

As this new route cut the voyage time by about half, it was soon adopted as the official route for VOC ships. There was, however, one major problem. Ships of the time were equipped with instruments such as the astrolabe that were satisfactory for the measurement of latitude, but no instrument existed for the accurate determination of longitude. This was estimated by the use of the compass (course) and the log (speed through the water). Such a system of 'dead reckoning' allowed considerable discrepancies; so it was inevitable that some East Indiaman would inadvertently sail too far eastwards before turning north and thus stumble upon the western coastline of Australia. That man was Dirk Hartog.

Born of a Dutch sea-faring family in 1580, Dirk Hartog probably went to sea at an early age. He commanded his first ship in 1610, brought his own vessel in 1611 and during the next five years made a number of successful trading voyages to Baltic and Mediterranean ports.

The voyage of the *Eendracht*

In 1615 Dirk Hartog entered the service of the United East India Company and was appointed master of the *Eendracht* for a voyage to Java. The *Eendracht* left Texel in January 1616 in company with a number of other VOC ships. After a most unpleasant voyage, the *Eendracht* reached the Cape of Good Hope along, having become separated from the rest of the fleet in a storm.

Leaving the Cape, Hartog sailed south-east on Brouwer's route to pick up the 'roaring forties', the prevailing westerly winds which carried them across the Indian Ocean. He continued eastwards until, somewhat to his surprise, land was sighted at 26° south latitude on the 25 October 1616.

The *Eendracht* was brought to anchor off an island behind which could be seen a vast mainland. Dirk Hartog examined the area thoroughly for two days, but could find nothing he considered of value or interest.

Before leaving, a post bearing a flattened pewter dinner plate was erected. A translation of the inscription on the plate reads:

The 25th October is here arrived the ship Eendracht of Amsterdam, the upper merchant Gilles Miebias of Leige, Skipper Dirck Hartichs of Amsterdam. The 27th ditto we sail for Bantum, the under merchant Jan Stins the upper steersman Pieter Doores of Brielle. Anno 1616.

The roads at which the ship had been lying and the island where the plate was erected were named Dirk Hartog Roads and Dirk Hartog Island, respectively.

The *Eendracht* sailed northward, accurately charting the coastline to 22°S. The newly discovered area was named 'Eendrachtsland' and remained known by that name for nearly two hundred years.

Leaving the barren inhospitable coastline, Hartog continued his voyage to Bantam, arriving in December 1616, five months overdue.

The Dutch East India Company may not have been too pleased with the length of Hartog's voyage and the fact that he had found nothing of value to them in the south-land and may not have offered him another command. Whatever the reason, on his return to Amsterdam in 1617, Hartog resigned from the Company and again went into private trading, making a number of profitable voyages to the Baltic.

Dirk Hartog died in 1621, aged 41 years. He was, as far as is known, the first European to set foot on the western coast of Australia.