

**From:** Jean-Philippe Beaulieu  
**Sent:** Tue, 29 Mar 2022 23:09:09 +1100  
**To:** hvc@huonvalley.tas.gov.au  
**Subject:** Leprena Trusts proposed Blackswan lagoon scenic protection area. Letter of support  
**Attachments:** letter-huon-council.pdf

Dear huonville Council,  
please find attached a letter to support the Leprena trust about the protection of the Blackswaan lagoon area.  
Best regards,  
Prof. Jean-Philippe Beaulieu

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Hobart, March 29, 2022

**Leprena Trusts proposed Blackswan lagoon scenic protection area.**

Dear Huon Valley Council,

I recently learned about the initiative by the Leprena Trusts to ask the Huon Valley Council for the creation of a 'Blackswan Lagoon Scenic Protection Area' for inclusion in the Huon Valley Councils Local Planning Schedule. I write this letter in support of their application.

Recherche Bay and the Black Swan Lagoon area are a site of unique importance for the history of early contacts between French of the d'Entrecasteaux expedition and aborigines people from Tasmania in 1793. These contacts took place in Recherche Bay peninsula, and mostly in the Blackswan lagoon area and on the beach in February 1793. There was curiosity from both sides, exchanges, and large groups of Frenchmen and first people, women, children, men, spent a friendly moment together. It is also became one of the rare sources about the life and languages of the first people. When leaving them on February 13, 1792, Admiral d'Entrecasteaux commented : *"The Aboriginal seems to offer the most perfect image of pristine society... Their open and smiling expression reveals a happiness that has never been troubled by intrusive thoughts and unattainable desires."*

The Blackswan lagoon and the beach were the location of a very precious moment in a mostly dark history of contacts between the first people and the new comers in Australia. The importance of Recherche Bay is now well established, but it is time to underline that the Blackswan lagoon and the beach are equally important and should be preserved for the generation to come. First, because of the symbol for humanity, but also because it is a mostly untouched area of first contact, that should be one day scientifically studied by archeologists.

I am a French researcher linked both with the Institut d'Astrophysique de Paris and the University of Tasmania. In 2003, shortly after the discovery of the potential remains of the garden planted during the d'Entrecasteaux expedition at Recherche Bay, my friend and colleague, Dr Françoise Jouffroy, *Directeur de Recherche* at the Museum of Natural History in Paris found the diary of the Gardener Felix Lahaie. She also found Eucalyptus globulus specimen, orchids and different plants collected in Tasmania during the expeditiion in the several million pages of the Herbarium kept in the museum. We decided to work together, focusing on the garden, and the contact between the aborigines and the French explorers using all existing sources, including manuscripts and letters. I went to the

Recherche Bay site, and we published several articles. We were sharing our findings with the campaign to preserve Recherche Bay, participating from the scientific side, until it was protected in 2006.

Finally, in 2016 we published our book "Secret Garden at Recherche Bay – 1792". As an appendix to the letter, I attach the pages from the book describing the exchanges between the first people and the French explorers on 1793. It took place mostly in the area proposed for protection, Blackswan lagoon and the beach.

I am of course available if you want further information about the area and its history.

With my best wishes,

Professor Jean-Philippe Beaulieu  
Directeur de Recherche CNRS  
Institut d'Astrophysique de Paris  
Warren Chair Professor of Astrophysics at the University of Tasmania



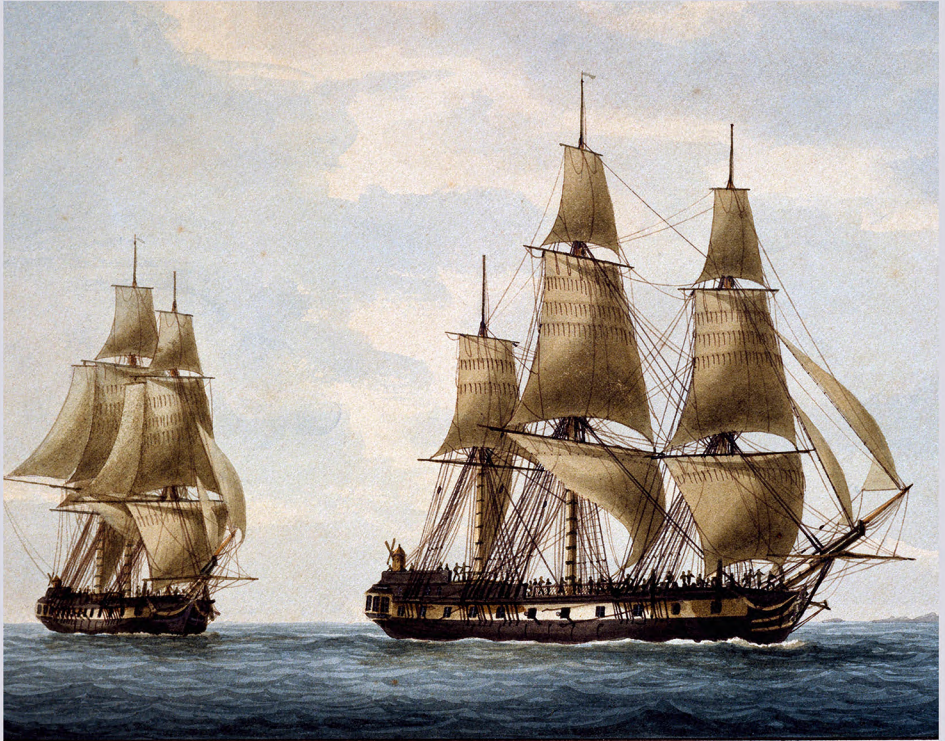
Some of our publications :

Jouffroy-Gauja, F. K., Beaulieu, J.P., Donatowicz, J., 2016, Secret Garden at Recherche Bay – 1792. Book.

Beaulieu, J.P., Jouffroy-Gauja, F. K., Donatowicz, J. 2006, « Un potager au bout du monde », Pour la Science, numéro de Janvier 2006.

Jouffroy-Gauja, F. K., Un lopin d'oseilles provençales face au pôle sud au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle, UNIA, 1, 87-102, 2003.

F.K. JOUFFROY-GAUJA   J. P. BEAULIEU   J.C. DONATOWICZ



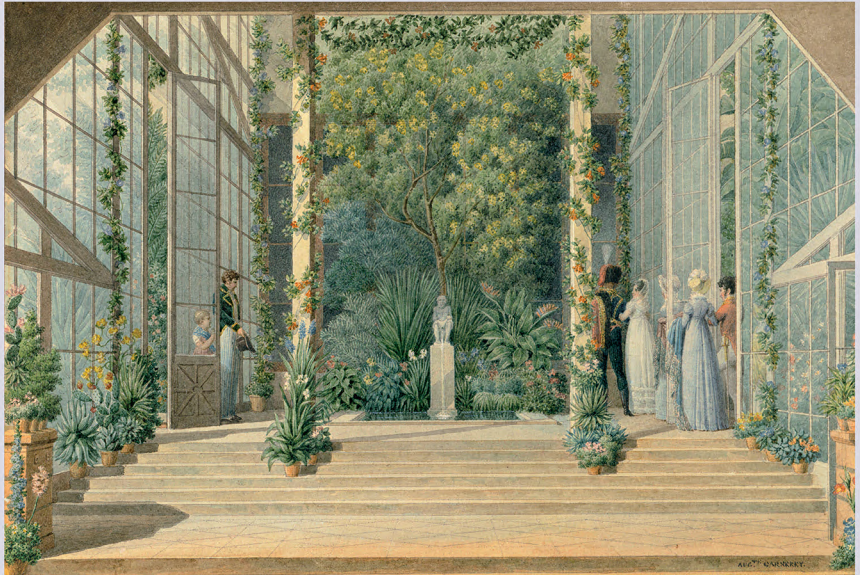
## Secret Garden at Recherche Bay - 1792





It is April 23 1792. Felix Lahaye, a young Gardener-traveller in the court of the King of France, unexpectedly lands at Recherche Bay in Tasmania, together with the two vessels *La Recherche* and *L'Espérance* of the French expedition led by the Rear-Admiral d'Entrecasteaux. That same day, Lahaye carries out the two main tasks of the assignment for which he has been commissioned: collecting seeds and plants from the area while exploring the local flora with the botanist Labillardière, as well as sowing and pricking out the seeds and plants he has brought from Europe. It was during that time that he laid out a small vegetable garden measuring 7 by 9 metres, subdivided into four beds. Some seeds thrived there for a few months only, as Lahaye could see when the expedition called in again at Recherche Bay in 1793. In 2003, a stone structure matching the description and approximate location of the garden was discovered in the eucalyptus forest and bushes of the northeast peninsula of Recherche Bay. The area became the focal point of a new confrontation between landowners, logging companies, politicians and the people from Tasmania before being finally protected for the generations to come.

This book describes in detail the story of Felix Lahaye and the French Garden in Tasmania, as discovered through reading the records produced by the main participants, marine officers, scientists, and above all as meticulously documented in the handwritten travel diaries by the Gardener himself.



## Recherche Bay again: revisiting the French Garden in 1793.

On January 21, 1793, the frigates *La Recherche* followed by *L'Espérance* dropped anchor for the second time in Recherche Bay, thus performing a complete counter-clockwise circumnavigation of New Holland. The new anchorage was located in the southern arm of the bay, some cables' length away from the previous one, Port du Nord. It was named by the members of the expedition Port du Sud, or Bay des Roches<sup>1</sup>. On this same memorable day, the man who had decreed the expedition, King Louis XVI of France, was guillotined. It is said that, on his way to the guillotine, some of the last words of King Louis XVI, was the question: “*Did we receive any news about Monsieur de La Pérouse?*”



Fig 29: A drawing of the Port du Sud of Recherche Bay made in situ by Piron in 1793. The shores are covered with forests. In the distance are the three tents of the Observatory, close to the exit of the bay. One of the frigates, possibly *L'Espérance* is anchored there. (Musée du quai Branly/Scala, Florence, © 2015)

<sup>1</sup> Nowadays known as Rocky Bay

While the carpenters and blacksmith set about repairing the vessels, Labillardière, with the indefatigable Lahaye on his heels, began immediately to carry out extended excursions into the mountainous part of the country. The Gardener commented on the botanical advantages of the new anchorage in his journal:

*“We arrived at Van Diemen’s Cape at the same place where we anchored last year and we set course towards another site in order to discover more new things. We found a great diversity that we had not seen previously, because the season was different and we were exploring another area. This provided us with many plants and seeds.” (Fig. 30)*

From January 21 till February 13, 1793, two significant happenings highlighted the Gardener’s second sojourn at Recherche Bay; revisiting the French Garden and coming into contact with the local Aboriginal people. The new anchorage was situated within a small distance of the garden planted by Lahaye nine months ago. D’Entrecasteaux, curious to know about the outcome of the effort at gardening, the endeavour he really wished to succeed, wrote:

*“While the men were busy repairing the frigates and replenishing our fresh food and water supply, I sent (a boat) to visit the Port du Nord where we had anchored in 1792. The watering place where we had replenished with fresh water was completely dried out. The garden had not succeeded; nothing, or almost nothing, had grown. Either the season had been unfavourable, or the sown seeds had been damaged.”*

For an eighteenth century naturalist it was undeniably a unique experience to get the opportunity of checking nine months later - that is to say in another season - the growth of plants he had sown in a newfound land for the benefit of future visiting navigators. The Admiral ordered Lahaye to go and examine the garden: *“I gave M. Lahaye, the botanist gardener, orders to go to the plot to try to understand the cause (of this failure)”*. It is to be noted in passing that the Admiral did not content himself with the sole finding of the failure, but instead exhibited a scientific approach to the case when questioning the Gardener about the whys and wherefores. For his part, Lahaye complied eagerly with the order:

*“I found the plants that I sowed last year, some of them emerging from the soil whereas others had not come up. The first ones exhibited only the first two seminal leaves, without further development. I attributed this to the soil, which was very dry and hard, whereas it was very humid at the time of the sowing.” (Fig. 30)*



Cape Van Diemen 1793

Cet endroit qui se monte à 18. espede . . . .  
 nous sommes arrivés le 21. janvier 1793 . . . .  
 au Cap Van Diemen au même endroit que  
 nous avions mouillé la nuit précédente et  
 nous avons dirigé nos courses d'une autre  
 côté afin d'y trouver plus de choses nouvelles nous  
 en avons trouvé un grand nombre que nous  
 n'avions pas encore vues. Comme les d'arbres  
 n'étaient pas les mêmes et que nous faisons nos  
 courses dans une autre partie. Ce qui nous a  
 procuré beau coup de plantes et de graines . . . .  
 J'ai trouvé les plantes que j'avais vues la nuit  
 dernière une partie d'entre d'autres qui  
 n'avaient levé la première et la seconde  
 feuille seminal. Sans aller plus loin j'ai attribué  
 cela à la terre qui était très sèche et très dure  
 et qui était très humide lorsque j'étais la dernière

Fig 30: Enlarged excerpt from Lahaye's *Journal du Tour du Monde* mentioning his visit to the garden planted the previous year. (MNHN)

The Gardener's observations also provide us with very reliable information about the climate in the south of Van Diemen's Land at the end of the eighteenth century. The journal written by Alexandre d'Hesmivy d'Auribeau<sup>1</sup>, first lieutenant on *La Recherche*, confirms Lahaye's statement and brings additional details about the unsuccessful outcome of the gardening effort:

"The botanist gardener, who was very eager to go and check the condition of the garden that he established in the little harbour last year, was not very satisfied with the little progress of the plants he had sowed. The vast majority had not come up, and the others remained with only the first two seminal leaves. He attributed this failure to the extreme humidity of the winter and to the extreme dryness during the summer, because the soil at this moment was completely dry like sand; all the small brooks where we found water in abundance last year were completely dried up."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> H. Richard (1986), op. cit.

<sup>2</sup> H. Richard (1986), op. cit.

Apart from revisiting and inspecting the vegetable plot, Lahaye shared with Labillardière the good luck of being among the first members of the expedition to get in touch with the Aborigines and establish friendly relationships with them. Numerous clues to the presence of inhabitants (cabins made of tree barks, fragments of baskets, etc.) could be seen everywhere along the shore and in the forest, but during the first landing, as well as in the first fortnight of their second anchorage in Recherche Bay, all the attempts to meet them had failed. The only exception had been the brief sight of four men caught from afar on the eastern shore of d'Entrecasteaux Channel, when the expedition was leaving Van Diemen's Land in 1792. The encounter of the islanders by the botanist and the Gardener was the focal point of the second sojourn at Recherche Bay. According to their accounts, Admiral d'Entrecasteaux wrote a detailed report of the events:

*“On February 7, the second journey of Labillardière and Lahaye toward the Port du Nord was more fortunate than all the previous ones; they met natives and the adventure with them established so much confidence that several other meetings ensued. All of these were also very friendly and suitable for providing the most flattering idea of the inhabitants of this land”.*

These first social exchanges with the Aborigines took place on the second day of their expedition, on February 8, near their overnight camp. While their two seamen companions were still asleep, the botanist and the Gardener departed very early in the morning with the aim of surveying the plants in the vicinity of a neighbouring lake<sup>1</sup> when they saw a group of about forty natives. Having rallied their two companions and carefully arming themselves with guns, the Frenchmen confronted the islanders. But, as it turned out, firearms were completely unnecessary, and there were friendly exchanges of gifts instead. Most of the men and women were, despite the temperature, entirely naked and although they did not seem to feel the need to wear garments, they were offered extra clothes brought by the Frenchmen:

*“We gave them a few small items”* wrote the Gardener, *“among which was a waistcoat that I offered to a young girl, who after placing it on her back, looked at herself, just as we do when our tailors have us try on an outfit.”*

Beyond doubt, the Gardener was a very gentlemanly young man! When they finally returned to their ship's boat, the botanical party was accompanied by a dozen male islanders. Their way back passed near Lahaye's garden, presenting an excellent opportunity to visit it once again. “M.

<sup>1</sup> “Southport Lagoon”: according to F. Horner, 1995





Fig 31: A friendly meeting between the crews of the frigates and the Aborigines near Black Swain lagoon. Mulvaney provides the following interpretation to the scene: the man with the beaver hat is likely to be Labillardière. A strong Aborigine is putting charcoal on the face of Piron dressed with a pantaloon and a cap. Piron had expressed the wish to be blackened. A sailor from the ship is holding a child. This shows a friendly encounter in the spirit of the Enlightenment. Detail of an engraving after a sketch by Piron entitled “Savage du cap de Diemen préparant leur repas”. Plate 5, de Labillardière. (MNHN, photo RMN-Grand Palais)

*Lahaye examined it more carefully than the first time*”, noted d’Entrecasteaux. Labillardière for his part wrote a precise account of this inspection:

*“As we were very near the garden which had been planted the preceding year under the supervision of citizen Lahaye, gardener to the expedition, we resolved to visit it. We saw with disappointment that there remained only a few cabbages and potatoes, some radishes, cress, wild chicory, and sorrel, but all in very bad condition; these plants doubtlessly would have succeeded better, had they been sown nearer a small river that we saw to the west. I had been expecting to find at least some cress planted on its banks; surely, it could only have been forgetfulness on the part of the gardener.”*

Here again, Labillardière shows himself an expert in the art of insinuation; at every occasion he tacitly belittles the skills and efforts of the





Fig 32: Aborigines fishing, possibly in Quiet Cove in 1793. Detail of an engraving after a sketch by Piron titled “Pêche des sauvages du Cap de Diemen”. Plate 4, de Labillardière. (MNHN, photo RMN-Grand Palais)

Gardener by emphasizing his own competence as a reputable expert botanist. What really happened to the garden during the nine months absence of the explorers we will probably never know. But to this day, there is an alternative scenario, equally possible if not the most probable one: could it not be that the unusual setting did attract the attention of the Aborigines, who, while investigating the traces left by the foreigners they met, out of curiosity, unknowingly damaged the sowed seeds and plants? On the other hand, different local animals could also have “discovered” the provision of edible vegetables. An important fact is that the seeds had been harvested in Europe and, relatively shortly afterwards, planted in Tasmania in an advanced season, which certainly would have affected their germination capacity, as correctly observed Lahaye. Lahaye tried to find a plausible explanation within the context of the botanical circumstances. Likewise, the scientist Labillardière could have considered the above possibilities as likely eventualities instead of blaming the Gardener.

Labillardière’s frequent cutting remarks about Lahaye’s aptitude provide an interesting insight not only into the scope of work for the garden. They also reveal the strained relationships and communication issues among all other members of the scientific team, a fact also well documented in many other different sources. Strained relationships existed not only within the group of scientists, but also between the scientists and the sailors as well.

Some of them even urged an appeal to the personal arbitration of Admiral d'Entrecasteaux as the last resort. Apparently, the revolutionary ideology of Labillardière had not weakened his deep-rooted caste prejudices, surfacing especially within the domain of knowledge and botany in particular. However, this last visit to the garden had also uncovered some important information about the intuitive botanical knowledge of the Aborigines:

*“While he (Lahaye) was looking with the greatest care at all the beds of the garden, one of the natives showed him the herbs that had sprouted up, which even though they were minute, he distinguished them perfectly from native plants.”*<sup>1</sup>

At the same time, Lahaye attempted to teach his new friends the rudiments of French cooking:

*“I found only potatoes; I lifted several of them that were very small and I did my utmost to make the savages understand that these roots, just cooked simply on live charcoal, were very good to eat.”*<sup>2</sup>

Without doubt, for the enthusiastic Lahaye it must have been a very moving experience to have these botanical exchanges with his new Aboriginal acquaintances in the small garden of European greens he had planted the previous year and was now on the verge of leaving forever. Indeed, from that day on, February 8, 1793, for almost two hundred and ten years the place would become a sleeping garden, protected from human incursions by an army of saw-sedges<sup>3</sup>. It seems that at the time of the expedition, saw-sedges were not as abundant as in the present days, since Labillardière spotted them only in the western coast of the harbour.

The two other friendly encounters with larger groups of Aborigines took place on February 10 and 12. Unfortunately, Lahaye did not take part in them and stayed on board instead, tidying up his collection and preparing it for the imminent departure. As regards the event of February 10, one boat from *La Recherche*, led by d'Auribeau, and another one from *L'Espérance*, rowed to the Port du Nord. There, the fifty-six Frenchmen of the party, including Labillardière, met forty-eight Aborigines of all ages and both sexes and spent the whole day in reciprocal observations, exchanging gifts and exercising each other in cross-corresponding vocabulary. Feeling nostalgic towards several of them, the French visitors observed various sides of the quiet and happy family life of the islanders. They were so confiding, frank and so ingenuous that a mother entrusted her baby to several Frenchmen to hold. The well-known, later engraved, illustrations drawn by

<sup>1</sup> *D'Entrecasteaux*, in Rossel, E.P.E. de (ed.) (1808). *op. cit.*

<sup>2</sup> *Lahaye's Journal du Tour du Monde (Mar).*

<sup>3</sup> *Native cutting grass (Ghania grandis)*



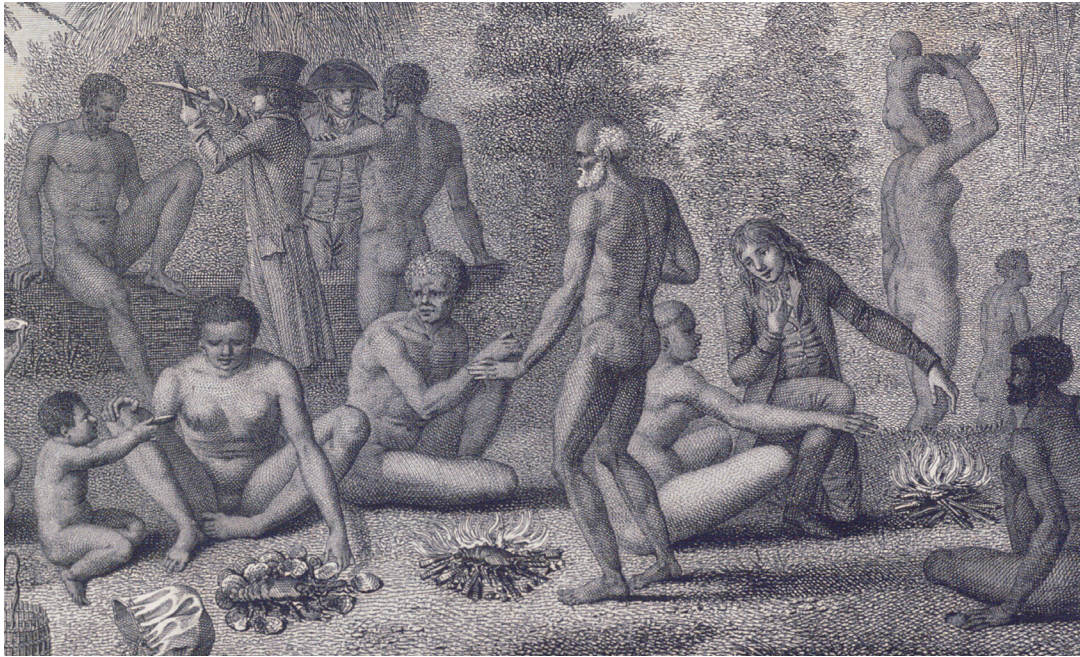


Fig 33: A friendly meeting between the crews of the frigates and the Aborigines near Black Swain lagoon. Mulvaney identifies the character in the back with the naval tricorne hat as likely being Louis Ventenat speaking with an Aborigine. To the left, it is likely that it is Lieutenant de Saint Aignain playing the violin which “did not please them at all” according to La Motte du Portail. Three fires are used by the women to prepare a meal to be shared with the new acquaintances of the tribe. Detail of an engraving after a sketch by Piron entitled “Sauvages du cap de Diemen préparant leur repas”. Plate 5, de Labillardière. (MNHN, photo RMN-Grand Palais)

the artist Piron (Fig. 32, 33), reflect these friendly encounters between two distinct cultures. On February 12, Admiral d’Entrecasteaux and Captain Huon de Kermadec went ashore where they met five native males. Most seamen and officers who still had not met the Aborigines were very eager to see them with their own eyes as well. Possibly considering Shrove Tuesday, or maybe in view of the expedition being on the eve of departure - the fact is that almost all crew members of both frigates were allowed to land for this last get-together. One of the Aborigines was bold enough and agreed to even go on board and personally visit *La Recherche*. This encounter with the inhabitants of Recherche Bay was the last one. The Admiral himself must have been profoundly touched by this incredible experience as he objectively remarks:

*“The Aboriginal seems to offer the most perfect image of pristine society... Their open and smiling expression reveals a happiness that has never been troubled by intrusive thoughts and unattainable desires.”*

On the following day, February 13, 1793, d’Entrecasteaux departed from Rocky Bay setting sail towards the channel he discovered the year before. This time the Gardener Lahaye was leaving his garden forever.



Fig 34: Baie des Roches in Port du Sud in 1793. The two frigates are anchored. A group of aborigines, adults and children, are wandering on the shore. (Musée du quai Branly/Scala, Florence © 2015)





Fig 35: Another plant collected by Lahaye himself during his voyage, Flagellaria indica also known as whip vine (MNHN)