

Australia Discovers the Duyfken

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It is now accepted that the *Duyfken*, skippered by Willem Janszoon, was the first European vessel to visit the shores of Australia. But this was not always the case. The Aboriginal people of west Cape York, when they first encountered the *Duyfken* in their waters, were of course well aware that those aboard the ship were the sort of strangers they had never encountered before. In effect they discovered the *Duyfken*, when it unexpectedly arrived off the coast, and the Dutch crew set foot on the shores of their country. But it took 400 years before the wider Australia community, and the rest of the world, came to acknowledge and commemorate that fact.

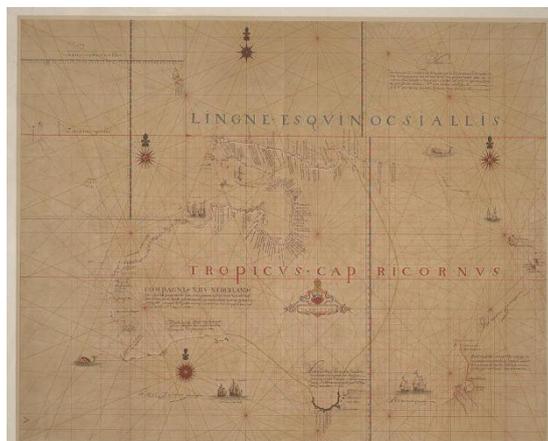
Numerous Aboriginal traditions have been recorded along the coast of west Cape York referring to the voyage of the *Duyfken*, contact with its crew and the interactions that followed. As we now know, this was the first documented contact any Indigenous Australians had with people from far off lands. A typical example of those traditions, recounting some of what took place, relates that:

"The Aboriginal people saw the first Dutch ship north of the mouth of the river in 1606. They saw a big mob of logs that were huge, very big with lots of devils on them. The devils looked strange. Their skin looked different and they were white. The Aboriginal people wanted to know why they had come.

The warriors were hiding and watching from the bush. They wanted to see what the strangers were going to do."

It would seem complex interactions then took place between the crew of the *Duyfken*, subsequent Dutch explorers, and the people of Cape York.

Paradoxically, the Dutch themselves did not initially know they had stumbled upon a new continent, they thought it was part of New Guinea. It was not until 1644, when Abel Janszoon Tasman had completed his second voyage to Australia, that a map was prepared linking together all the Dutch explorations that this became apparent. The map in question, 'Compagnis Nieuw Nederland' ('Company's New Netherlands') formed the basis for many later maps, including the famous Thévenot map of 1663.



Compagnis Nieuw Nederland
(Abel Tasman, 1644)
National Library of Australia: Map NK 9814

While this map, and others based on it, clearly showed the part of the coast charted during the *Duyfken's* voyage, it was not apparent that this had been the first encounter with Australia. The proof of this lay in earlier documents. Janszoon of course had kept a journal and produced a chart of the 300 kilometres of the coast of west Cape York they traversed. But both the original journal and chart were subsequently lost. The wider world eventually became aware of the voyage of the *Duyfken* from other sources. Captain John Saris, based in Banten, noted the departure of the *Duyfken* on 28 November 1605, 'for the discovery of the Iland called Nova ginnea which, it is said, affordeth great store of Gold,' and news of its return on 25 June 1606, 'the *Flemmings* [Dutch] Pinnasse [*Duyfken*] which went upon discovery for Nova Ginny, was returned to *Banda*, having found the Iland'. The comments of Captain Saris were published in Samuel Purchas's *Purchas His Pilgrims* in 1625. The voyage is also mentioned in a document produced in 1618 for the Lords States of Holland and West Friesland. In his journal as commander of the *Pera* and *Arnhem* in 1623, Carstenszoon mentions the *Duyfken's* voyage a number of times, and from this it was apparent they were carrying a copy of the *Duyfken's* journal and chart. Finally, Tasman's instructions for his voyage to northern Australia in 1644, makes reference to details of the *Duyfken's* explorations, as well as mentioning the existence of the chart.

Even though the archivist and administrators of the Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie (VOC) were well aware of the *Duyfken's* exploits, initially the wider world was not. In the 17th and 18th century cartographic information was of strategic importance, and communications were slow, limited and erratic. Consequently, information flowed slowly, spasmodically and often incompletely, and its implications were often not appreciated. At times it was distorted to meet personal, commercial and national agendas. Maps were one means by which contemporary information on what explorations and discoveries Europeans had made was represented. Probably the earliest map to show the part of Australia charted by the *Duyfken* was the Gerritsz map of 1622.



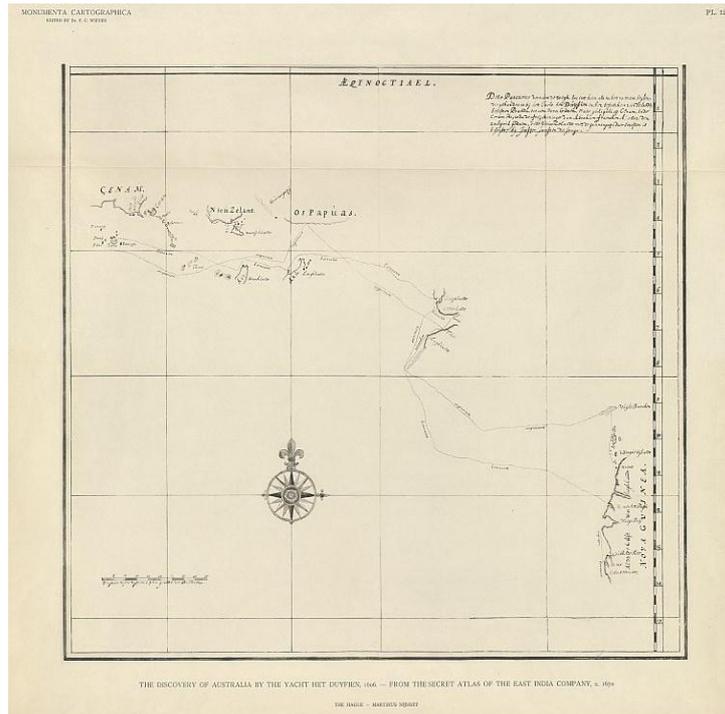
Mar del sur
(Hessel Gerritsz, 1622)
Bibliothèque Nationale de France

Such maps do not did not necessarily achieve a wide circulation or detail the sources on which they were based however. Consequently it took many years for the details of the *Duyfken's* voyage and its chart to emerge. Thévenot, although responsible for producing the 'Hollandia nova detecta' map of 1663, showing what had been charted by 1644, thought the Chinese had been first foreigners to voyage to the shores of Australia. However, by 1677, French sources were acknowledging the fact that Hartog, Nuyts and Tasman had visited and charted parts of Australia. Bowen, the most eminent English geographer of the first half of the 18th century, in his *Complete System of Geography*, published in 1747, also acknowledged Dutch primacy in first contact with Australia, noting in particular the explorations and charting undertaken by Nuyts and Tasman. By 1756 French geographer de Brosses, despite many factual errors in documenting early Dutch voyages, had identified Dirk Hartog in the *Eendracht* in 1616 as the first to encounter *Terra Australis*.

In the second half of the 18th century understanding of early voyages and exploration of Australia was to change dramatically. This began with the discovery in Manilla in 1762 of Luis Vaez de Torres 1607 letter to the Spanish Council of State, describing his voyage through Torres Strait. The pre-eminent British cartographer from that time, Alexander Dalrymple, soon published a map which showed the track Torres had taken in 1606, thus giving Torres precedence. However, before long it appears Dalrymple became acquainted with Tasman's Instructions, and the account by Captain Saris, and so it appears he concluded that indeed the *Duyfken* had made the first voyage to Australia. This is not certain as the relevant part of the only copy of his *Collection concerning* [sic] *Papua* appears to be missing. Fortunately distinguished navigator and cartographer Matthew Flinders was made aware of its content through Sir Joseph Banks, and accepted that the *Duyfken* was the first authenticated voyage to Australia.

With the *Duyfken's* voyage now being accepted by such respected authorities, competing claims for precedence, such as the Chinese and the Frenchman de Gonneville, were not given much credence. But then in 1861 R. H. Major, historian and map curator with the British Museum, detailed his claim that the Portuguese had charted the northwest coast of Australia in 1601, and had thus preceded the *Duyfken*. He based this on his discovery of the Heredia Map, which turned out to be a fabrication, but it opened the door to many alternative theories about earlier voyages, the Portuguese, the Chinese, the Spanish, even the Phoenicians. Such debates continue, much based on speculative interpretation of the enigmatic 16th century Dieppe maps, but the consensus is now well-established that the *Duyfken* was the first authenticated voyage to Australia.

What conclusively established the authenticity of the *Duyfken's* voyage, ending all further doubt, was the discovery of a copy of the original *Duyfken* Chart, published in 1670. Dr F. C. Wieder chanced upon it in what is known as the *Blaeu Van der Hem Atlas*, held by the Österreichische Nationalbibliothek in Vienna. Wieder published a copy of the *Duyfken* Chart in his *Monumenta Cartographica* in 1933 and a copy was then made available to the Mitchell Library in Sydney by Professor G. C. Henderson. Thomas D. Mutch, historian, and at one time New South Wales Minister for Education, subsequently published an article about it in the *Sydney Morning Herald* on 2 and 9 December 1933. Mutch later gave a paper on the Chart to the Royal Australian Historical Society on 26 May 1942, and this was reprinted as a monograph in that year.



The Duyfken Chart

National Library of Australia: MAP Ra 265, Part 125

In 1956, the 350th anniversary of the voyage of the *Duyfken*, this landmark in Australian history appears to have passed by unnoticed and unremarked. However, in 2006, for the first time national commemorations were organised. Well over 150 events took place, with a voyage by the *Duyfken* replica being one of the highlights. One could argue that, after 400 years, not only had the Aboriginal people of Cape York discovered the *Duyfken*, but the wider Australian community finally had as well.