

A Note on the Text

In 1876, George Routledge and Sons published an anonymous translation of Verne's novel *Journey to the Center of the Earth*. It has long enjoyed a reputation among Vernians as the most accurate and graceful of the Victorian translations of the novel.

Recently the Verne scholar Alex Kirstukas was able to locate the copyright receipts in the Routledge archives. These were fill-in-the-blank forms where translators noted the payment they received in return for signing over the copyright for their work. From these records he was able to prove that this translation was the work of Jessie Campbell.

Campbell's work on the whole remains accurate and graceful, but it also remains Victorian. There are words that have dropped out of use and words that have acquired vastly different connotations in the years since the translation was published. There were some odd choices she made — leaving words and phrases in the original French here and there, for example; occasional jarring literalisms; and a handful of minor mistakes. And there are cases where ways of structuring sentences have changed so much that Campbell's wording no longer sounds natural.

In 2023, I began working on a project to create an audio version of *Journey to the Center of the Earth*. I started with Campbell's version, updating and adapting it as necessary — using whatever modest skills I could bring to bear on the project — to make the style a little easier for me to speak and for other people to hear. Rightly or wrongly,

my years of experience with audio have left me with strong ideas about what is and is not immediately comprehensible to a listener hearing a text for the first time. And it was exactly that kind of listener that I had in mind as I was making the changes I made. That doesn't mean I wanted to modernize the style. This is still almost entirely Jessie Campbell's work. But it's Jessie Campbell's work with some of the stumbling blocks removed and some guide rails added here and there.

Here are some examples of the kinds of changes I made.

- Words I thought might cause problems for a listener in the 21st century, like *savant*, *convolvulus*, *knee-pan*, or even *original* — which in the context of the novel means *eccentric* — were changed to more familiar equivalents. But in searching for equivalents, I tried to remain within the limits of a 19th century vocabulary.
- Campbell occasionally left words or passages in French. For example, when working out the cryptogram, Axel tests Lidenbrock's theory by writing a love note to Gräuben: Campbell doesn't translate the love note from French; instead, she provides the English text in a footnote. I dispensed with the footnote, brought her English text inline, and reworked the cryptogram accordingly.
- In Verne, the “log” Axel keeps when they are sailing across the Sea of Lidenbrock is written entirely in the present tense. Campbell is inconsistent in her use of tenses in these chapters, shifting between past and present, sometimes in the same

paragraph, sometimes even in the same sentence. I've recast the entire log in the present tense.

- Campbell sometimes makes a mistake, either in translation, transcription, or calculation. I've corrected these mistakes wherever I've been able to identify them. For example, when he and his uncle are debating the wisdom of making the journey, Axel suggests the temperature at the center of the earth is 200,000° centigrade; Campbell — or possibly her typesetter — gives it as 20,000°.
- Some phrases were just too awkwardly literal to leave as they were. For example, when Campbell's Lidenbrock wants to know what bothers Axel so much, he says: *And you are afraid of passing into a state of fusion?* A simpler and more direct way of putting it would be: *And you are afraid of melting?* So that's what I said.
- At the risk of opening myself up to the charge of "dumbing down", I've added short explanatory phrases here and there. For example, when Axel takes a last look at the Icelandic sky from the bottom of the Snæfells volcano, Campbell's translation has him identify the star he sees as "β Ursae Minor". Sensing that this might sound abrupt and confusing to a first-time listener, I expanded this to: "Beta, one of the stars in the constellation Ursae Minor". (Usually when I've done this, I've added a footnote in the etext indicating Campbell's original phrasing and Verne's original French.)
- Distances are always an issue for modern readers. Verne moves around freely among fathoms, leagues, meters, miles, and even cubits. Wherever possible I've

converted his distances consistently to inches, feet, and miles. Campbell sometimes did this conversion, sometimes not. I've redone all of the calculations, and many of my results vary significantly from hers. (Speaking of leagues, by the way, this was one of my main departures from Campbell: she adopted the conventional English equivalent of three miles per league; but it's clear from the context that Verne's rule of thumb was closer to 2.5 miles per league, and that's the value I've used. That's one of the main reasons for the differences I just mentioned.)

- On the other hand, when Verne gives the value for a temperature reading, I've left it in centigrade, for one simple reason: when the travelers are setting out, they make sure they have an "Eigel centigrade thermometer, graduated to 150°". At no point do they ever supply themselves with a Fahrenheit thermometer. I did not want to have to explain myself or provide equivalent values every time a temperature was given.
- Verne's Scandinavian words and phrases are a challenge. Much of what he calls Danish is actually Swedish, and some of his Icelandic is at first glance indecipherable. Following the example of recent translators like William Butcher and Matthew Jonas, and with the help of online dictionaries and a couple of native speakers, I've tried to sort out this linguistic confusion as much as possible. As it happens, some of the "Icelandic gibberish" turns out to be the result of minor transcription errors, and once the appropriate alphabet is restored, the words make

perfect sense. (I've included footnotes at various points in the etext identifying these changes. In an academic translation, fewer changes would have been made to the text and more explanations would have been relegated to footnotes. But this isn't an academic translation. It is, in essence and intention, the script for an audiobook.) On the other hand, I did not try to translate the Swedish that Hans is actually speaking most of the time back into the Danish that he is supposedly speaking.

- Place names offer an extra layer of confusion. Following up suggestions by Butcher and Jonas, and cross-referencing them with an 1844 map by Olaf Olsen and Björn Gunnlaugsson — quite possibly the same map Verne refers to in the novel — I've made a number of substitutions: for *Cape Skagen* in Iceland: *Skagi Point*; for the villages of *Ejulberg*, *Brantar*, and *Gardar*: *Esjuberg*, *Brautarholt*, and *Garðar*; for the rivers *Alfa* and *Heta*: *Álftá* and *Hitá*; and for the villages *Krösholbt*, *Budir*, and *Stapi*: *Krossholt*, *Búðir*, and, well, *Stapi*. I haven't tried to identify modern equivalents for any of the place-names. A volcano on a Norwegian island that Verne misidentifies as the Esk has been corrected to the Beerenberg. This was not a question of the name having changed over time; Verne simply got it wrong. (As with changes to Scandinavian phrases, the changes are made in the text and commented on in the footnotes, rather than the other way around, and for the same reason.)

- There is one section where the audio varies significantly from the text of the novel. When the cryptogram is being analyzed, descriptive phrases have been added to the narrative to help the listener visualize the structure. For example, the row and column being read off are usually identified. And one or two sentences where Axel announces that he is about to show the reader the actual cryptogram have been omitted, since in an audiobook he is obviously able to do no such thing.

I have several debts of gratitude to express. Several Verne scholars provided encouragement and material assistance as I was working on this project. Before I name them, I want to make it clear that none of them had an opportunity to review this manuscript in its entirety; some of them didn't see it at all; and none of them can be considered as sponsoring, authorizing, or endorsing it in any way. That being said, I want to thank Alex Kirstukas, William Butcher, Arthur Evans, Frederick Paul Walter, and Ron Miller for the help they provided at various points along the way.

At times, when Campbell's Victorian prose seemed unclear or awkwardly literal, and my own attempts to render the French were just as awkward, I consulted translations by William Butcher, Frederick Paul Walter, Ron Miller, Robert Baldick, Willis T Bradley, and Frank Wynne for hints. William Butcher's annotated French edition of the novel, published by Gallimard in 2014, was a major resource.

To sum all this up, I have tried to honor Jessie Campbell's work as a translator —

and Jules Verne's as a writer — as conscientiously as I can. I believe the result shows Verne in a way that is attractive and engaging for readers and listeners today, without losing the flavor of the time in which it was originally written. I hope you will agree.

[And A Note on the Notes](#)

This is *not* a fully annotated edition of the novel. I've retained Verne's original footnotes. And I've added a number of my own, mostly noting variances from Verne or Campbell, along with some of my observations about languages and place names. I have *not* tried to document every change or correction I made.