

The First Views of Australia's Coast in 1658

Many of us have an interest in old maps, particularly old maps of Australia. Most would know that the first charting of Australia took place in 1606 when the *Duyfken* charted about 300 kilometres of west Cape York. But the original chart no longer exists, the oldest copy being in the *Van der Hem Atlas*, published in 1670 and held by Österreichische Nationalbibliothek (National Library of Austria). Consequently it would appear that the oldest extant map which shows any part of Australia is the Gerritsz map of 1622.

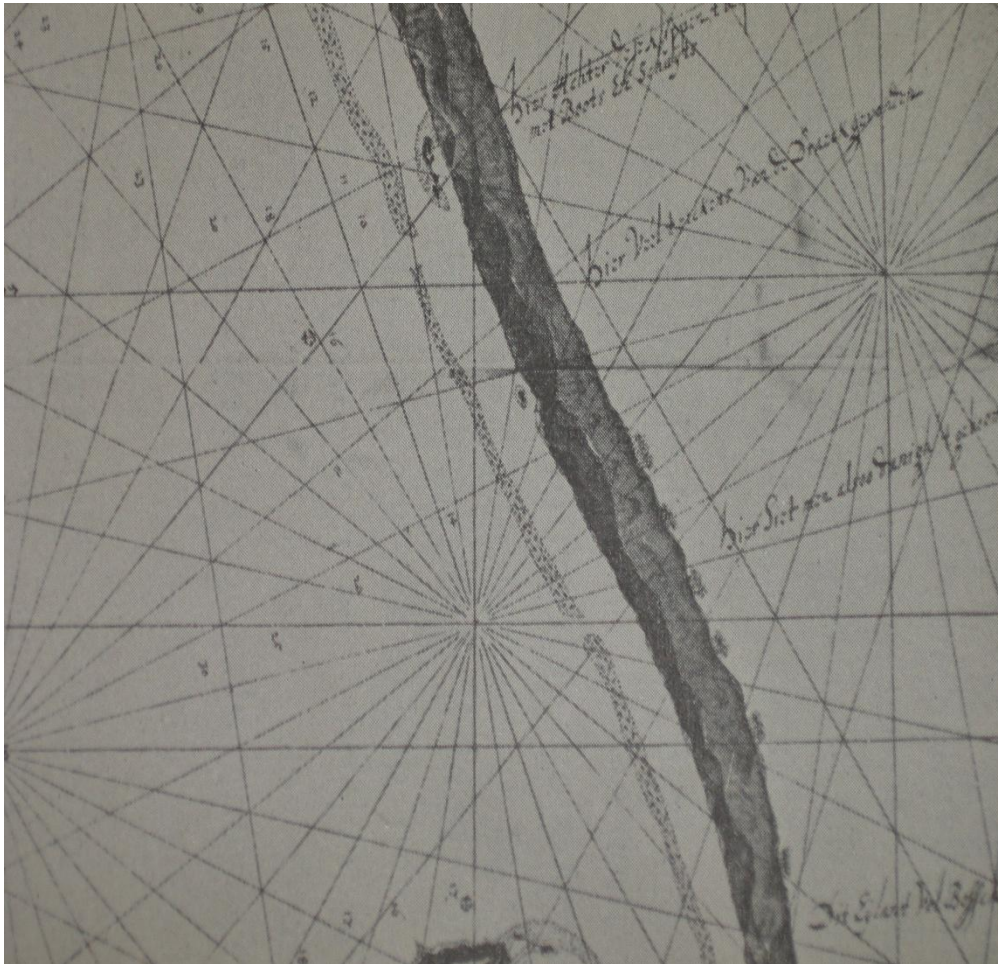


Gerritsz Map (1622)
Bibliotheque Nationale

This is a map of the Pacific which shows the part of Cape York charted by the *Duyfken*. Even though Dirk Hartog had charted some of the Western Australian coast in 1616, this was not published until 1627 as part of “Caert van't Landt van d'Eendracht uyt de Iournalen ende afteykeningen der Stierluyden t'samengestelt” [Map of Lands of Eendracht from the Taurus Journals and accounts of ordinary people]

But there is more to hydrography than just charting and mapping coasts. Accurate maps are of course important for navigators, then as now. Long ago, before such things as bathymetric charts, GPS, sonars and lidars were even dreamed of, explorers and navigators needed all the help they could get. One of the few tools available at that time, apart from compasses, charts and maps, were coastal profiles. These were intended to help those visiting unfamiliar coasts to identify where they were, by providing a panorama of the coast, its form and features. In effect they were landscapes of the coast as seen from the sea.

For Australia the oldest coastal profiles date from 1658. One is rather unusual in that it combines a chart with a coastal profile. That was a chart known as *Kaart van Eendrachtsland* [Chart of Eendrachtsland] drawn up from a survey of 500 kilometres of the coast, north from Rottnest Island (off Perth) in Western Australia by Skipper Samuel Volkersen of the *Waeckende Boey* [Watching Buoy]. Volkersen and the crew of the *Waeckende Boey* had been searching for 68 marooned passengers and crew from the *Vergulde Draeck*, which had sunk 90 kilometres north of Perth in 1656.

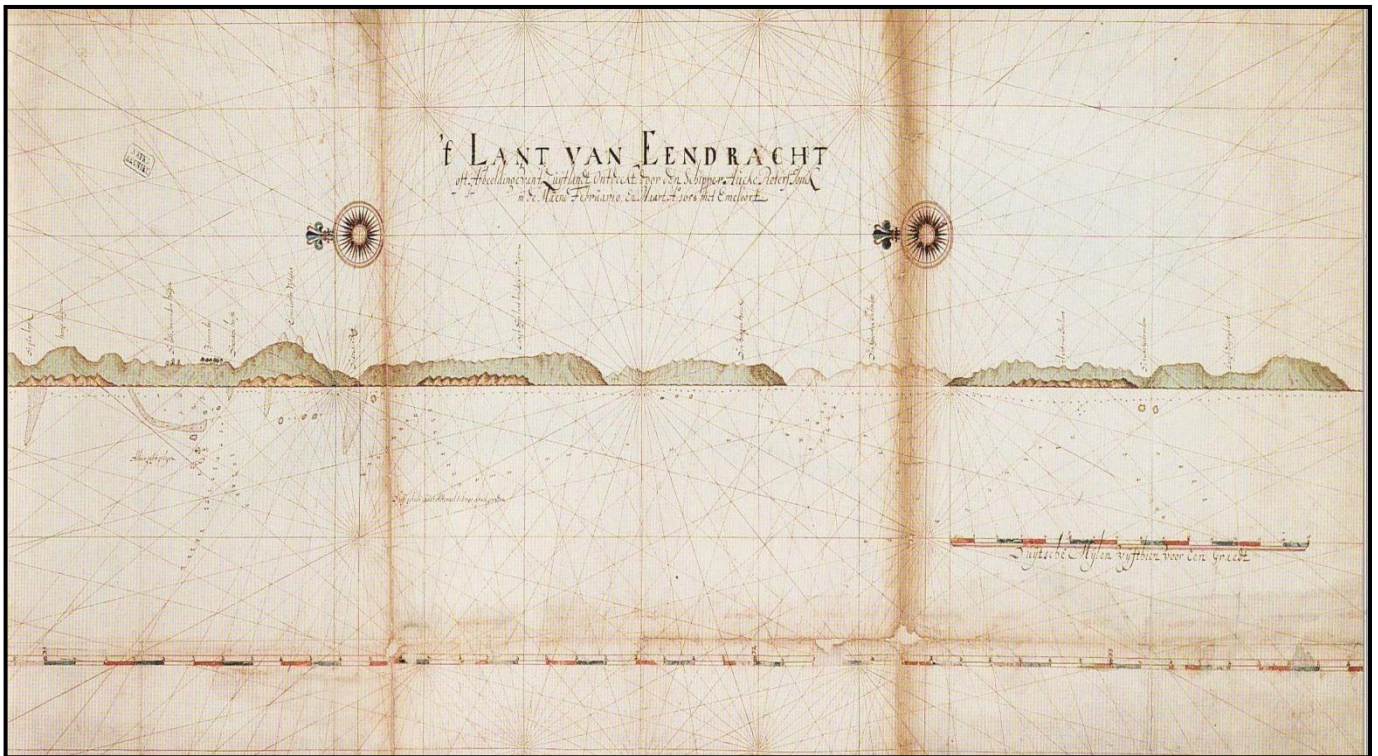


Part of *Chart of Eendrachtsland* (Volkersen, 1658)

Part of Rottnest Island, which was discovered on this voyage but not named until 1697, can be seen at the bottom of the map. Unfortunately, while at least providing a view of the coast, for the most part there is not much detail apart from a disproportionately prominent Mt Lesueur farther north.

Accompany the *Waeckende Boey* was another ship, the *Emeloort*, skippered by Aucke Pieter Jonck. Jonck's charting resulted in another map, also known as *Kaart van Eendrachtsland*, of this part of the Western Australian coast. But a separate coastal profile was drawn up by Johan Nessel, based on Jonck's observations of the coast. This is far more striking. The profile, known as '*t Lant van Eendracht oft Afbeelding van't Zuytlandt*, [*Images of the Land of Eendracht of*

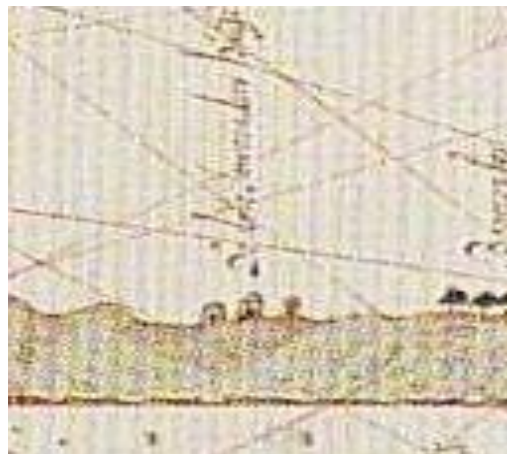
the Southland] was produced in 1658 and is held by the Algemeen Rijksarchief in the Netherlands.



't Lant van Eendracht oft Afbeelding van't Zuytlandt
Johan Nessel (1658), Algemeen Rijksarchief

It laid out with north to the left and shows the coast north of Perth. The elevations in the landscape are not in true proportion as the coast here is actually relatively low and featureless. Reefs extending out from the coast can be seen (the stipled areas), then some of low coastal limestone cliffs (usually no more than 10 m high) overlooking the beach (the brown ridges) with scrub covered dunal ridges, which can be up to 80-100 metres high, in the background.

If you look carefully, at the northern end (left side) there are two Aboriginal habitations depicted.



Aboriginal (Juat) Dwellings 1658

The representation of these dwellings is fanciful and not typical of the type of habitations the Juat actually made. Their inclusion reflects the fact that a landing party from the *Emeloort* had an amicable meeting with some of the Juat.

Although Nessel's and Volkersen's coastal profiles were intended to guide those who followed, they are in effect the first European landscapes of the Australian mainland, and the first attempt at depicting Aboriginal habitations.

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