



## Geographers and Scientists

Examine the geography and science of Rapa Nui (Easter Island)

### *19. Whaling ships – the Margaret Rait*

*Requirements: writing materials*

*Working style: individually, in pairs, and discussion as class*

*Curriculum: Science; Maths; History*

*Time: 20 minutes*

*Early foreign visitors to Rapa Nui were ships involved in the South Pacific whaling industry during the late C18th and early C19th (about 200 years ago). Whales were hunted almost to extinction during this time because of their natural oil which was used to light the streets of many European cities and towns, oil machinery, and for use in soaps and cosmetics.*

*The Margaret Rait was a whaler from Nova Scotia in the North Atlantic which had spent 4 years at sea by the time it visited Rapa Nui just after Christmas in 1843. They spent 5 days there trading with the local Rapanui, swapping whale blubber for sweet potatoes, yams, bananas, and sugar cane to help with their long journey home.*



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*Sweet potatoes, yams, bananas, and sugar cane would have been great sources of energy (carbohydrates) and essential vitamins for the crew of about 35 men on board the Margaret Rait. They would have helped combat scurvy (an illness caused by lack of vitamin C) and offered a fresh, tasty alternative to hardtack crackers and salted pork.*

*A hardworking sailor ideally needs to eat 3,000 calories each day. A calorie is a unit of measurement used to measure fuel the human body needs to function properly each day.*

*Suggest a menu of sweet potatoes, yams, bananas, and sugar cane which would provide at least 2,000 calories each day for the sailors on Margare Rait, using this information:*

*1 banana = 110 calories; 1 yam = 110; sweet potato = 150; sugar cane = 375/ 100g*

*How many of each item would you need to feed 35 men for 1 week? What does this tell you about the importance of Rapa Nui as a place to obtain food for these whalers?*