



RELIVING HISTORY: Sarah Darwin aboard the Stad Amsterdam which retraced her great-great-grandfather Charles Darwin's voyage around the world 178 years ago. The journey took eight months and the final stop was Cape Town.

Picture: SAM CLARK

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A Darwin sails back into Cape Town after 178 years

MARY-ANNE GONTSANA

A DESCENDANT has undertaken the same around-the-world journey as Charles Darwin 178 years ago, to mark his 200th birthday.

Sarah Darwin, 46, is part of a crew of the 76-metre Stad Amsterdam, a Dutch vessel fashioned on a 19th century clipper, on an eight-month journey retracing the route of her great-great-grandfather's HMS Beagle and collecting scientific information.

Cape Town was the last stop on the journey, which started in Britain on September 1 last year.

"I was so excited and

amazed when Hans Fels, who came up with the idea, asked if I wanted to join in the expedition. I was like, well, of course! It was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity and reliving what my great-great-grandfather its own. The countries we visited were wonderful," said Darwin.

Married with two children, Darwin is a biologist and botanist who studies invasive plants.

"My great-great-grandfather was an influence but I have personally always been interested in plants. I had two avocado plants when I was 10 and it fascinated me how two things that are the same, could grow so differently," she said.

Darwin said she really got into biology and botany when she was in her 20s and before that had worked in the theatre where she was a botanical illustrator.

She did plant illustrations for field guides.

Even though Darwin did not know her grandfather personally, she said she had learned a great deal about him and the work he did. She admitted that she sometimes came across people who knew more about him than she did.

The crew from the Netherlands and Denmark consisted of scientists, philosophers, historians, artists and biographers who are helping to shoot

a 35-episode documentary on the voyage of the HMS Beagle.

Darwin is handling the historical part of the documentary.

The clipper, which normally operates as a cruise ship, was changed to accommodate the television studio, editing suites, satellite domes and webcams.

The vessel has sailed through Holland, Spain, Brazil, Australia and Mauritius, among others.

As a relative of the naturalist, Darwin said the surname did count in her favour at times and it had opened a lot of "positive doors" for her.

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