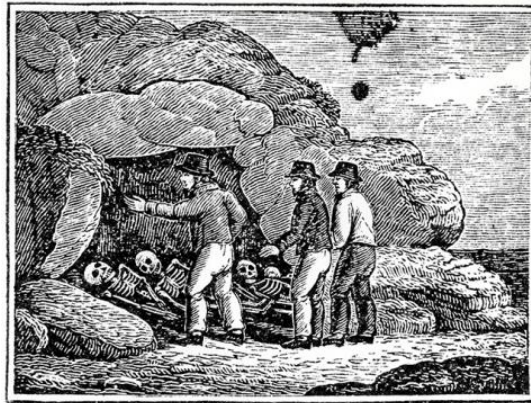




When Captain Pollard decided it was time to leave Henderson Island—which the men of the shipwrecked *Essex* had misidentified as Ducie Island—three of the crew decided to stay behind. They were:

- Thomas Chappel
- William Wright
- Seth Weaks

As the men explored the island, they discovered skeletons in a cave. Even so, they thought their survival chances were better on land than if they continued an uncertain journey in their open whaleboats.

Captain Pollard agreed they could remain behind. He promised that if any other crew member made it, that survivor would report the whereabouts of Chappel, Wright and Weaks.

Four months later, the three *Essex* crewmen were rescued. They had survived on the minimal offerings which Henderson Island afforded to them.

What of the skeletons in the cave? Were they ever identified?

Years later, experts determined that the never-identified people, including one child, had likely been shipwrecked. Their probable cause of death was lack of fresh water.

We learn more about the skeletons, in the Henderson-Island cave, from Pitcairn Islands Business Law Handbook:

*...a search of the official records ... and a medical examination of some of the bones revealed that they were of Caucasian origin confirming the belief that they were the remains of shipwrecked seamen from an unidentified wreck...*

*Although buried in shallow graves by Pitcairners [from Pitcairn Island] on their visit to the island in 1958, the remains were again investigated by a United States survey party in 1966 and after examination of the bones the skeletons were given final burial in five coffins which were placed in the far left corner of the cave in which they had been found...*

*From this examination it was revealed that the skeletons were of five or six people, of whom one was a child aged between three and five years; that they were probably survivors of a shipwreck; and that the primary cause of death was lack of water. (See Pitcairn Islands Business Law Handbook, at page 75.)*

This woodcut illustration, of unknown origin, depicts the three *Essex* crewmen who discovered the skeletons in the Henderson-Island cave (and lived to tell about it).

Credits:

Woodcut illustration, depicting the three *Essex* crewman at Henderson Island, by an unknown artist published at an unknown date. Online via Wikimedia Commons.

See Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/Henderson-Island-and-the-Cave-of-Skeletons>

See Learning Tasks for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/Henderson-Island-and-the-Cave-of-Skeletons>