

Fuega Basket, Captain Fitzroy, Charles Darwin & The Beagle



Above - HMS Beagle being hailed by Fuegians, painted by Captain Fitzroy's draughtsman, Conrad Martens

In 1829, *Captain Fitzroy*, in command of *The Beagle* was on a voyage of exploration of *Tierra Del Fuego* in *Patagonia*. The name of this area is in Spanish and translates as 'Islands of Fire' and was named from the fires that the island inhabitants had lit on the beaches when European explorers first saw it. This area consists of a number of islands at the southern tip of *South America* and it is one of the wildest and most desolate places on earth.

Captain Fitzroy anchored his ship off the coast and set about exploring the many waterways with a whaleboat. However, this became beached after a huge storm. Some of the native people stole the whaleboat and would not return it. In retaliation *Captain Fitzroy* took a number of Fuegians as hostages. A number of these managed to escape leaving *Captain Fitzroy* with four hostages that consisted of two children and two adult males .

Captain Fitzroy renamed them as follows:

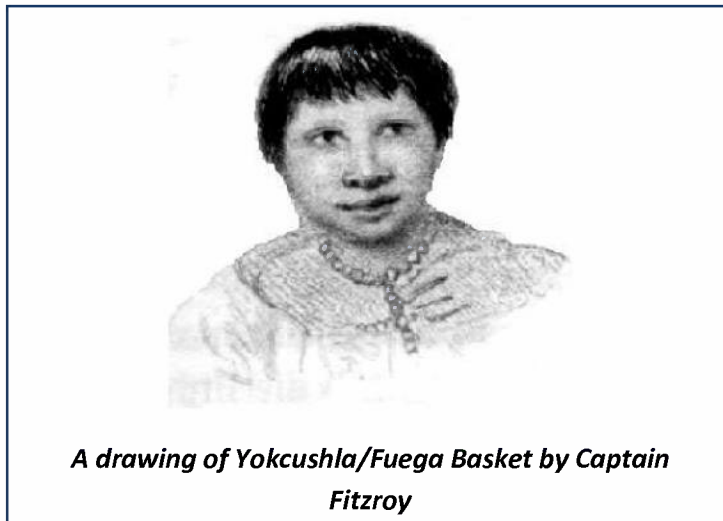
Fuega Basket (A Girl aged 9 years, original name **Yokcushla**, named after Basket Island)

Jemmy Button (A boy aged 14 years, original name **Orundellico**, who had been exchanged for a pearl button)

Boat Memory (A male aged 20 years, original name unknown) and

York Minster (A male aged 26 years, original name **El'leparu**, who was named after a hill that looked like York Minster)

He decided to take them to England in order for them to be educated and converted to Christianity. The intent was that, after a few years they would be returned to *Patagonia* to 'civilise' the native people and convert them to Christianity.



A drawing of Yokcushla/Fuega Basket by Captain Fitzroy

Walthamstow



Picture – Left was parochial St Mary's National School in Vestry Road (Opposite the museum) that was re-built in 1866 to replace the original 1819 school. The picture - Right shows the present day commemorative plaque on the present day Spiritualist church that is on the site.

The *Beagle* landed in Plymouth in 1830. Unfortunately, not long after their arrival, **Boat Memory** died of the smallpox and the other three were sent to live in *Walthamstow*. Here, the two children were enrolled in a school so that they could learn English and get a rudimentary education. This school was the parochial St Mary's National School and was one of the oldest primary schools in England. It was built in 1819 and by 1830 it had over 460 pupils. We can only imagine the effect that the introduction of these three Patagonians would have had on the people of *Walthamstow*.

High Society

The Patagonians were dressed in western clothes and shown off to London's society including *King William IV* and *Queen Adelaide*. The Queen gave **Yokushla/Fuegia Basket** a bonnet and money to buy herself some fashionable clothes. All appeared to be going well in *Walthamstow* until there was some sort of sexual incident between **Yokushla/Fuegia Basket** and **El'leparu/York Minster**. As a result of this, fearing a scandal, *Captain Fitzroy* decided that the Patagonians should be returned as soon as possible.



Return To Tierra Del Fuego

In 1831, the *HMS Beagle*, under the command of *Captain Fitzroy*, with the three Patagonians on board, set sail on its now famous research journey around the world. Also aboard *The Beagle*, was *Charles Darwin*, a trainee Pastor, a naturalist and friend of the ship's captain. It was largely as a result of his research and studies on this voyage that *Charles Darwin* later formulated his theory of evolution that changed our view of the world..

The Beagle arrived at *Tierra Del Fuego* in January 1833 and landed the three Patagonians. With the help of *The Beagles's* crew, buildings were erected and there was an attempt to set up a garden. *The Beagle* then left on a short local exploration cruise and returned three days later. They found that while they had been away some other Patagonians had plundered the new arrivals' possessions. *Fuegia Basket* and *York Minster* were now 'married' and all three seemed confident that they could manage and the *Beagle* sailed away.

Aftermath

There isn't any evidence to suggest that the three returning Patagonians attempted to convert any of the local people to Christianity. In fact, what we do know of the later life of the three returnees, tells us that, with it was with some difficulty that they re-assimilated back with the local tribe's people.

Over the next 30 years, there were a number of attempts by Christian missionaries to try to convert the Patagonian people to Christianity and in 1854 missionaries established a base called *Cranmer* in the *Falkland Islands*. The intent was that they would encourage Patagonian people to visit and stay at *Cranmer* to be converted to Christianity and to be educated. By chance, in 1855, they made contact with *Orundellico/Jeremy Button* who was persuaded to stay at *Cranmer* with one of his wives and three children. In 1867 a missionary settlement was built on *Tierra Del Fuego* and in 1869, *Waite Stirling* was made Bishop of the *Falkland Islands*. This finally legitimised the South American Missionary Society as part of the Church of England.

Bill Bayliss
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If you want to learn more about the Tierra Del Fuegian people in this story, the following websites may be of interest:

<http://charles-darwin.narod.ru/fuegiaInglese.pdf>
<http://creation.com/darwin-and-the-fuegians>

For information about the St Mary National School: <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=42784>