



ITALY/SAINT HELENA

TWICE IN THE DUST

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Sarzana, Italy. A map in the office of Federico Galantini, a Napoleon historian and enthusiast who collects artifacts and documents related to the emperor. The map is the original used by Napoleon's officers to trace the route which would take the emperor from Fontainebleau to his exile on the Elba Island. The route is traced in black.

May 5, 1821. Napoleon Bonaparte dies on the island of St. Helena, where he has been in exile for six years. He is not even 52, and has been sent into exile twice: "twice in the dust", as a famous Italian poem recites, "twice on the altar". In his short life, he turned the fortunes of Europe and the world upside down. Napoleon, considered the greatest military strategist in history, was at the head of a huge empire. He conquered countries, boosted economies, wrote laws that are still the basis of the modern codes in Europe. Probably he was also a victim of his own impetus: the Russian campaign marks the beginning of his decline.

In May 1814 he is exiled to the island of Elba so that he can no longer be a threat. But he returns to France after only ten months, regaining power in a hundred days and clashing once again with the opponent. He is exiled again to the island of Saint Helena, in the middle of the Atlantic: a place chosen by the English, to have the certainty that he would never come back. And in fact it happened so.

Someone even feared that he could rise again after death. And in a certain sense this has also happened: 200 years after his death, Napoleon is the most Googled character after Jesus Christ, and no other historical figure has generated a comparable phenomenon, made of books, objects, fans, re-enactments and emulators.



Elba Island, Portoferraio, Italy. A room of Villa dei Mulini, the mansion – now a state museum – which served as Napoleon's main residence during his ten months on the island.



Elba Island, Portoferraio, Italy. The garden of Villa dei Mulini, the mansion – now a state museum – which served as Napoleon's main residence during his ten months on the island.



St Helena island, Jamestown. A worker at the island's archives, where the stored certificates date back to the 18th Century.



St Helena island. The RMS St Helena is forced to anchor at a distance from Jamestown, the island's main village, which has no proper dock. Goods are transferred by barge. Sometimes the offloading operations last up to three days, depending on the condition of the sea.



Elba Island, Portoferraio, Italy. A book on Napoleon kept in the archives of Villa San Martino, the mansion – now a state museum – which served as Napoleon's summer residence during his ten months on the island.



Elba Island, Portoferraio, Italy. A vintage vessel moored in the port is reminiscent of the Inconstant, the ship which Napoleon used to leave the island on February 26, 1815, after spending over ten months in exile here.



Elba Island, Portoferraio, Italy. Shoemaker Santino Valli in his workshop. A Napoleon enthusiast, Valli has reproduced a miniature version the emperor's boots, which he proudly exhibits on the table on the right.



Elba Island, Rio Marina, Italy. A room of the crumbling building which used to be the town governor's house. When Napoleon came to Rio Marina to oversee the iron mining operations, which he had revitalized, he would spend the night here, possibly sleeping in this bed.



Elba Island, Rio Marina, Italy. Franco Giannoni, 65, a retired customs officer, is one of the island's two official lookalikes of Napoleon, whom he regularly impersonates during historical re-enactments.



St Helena island, St Pauls. George is St Helena's oldest tortoise, and lives in the gardens of Plantation House, the Governor's residence on the island (in the background). Rumor has it that George might be over 200 years old, and thus was already around when Napoleon lived on the island.



St Helena island, Jamestown. People walk on Main street past a Napoleon statue on the terrace of the Consulate hotel.



Elba Island, Portoferraio, Italy. The main town's port seen from the sea, a point of view which must have been quite familiar to Napoleon, who spent ten months on the island.

par Marey et Emmer

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Napoleon

St Helena island. A reproduction of a handwritten letter with Napoleon's signature at Longwood House. The former British vice Governor's residence was used to house Napoleon from late 1815. The former Emperor spent the last six years of his life here as a prisoner. He died in his bedroom on May 5th, 1821.



Elba Island, Portoferraio, Italy. The facade of Villa San Martino, the mansion – now a state museum – which served as Napoleon's summer residence during his ten months on the island.



St Helena island, Jamestown. Goods for sale in the coffee shop of the Consulate hotel, whose decoration is almost completely inspired by Napoleon. Shelves are usually full for some time after the arrival of the mail ship that carries them. It is just a matter of days before St Helenians buy all they can to store up until the ship's next call.



Elba Island, Rio Marina, Italy. Franco Giannoni, 65, a retired customs officer, is one of the island's two official lookalikes of Napoleon, whom he regularly impersonates during historical re-enactments.



Elba Island, Porto Azzurro, Italy. The window of a bar is decorated with the imperial N, which celebrates the 200th anniversary of landing of Napoleon on the island for the first exile.



Florence, Italy. A print depicting Napoleon in exile on St. Helena is exhibited (top right) in the Spadolini Foundation's library in Florence. Giovanni Spadolini (on the portrait under the Napoleon print), an ex Prime Minister of Italy and a Napoleon enthusiast, collected a large number of books, documents and artifacts related to the emperor.



St Helena island, Longwood. A bronze statuette of Napoleon at the entrance of Longwood House, the former British vice Governor's residence which was used to house Napoleon from late 1815. The former Emperor spent the last six years of his life here as a prisoner. He died in his bedroom on May 5th, 1821. His body was taken back to France in 1840 and interred at Les Invalides.



St Helena island, Sandy Bay. A few years ago, six cannons, probably British and dating back to the 18th Century, were found on this beach, where the British built a fortified structure between 1695-1742. The cannons, in the words of one St Helenian, were too heavy to be transported elsewhere, so they were simply left on the beach.



Sarzana, Italy. A Napoleon-themed ashtray in the office of Federico Galantini, a Napoleon historian and enthusiast who collects artifacts and documents related to the emperor.



St Helena island, Longwood. Michel Jantzen inside Longwood House, the former British vice Governor's residence which was used to house Napoleon from late 1815. The former Emperor spent the last six years of his life here as a prisoner. He died in his bedroom on May 5th, 1821. His body was taken back to France in 1840 and interred at Les Invalides.



Elba Island, Portoferraio, Italy. A room of Villa dei Mulini, the mansion – now a state museum – which served as Napoleon's main residence during his ten months on the island.



St Helena island. An engraving depicting Napoleon on his deathbed at Longwood House. The former British vice Governor's residence was used to house Napoleon from late 1815. The former Emperor spent the last six years of his life here as a prisoner. He died in his bedroom on May 5th, 1821.



St Helena island, Jamestown. The bay at dusk seen from a WWII-era military redoubt. Even though small-scale tuna fishing is the island's main business, it is still practiced on small boats with a crew of one or two. The first commercial fishing boat was purchased by a local cooperative only in 2013.



Elba Island, Portoferraio, Italy. A room of Villa dei Mulini, the mansion – now a state museum – which served as Napoleon's main residence during his ten months on the island. The print on the wall represents the greatest concern of the British at the time: that Napoleon might somehow rise again after his death.



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