



# New Holland Update

## "Enriching Australia's History"

Official Newsletter of the VOC Historical Society Inc.

Vol 6 No 3

<http://voc.iinet.net.au>

SEPTEMBER 2006

## Underground?

A puzzling aspect of the Vergulde Draeck survivors is the lack of evidence on the mainland of their presence.

Any evidence that is there remains scattered over a wide area and this suggests that there may have been more people than the 68 as reported by the Understeersman (who is thought to be Abraham Leeman) when he arrived in Batavia on 7 June 1656.

He stated that the others had perished on the wrecksite. Yet, all the way to Greenhead there were timbers and also evidence of human habitation (Norm Fuller "Gilt Dragon at Greenhead")

Captain Pieter Albertz and 74 others made it to shore in the two boats. These were officers and passengers in the first instance and some crew members. Were the other 109 left to perish of whom some made it to shore later? A south westerly which is a prevailing wind on that coast that would have pushed to shore a lot further north.

Leeman's statement that the 109 had perished justified the rescue of the 'valuable' people cargo.

On that stretch of coast there are hundreds of caves, many of which provide an ideal shelter as well as protection. This may explain the lack of 'houses' and the like.

Above ground there was evidence of agriculture, growing yams.

Our field team inspected many possible sites along that stretch of coast in the hope of stumbling across something tangible.

There was the story of the Hill River Dutchmen just north of The Pinnacles and in April we drove through dunes and sandy deserts to find Hill River petered out on the beach. Further inland the river showed a different perspective that fired the imagination.

There was ample fresh water with enough mud and reeds to build the wall of a hut and the same reeds for a thatched roof. Quite an idyllic site, belying the belief that the WA coast is barren and without water.

The isolation lay thick on the landscape and we wondered what these people thought who were without a prospect of going home.

## Caves

JOURNAL OF AGRICULTURE, W.A. 1908

NAMBAN CREEK PHOSPHATIC DEPOSITS.

The Minister for Agriculture, Hon. Jas. Mitchell, accompanied by the Under Secretary, Mr. A. Despeissis, Mr. Jas. Gardiner, and representatives of the Press, made a visit

of inspection of the important phosphatic deposits recently discovered by the Geologist engaged by the Department, Mr. S. Goezel, from the Moore River or the Arrowsmith, a report of which was published in a previous issue of the Journal.

Several caves have been opened up and explored at Namban Creek, near the coast, in the vicinity of Cervantes Island.

The locality where Mr. Goezel is conducting exploring operations in one of the cave groups, is situated about 70 miles to the west of Moora, on the Midland Railway, and on the extensive range of limestone formation running within a few miles of the coast. At this spot Mr. Goezel and his helpers have their camp, and are conducting from this base their search for phosphates. So satisfactory have been the results of their investigations that there is a reasonable prospect of "the man on the land" being provided with a capital fertiliser at a cost which will, perhaps, be less than half that now obtaining. That these discoveries will be of inestimable value to the wheat-grower, and greatly improve the State's agronomic conditions generally goes without saying. The Minister regards this discovery as the most important development in this direction since guano was first made in a useful and marketable quantity.

There are now in sight in three caves about 10,000 tons of phosphates of high grade awaiting transport to Fremantle. In and around Namban Creek there are from 30 to 40 caves, the majority of which contain large quantities of the fertiliser, while it is now common knowledge that for a stretch of from 130 to 150 miles contiguous to the seaboard there exist similar deposits in large caves which have yet to be thoroughly opened up and explored.

Where below the stalactites there had not formed stalagmites there were large mounds, on the sides of which were terraces of delicate formation, in form similar to the famous pink terraces of New Zealand. But these cave terraces were of various colours, from a delicate whitish-pink to a dark brown. The summits of these mounds were of inverted bell shape and they held small stones of various shapes and colours the result of the continual dripping of water for ages. From the flooring in other places there rose large stalagmites of mushroom shape, while here and there were pools in the marble-like basement, over which had been formed a protecting transparent lid. In the centre of a shining ledge there had been a breaking away of the upper crust, which left an opening of oblong shape. Underneath there glittered crystals of all colours, the whole giving a replica of a well-laden jewel casket with the lid removed. From the sides of the caverns there hung flimsy shawl and curtain formations, which appeared to be of the most delicate texture and of different tints. The forests of hanging stalactites were varicoloured. Some were as alabaster and others of a coffee colour

with streaks of blood red running down them. Everywhere was something entrancing, some thing awe-inspiring, almost all indescribable. Those of the party who had marvelled at the wonders of the Jenolan, Narracoorte, Margaret River, Yallingup, and Yanchep caves stood entranced with the wonderful works of Nature revealed in this Namban Creek cavern, and without hesitation there was a general agreement that there had now been discovered a cave for beauty, for splendour, for grandeur and for magnificence the like of which Australia had never before dreamt of.

So soon as he had returned to the surface Mr. Mitchell gave instructions for this particular cave to be sealed up, for he considers that in days to come it must prove one of the greatest tourists' attractions in the Southern Hemisphere.

Half-a-mile nearer the coast another magnificent cave-larger in dimensions and more awe-inspiring, because of the immensity of the beautiful formations-was visited. It, too, will be saved from desecration, and until such time as the Caves Board declares it open for public inspection it will be sealed up. Though 70 miles from the railway line, and separated from settled parts by 60 miles of dreary, sun-baked sand plains, these caves are but 4.5 miles from the seaboard; the nearest landing place is but eight hours' sail from Fremantle, and they are situated in a grove of tuart near placid pools of pellucid waters. (Extract James Mitchell 1908 report)

#### Conclusion

Three basic questions emerge from this report.

1. The recovery of the phosphate was not proceeded with. Why?

A possible answer is that the interior of the caves might have been destroyed in the process. Feasible.

2. As these caves were considered more exquisite than the ones at Yanchep and Yallingup, why was their tourist potential never exploited?

3. Last but not least, why did James Mitchell, after coming out of the last cave, gave the strict instruction for it to be sealed?

Our attention was drawn to the report by a retired senior employee of the Agricultural Dept. This person told us that he had terminal cancer and wanted the truth to come out about the caves. He said that the word went around that the last cave contained 'things' from Dutch ships.

That area of coast consists of limestone and is a labyrinth of caves.

The shipwreck survivors may well have found caves and used those for shelter, being cooler in summer and many had underground streams of fresh water.

If that were the case, then it would explain why not many artifacts were found on the surface.

It opens up a whole area of speculation and may hopefully throw some light on what happened.

#### SOCIETY'S WEBSITE

VOC members should be proud of the Society's website.

The VOC Historical Society is the only entity in Australia specifically formed to create awareness and inform the public about the VOC and its activities during the 17 and 18th

centuries here in the former New Holland.

To promote those activities the Society has created a very extensive website which gets a good share of worldwide visits (hits) - 600 per week on average over 4.5 years - inline with the norm for historical sites.

It has been adopted as a resource by various educational websites in Australia.

Its many pages tell the story of the

- VOC, its history and impact on Australia in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century
- 4 ships that were shipwrecked on WA's coastline leaving behind hundreds of castaways
- Captains and their ships that charted and explored the land
- VOC Historical Society, its aims and objectives
- current activities in relation to the Society's objectives

As at June 2006 the site consisted of 29 separate web pages or html files. In total these sites display 85 images.

It is located at the old address of [www.voc.iinet.net.au](http://www.voc.iinet.net.au)

If you have a website, see if you can find a spot to place our logo (below) on it and link it. You can pick it up from most of the Society's websites.

# They Didn't Appreciate Our Efforts

by Rupert Gerritsen

The first visit to Australia by outsiders of which we are certain was a Dutch ship, the Duyfken, in 1606. While there are claims of earlier visits none are proven, though it is possible that people known as the Macassans began coming to northern Australia around this time from Sulawesi, now part of Indonesia. The Macassans came to get trepang, the sea-slug, for the Chinese market, so they sailed in spring with the north west monsoon, stayed for six months, trading with and employing Aboriginal people from Arnhem Land. Then they returned home with the south east trades at the beginning of the dry season. The Dutch, however, were on the lookout for trading opportunities. Spices, gold, copper, gems, minerals, anything valuable.

Following the visit of the Duyfken the next foray by the Dutch to northern Australia was undertaken in 1623 by the ships Pera and Arnhem, under the command of Jan Carstenszoon. The expedition did not start well. On the coast in West New Guinea the Arnhem's pinnace went ashore, lead by their skipper, to fish. The sailors were not on their guard, the "men running off in [all] directions," and were ambushed. Nine were killed, with the skipper "loudly lamenting ... and entreating pardon for the fault he had committed." This set the pattern for the whole voyage. A little later, also on the south coast of New Guinea they shot two men in a canoe who they had been trading with. These men had thrown spears

at them after they thought they were about to be attacked with the oars of the Pera's boat. Carstenszoon became exasperated as the expedition continued and let his prejudices show, "in appearance they are more like monsters than human beings," he wrote, "they seem evil and malignant." The following day another shore party came under attack while reconnoitring, a shower of arrows greeting them, they returned fire and at least one of the New Guineans was killed.

A couple of weeks later, while still cruising along the New Guinea coast, they endeavoured to trade with some New Guineans, exchanging beads and iron for local weapons. But a more sinister motive emerged. The Dutch attempted to kidnap a couple of the New Guineans, trying to capture them with nooses. It marked a pattern of behaviour they were to repeat when they finally reached Cape York. Their first encounter in Australia, possibly with the Anggamudi people of upper Cape York, took place on 15 April 1623. Having seen them the Dutch went ashore and attempted to coax them into a meeting with beads and iron but to no avail. They then moved on and three days later, near Edward River, managed to hold a parley. The Thaayore were not intimidated and according to Carstenszoon "showed no fear and were so bold as to touch our muskets." Again they tried to tempt them with iron and beads and this time the ruse worked, they "seized one of the blacks ... .. and carried him off to the pinnace ... the blacks who remained on the beach set up dreadful howls and made violent gestures." They had kidnapped one poor unfortunate, the idea being that they would teach him Dutch and then "be able to get information from the black man."

Upon landing the following day a little further south the shore party was threatened by up to 200 warriors. They fired on them, with "one of their number having been hit and fallen." It was then decided by Carstenszoon and the expedition's Council "to give 10 pieces of eight to the boatmen for every black they shall get hold of [kidnap] on shore and carry to the yachts." Given what had happened clearly word must have spread among the different groups of Aboriginal people along the coast because they now became very suspicious and refused to come near the Dutch explorers, even trying to prevent them from landing. But near the Archer River the Dutch tried their ruse again, of tempting the local inhabitants with trade goods, and succeeded in kidnapping another man. Thus provoked, the local Wik people began "furiously assailing" the Dutch, who predictably used their guns and shot at least one man. This pattern of trying to lull local Aboriginal populations into a false sense of security, then attempting to kidnap an individual or two, continued, usually with little success and fatal consequences. On 12 May on a river, probably the Wenlock River, which the crew of the Duyfken seemed to have rowed up in their boat in 1606, another incident occurred which resulted in a Tjungundji man being wounded. Intriguingly they found he was carrying a piece of metal which Castenszoon concluded he "probably got from the men of the Duyfken."

And so the voyage continued. Near the end of the voyage the Arnhem became separated from the Pera and while making its way home encountered Arnhem Land. Amazingly, near the end the voyage of the Pera, a rather miffed Carstenszoon bizarrely claimed "on all places where we have

landed we have treated the blacks or savages with especial kindness, offering them pieces of iron, strings of beads and pieces of cloth, hoping by so doing to get their friendship" How, he wondered, could they be so forcefully resisted "in spite of all our kindness." Why indeed?

## A Pleasant Surprise

A few days ago, the postman delivered an A4 envelope with Dutch stamps that turned out to be a belated birthday present. It contained a copy of a last will and testament. Not a small fortune left to me by a rich aunty but the testament of Captain Willem Janszoon

It was duly signed and sealed by two witnesses on 25 April 1630.

Willem Janszoon left 60 guilders a year to Elsgen Martens an old spinster.

This is interesting information and shows a facet of Janszoon's life and death.

Most people in Australia have heard of the Duyfken but there is not the same awareness of its captain. This is paradoxical for James Cook's name precedes the name of his ship.

Tom V.

**When** the Society was formed in 2000 we set about collecting and collating data from libraries and other sources in order to build a picture. Later this was extended to field work and talking to people along the coast. This often resulted in 'old timers' telling their story relevant to their district. This enriched the effort considerably and this will become available in the fullness of time.

### The White Tribe story.

The letter to the Editor of the Leeds Mercury in 1834 which prompted Les Hiddens to take up the investigation was found to be a hoax. Dr. Karen S. Cook of Kansas City University collaborated with Hiddens in his research. Subsequently, Karen researched Ensign Robert Dale, who was a likely candidate as an explorer in that saga. This put the spotlight back on the issue and some of the 'facts'.

The ship that allegedly wrecked on the WA coast was the Concordia in 1708.

The archives told us that she sailed from Batavia, through the Sunda Strait where she was caught in a storm and never heard from again.

As both the winds and currents flow from east to west, landing on the WA coast was highly unlikely. All known shipwrecks were enroute from Cape Town to Batavia, not the other way around.

The name van Baerle, the ship's master, can be obtained readily from records, even in 1830's

Another point is the survivors walking all the way, 1000km, to the centre of Australia. What would have possessed them to do so.

In the story, the explorer had spent some time in Holland and spoke some of the language.

Robert Dale had lived on Walcheren ( an island off the south west coast of the Netherlands) for some time where his father Major Thurston Dale was serving as aide-de-camp to General William Dyott during the Napoleonic Wars. As a child, Dale would have readily picked up Dutch whilst playing with local kids, as often happens.

Dale's exploration took place mostly north of Perth along the Avon Valley. There was only a two month assignment in Albany.

Then there is the question about what happened to a 200 page report that Dale handed to Governor Stirling.

As Stirling was due to leave for England in a month, he asked George Fletcher Moore to make a copy for him.

Moore declined on the basis of shortness of time and it is assumed that Stirling took the report with him. It has never been seen since.

Although the evidence is circumstantial, there are two questions that arise.

1 Would Stirling have been interested in a White Tribe some 1500 km to the north east?

2 Was the White Tribe really found some 100 km north of Perth in the vicinity of the Moore River and therefore of much greater concern to Stirling?

The Moore widens out considerably and from the air looks like an elongated lake not unlike the lake described at the centre. It is rich in fish, marron and other edible fare, as well as a source of fresh water..

Eventually the coin will drop and the facts will spill forth. I certainly hope so.

Tom V.

## Gingin Market Festival

The Gingin shire is the 'home' of the Vergulde Draeck and they have been very supportive with our bid to extract information, as well as putting up a Commemoration Plaque on 28 April last.

It became clear from what people said, that they were not aware of Australia's early history and many expressed appreciation at being informed by us. Our thanks go to our members who donated their time to this event.

The VOC Historical Society Inc. now consists of a group of members - Australia wide - who contribute to making the 17th century history more widely known.

Australians were only told half the story during history lessons and are now pleasantly surprised that there is more.

The Society have not set out to discredit Captain Cook, indeed it was he who recognised the Dutch as his predecessors when he landed on the east coast in 1770.

I want to thank all our members for their ongoing support and we can only keep on growing and continue to tell the story.

Tom Vanderveldt - President



Dirk Hartogh's ship 'd Eendracht ready to make a landing on the island at Shark Bay later to be named Dirk Hartog Island



Our display in the entrance of the main hall with Peter and Marten to tell the story.



Traditional Poffertjes as "17th century food" with Joan and Evelyn



A model of Batavia's ships boat on from A.de Jong

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