

The Dutch Mariners... on a collision course with the West Coast



First Encounters with the West Coast...Cape Inscription

THE Dutch are on their way... and it would only be a matter of time before a vessel from the VOC fleet made contact with the west coast of Australia, more by accident than good management.

The successful adventure by Hendrik Brouwer in opening up a new sailing route (the Brouwer Route) to the East Indies in 1610 prompted a future VOC governor, Pieter de Carpenter to say: "If we had to sail a hundred times to the Indies we should use no other route than this."

By 1616 more and more ships within the VOC fleet were navigating the Brouwer Route to the Indies, and in doing so were saving seven to nine months in sailing time, and that time saved meant more profit per voyage, which was all good news to the VOC directors, known as the Heren 17.

Despite the time saving the Brouwer Route was not without its challenges. In their quest to get further and further south in search of the strong westerly winds, the ships risked encounters with stray icebergs and damage to the sails and rigging when confronted with wild weather and big seas.

In such a remote region any hope of rescue should difficulties arise was out of the question. Yet despite this risk, the ships did come... the rewards for success were enormous.

There were many unknowns back in the early 17th century. Although latitude (distance north/south) was understood, the measurement of longitude (distance east/west) was not understood, so it was only a matter of time before a ship misjudged how far east it had travelled and bumped into a significant land mass... a land mass that until 1616

remained unknown.

The *Eendracht* (Concord) under the command of Dirk Hartog left Texel in the Netherlands on January 23, 1616 headed for Cape Town and then on to the East Indies via the Brouwer Route. The course to be sailed from Cape Town required vessels to sail east across the Indian Ocean for 1000 Dutch miles (approximately 7,400 kms) before turning left and heading north to the Sunda Strait.

During this voyage it's thought that Hartog encountered stronger than expected westerly breezes, and with longitude difficult to calculate, the *Eendracht* overshot the northerly turning point,

ending up on a northward course that had them sighting the Western Australian coastline in the area we now know as Shark Bay.

On 25 October 1616 the *Eendracht* dropped anchor with members of the crew going ashore at the northern end of what is now known as Cape Inscription on Dirk Hartog Island.

How do we know this to be true?

Well the crew left a record of their visit inscribed on a flattened pewter plate, nailed to an oak post and placed upright in a fissure on the cliff top.

What did they inscribe on the Hartog Plate?

Join us again next month in *Have A Go News* as we transcribe what Hartog wrote.

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