over a Large part of which the Limits Convenient for Such an observation are Extended.<sup>3</sup>

Upon Considering the plan of this Scheme, it immediately occurr'd to me that it would be a most desirable one for me to Engage in. The Whole tract of the South Seas, & I may say, all South America is Intirely unknown to a Naturalist. The South Sea at least has never been visited by any man of Science in any Branch of Literature.<sup>4</sup>

Upon looking at the Plan of the Voyage, it might Easily be seen that this would not be the Extent of it. A Ship in the midst of the South Seas would never attempt to return against the S[outh] E[ast] Trade. She must therefore necessarily go forwards & visit the Ladrões,<sup>5</sup> some parts of the East Indies, & the Cape of Good Hope, all places much worth the attention of a Naturalist. This [is] the Least of the plan. She may do much more, as if you look upon a Chart you may see.<sup>6</sup>

I was much Encouraged in this Scheme by our Freind Solander,<sup>7</sup> who so heartily agreed in the Excellence of it that he promis'd to make application to the trustees of the Museum,<sup>8</sup> & if Possible get Leave to accompany me, which [he] has done, & got the nesscessary leave of absence signd, & is now going with me. I take also, besides ourselves, two men to draw, & four more to Collect in the different branches of Nat[ural] Hist[ory], & such a Collection of Bottles, Boxes, Baskets, bags, nets &c. &c. &c. as almost frighten me who have prepar'd them.

England you say is behind hand with the rest of Europe in Undertakings of this Kind. You will not wonder at it when I tell you that on application to the first Lord of the Admiralty, when I had stated the Case, & told him what I meant to do, his answer was, 'You sir are very welcome to go, & it shall be my care that you have Every Convenience which I Can Procure for you, but we Cannot find room for people skilld in Botany & drawers of Plants.' This at first hurt me much, & I had almost given over my Plan, but upon Application to the Secretary of the Admiralty, he undertook to do it all without any more trouble to me. So I have not been near Sr E: H:<sup>9</sup> since, but made Every application to the Secretary,<sup>10</sup> who has done Everything we wanted with as much alacrity & spirit as could be wishd.

Adieu. I thought to have made this much Longer, but am sent for by Express to Join the Ship[. I] will write again From Madera. Till then, beleive me,

Sincerely Yours,

J Banks.

[D.R.O. FitzHerbert MS. D239M/F15883.]

<sup>1</sup>The last letter Perrin sent: Perrin to Banks, 15/4/1768, N.L.A. MS. 9/129.

<sup>2</sup>The Transit of Venus occurs when Venus passes in a direct line between the Sun and the Earth. Scientists hoped that a successful observation would allow an exact calculation of the distance between the Sun and Earth. They argued that navigation would be improved because longitude could then be accurately determined using the Moon's position. The transit could be observed from certain sites in June 1769.

<sup>3</sup>Following discussions in 1766, a committee of Royal Society Fellows was established in 1767 to consider sending astronomers to observe the Transit of Venus. They proposed an expedition into the Pacific for late 1768 or early 1769, and in the New Year of 1768 a memorial to George III (1738-1820) was drawn up, which received royal approval. The King gave £4000 as personal grant, and ordered that the Navy Board should provide a suitable vessel.

<sup>4</sup>This is not strictly true. For instance, voyages to the South Seas had been, or were being made. Two were made in HMS *Dolphin*, 1764-1766 and 1766-1768, under John Byron (1723-1786) and then Samuel Wallis (1728-1795) respectively. Wallis was closely followed by Louis-Antoine de Bougainville FRS (1729-1811) on the *Boudeuse*, accompanied by the store-ship *Étoile* for part of the journey. Philibert Commerson (1727-1773), a naturalist, and Pierre Antoine Véron, an astronomer, went with Bougainville.

<sup>5</sup>Ladrones, a Pacific island chain, also called the Marianne or Mariana Islands. They were discovered in 1521 by Ferdinand Magellan (c.1480-1521).

<sup>6</sup>At 3 o'clock in the afternoon on 25 August 1768 HMS *Endeavour* left Plymouth Sound, and a summary of its route follows. HMS *Endeavour* visited Madeira before sailing for the coast of South America, where it stopped at Rio de Janeiro. It subsequently moved on to stormy Tierra del Fuego, and passed Cape Horn late in January 1769. In the Pacific the *Endeavour* sailed to the Society Islands, and the Transit of Venus was observed as part of a three month stay at Tahiti (King George III's Island, Otaheiti). Having

circumnavigated the islands of New Zealand, a course was set towards Australia, and along its East Coast. This epic portion of the voyage was completed by August 1770. Afterwards, HMS *Endeavour* passed through the Endeavour Strait, Torres Strait, and, following a brief stay at Irian Jaya, steered for Java Head, the Sunda Strait, and then tragedy in Batavia. The way home led to Cape Town on 14 March 1771, and from St. Helena to Deal on 12 July.

<sup>7</sup>Banks's party consisted of: Dr. Daniel Carl Solander FRS (1733–1782) as Banks's companion botanist; Sydney Parkinson (c.1745–1771) and Alexander Buchan (d.1769) as artists; Herman Dietrich Spöring (1733–1771) as secretary and assistant draftsman; Peter Briscoe (1747–1810), James Roberts (1752–1826), Thomas Richmond (d.1769) and George Dorrton (d.1769) as servants and field workers.

<sup>8</sup>The British Museum.

<sup>9</sup>Sir Edward Hawke (1705–1781): First Lord at the Admiralty, 1766–1771.

<sup>10</sup>Sir Philip Stephens FRS (1725–1809), 1st Baronet: First Secretary at the Admiralty, 1763–1795.