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CHAPTER III

EXPLORERS OF THE COASTS OF QUEENSLAND AND “NEW HOLLAND”

Incidental piecemeal discovery

Jansz’s voyage of 1606 in the “Duyfken” to the north tip of Queensland was followed by others, equally poor in financial promise, equally marked by disaster. In 1623 Governor van Speult of Amboina sent two yachts, the “Arnhem” and the “Pera,” to follow and extend the course of the “Duyfken” and to determine whether there was a strait below New Guinea; and also, whether “Van Diemen’s Gulf” (the Gulf of Carpentaria) was indeed a gulf, or was a wide strait separating “New Holland” in the West from a great southern extension of New Guinea to the south, that might have as its eastern shore de Quiros’ “Australia del Espiritu Santo.” By the time Jan Carstenz, the leader of the expedition, had reached 9° 6’S. (on the south-west coast of New Guinea) he had lost one skipper and nine men, murdered by the natives ashore; he was at the western edge of the Straits among the treacherous reefs, shoals and shallows near the coast (they stretch south for sixty miles) and their dangerous tide-rips (that he took to be estuarine waters). This is a very easy mistake to make, for as you approach this part of the Strait from the west the islands appear to make a continuous indented line.

He named the whole wide area “Drooge Bocht” (Shallow Bay) and, giving it a wide berth westerly, ran south 450 miles along the Queensland coast to a “salt water inlet” in 17° S. with Mornington Island, which he took to be its western edge, stretching north, on his starboard bow and abeam. There, fearing to be blown on a lee shore by a northerly gale, he beat out with his sister ship, the “Pera”; was separated from her during the storm and darkness and saw her no more (she beat hack to Amboina); drifted across the Gulf of Carpentaria to “Arnhem Land” (in what is now the Northern Territory of Australia), and so made for home.

In 1636 Gerrit Thomaszoon Pool (or Poel) was commissioned to discover whether he could pass through the “salt water inlet in 17° S.” right to the remote south coast of Australia, and, if so, to do so and to return, west-about “Eendrachtsland.” (He was killed by the natives on the New Guinea coast before his voyage had encoun-tered any new land, and his men took the ship to Arnhem Land and home again, but did no more.) So much for discovery on the far north coast of Queensland during that period.

Meanwhile almost the whole of the western part of the continent had been roughly mapped by the Dutch. In 1611 Hendrik Brouwer reported that if, after rounding South Africa, a course was steered due east for about 3,000 miles—until, in fact, one reached the longitude of Java—and then the course was changed to north, the ship had the advantage of favourable winds for both parts of the journey, avoided enemies, and shortened the voyage considerably. From the year 1613, acting on his advice, the Directors of the Dutch East India Company ordered all Dutch sailing masters to follow this route. This made the discovery of Australia inevitable, but deflected interest from Queensland waters to points many hundreds of sea-miles west.

On 25 October 1616 the “Eendracht,” commanded by Dirk Hartog, making from the Cape of Good Hope for Java, overran her easting, and sighted and visited the west coast of Australia. She left her name to the area (Eendrachtslands) and her Captain’s name to Dirk Hartog Island (25° 56’ S.). This “Eendrachtsland” became the regular landfall for subsequent vessels and some, out of their direct course by reason of contrary winds, soon added to the map Edel’s land (or D’Edel Landt, 1618) and, in 1623, Leeuwin Land to the south of it; while in 1627 the “Gulden Seepaart,” with Pieter Nuyts aboard, ran right south of the Australian continent from its south-west corner as far as the eastern head of the Great Australian Bight. Above Eendrachtsland, de Wit in 1628, sailing home in the “Vyanen,” was almost wrecked on the north-west coast and added his name to the list.

It had been intended that the British and the Dutch and their East India Companies should work together against Spain, the common foe, but the ambition and rapacity of local officials wrecked plans drawn up halfway across the world in Europe (including the treaties of 1617 and 1619), and there were other disasters. The first British vessel mentioned off the shores of Australia was the “Tryal” or “Trial,” which was wrecked with the loss of ninety-seven lives on the Trial Rocks (Montebello Island) on 1 June 1622.(9a)

About the same year friction reached a crisis point between the Dutch and English in Amboina, and in 1623 after a mock trial all the English merchants were murdered there by the ghastly method of “breaking on the wheel.” James I, whose cowardice was self-righteously excused as “conscientious impartiality,” had allowed

(9a) 333 years later, this area began to figure as the approved testing ground for the first atomic bombs to be exploded in Australia.
Sir Walter Raleigh to be beheaded to mollify Spain; it is not recorded that he took any adequate action to revenge the British merchants seeking to serve England in the East Indies.\(^{10}\) It was only by the accident of his son’s wife, Catherine of Braganza, bringing with her, as dowry, possessions in India, that England’s footing in the east was maintained; but the direction of English enterprise was deflected increasingly to the sub-continent of India—leaving Indonesia to the Dutch, and far north Queensland in a little visited backwater.

The period of Dutch discovery ended gloriously with Anthony van Diemen, Governor-General of the Netherlands East Indies from 1636 to 1645, and Abel Tasman, the greatest of his explorers. Tasman had already had some ten years of distinguished service in the Indies when he was commissioned by van Diemen to seek to find a way south of Australia to South America and to defy the Spaniards there on their own soil. After running south from Java to 49° S. he turned east and, on 24 November 1642, reached and discovered Van Diemen’s Land (Tasmania), about the level of what is now Macquarie Harbour. He coasted the new land southabout and took possession of it for the Dutch. On 4 December 1642 he left it, sailing east, and nine days later sighted the west coast of New Zealand, which he named Staten Land and explored.

Obsessed with the idea that Terra Australis reached and surrounded the South Pole,\(^{11}\) he considered New Zealand a great promontory of this “Southland” and the stretch of water between New Zealand and Australia a mere strait, which he named “Abel Tasman’s passage.” Sailing wide to the north-east to round the reputed area of the Solomon Islands, he reached the eastern end of the New Guinea archipelago (discovering the Friendly Islands—Tonga—on the way) and so returned to Java. He had proved that Australia was an island (or two islands if there were a channel through it southerly from the Gulf of Carpentaria), and that somewhere within the line he had traced it must have an eastern coastline.

In 1644, a year after his return, he was sent by van Diemen to test the truth of the ancient Franco-Portuguese maps that showed a strait south of New Guinea and an eastern seaboard to “New Holland” (see pp. 17 & 21). If successful, he was to sail south along that coast until he reached his Tasmanian discoveries, and then westerly till he reached the eastern end of the Great Australian Bight (Nuyts land), returning to Java via “Eendrachtsland.” He failed—he did not find Torres Straits—but he named Cape York peninsula,

\(^{10}\) Cromwell, in 1654, exacted tardy justice and a heavy indemnity for the relatives of the murdered men, from the Dutch.

\(^{11}\) Antarctica—a continent bigger than Australia, does in fact, do so.
ORTELIUS' MAP OF 1587 (courtesy of John E. O'Hagan of Brisbane from copy in his collection). Note that Southland still dominates the picture. New Guinea is shown as an island recalling the western part of the Portuguese map (see Plate III) but dissociated from Java. The eastern part of the map is maintained approximately in the position and shape assigned to it, but on false interpretations of Marco Polo's "Maletur," etc. (see page 13). The coast line of the Southland ("Terra Australis" not yet known) in the Pacific and Indian Oceans is presumed from reported chartings and sightings of island groups linked by guesses of the cartographer.

PLATE IV.

MAP OF 1652 BY SANSON, GEOGRAPHER TO THE KING OF FRANCE.

Note at the extreme left centre, accurate map of south coast of New Guinea (from Spanish charts previously supposed unpublished till late eighteenth century), also Torres Sts., and the Dutch chart of west coast of C. York peninsula (Queensland) to 17° S. The Dutch map of 1640 (Plate VI) was apparently unknown to Sanson and the Portuguese map (Plate III) had seemingly been discarded. The Pacific coast of "Southland" is presumed from recorded landfalls of island groups, linked by the cartographer. (With acknowledgement to John E. O'Hagan of Brisbane, who first discovered this map and recognized its importance.)

PLATE V.
THE DUTCH DISCOVERIES SHOWN IN THE BLAEU MAP OF 1640 (courtesy of John E. O'Hagan of Brisbane from copy in his collection). Note the careful charting of the west coast of C. York Peninsula (Queensland) and the west and south coasts of Australia as far east as the east end of the Great Australian Bight. It was suspected a passage of some sort separated east and west portions of a continental land mass or traversed an archipelago like the Philippine Is. Note the reef, the uncertain coast line and the name “Drooge Bucht” (Shallow Bay) at Torres Sts. (the existence of which the Dutch had come to reject by that date).

PLATE VI.

Text Figure 1. "It must have an Eastern Coastline." (Courtesy of John E. O'Hagan of Brisbane from map in his collection.)

the great northern part of Queensland above 17° S. which is as large as England and Wales together—“Carpentaria land,” after Pieter Carpenter (1622-28), who had been Dutch Governor-General when he first arrived in the East Indies.

Merchants were at the helm in Holland; Van Diemen died in 1645, just in time to avoid a cold rebuke from the Directors of the Dutch East India Company on the money and time wasted in unremunerative exploration and the search for gold and silver mines. There was, they said, sure profit in nutmegs from Amboina, cloves from Ceylon, rice from India, pepper from the Moluccas, cinnamon from Java, silks from China, and a hundred other dazzling products of the abundant East. Why bother about barren and remote countries inhabited by wild, cruel and unprofitable savages?

The map of these areas, as Tasman left it in 1644, remained virtually unaltered till Cook's voyage of 1770.

There were several voyages that might have anticipated Cook’s discoveries. For example, the riches of the East attracted all sorts of adventurers—pirates and privateersmen. Among them the Captain of the “Cygnets” had with him Dr. William Dampier, when, in 1688 (precisely a century before Governor Phillip was to land with his
first group of settlers at Sydney), he dropped anchor below Cape Lévêque, which tips the great promontory that lies between what are now Derby and Broome in North-Western Australia, and lay there some weeks for repairs.

The importance of this chance visit lay in a scheme which Dampier evolved when he returned to England, where it attracted great interest since England and Holland—the former comrades-in-arms against Spain—were then striving for maritime and economic supremacy. Leading men of affairs discussed the matter with him, and as the Admiralty was also convinced that there was advantage in the project, Dampier was permitted to undertake a voyage of discovery to New Holland in 1699 in the “Roebuck,” a vessel under his own command.

Little things have great consequences. Had Dampier carried out his original intention of approaching the country from the east, around the southern extremity of South America and across the Pacific, he would have anticipated Cook’s discovery of the east coast of Australia and, in particular, of Queensland and of Torres Straits by seventy years, but because of the cold, which provoked relapses of the malaria he had acquired in Sumatra—he dreaded it—he chose the alternative route round the Cape of Good Hope and so came in from the west. Little new was to be anticipated by this route, since Dutch explorations had already revealed the general lines of the whole of the western and northern coastlines. Dampier did not find the country any more attractive than they had. Indeed the thousand miles of coast he saw is probably the least attractive shoreline in all Australia!

“If it were not for that sort of pleasure which results from the discovery even of the barrenest spot upon the globe, this coast of New Holland would not have charmed me much,” he said. He found the natives utterly repellent, “black, ugly, fly-blown blinking creatures,” the most unpleasing human beings he had ever encountered, “though I have seen a great variety of savages.”

The Admiralty saw nothing to induce them to make further experiments in colonisation in Australia after reading his reports. “New Holland” as a colony became rather a subject for joking. (12)

Serious attention was given, however, to the possibilities of New Britain, east of New Guinea. Dampier had discovered that it was separated by a strait, to which his name has been given (though he missed the other that separates New Britain easterly from New Ireland).

The Dutch, in a momentary revival of interest, stimulated by his visit, sent a vessel as late as 1705 to try to find a passage through Queensland’s Gulf of Carpentaria to the south shore of Australia. It found nothing, but for some reason it was asserted that it had proved such a passage to exist, and it was affirmed that “New Holland” was no continent, but a mass of islands like Indonesia or the Philippines, perhaps situated round an inland or central sea.

This was to colour the idea of explorers by land and sea until the days of Oxley and Cunningham in Queensland 125 years later.

After the Seven Years’ War with France and Spain, Byron (1764-6), Wallis (1766-8), Carteret (1766-9) and others were sent out by Great Britain to advance “the honour of this nation as a maritime power... and the trade and navigation thereof.” Carteret, the best of these, rediscovered (among other places) Mendana’s Solomon Islands, Santa Cruz, and also Dampier’s New Britain, which he proved was separated from New Ireland by a strait. The French competed with the English with the same objective and at the same places. De Bougainville (1766-9), Surville (1769-70), and Marion (1771), for the French, had less luck than the British.

(12) Scott in his “Short History of Australia” points out that in Dean Swift’s “Gulliver’s Travels” the position of Lilliput, where Gulliver was wrecked, was made to correspond precisely with the southwest coast of Australia, and Swift fabled that Gulliver was a cousin of that adventurous buccaneer!
De Bougainville rediscovered the Solomon Islands and New Britain just after Carteret; and also the New Hebrides. He discovered the Samoan group and the Louisiade chain stretching many miles east of Papua’s south-eastern extremity and started south for the Queensland coast and Torres Straits two years before Cook. Outlying patches of the Great Barrier Reef and sickness turned him back. But the hunt was closing in: already one could guess where the east coast of “Terra Australis” must lie.

Cook’s instructions in 1768 directed him to sail to Tahiti in the Pacific to observe the transit of Venus across the face of the sun, and then: “to prosecute the design of making discoveries in the South Pacific Ocean by proceeding to the south as far as the latitude of 40 degrees,” to search for the supposed “Terra Australis Incognita.” If Cook found no land at 40 degrees south he was given rather a free hand: he was to sail to New Zealand, to explore it as far as possible, and then to return to England by whatever route he thought proper. Cook was in no doubt as to what that course would be.

The voyage commenced on 28 August 1768 and the transit of Venus was successfully observed on 3 June 1769. Cook then ran south to look dutifully for the supposed continent. At 40 degrees he found only water, and so made for New Zealand, where he remained exploring and charting the islands for nearly six months. Cook’s circumnavigation of both islands of New Zealand demolished the theory that the land was a finger of some great Antarctic continent, as Tasman thought when he discovered it, and as subsequent maps had suggested; and as Dalrymple had insisted to the Admiralty.

Cook left New Zealand on 31st March 1770, resolved to continue westward “until we fall in with the east coast of New Holland, and then to follow the direction of that coast to the northward or what other direction it might take us until we arrive at its northern extremity.”

On Thursday, 20 April 1770, at 6 a.m., Lieutenant Hicks, who was on watch, sighted the east coast of “New Holland,” i.e. Australia. Rounding Cape Howe, the “Endeavour” sailed north along the east coast, and on 30 April (1 May) anchored at Kurnell (abo. “Kundel”) in Botany Bay at 3 p.m. A stay of a week was made in the harbour—Cook’s first and only visit ashore, except for the nine landings he made in Queensland. The ship continued her voyage northward on 7 May, past the entrance to Port Jackson, where Sydney was later to stand, and so on along a coast totally unknown up to that date.

Except for the next few days, Cook was to spend the whole period of his stay on the Queensland coast.

(13) In his later voyage Cook was the first man to sight the glaciers and the ice barrier that bounded the unknown continent of Antarctica.

(14) Cook’s log says 19th April but, sailing west from Europe round Cape Horn, the ship had lost a day and its calendar had not at that stage been corrected. Moreover, the nautical day began at noon and not as the civil day did at midnight, so that 6 a.m. on his 19th April (20th April) would, in civil time, be 6 a.m. on 21st April 1770; 30th April at 3 p.m. would be 1st May.