

One Year Since the Shipwreck

It had taken Crusoe most of his first year on the island to map out the geography of the place he found himself living in. The first three months had been taken up with the day-to-day business of survival, of course – teaching himself how to fish, how to catch wild pigs and which fruits he could eat without getting crippling stomach pains. That, and the frequent periods of several days when he would just stay in the cave, sleeping as much as he could, wishing that he was dead when he wasn't sleeping. Once he could make a decent trap, or bait a hook and know that a fish would almost certainly go for it, he found he had time to explore.

For a couple of weeks he spent his time walking around the coast – first clockwise and then counter-clockwise. He had hoped that he could circumnavigate the whole island in this way, going all the way around until he reached the beach and the cave where he lived again from the opposite direction, but that hadn't worked. Two hours in one direction and three hours in the other he came across areas where towering cliffs rose directly from the sea, and where there was no obvious way past. He supposed that he could walk inland for a while until he was on a level with the cliffs, then walk back at an angle, back towards the beach on the other side– if there was a beach, and the cliffs didn't stretch for miles. The problem was, he was worried about getting lost once he was away from the coast and in the centre of the island. He had to find a different way of getting around. He needed a map.

So, from then on, every day he picked a different direction and walked in a straight line for an hour or two, making a mental note of what he saw before waking back.

The trouble with that idea was that keeping going in a straight line wasn't easy. In the open he had to keep identifying features on the horizon – a strangely shaped lone tree, perhaps, or a projecting rock on some raised ground – and walk towards it. Having got to it, he then had to choose another feature far ahead that formed a straight line both with the feature he had reached and the feature he had previously left. It was a painstaking way of exploring, but at least it meant he could find his way back again. The trouble was that when he entered one of the patches of forest that covered the island he found that he tended to gradually veer to the right without realising. The only way to prevent that from happening was to make his identifiable features much closer – trees just a few hundred metres away rather than features on the horizon. That took a lot of time, and frequently he lost track of where he was and had to painstakingly find his way back again. Sometimes he got lost for hours, and had to fight a growing feeling of panic until he recognised something that he had seen before. He kept telling himself that getting lost didn't really matter – he could make a new base anywhere he wanted – but there was something about having his own cave in a

place he was familiar with that comforted him. It even had things – bits of picture frames, fragments of glass – that he had salvaged from the shipwreck: things that connected him however tenuously to his previous life.

High hills were useful as vantage points from which he could see larger swathes of the island, and get a sense of its geography. The trouble with that approach was that the eastern side of the island was composed of a series of hills, each larger than the one before, culminating in something that seemed to be closer to a mountain than a hill. Its top was certainly shielded by cloud a lot of the time.

Gradually, however, he began to assemble in his head more and more of a map of the island. He knew which paths to follow to get to the pools with the best fish, and which areas of the forest had the best birds or wild pigs to catch. He knew where to go to get fresh water from fast-running streams that weren't contaminated with minerals washed down from the hills, and where to find soft fruits that he could safely eat and yet which, for some reason, were not often found by birds or other animals.

Each time when he got back to his cave after an exploratory walk, he used a sharp flint to scratch details of what he had found on a large, flat rock that sat at the back of the cave. He tried to keep the map to scale, as best he could, and worked out directions by assuming that the sun rose in the East and set in the West. That way, he could tell that he had been shipwrecked on the north-east of an island that was shaped roughly like a lozenge: wider East to West than it was North to South.

He also made a straight-line scratch on the side of the rock for each time the sun rose, bunching the lines together in sixes and then finishing each bunch off with a seventh line running diagonally through it. That way he could easily count the number of weeks he had been on the island.

It was two years after he had been shipwrecked that he first met Suriya Dinajara – the girl he would call Friday.