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# **THE TIWI MEET THE DUTCH:**

## **The First European Contacts.**

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**An outline of the history of Tiwi Contact with European navigators,  
with special reference to the Tiwi encounter with dutch seafarers  
in 1705.**

**-by-  
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**For**

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## **Foreword**

During the past few years our people have recalled with pride a number of special moments in our history when our fathers and mothers responded to certain events of their time; our work during the Second World War, the crisis caused by Cyclone Tracy, the Bicentenary of Australia - all touching our lives and involving us all.

But our history extends beyond these recent events to the beginning of time on this land. Even as Australia itself celebrates 200 years of European settlement, we ourselves recall quite lengthy visits of European people nearly 300 years ago. Some of our school children have been enquiring about these matters and our Land Council has been pleased to produce this booklet to coincide with our commemoration of the visit of Commander van Delft 290 years ago.

You will read in these pages the events of long ago. What you will not find are the names of our families who participated in these times, they belong to the songs and legends of the Tiwi, and are as real to us as the writings in this book. We are proud to belong to these families and to the traditions of courage, integrity, pride and loyalty to each other that they established.

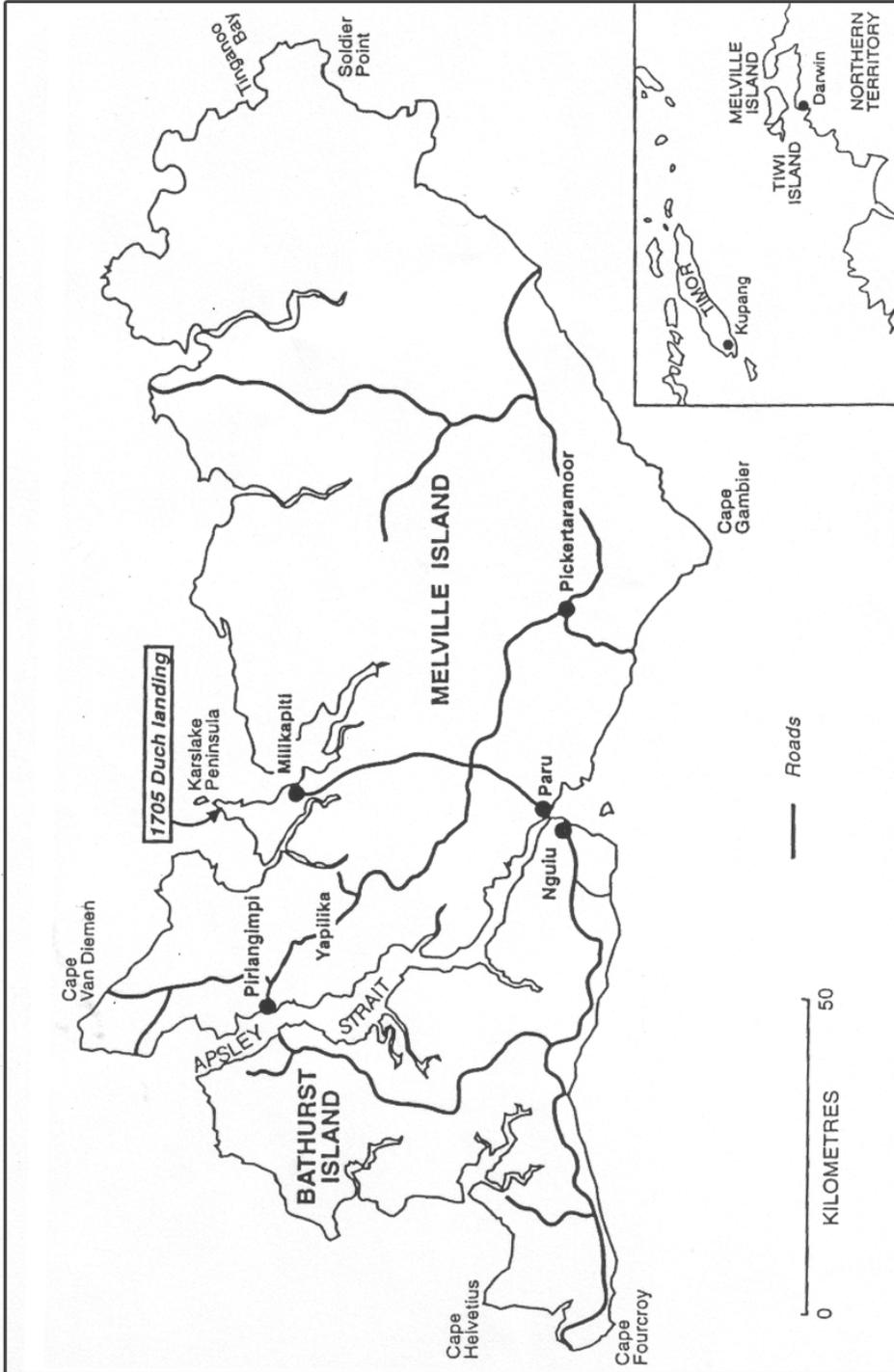
As we now face the challenges of these new times with unemployment, sickness and economic uncertainty, we draw heavily on the qualities inherited from our ancestors. They keep us strong in our beliefs that our difficulties are not purposeless; they are there for our own strength to be nurtured for us and for our children.

This is a true story, a Tiwi story that is part of the history of Australia. It is not widely known beyond a few researchers, and we hope the telling of it will draw you into discovery of the rich and ancient history of our past. Here it is - the Dutch and ourselves - but there remain many other untold stories Aboriginal, European, Asian - all woven into the history of our nation, and part of the heritage belonging to us all.

We hope you will enjoy this insight into the beginnings of systematic exploration of Australia and the part played by Tiwi people in the events that later shaped our nation.

**Matthew Wonaeamirri**

Chairman  
Tiwi Land Council



THE TIWI ISLANDS

# THE TIWI MEET THE DUTCH: The First European Contacts

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## *The Tiwi in Australian History*

People who are familiar with the conventional history of Australia may not know very much about the Tiwi, and their home on Bathurst and Melville islands. They may not realize that the Tiwi have been in Australia since time immemorial, and that the Tiwi were the first Australians to come into sustained contact with seafarers from the European world.

That contact began in the year 1636, more than one and a half centuries before white people began their first permanent settlement in Australia at the place we now call Sydney. In 1705, sixty five years before Captain Cook sailed along Australia's east coasts, Dutch navigators spent many weeks on the north coasts of the Tiwi islands. As we will see in this booklet, the Tiwi and the Dutch had much to do with one another in 1705, and the Dutch writings about their meeting with the Tiwi were the first detailed European descriptions of Australian Aboriginal people.

Thus the Tiwi hold a special place in Australian history, a place which they are proud to commemorate by recalling the events of 1705 when Tiwi People met Dutch navigators.

## **Tiwi Creation**

Although the year 1705 was long before the British had thought of sending convicts to Australia, the Tiwi had already been in their country "forever". Their legends, passed down through the generations in story, song, dance, sculpture and painting, tell of the Dreamtime creation of the Tiwi islands by the old blind woman, Mudangkala. Mudangkala arose from the earth carrying three babies in her arms. She crawled across the dark, unformed landscape, and the seawater followed the imprints made by her body. In this way the islands and the straits between them were created. Then Mudangkala covered the islands with plants, and she filled them with living creatures. Finally, the land was prepared for her children and for the Tiwi who descend from them.

## **The Rising of the Seas**

Certainly the Tiwi occupied their islands before the last Ice Age, about 20,000 - 15,000 years ago. Because much of the world's sea water was frozen during the Ice Age, sea water levels were much lower than they are today. Consequently, the edges of the Australian continent extended well north of their present locations. It is likely that Bathurst and Melville Islands were joined to the mainland, and that they only became islands when the sea water levels began to rise as the Ice Age came to an end. When the water rose the Tiwi were left behind on the newly created islands, and for thousands of years, because of their isolation, they had little contact with the outside world. As a result, Tiwi culture developed in its own world, in ways which have made the Tiwi a very distinct group of Australians.

## **Events in Europe**

Tiwi civilisation was highly developed by the time white people in Europe began to emerge from the Middle Ages and to form the nation / states which led to the dramatic expansion of Europeans into many scattered parts of the world.

Spain and its satellite Portugal were among the first modern nations to look beyond Europe, in search of opportunities across the sea. The Spanish and Portuguese, and later the Dutch, British and French, ventured into "New Worlds" where they hoped to find opportunities for trade, for the creation of vast empires, for the conversion of souls to Christianity, and where they hoped to find the source of the spices which in Europe were as precious as gold.

Spices had been brought to Europe for many hundreds of years - first by Arab traders who sold spices to Venetian merchants who then distributed them at a vast profit. The Arabs, to secure their monopoly of the trade, did not tell the Europeans that the spices came from the south-cast Asian archipelago, to India and Ceylon and then by sea to Arabian trading ports and then finally to Venice.

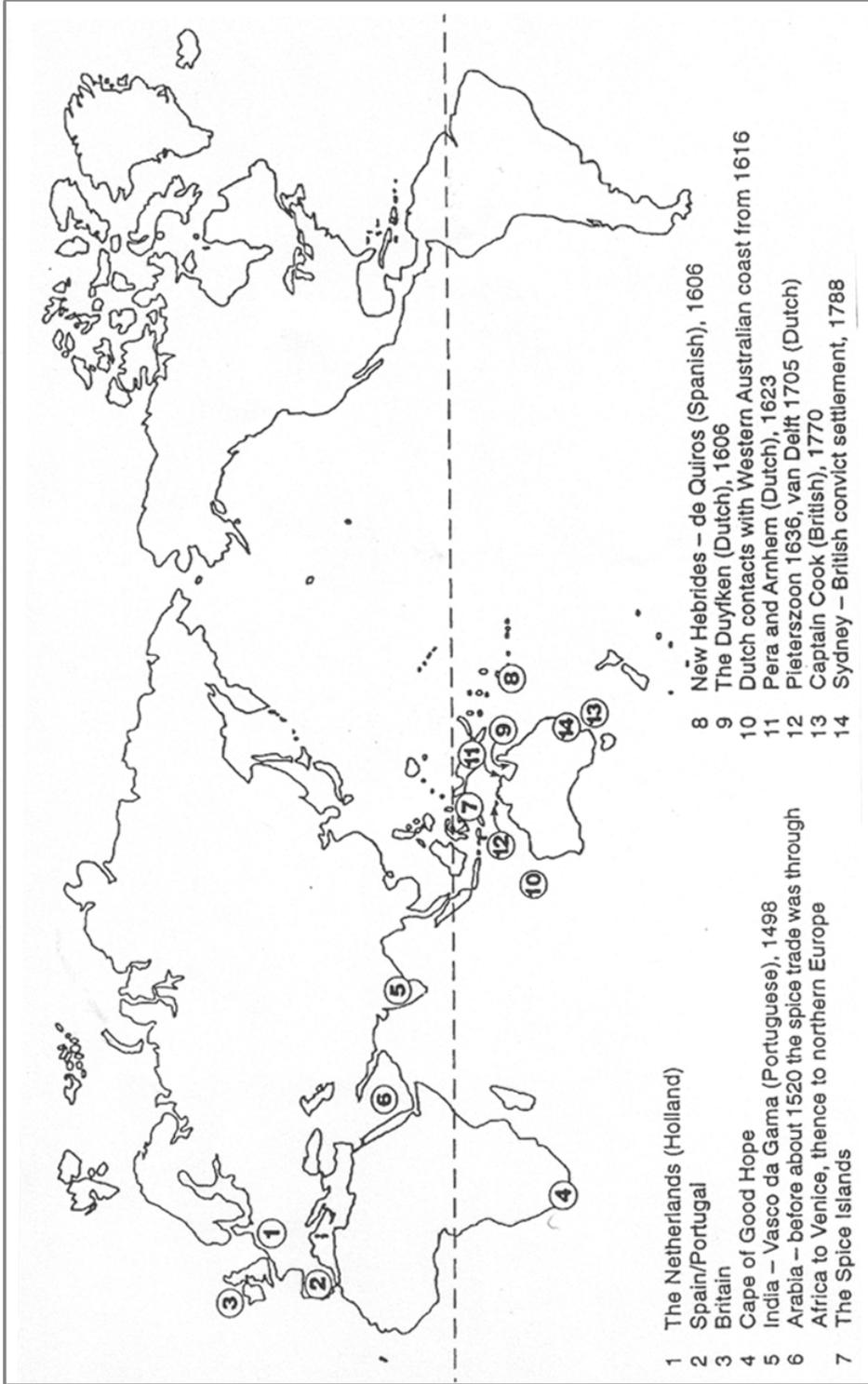
The Portuguese and Spanish were the first to resolve to break the Venetian monopoly on the spice trade. Knowing by now that the spices came from somewhere beyond India, they determined to sail directly to wherever the spices were grown and then to bring them back to Europe. Improvements in ship design and building, better navigation and map making techniques, and the arming of ships with powerful cannon made it possible for the first time to consider voyages which might cover long distances and could take years to complete

In 1498 the Portuguese navigator Vasco da Gama sailed around the Cape of Good Hope to reach India. By 1511 the Portuguese had captured Malacca, the key Asian port at which the spices arrived from the south east. Within another year Portuguese navigators had reached Banda and Ambon, the main "spice islands". Thus, European seafarers were within just a few days sail of the Tiwi islands.

The Spanish for their part approached the spice islands from the other direction. In 1522 the remnants of Magellan's fleet reached the island of Ternate. Thus, the Europeans had found the sources of cloves, nutmeg, pepper and the other spices which were so prized and so essential to European life as a means of flavouring and preserving food.

The Portuguese established an outpost on the Spice Islands, and managed to establish a dominant position in the trade. Lisbon became the main European distribution point for spices, but the trade in northern Europe was controlled through the Netherlands, from whence traders distributed Portuguese spices.

By the late sixteenth century Spain had annexed Portugal as a vassal state. Spain maintained the spice trade through Lisbon and Antwerp until 1580, when war broke out between Spain and the Netherlands. The areas now comprised by Belgium and Holland had been Spanish provinces, but they rebelled and formed the "United Provinces".



- 1 The Netherlands (Holland)
- 2 Spain/Portugal
- 3 Britain
- 4 Cape of Good Hope
- 5 India - Vasco da Gama (Portuguese), 1498
- 6 Arabia - before about 1520 the spice trade was through Africa to Venice, thence to northern Europe
- 7 The Spice Islands

- 8 New Hebrides - de Quiros (Spanish), 1606
- 9 The Duyfken (Dutch), 1606
- 10 Dutch contacts with Western Australian coast from 1616
- 11 Pera and Arnhem (Dutch), 1623
- 12 Pieterszoon 1636, van Delft 1705 (Dutch)
- 13 Captain Cook (British), 1770
- 14 Sydney - British convict settlement, 1788

## IN SEARCH OF THE SOUTHLAND

Spain closed access to Lisbon and the spice trade to the Netherlands traders, so the resourceful Dutch determined to send their own ships direct to the spice islands. Dutch merchants reached the islands in 1596, and in 1602 the Dutch who were interested in the spice trade combined to form the Vereenigede Oostindische Compagnie (VOC -United East India Company) the "Dutch East India Company". The Dutch government gave the company exclusive trading rights from the Cape of Good Hope to South America, and for two centuries the company jealously and effectively guarded those rights. Strict adherence to the main purpose - the enrichment of its shareholders: ruthless action to create and uphold monopolies; steady and committed endeavour; and cautious prudence were the hallmarks of the company and its servants.

By 1605 the Dutch had expelled the Portuguese from the spice islands. Before long the Dutch had successfully excluded all competitors from the trade, and from 1614 the VOC controlled its East Indies empire from bases in Java.

Two of the company's directors-general in Java, Jan Pieterszoon Coen and then Anthony van Diemen, had a particular interest in exploration beyond the immediate area of the East Indies. In particular, they sought alternative shipping routes to and from Europe and South America, and they searched for trading opportunities in new lands. They were to commission the voyages which were to reveal the northern and western coasts of Australia to Europeans for the first time.

### **The South Land**

The Dutch were spurred by the belief that somewhere near their new possessions there had to exist the "South Land" about which geographers had theorised since ancient times. Greek and Roman thinkers believed that there had to be an Unknown South Land - "Terra Australis Incognita" to balance the land masses of the northern hemisphere. The Dutch saw no reason why this land should not present opportunities for the even greater enrichment of their company.

Spanish seamen had discovered the north coast of New Guinea in 1545: then de Quiros sailed from South America to the New Hebrides 1606. In the same year the Spaniard Torres sailed from New Hebrides to Philippines through the passage we now call Torres Strait in 1606. The Spanish suspected that they may have touched the South Land, 'Austrialia Incognita" but their navigations had not succeeded in giving its shores any definition. This had to await Dutch exploration.

The Dutch search for the Great South Land, which European geographers were by now certain existed somewhere south of New Guinea (discovered by the Spanish and Portuguese), quickly began.

### **The First Dutch Discoveries of Australia**

Early in 1606 an officer of the VOC, WillemJansz (Janszoon) sailed the small yacht,Duyfken from Java, southeasterly intoTorres Strait, then south down the west coast of Cape York Peninsula. Jansz believed that the land he saw was part of New Guinea. He was not impressed by the commercial value of the land he had seen, but company officials were sufficiently interested to encourage further investigation.

At about this time Dutch navigators, on their outward journey from Europe to the East Indies, began using a route which took them east from the Cape of Good Hope, then north to Java, In this way they could take advantage of prevailing westerly winds, but sometimes they sailed too far east before turning northward. Thus, from 1616 Dirk Hartog ,Frederik Houtman, and other Dutch navigators had accidentally encountered the coasts of what is now Western Australia.

### **Arnhem Land named**

In 1622 the Dutch resolved to further explore the coasts to the south of the Spice Islands. On 21 January 1623 Jan Carstenz took the Pera and Arnhem (commanded by Willem van Colster after its substantive captain was killed in New Guinea early in the voyage) south from Ambon. The ships sailed together into the Gulf of Carpentaria, until at the bottom of the Gulf they separated.

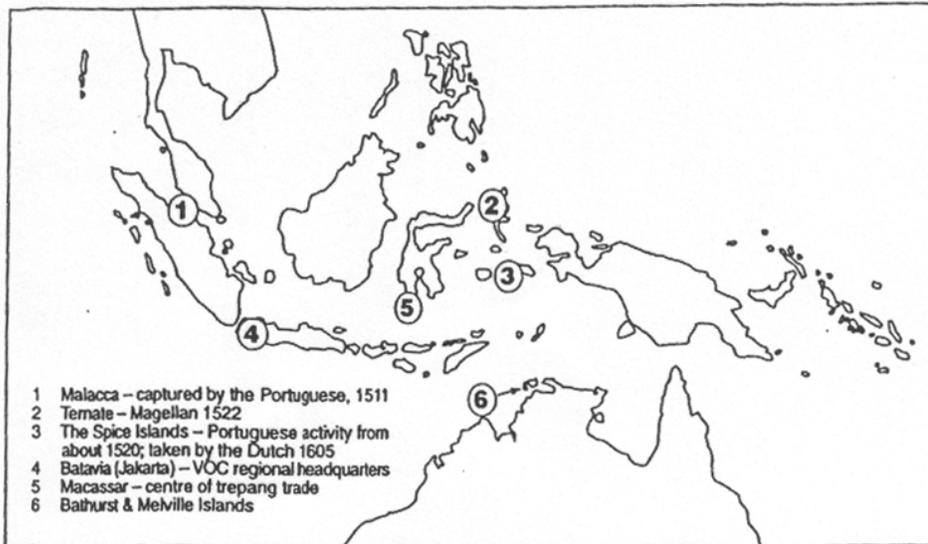
van Colster took the Arnhem along the west side of the Gulf and then back to Banda, naming the land area "Arnhem Land." Aborigines were encountered on nine occasions, but only fleeting descriptions of them were recorded by the Dutch.

van Colster, in common with most of the early Dutchmen, thought that the land he had seen was part of a number of islands. What lay beyond those islands was the geographic question now to be answered - might there be a passage through the islands to South America, or might the South Land lie beneath the islands? In 1636 Anthony van Diemen became Governor-General in Batavia (then the principal Dutch base in Java; now called Jakarta). van Diemen resolved to investigate the "Southland", and under his direction exploration activities increased.

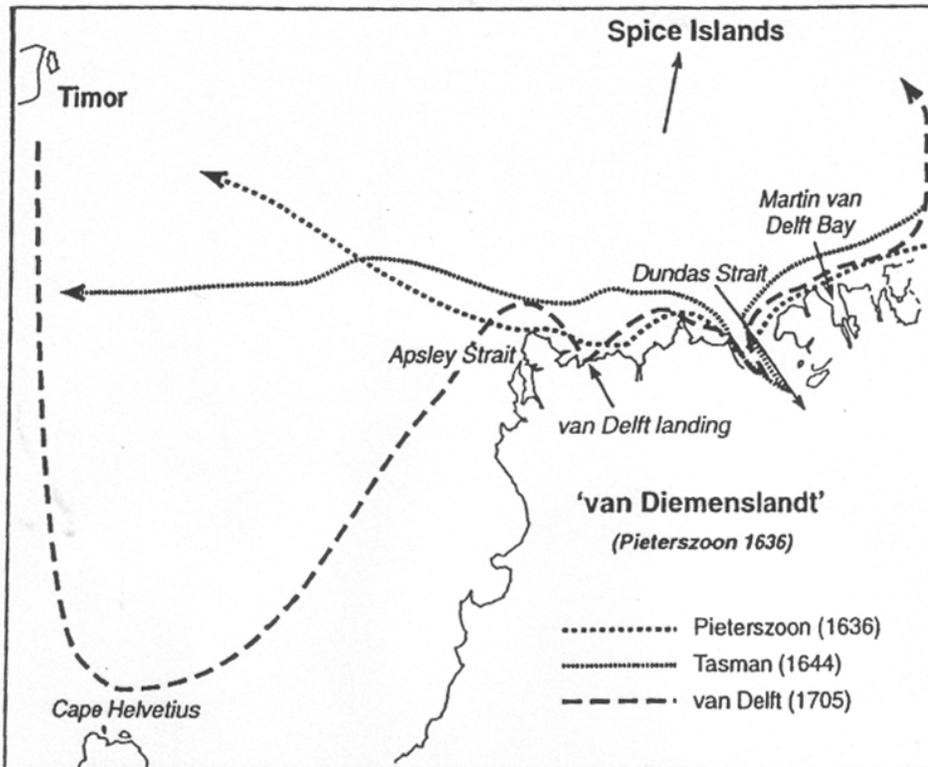
### **Pieterszoon comes to the Tiwi Islands**

In June 1636 two ships, the *Cleen Amsterdam* and the *Wesel*, were sent south to investigate the possible existence of a channel which might lead to the southern or eastern parts of the South Land, or to an inland sea. The merchant Pieter Pieterszoon took charge of the expedition after the appointed commander Gerrit Pool was killed in New Guinea, at the outset of the voyage.

Pieterszoon took his ships south westerly from New Guinea to the Aru Islands, then south. This course brought the ships to the vicinity of Melville Island. On 13 June 1636 Pieterszoon sighted land ("low land with small hillocks"), near what is now Dundas Strait, separating Melville Island from Cape Don. For the next nine days the two ships sailed west along the north shore of Melville Island, making at least one landing, in the vicinity of Tinganoo Bay. Fires were noted, but people were not seen ashore - "We saw in many places inland great smoke clouds, but perceived no fruit trees, houses, canoes, or people. It seemed to be a waste land." Pieterszoon "had paddled close along the shore with (a canoe). and gone ashore in sundry places, finding the land wild and barren". Although the Dutchmen did not see any Tiwi. it is certain that the Tiwi closely watched the Dutch.



**SOUTH EAST ASIA AND NORTHERN AUSTRALIA**



**DUTCH GEOGRAPHIC KNOWLEDGE OF NORTHERN AUSTRALIA,  
 VICINITY OF BATHURST AND MELVILLE ISLANDS.**

Taken from a Dutch map, about 1705.

Note that Dundas Strait was thought to be a possible seaway to the interior of the 'Great South Land'.

By 21 June 1636 Pieterszoon had reached the vicinity of Cape van Diemen. He called the whole region "van Diemenslant". Adverse winds prevented the ships sailing south west to explore the coast of Bathurst Island, so Pieterszoon ended his exploration and sailed for Banda and Ambon, via Timor. Despite this premature termination, Pieterszoon had carried out the most systematic European exploration of the Australian coast which had been undertaken to that time.

### **Abel Tasman**

In 1642 and again in 1644 van Diemen sent Abel Tasman in search of the Southland "to explore it more fully and to find an opening to some important countries or at least to useful routes to established rich markets." The first voyage resulted in the circumnavigation of Australia (although Tasman was so far offshore that he failed to discern the presence of the continent), and the discovery of Tasmania, New Zealand, and Fiji.

On his 1644 voyage Tasman sailed into the Gulf of Carpentaria, down the west coast of Cape York and then north to the area sighted by van Colster. Tasman then sailed westward along the north coast, naming several features as he went; then around the western tip of Cobourg Peninsula and southward through Dundas Strait (which he called van Diemen Bay) and anchored inside what is now called van Diemen Gulf. Tasman then sailed north, back to open sea, and then along the north coasts of Bathurst and Melville islands. Tasman observed the Tiwi lands from a distance, and did not recognise that they were in fact islands before he sailed west and south west, around the northwestern Australian coasts. Finally, Tasman returned to Java from the present vicinity of the coast off the present locality of Carnarvon, in Western Australia.

Tasman's general route was well offshore, and he did not observe the details which might have indicated which areas of land were merely islands and which might comprise the mainland. Tasman "did not discover anything important. but only found wretched naked beachcombers". Dutch interest in the South Land lapsed, and did not revive for another sixty years.

## **William Dampier**

In 1699 the British navigator William Dampier voyaged around the north west coasts of what is now Western Australia. Dampier became the first Englishman to set foot on the Australian continent when, on 5 January 1688, he landed on the shores of King Sound, in the present locality of Derby. Dampier recorded more extensive descriptions of Aborigines than earlier explorers had done, but his descriptions were unsympathetic and somewhat superficial. "They differ but little from Brutes" Dampier wrote. A more accurate and detailed description of Aboriginal Australians had to await renewed Dutch exploration.

Publication of Dampier's journal revived the notion that the areas so far discovered might mask a sea passage to more useful lands further south. The Dutch feared that Dampier had signaled a quickening of British interest in the South Land, and to forestall possible British competition or colonisation the Dutch renewed their exploration of the Australian north coasts.

## **Maarten van Delft ,1705**

On 20 January 1705 the Governor-General and Council of the VOC instructed Maarten van Delft to take three ships from Batavia. (the *Vossenbosch*, *Nova Hollandia*, and *Wajer* ) to Timor and thence to Cape Van Diemen. van Delft was instructed to explore Van Diemen Bay, and in particular to investigate the possibility that it might give access to the southern parts of New Holland. van Delft was told "Van Diemensland in Hollandia Nova ... is said to consist altogether of islands, a matter that will thus be cleared up." After leaving the Van Diemensland area, van Delft was to sail east to Aarnemsland (Arnhem Land). thence into the Gulf of Carpentaria, and then back to Banda.

Van Delft's three ships left Batavia on 23 January 1705. They arrived at Koepang on Timor, on 12 February and, due to bad weather, remained there until 2 March. Then they set out for the South Land, taking a course south easterly from Timor.

On 2 April 1705 van Delft and his party again saw land, probably the north western shore of Bathurst Island, about the area presently called Cape Helvetius. Almost immediately the sailors saw smoke and other signs of habitation.

The three ships spent the next three months (until 12 July 1705) exploring the coasts of the Tiwi islands and the adjacent mainland eastwards from Cape Don toward Croker Island. (It should be noted here that the dates cited by Dutch authorities in reporting van Delft's voyage employed the "Old Style" calendar. At about this time the Dutch adopted the new Gregorian calendar which is in use today. However, it appears that the old Julian calendar may have been still in use in the East Indies in 1705. Dates may therefore be ten days at variance from the dates which would have been cited had the modern calendar been used.)

From the Cape Helvetius area the ships sailed around and into St. Asaph Bay, at the mouth of Apsley Strait, and there saw some "natives" with dogs. As they proceeded west they applied several place names (now replaced), and at a point west of Cook's Reef they landed and obtained fresh water (calling the place "Waterplaets").

On 31 April (probably 23 April by the modern calendar) the ships sailed into Shark Bay and landed. Some of the men saw some natives who drove the mariners off. The location appears to have been the Melville Island mainland, between Cooks Reef and Karlake Island. At first the Tiwi retired, but "Between these two islands or headlands some natives were met by our men on April 23rd., who did not indeed retire, but nevertheless ran together toward an eminence, and with all sorts of movements and gestures attempted to drive our men from the land ..."

An affray resulted, and about 14 or 15 men, seeing that their hostile demonstration had not caused the Dutch to withdraw, began to 'throw assegais or better sharpened sticks at our men". A shot was fired and one of the "chiefs" was hit.

Perhaps this incident, by demonstrating to the Dutch that the Tiwi would fight bravely and effectively in defense of their land, established a better basis for relations between the two groups. By forcing the Dutch to withdraw, the Tiwi had shown that they required to be treated with respect and caution. It seems that peace was made on a foundation of mutual respect, and that for the next few weeks there was considerable friendly contact. The wounded Tiwi man was assisted and bandaged, then stayed aboard one of the ships until the Dutch left Tiwi waters. Other Tiwi went aboard the Dutch ships, with gifts of fish and crabs, while the Dutch gave the Tiwi clothing and ornaments. Until the day of the seafarers' departure it appears that the Tiwi permitted the Dutch to land at will. to obtain fresh water, and to reconnoiter the hinterland.

The report goes on to talk about the native people met by the mariners "from before mentioned date until their departure." "they go stark naked, without shame to age or sex .. except that only the women who had children with them came to cover their privy parts with leaves or the like." They were described as "very agile and of well made posture; but the wives are tall and thin, with very broad mouths and small eyes, the hair of both is woolly, like that of the inhabitants of the Papuan islands, and a yellow or red ointment, prepared with turtle fat, seems their ornament."

"they... appeared to be very greedy after linen, knives, beads, and such knick-knacks, but possess nothing which is of value. They have neither Iron nor anything like minerals or metal; for a stone which has been grounded serves as their hatchet; have neither houses nor huts, and occupy themselves with fishing by means of harpoons of wood, and also of little nets, and putting out to sea in little vessels made of the bark of trees, which are so fragile they have to be shored up with cross-beams." "Some of them have scars as if they have been cut or carved, which they use as a kind of ornament. They eat sparingly and moderately, through which they were always found active and lively; also they seem to manage alone with the before mentioned fishing, and use also a few roots and tuberous plants but no birds or animals of the woods ..."

Another account of the voyage is quite explicit that the Tiwi ate no birds or "wild animals" - "they grow up always active and nimble; their diet seems to consist of fish, and a few roots and vegetables, but no birds or wild animals of any kind are used as food, for though animal food exists, and was found by our men in abundance, the natives appeared indifferent to it. "

On 14 June 1705 the sailors saw about 500 Tiwi gathered, at a place about two miles inland - "at night they were descried sitting round several fires among the bushes; nothing however was seen in their possession of any value."

Other detailed references to the Tiwi were included in the report - these were probably the most comprehensive descriptions of Australian Aborigines to that time. However, the most important consideration from the Dutch viewpoint, was that the people had no possessions of any value for trade.

The three Dutch ships sailed on, easterly into Lethbridge Bay, and then east wards toward Cape Fleeming and Dundas Strait (Tasman's van Diemen Bay). It seems that as the Dutch ships were about to leave the vicinity of Melville Island there was a second affray between the Dutch and eight Tiwi. It appears from the Dutch reports that Tiwi had been aboard the ships, and that generally there was very close and cordial contact. However. "at the last moment when our men were on the point of departing, two sailors were attacked and wounded by eight natives, with the hope of taking possession of their cloth, and that after having conversed with these people for weeks, eaten and drunk, been aboard, examining all things in admiration, having received presents, and on their part had regaled our men with fish and crabs."

We have only the Dutch version of these events, but it is likely that the Tiwi, once it became apparent to them that the Dutch intended to leave, determined that they would obtain as much as possible of any valued Dutch goods. Probably the Tiwi believed that they were entitled to these goods in return for their hospitality of past weeks. In any case, a skirmish apparently resulted, and the Dutch sailed away with a negative view of the Tiwi as people "full of treachery".

The small ship *Nova Hollandia* sailed south into the Strait; Mount Bedwell was noted on the southern shore of Cobourg Peninsula and a landing was made on Greenhill Island, where water was obtained.

The ships then sailed east along the north coast of Cobourg Peninsula, naming Port Essington "Maarten Van Delft Bay".

On 12 July the ships began their return journey from the vicinity of Croker Island - many of the sailors had died or were seriously ill, and fresh food was urgently needed. The *Vossenbosch* did not reach the East Indies until 4 August 1705, but the commander van Delft was dead and reports of the voyage were sketchy and second hand.

### **The Last Dutch Explorations**

In 1751 a Chinese trader, searching for turtle shell, sailed southward from Timor and after five days landed on what was probably one of the Tiwi islands. The Chinese was welcomed by people of "more than ordinary length and stature, very black and the hair woolly, but rather long." The Chinese trader sailed on after two days.

On receiving a report of the Chinese sailor's voyage there was renewed Dutch interest in the South Land, although in 1754 the managers of the VOC at Batavia reported to the company governors in Amsterdam that "The Southland which is in the southeast of Timor and not far from thence, is made now and then from Timor and Makassar, but produces so far as we know nothing but trepang, being dried jelly fish, and wax." This is perhaps the earliest specific documentary references to the trepang trade, and implies that the trade was of little account at that time.

As a result of the Chinese voyage the Dutch commissioned further exploration, sending two ships south under the command of Jean Gonzal. The ships left Batavia in February 1756 and appear to have sailed into the Gulf of Carpentaria. This appears to have been the last Dutch exploration of the north coast of Australia. It was left firstly to Macassan trepangers and then to British and French navigators to carry out further exploration in northern Australian waters.

### **The Significance of Tiwi the Contact with the Dutch**

The Dutch had come in search of a land which might have possibilities for trade. They found a land which they thought was barren waste, inhabited by people who had no possessions of value for exchange. On Bathurst and Melville islands the Dutch found a people who had a rich and highly developed civilisation, but a civilisation which was so unlike that of the Europeans that the two people were too dissimilar to have anything to offer one another.

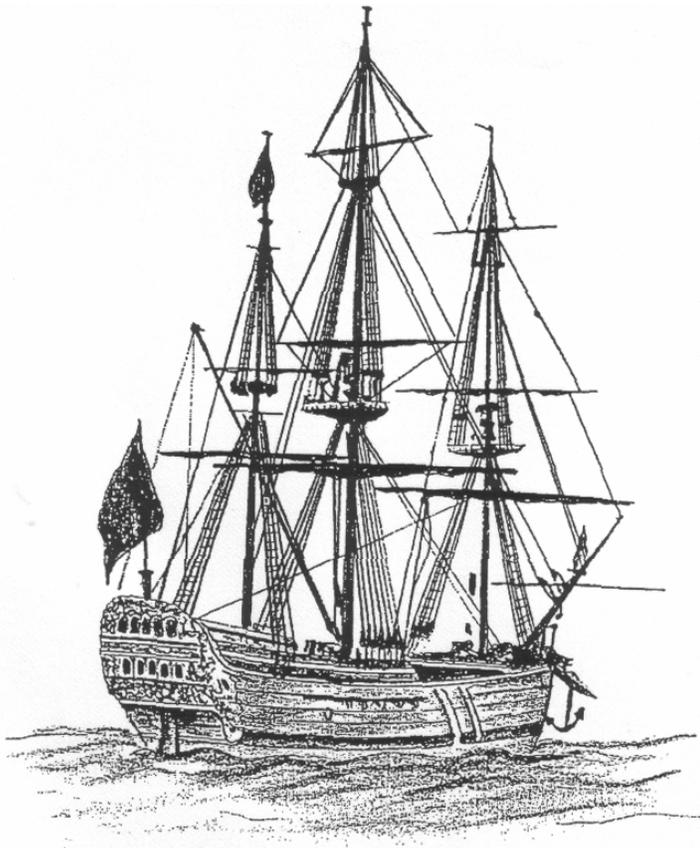
The Dutch found, as the British were to find later, that the Tiwi Islands were typical of north Australia. It was a rich country for the Tiwi, productive and able to sustain a numerous, vigorous, and healthy people who had a full and complex cultural life. To the Tiwi their islands were "the world", and within them was to be found everything which was necessary to sustain physical and spiritual life. However, in Dutch eyes the islands lacked even the most basic life essentials. Further, the Tiwi were potentially hostile and aggressive, and well able to repulse any unwanted Dutch contact.

As a result, the Dutch formed a negative opinion of the South Land. They had called it Nova Hollandia, but they thought little of it, and they were happy to relinquish any claim they might have made on it. In 1788 they were content to see the British settle the country and then eventually call it "Australia".

Although the Australian nation derives substantially from that British settlement from 1788, we have seen that modern Australian history is in fact much older than 1788. Detailed European knowledge of Australia can be traced to at least Pieterszoon's landing on Melville Island in 1636, and the earliest detailed European knowledge of the first Australians can be dated at 1705, when van Delft and his men spent several months on and about the Tiwi islands. At that time Bathurst and Melville islands were probably the best known parts of Australia. Certainly, at that time the Tiwi were the best known and most fully described Australians.

That knowledge was fundamental to Australia's history. Because of it the Dutch waived their interest in northern Australia, leaving the way open to the British to stake their claim in 1824. In that year the British came to Tiwi country, but, like the Dutch, they did not stay long. For almost five years the Tiwi kept the British virtually besieged in Fort Dundas, and finally the British, like the Dutch, sailed away.

The Tiwi had demonstrated that outsiders who would come into the Tiwi world could stay only if they showed proper respect for the land and its people. They had established a tradition which endures three centuries later.



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# Timeline of Tiwi History

## The Dreamtime

The Tiwi ("we, the only people") people created by spirit ancestors; they live on their present country, in twelve main groups

## 15.000 years Before Present

Seas begin to rise as the last ice Age ends; areas of Bathurst and Melville Islands become isolated from mainland

## 1636

Dutch navigator Pieter Pieterszoon. in ships *Kleen Amsterdam and Wesel*, explores north coasts of Tiwi Islands; lands at Tinganoo Bay and gets fresh water; names area "van Diemenslandt" (after Dutch governor of East Indies)

## 1642

Dutch navigator Abet Tasman sails past Tiwi islands: sails into van Diemen Gulf

## 1700++

Tiwi make occasional raids an mainland to capture wives: they have occasional contact with seafarers and Macassan trepangers; the Tiwi are renowned for hostility to outsiders

## 1700++

It is possible that Portuguese slave traders from Timor raided the Tiwi islands in the eighteenth century, reinforcing the traditional hostility to outsiders

## 1705

Dutch navigator Maarten van Delft, in ships *Vosenbosch, Hollandia* and *Wajer* spends weeks on north shores of Tiwi Islands: meets Tiwi and describes them in detail

## 1740++

Possible visits From Macassans - perhaps these visits were only occasional; Macassan stories are that the

Tiwi drove away any Macassan visitors

**1751**

Chinese navigator from Timor lands on the Tiwis.

**1770**

Captain James Cook describes east coast of Australia

**1788**

Convict settlement established at Port Jackson  
(Sydney)

**1803**

French navigator Nicholas Baudin sighted west coast  
of Bathurst Island

**1818**

British navigator Philip Parker King explores waters  
of Tiwi islands area in detail

**1818. 17 May**

King and a party land on Melville Island - driven  
back to their boat by Tiwi

**1818, 19 May**

King completes voyage through Apsley Strait into van Diemen Gulf.  
proving that Bathurst and Melville Islands were separate from mainland

**1824, 30 September**

The British begin to establish a military outpost at Fort Dundas (near  
Pirlangimpi) - this is the first British settlement in north Australia

**1824-1829**

The Tiwi keep the British besieged in a small area around the Fort

**1826, September**

The first buffalo brought to Fort Dundas

**1829, March**

Fort Dundas abandoned - largely because of Tiwi hostility

**1895**

Joe Cooper and others begin buffalo shooting on Tiwi islands. then  
withdraw to mainland

**1905**

Joe Cooper and family return to Melville Island; resume buffalo  
shooting and commence timber cutting and milling; Tiwi people often  
visit Darwin and other mainland places with Cooper

**1909**

Father Gsell selects Nguiu mission site

**1911 June**

Father Gsell, with four Filipinos. begins mission work at Nguiu

**1914**

Vesteys (British meat conglomerate) leases Melville Island for buffalo shooting; shooting carried on until 1916; leases surrendered in 1933  
1927 Gsell encourages monogamy; arranges Christian marriages

**1928**

Mission begins teaching English 1928 population estimated at about 1,100

**1929**

Japanese pearlers establish camps, especially near Garden Point: take Tiwi women - this continues until war breaks out late 1941

**1937**

Policeman stationed at Garden Point to control Japanese contact

**1939**

Patrol Officer Bill Harney rounds up Tiwi people in Darwin and brings them to Garden Point; soon after these people were moved to Snake Bay (Milikapiti)

**1940, September**

Mission for children established at Garden Point

**1942- 1945**

Tiwi people play an active part in World War Two

**1954++**

Welfare Branch active on Tiwi islands

**1972**

New self determination" policies adopted for administration of Aboriginal affairs

**1978**

Tiwi Land Council formed