The Mutineers Marooned in 1629 – Hutt River or Wittecarra Gully?

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Introduction

Between 1629 and 1727 at least 73 crew members and passengers from Dutch ships are known to have found themselves unwillingly but permanently detained on the central and upper west coast of Western Australia. The actual number could have been as high as 240. These people found themselves in this predicament as a result of a number of shipwrecks, other accidents or deliberate marooning. The possibility that some actually survived and perhaps even prospered on what was to them foreign shores is an intriguing one. It is also of some significance for Australian history in that it marks the beginnings of a permanent European presence in Australia. The prospect that they may have interacted, engaged and perhaps integrated with Aboriginal populations in those parts, and in so doing influenced their culture in some way, adds a further, tantalising, dimension to the historical interest engendered by this topic. It not surprising, therefore, that considerable amount of research and commentary has been generated over time in regard to these issues.

Speculation about the fate of these crew and passengers began in the latter half of 19th century and early 20th century with some, such as explorer AC Gregory and ethnographer Daisy Bates, asserting that these unfortunates had actually survived, and this was evident in the physical appearance of particular Aboriginal populations. While Ernest Favenc's *Marooned On Australia*, published in 1896,[1] provided a fictionalised account of the adventures of the two *Batavia* mutineers abandoned in 1629, the question as to the actual fate of those stranded on the west coast did not begin to be rigorously pursued until the second half of the 20th century. This was largely because research and investigations prior to that was focussed on locating and identify the ships known to have been wrecked at various points along the coast. A paper by Playford in 1959 on the wreck of the *Zuytdorp* was probably the first to seriously consider the question of what had become of the folk stranded on these shores and the nature of their interaction with any Aboriginal people they may have encountered.[2]

The 1990s marked the beginning of a period of increasing interest and new research into the fate of the missing crew and passengers, beginning in 1990 with Gary Crew's *Strange Objects*,[3] another fictional account of the exploits of the two *Batavia* mutineers. Gerritsen's *And Their Ghosts May Be Heard*, published in 1994, was the first dedicated investigation into the fate of the numerous individuals and groups who had been marooned. This was followed shortly after by a further contribution from Playford, in his work *Carpet of Silver*.[4] Since then the question has attracted lively debate, particularly in regard to the linguistic evidence advanced by Gerritsen.[5] Another contentious and highly relevant issue that has been the subject of ongoing debate is the question of where the two mutineers from the Batavia Mutiny were abandoned in 1629. These men were the first Europeans to take up habitation in Australia, and they quite possibly had a significant impact on the Nhanda people of the central west coast. This chapter will consider that debate, review the evidence and arguments that have been put forward, and provide relevant information where appropriate.

Background

On 16 November 1629, following the Batavia Mutiny on the Abrolhos Islands, just off the central west coast of Western Australia, Commander Francisco Pelsaert marooned two of the mutineers on the adjacent mainland of Australia. Since 1959 there has been an ongoing debate as to where these two mutineers, Wouter Loos and Jan Pelgrom de Bye van Bemmel, were put ashore. Two contending sites have been proposed, the mouth of the Hutt River and a location 61 kilometres further north, Wittecarra Gully, with an array of evidence having been marshalled by the proponents of each of the sites to support their case. This is no trivial matter, as these two mutineers were in fact the first Europeans to take up permanent residence in Australia, 159 years before the First Fleet. It is therefore a question of some significance in Australian history.

The story began in the early hours of 4 June 1629, when the Dutch ship the *Batavia* with 320 people on board, struck Morning Reef in the Northern, or Wallabi Group, of the Abrolhos Islands, 90 kilometres west-north-west of Geraldton.[6] Approximately 275 people survived the initial disaster, finding their way by various means to the nearest islands. But they were still in great peril as they had almost no food or water. Pelsaert had immediately begun to search for water on nearby islands in the ship's yawl, without success. He then decided to make for the mainland in the yawl, accompanied by 50 of the crew. On 9 June, as they approached the coast to land, they were struck by a severe winter storm, and were nearly swamped. They hovered off the coast for almost 2 days, battling to stay afloat in the stormy seas, before heading north in the hope of finding calmer conditions and water, but were unable to land for a further 550 kilometres. When they did, they found little water and so the decision was made to make for Java, over 2000 kilometres away, to get help. They reached the Sunda Strait on 7 July and were picked up by a passing ship, the *Sardam*. The alarm was raised in the Dutch port of Batavia (modern day Djakarta) and the *Sardam* was quickly readied to return, with Pelsaert in command, to effect a rescue. The *Sardam* departed on 15 July and by the last week in August had returned to the Abrolhos Islands but, because of inaccuracies in determining latitudes, then spent over three weeks trying to locate the wreck and those who had been left behind. Finally, on 17 September they re-located the passengers and crew, only to be confronted by the horror of the infamous Batavia Mutiny. In their absence the mutineers had murdered about 125 men, women and children.

The Batavia Mutiny was a plot hatched and led by the Under Merchant Jeronimus Corneliszoon. Initially he and his confederates acted secretly, managing to trick a body of soldiers to go to a nearby island, West Wallabi Island, where they thought they would die of thirst or starvation. With most of the soldiers out of the way, Corneliszoon and his fellow mutineers then engaged in an orgy of rape and bloodshed. But the soldiers they had abandoned, rather than dying, prospered, having found water, birds eggs and tammar wallabies on West Wallabi Island. The Defenders, as they became known, were then joined by a handful of individuals who had managed to escape from the mutineers and warn them as to what was taking place. The mutineers subsequently launched three attacks on the Defenders who, ably led by a soldier, Webbie Hayes, stoutly resisted. The first two attacks were completely inept and resulted in the Defenders capturing Corneliszoon. The mutineers then elected one of their number, 24 year-old soldier Wouter Loos, as their new leader. Loos now led the third, and most effective

attack, in the midst of which Pelsaert, like the proverbial cavalry, miraculously appeared in the *Sardam* and put down the mutiny.

The next two months were spent in salvaging what they could from the *Batavia* and interrogating and trying the mutineers. On 2 October seven mutineers were hanged, most having hands chopped off prior to their execution. One of the condemned men, 18 year-old cabin-boy Jan Pelgrom de Bye, pleaded for his life and was given a last-minute reprieve because of his age. Wouter Loos also escaped execution because of a lack of evidence, the result of his ability to resist the application of judicial torture, a normal part of investigations at the time.[7] Consequently Pelsaert decided instead to maroon both on the mainland, 'in order to know once, for certain, what happens in the Land'.[8] This was done with a view to retrieving them at some point in the future so they could give and account of what was to be found in the great unknown of the Southland. Tasman was actually instructed to look out for these two men on his second voyage to Australia in 1644.[9]

It took many years for the wreck of the *Batavia* to be located, basically because the searchers were looking in the wrong location. As a result of rigorous research by Henrietta Drake-Brockman indicating the wreck actually lay in the Wallabi Group, Max Cramer and others found the wreck on 4 June 1963.[10] This was a momentous discovery in itself, but also an important one in determining where the mutiny had taken place, and where the voyage to deposit the mutineers Loos and de Bye had commenced.

The Marooning of Wouter Loos and Jan Pelgrom de Bye

Pelsaert's original plan had been to maroon Loos and de Bye somewhere between the Gascoyne River and North West Cape, in 24 or 25 degrees latitude.[11] The *Sardam* thus departed the Abrolhos Islands on 15 November and reached the coast by the noon. They sailed up the coast for a few hours, on the look-out for five sailors who had gone in a boat to North Island on 14 October to retrieve a barrel of vinegar and had disappeared in a gale.[12] They anchored in the mid-afternoon and on the following morning resumed sailing up the coast. Around noon Pelsaert realised they were at the location where he had tried to land in the yawl on 9 June. Consequently he decided to cast Loos and de Bye ashore there instead. After sending a party onshore to reconnoitre the locality, preparations were made for the mutineers abandonment. Having ensured they were 'provided with everything', including a small flat-bottomed boat Pelsaert called a 'champan',[13] and given a set of instructions, the two 'death-deserving delinquents'[14] were then sent ashore. In their instructions, copies of which still exist, they were advised 'to make themselves known to the folk of this land by tokens of friendship' [toys, mirrors, beads etc], noting that 'Man's luck is found in strange places'.[15] And so, a little after noon on 16 November 1629, 24 year-old soldier Wouter Loos and 18 year-old cabin boy Jan Pelgrom de Bye became, albeit unwillingly, Australia's first European residents.

The Marooning – The Original Evidence

In considering the question of the location where Loos and de Bye were put ashore there are two main contending theories, that it was either at Wittecarra Gully, a few kilometres south of the mouth of the Murchison River, or at the mouth of the Hutt River. To consider and review the

theories an examination of the primary evidence is necessary. The main source is Pelsaert's *Journals*, which provide a full account of the events leading up to the marooning of the two mutineers. There are two sections containing relevant evidence, the period from 8 to 11 June 1629, when searching for water they approached the subsequent landing site for the first time and hovered off the coast there, and the period 15 to 16 November when they left the Abrolhos Islands, headed for the mainland coast and abandoned the hapless mutineers.

Pelsaert, in the first passage, refers to the inlet where Loos and de Bye were subsequently marooned, the 'small Inlet where on 8 June when in the boat we were searching for Water, we thought to run in'.[16] It was actually on 9 June. What Pelsaert's *Journals* state for the period from 8 to 11 June 1629 is:

> 'On 8 do., [June] in the morning we sailed from this island to the continent, after I had read to all the people the resolution taken by us, and commanded them to take the oath which they did....
> At noon had a latitude of 28^{o} 13 minutes; saw shortly thereafter the continent, and guessed to be 6 mijlen ["Mijlen" is the Dutch nautical mile, of 7.2-7.4 kilometres, depending on which variant Pelsaert was using.] N by W [this is wrong as that is out to sea – Pelsaert probably meant N by E] of our ship; the Wind West; had ground at 25 and 30 fathoms in the evening about 3 hours, in the night we went away from the land, and after midnight we ran again towards it.
>
> On 9 do., in the morning, we were still about 3 mijlen from the coast, the wind mostly NW with some rain; this 24 hours, by guessing, covered 4 to 5 mijlen; held N by W; the coast here stretched mostly N by W and S by E. It is a bad Rocky land without trees, about high as Dover in England. Here we saw a small Inlet as well as low dune land, where we intended to land, but approaching, noticed that there was a big surf and many breakers near the shore; very suddenly the swell out of the West became so heavy and ran so high against the coast that we could not easily keep off it, and the wind increased more and more.
>
> On 10 do., we kept hovering off and on the whole 24 hours because of the hard wind and had to set adrift the sloop which we had taken with us, on account of the storm that blew out of the NW; and we also threw overboard portion of our bread and everything in our way, because we could not get rid of the water. In the night we were in great peril of Sinking through the hard wind and the hollow seas. Also could not get away from the coast because we could not carry a sail as we could only fight the sea; it rained the whole night so I hope that our people at the island have also had these rains.
>
> On 11do., in the morning, the weather began to calm down and the wind ran to WSW and then we steered round to the North, but the waves ran as high as ever.'[17]

The second section of Pelsaert's *Journals* describes events when they finally departed from the Abrolhos Islands and sailed to the mainland and reached the location where he decided to maroon the two mutineers. The relevant parts of the journal states:

> 'On 15 do., [November] the Wind SSWest, with apparently beautiful Weather. Therefore, have weighed our anchor in the name of God, and have gone under Sail, away

from these disastrous Abrolhos, to the continent, course ENEast in order to search there for the skipper and 4 other men [the men lost on 14 October] ... ...

And about Noon, came near the land, where we sailed at about half a Mijlen from the beach with small sail, in order to see if we could see any people or signs, until the afternoon when we saw on the heights a little smoke rising, but it blew away immediately; however, anchored there at 21 fathoms, clean sand ground, in order to see if it was the skipper with his men; but the smoke remained in the background and no-one appeared on the beach; from which we came to the conclusion that it had been made by the Inhabitants who did not dare show themselves; remained lying at anchor, because it blew very hard, until –

On 16 do., in the morning when we weighed our anchor again, the wind SSEast with topgallant gale, sailed again with small sail, close along the shore a *Cartoue* [cannon] shot from the surf; towards noon noticed the small Inlet where on 8 June [actually 9 June] when with the boat we were searching for Water, we thought to run in. But through the North-west storm which fell upon us, we were in great danger of sinking, and God so miraculously saved us. Here we saw several smokes rising up, and we were altogether gladdened that our folk [the lost Skipper and boat crew] might be there. Therefore I have immediately sent the yawl to the land in order to get sure information about this place and the smokes; who found around a steep corner, there where we thought there would be water, running water, which was brackish on the side to the Sea, but Higher up was Fresh. They also saw many footprints of people and small footpaths running to the mountains, with many smokes, but the Blacks kept themselves hidden and did not show themselves to anyone. – Before this [9 June], when we were searching about here with the boat, we were also close under the land, but at this place have seen neither people nor smoke. – At this good opportunity, I have ordered the two sentenced delinquents, to wit Wouter Loos and Jan Pelgrom de By van Bemel with a Champan provided with everything, to sail to this land. God grant that it may stretch to the service of the Company [VOC] and may God grant them a good outcome, in order to know once, for certain, what happens in this Land. This small Inlet is situated on the latitude of 27 degrees 51 minutes. In the afternoon ... ... set sail, our course two points outside the coast ... ...'[18]

The Debate – Where Were They Marooned?

The first researcher to seriously consider the question of where the two mutineers were marooned was Dr Phillip Playford, in his 1959 paper, 'The wreck of the Zuytdorp'.[19] In this Playford claimed:

'They [De Vlamingh's charts] clearly show he [De Vlamingh] obtained drinking water at Wittecarra Gully at the southern end of Gantheaume Bay [into which Murchison River flows], about 45 miles south of the position where the *Zuytdorp* was wrecked. Wittecarra Gully is almost certainly the 'running streamlet' where Pelsaert marooned two of the conspirators from the Batavia in 1629, as it fits his description well, and is only 6 miles [9.6 km] north of the latitude given by him.'[20]

Soon after this paper appeared Henrietta Drake-Brockman disputed this conclusion, arguing that Hutt River was the correct location.[21] Subsequently Glenys McDonald,[22] Rupert Gerritsen,[23] and Gerritsen, Colin Slee and Max Cramer,[24] published works supporting the Hutt River option. Most recently Mike Dash has favoured Wittecarra Gully.[25] Playford in the meantime published work elaborating on his argument in favour of Wittecarra Gully.[26]

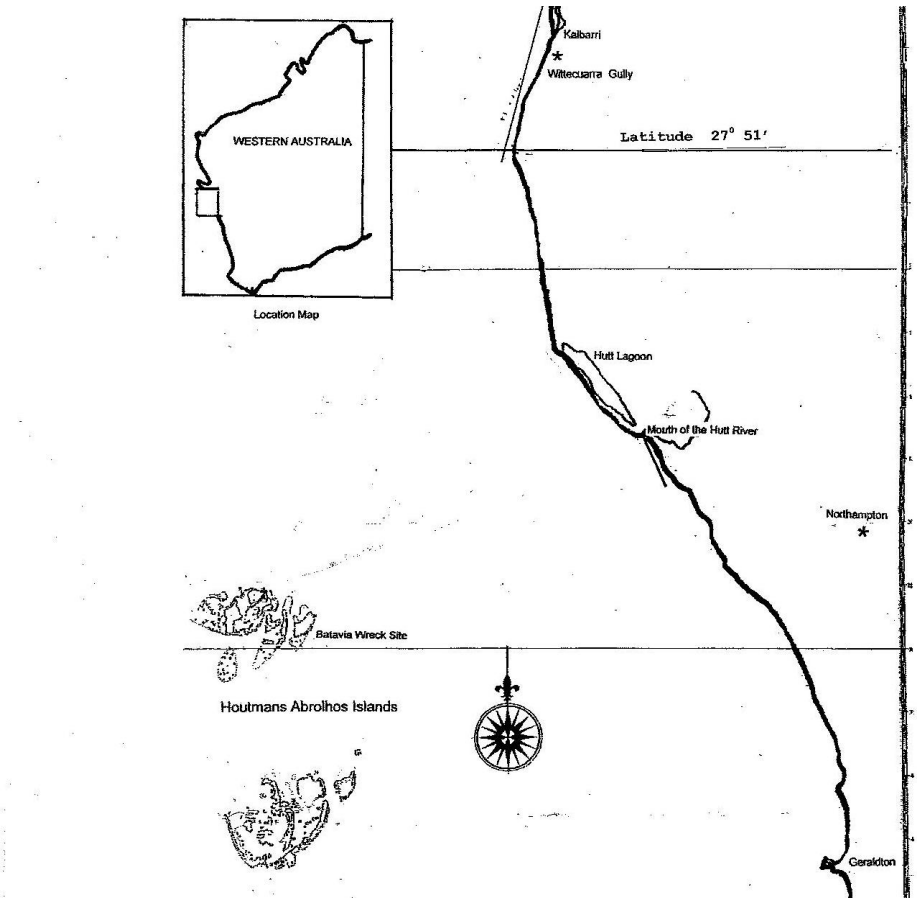
In tackling the question of where the mutineers were put ashore two types of approaches have been adopted. The first involves a direct comparison of the two contending sites, focussing on identifiers contained in Pelsaert's *Journals*. The second approach attempts to recreate the two voyages to the coast, the first in June in the yawl when they tried to land at the location of the marooning, and the second in November in the *Sardam* when the marooning took place. Consequently, both of these approaches will be employed to help distinguish between the contending sites.

Description of the Locality

In the two extracts from Pelsaert's *Journals* there are a number of elements that may help identify the location of the marooning of Wouter Loos and Jan Pelgrom de Bye. These are:

1. A coast stretching 'mostly N by W and S by E'
2. A 'bad Rocky land without trees, about as high as Dover in England'
3. A 'small Inlet as well as a low dune land'
4. A 'big surf and many breakers near the shore'
5. A 'steep corner' [Drok translation] or 'steep point' [de Heer translation] where Pelsaert 'thought there would be water' and there was 'running water which was brackish on the side of the Sea, but Higher up was Fresh'
6. 'small footpaths running up to the Mountains'
7. Latitude '27 degrees, 51 minutes'

In regard to Point 1, the bearing given, north by west and south by east, indicates a coast that trends 11.25 degrees west of true north. The orientation of the coast in the Hutt River region generally trends in a north-west by south-east direction. But the area just to the south of Hutt River, where the heights of the Menai Hills lie, trends 15 degree west of north. In comparison the coast south of Wittecarra Gully trends north-north-east by south-south-west, varying between twenty and thirty degrees east of north. The differing trends of the coast at each proposed landing site can be seen in Map 1 below.



Map 1 – The Central West Coast of WA
(Adapted from Gerritsen, Slee and Cramer 2005,p.2)

Regarding Point 2 – the 'bad Rocky land without trees, about as high as Dover' – does not provide any basis for distinguishing clearly between the Hutt River and Wittecarra Gully locations. Both areas have bare or scrubby cliffs of similar height leading up from the south; the white cliffs and heights of Gill Hill and the Menai Hills in the case of Hutt River and the red, yellow and white sandstone cliffs from Bluff Point to Red Bluff immediately to the south of Wittecarra Gully. However, Pelsaert's expression 'as high as Dover' is suggestive, in that he may have been associating the whiteness of the cliffs of Dover with those south of Hutt River, in particularly the portion known as White Cliffs.

In considering Point 3 in reference to the 'small Inlet as well as low dune land', the evidence is again not necessarily clear-cut. Wittecarra Gully sports a low, sparsely vegetated, coastal barrier dune that continues north for most of the length of Gantheaume Bay, as can be seen in Figure 2.

Figure 2 – Entrance to Wittecarra Gully With Coastal Dunes
(*The Author*)

Hutt River does, however, have an extensive area of low unstable dunes, covering approximately one to two square kilometres. This dune land usually has little vegetation, and forms the southern bank of the river at its mouth, reaching to the foot of the Menai Hills and bounded by the adjacent beach. It is quite a distinctive feature, as can be seen from Figure 3.

Figure 3 – Part of Dunal Area on South Bank of Hutt River
(*The Author*)

As for the ‘small Inlet’ of Point 3, both localities could fit the description. The mouth of the Hutt River is the deepest point of a shallow bay, Broken Anchor Bay. There is a pronounced inlet at Wittecarra Gully, bounded on one side by Red Bluff, which sits within a much larger bay, Gantheaume Bay. Broken Anchor Bay would appear to be more consistent with a ‘small Inlet’, but the term is too imprecise to be certain.

The observation that there was a ‘big surf and many breakers near the shore’ from Point 4 is, again, not very revealing or specific. Such statements would be true of just about any part of the west coast during stormy weather, and there seems to be little difference between the two localities in this regard.[27]

In order to differentiate between the contending sites and ascertain whether Pelsaert was referring to Hutt River or Wittecarra Gully the evidence subsumed under Point 5 must be viewed more as a whole. This includes the *steylen hoeck*, the ‘steep corner’ or ‘steep point’, where they ‘thought there would be Water’, and the ‘running water which was brackish on the side of the sea, but Higher up was fresh.’

In arguing that the location was Wittecarra Gully, Playford has equated Red Bluff with the ‘steep corner’,[28] drawing on Professor Heeres and Dr de Heer’s translations of Pelsaert’s journal. The de Heer translation states:

> ‘I at once sent the yawl to the shore in order to obtain a precise report about the place and the smokes, who there, after a steep point where we presumed there would be water, found a running-down water, which was brackish on the side of the sea, but was fresh higher up.’[29]

E. D. Drok’s translation, which others such as Drake-Brockman and Gerritsen have relied on, transcribes the passage differently, although the differences between the three translations are minor, the main issue being one of interpretation. Drok’s translation reads:

> ‘Therefore I have immediately sent the yawl to land in order to get sure information about this place and the smokes; who found around a steep corner, there where we thought would be Water, running water, which was brackish on the side of the sea, but Higher up was Fresh.’[30]

The principal point of difference between the translations relates to the question of whether the steep point or corner was encountered before they landed or after. Playford, in arguing for Wittecarra Gully, as noted above, equates Red Bluff with the steep point or corner. A photo of Red Bluff from the sea appears below.

Figure 1 – Red Bluff
(*The Author*)

This feature, the *Roode Houck*, the 'red point', was first charted, and portrayed in a coastal profile, by Victor Victorszoon, cartographer on the de Vlamingh expedition, when they anchored in Gantheaume Bay and explored Wittecarra Gully from 24-27 January 1697.[31] As far as can be ascertained this was the first time this feature appeared on any chart or map. Thereafter it became a notable landmark on many early maps of Australia.

In regard to the other elements in relation to Point 5, Wittecarra Gully could be described as a shallow, gently sloping, valley in which Wittecarra Creek lies, terminating in a cove at the base of the headland formed by Red Bluff. Playford characterises it as a 'salt marsh extending back for 750 metres behind the sandbar', noting that the 'water flowing into this marsh is salty to brackish for more than 2.5 kilometres upstream'.[32] The creek itself only flows after there has been rain, as Playford acknowledges,[33] and it is normally closed by a sandbar, as are all rivers and creeks in the region, with the exception of the Murchison River, when not flowing. Normally the only surface water present at the mouth consists of a pond 10 – 30 metres in diameter situated about 150 metres behind the sandbar.[34] Photographs of Wittecarra Creek, taken in June 2007, showing the mouth and what lies upstream from there, are contained in Figures 4 and 5.

Figure 4 – Mouth of Wittecarra Creek
(*The Author*)

Figure 5 – Upstream View of Wittecarra Creek
(The Author)

It is uncertain as to how much water may have been in Wittecarra Creek on 16 November 1629, the day the mutineers were abandoned. Playford originally cited the examples of explorer Lt., later Sir George, Grey finding water at Wittecarra Gully on 2 April 1839.[35] An examination of Grey's account from 2 April 1839 shows that he 'found the bed of a stream occupied by pools of water'.[36] Undoubtedly he had encountered Wittecarra Creek, which he correctly noted came from the south-east and entered the southern part of Gantheaume Bay. However, Grey had encountered Wittecarra Creek shortly after a cyclone had passed through the region. This cyclone, of such ferocity that it effectively destroyed Grey's expedition when they were exploring Shark Bay, had passed directly over the expedition 33 days before and appears to have brought substantial rains to a wide area.[37] Grey appears to have witnessed the remnants of that at Wittecarra Gully. In this context it should be noted that Pelsaert did not record any rain as such on the Abrolhos for six weeks prior to the marooning,[38] and climate data from nearby Kalbarri indicates that the area receives on average only 2.3 mm of rain in November. Rain only falls there in November on average less than one year in two.[39]

The source of fresh water identified by the proponents of Wittecarra Gully, equating to water that 'Higher up was Fresh', is Wittecarra Spring, 3.5 kilometres up the valley.[40] The discovery of Wittecarra Spring by de Vlamingh's shore party on 25 January 1697 is cited by Playford as support for this proposition.[41] Playford, in identifying this as the source of fresh water found by Pelsaert's men, states that Wittecarra Spring 'contains excellent water throughout the year, forming a picturesque pool about 2 metres across and up to 40 centimetres deep'.[42] It appears to have found by a shore party from the de Vlamingh expedition, near the end of a difficult day-long sojourn on 25 January 1697.[43] Dash, in concurring with the identification of Wittecarra Spring as the source of fresh water, claims that it is 'one of the few places on the Western Australian coast where water can always be found.'[44] But Dash's view is unsustainable since there are, in fact, over 40 permanent water sources between Wittecarra Gully and Hutt River alone.[45]

The alternative site, the Hutt River, flows down a wide valley before wending its way through a gap, bounded on one side by a steep bluff and a steep parabolic ridge on the other, and then flowing past the dune land referred to earlier before making its way to the sea. In spring, as the water flow diminishes, a bar forms across the mouth of the river, leaving a long stretch of brackish water in the river bed adjacent to the dune land. Just upriver from the steep bluff there is permanent fresh water in the river bed and a small wetland. Permanent fresh water springs in the area also feed the Hutt River. A photo of the mouth of the Hutt River, taken on the same day as the one at Wittecarra Gully, is shown below in Figure 6.

Figure 6 – Mouth of Hutt River
(*The Author*)

What is notable about the river here is the narrow sandbar between the river and the sea. At high tide and when there is a strong swell the sea washes over the sandbar, making the water there brackish. The view upriver from there is shown in Figure 7.

Figure 7 – Upstream View of Hutt River
(*The Author*)

Seen from this viewpoint the low dune land on the south bank is quite apparent. The river always has water in it for several kilometres upstream. While difficult to discern from this perspective, in the distance is a steep bluff, the *steylen hoeck*, the edge of the Murchison Plateau and site of the old convict settlement of Lynton. At closer quarters this bluff is quite distinctive, as can be seen from Figure 8.

Figure 8 – Bluff at Hutt River
(*The Author*)

Just a little way past this bluff is a part of the Hutt River where the river always contains fresh water and forms a small wetland which floods when the river is high. Part of this area is shown in Figure 9.

Figure 9 – Fresh Water Adjacent to Bluff at Hutt River
(*The Author*)

Considered as a whole, Hutt River appears to be consistent with all the translations. Firstly, there is a shallow inlet and a distinctive dune field. The comment that 'there where we thought there would be Water' is also instructive. Hutt River has a narrow but clearly discernable water course which is, as can be seen from Figure 6, visible from the sea even when barred. The reference, depending on the translation, to 'running water' or 'running-down water' is, in either case, applicable to Hutt River. There is always water in this part of the river and springs feeding it,[46] so that there is always a small flow as well. But it may be that Pelsaert's men, seeing ample water in the river, just assumed it was flowing. And finally, the comment that it was 'brackish on the side of the sea, but Higher up was Fresh' is explicable in terms of barring of the river, made brackish at the mouth by over-wash from the sea, with the presence of fresh water two kilometres upstream just past the steep bluff.

Another of the identifying factors provided by Pelsaert was the comment that there were 'small footpaths running up to the Mountains [hills]' which has been designated Point 6. Grey, when passing Hutt River on 5 April 1839, still flowing strongly through the 'steep limestone hills' from the recent cyclonic rains, clearly noted many 'native paths',[47] as did Surveyor-General

John Septimus Roe when investigating the area on 15 and 16 June 1847.[48] 'Native paths' were a feature in many places and de Vlamingh noted '10 to 12 footpaths' that led to the spring the shore party eventually discovered in Wittecarra Gully.[49] Without more specific information this passage does not provide any basis for making a distinction between Wittecarra Gully and Hutt River. Even the reference to the 'Mountains' which in Dutch usage at the time could mean anything ranging from large hills to actual mountains, is not capable of enlightening us further, both localities have large hills. In the case of Wittecarra Gully these are the range formed by the edge of the Murchison Plateau, which steadily rises to the local high point of Meanarra Hill at 204 metres, whereas at Hutt River the Plateau near the steep bluff reaches 129 metres, with the nearby twin peaks of Mounts Victoria and Albert at 152 metres being local prominences.

Far more specific is the latitude, 27°51'S, which is the final element in Pelsaert's information on the locality the mutineers were cast on to the unknown continent. Unfortunately, though not unexpectedly, neither Hutt River nor Wittecarra Gully are exactly at that latitude. Wittecarra Gully is situated on latitude 27°44'S whereas Hutt River, at the mouth, is 28°13'34"S. On the basis of these readings Wittecarra Gully is closer to the given position, being only 7 minutes north of the given latitude, whilst Hutt River is 22.5 minutes too far south.

However, there is reason to question all of Pelsaert's fixes. There were inherent inaccuracies in early seventeenth century instruments, and the accuracy of readings depended on the capabilities of those taking the readings, the conditions under which they were taken and even when the readings are taken. Errors of half a degree are commonly found in latitudes recorded by other Dutch mariners visiting Australia in this period. For example, the location of the *Vergulde Draeck* wreck site as originally recorded was in error by 33 minutes,[50] and even de Vlamingh's charts contain similar latitudinal errors in some parts.[51]

Not surprisingly the evidence from Pelsaert's *Journals* also shows a degree of inconsistency in readings taken at the time. On 15 November, for example, he recorded the three sets of readings taken of the position of the wreck of the *Batavia*, two from the days immediately following their mishap and the third prior to their departure in the *Sardam*. The latitudes given were 28°8'S, 28°20'S and 28°36-40'S,[52] a variation of 32 minutes. Similarly, on 8 June Pelsaert gave his latitude as 28°13'S. If, as suggested a little later, they had sailed directly east for the mainland he would still have been on the same latitude as the wreck site. When the wreck of the *Batavia* was discovered in 1963 it was found to situated at 28°30'S, showing the original errors in determining the ship's latitude ranged from 6 minutes to 22 minutes. In three of four instances the latitude given for the wreck site is too far north by 10, 17 and 22 minutes. In this context it is no surprise that it took Pelsaert over three weeks to re-locate the wreck site and the survivors when he returned in the *Sardam*.

Given that the latitude, 27°51'S, Pelsaert entered in the journal for the location of the marooning is 22.5 degrees north of Hutt River, it would appear Hutt River lies within the range of error. As noted above, there was a variation of over half a degree in latitude evident in attempts to accurately fix the *Batavia*'s position and errors of half a degree are commonly found in latitudes recorded by other Dutch mariners visiting Australia in this period. The lack of confidence the Dutch had in their original readings is perhaps indicated by Tasman's instructions,

in which he was told to search for the mutineers 'about 28 or 26 degrees'.[53] So, while the evidence in this instance favours Wittecarra Gully, it is far from conclusive.

Voyage Recreations

The second type of approach involved in attempts to identify the location where the marooning took place relies on replications of Pelsaert's movements in the yawl following the wrecking of the *Batavia* and later in the *Sardam* when the mutineers were abandoned. This involves a range of assumptions, inferences and calculations based on limited evidence for the two separate voyages to the landing site.

The first voyage was undertaken in very trying circumstances, the situation at the wreck site was confused, the decision to leave to sail to the mainland for water was a difficult one, and they were struck by such an intense storm they were in great danger of sinking. Consequently, as Playford points out, and I concur, the 'log for those two days is somewhat confused'.[54] Other unknown factors such as currents, sailing speeds and the accuracy of distance estimates further complicate the situation. However, the second voyage to the coast in the *Sardam*, was more sedate and deliberate with more specific information. The facts relating to the first voyage are:

<u>8 June</u>

- They knew they were off the 'main Southland', 'the continent'[55]
- They decided to head for 'the continent'[56]
- At noon they recorded a latitude of 28°13'
- Just after noon they saw the mainland about 44 km 'north by west', but it is presumed 'north by east' was meant
- The wind was west during the day
- They sailed away from the land in the evening until midnight and towards it after
- Around 9 or 10 pm they recorded depths of 25 and 30 fathoms [47-56 m based on a Dutch fathom from that period of 1.88 m]

<u>9 June</u>

- They were 22 km from the mainland in the morning
- The wind was mostly north-west
- They held 'north by west'
- The line of the coast was north by west and south by east
- They saw the 'Rocky land without trees', the 'small Inlet' and the dune land

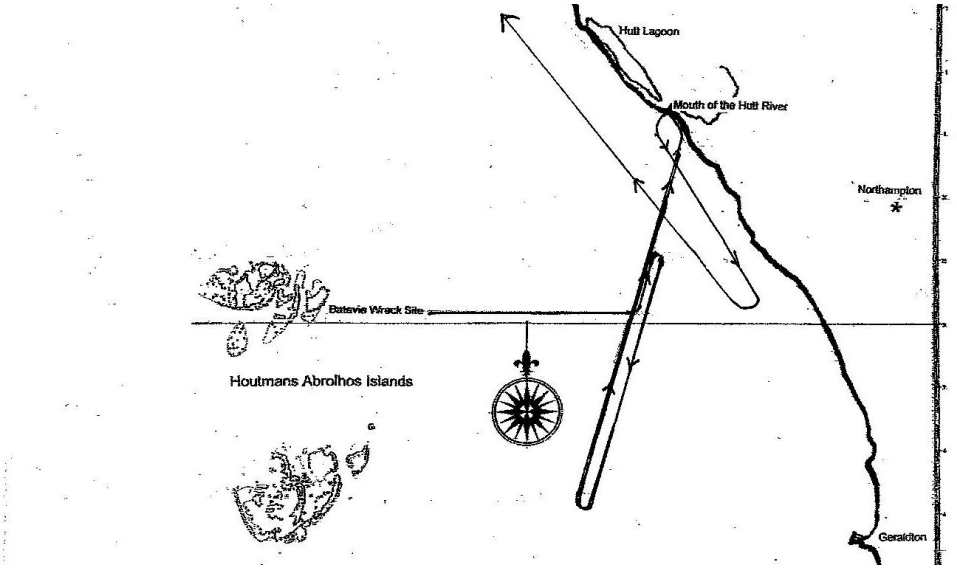
<u>10 June</u>

- They hovered off the coast for 24 hours
- The wind was north-west
- They were unable to move away from the coast because they could not carry a sail
- The weather became calmer

<u>11 June</u>

- The wind was now west-south-west
- They 'then ... steered round to the north'

Given such limited, imprecise and possibly inaccurate information it is only possible to sketch a hypothetical track for their voyage, as shown on Map 2.

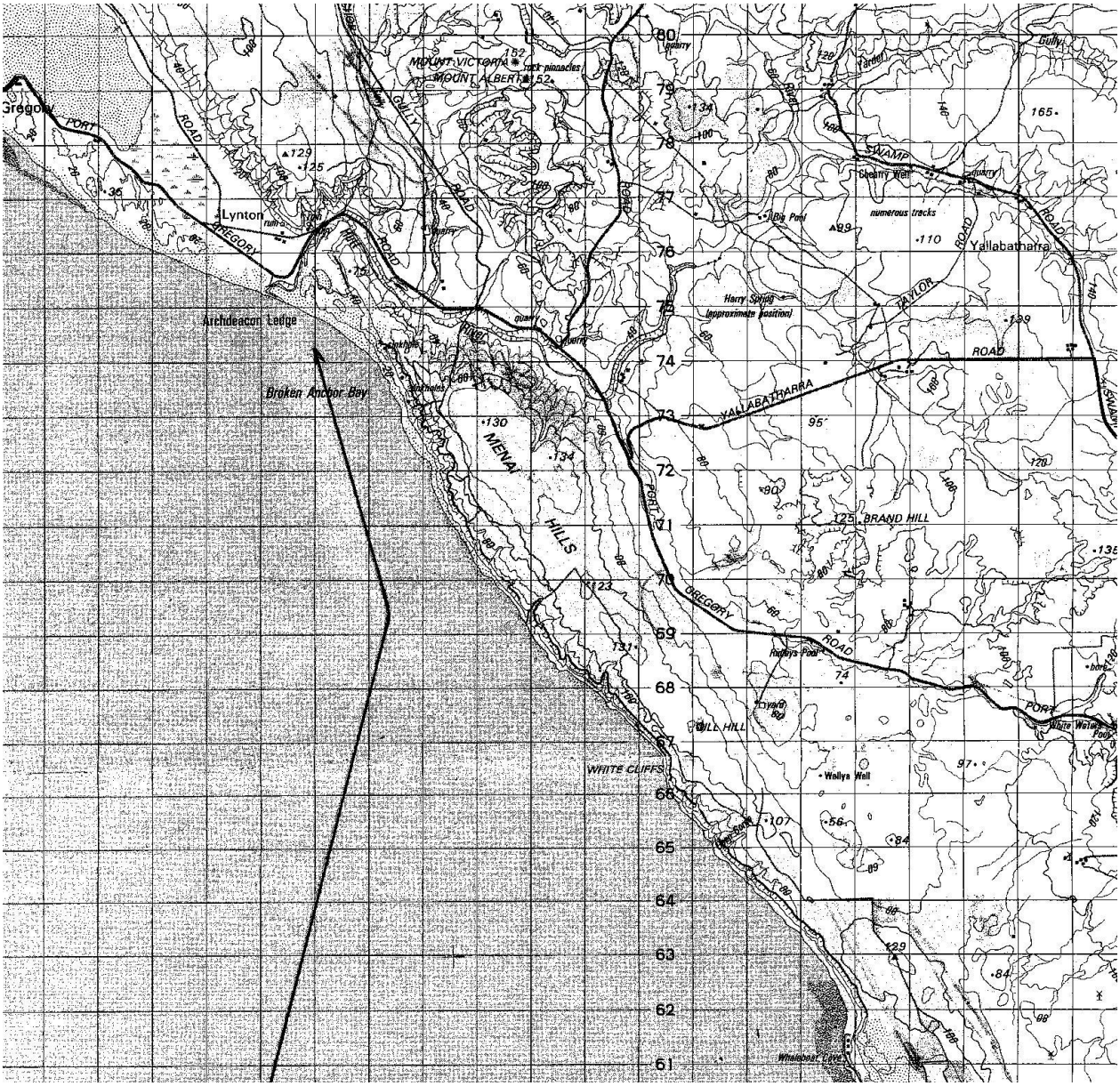


Map 2 – Pelsaert's Course 8 – 11 June 1629

With the wind from the west, it is assumed they headed east for the mainland of 'the continent', as the rough outline of the Western Australian coast was known at that time,[57] and they appear to have realised their position relative to it. They recorded their latitude at noon as 28°13'. However, if had they sailed due east they would still have been at the same latitude as the wreck of the *Batavia*, 28°30'. This scenario is supported by the fact that they had erroneously determined the latitude of the wreck twice in previous days as 28°8' and 28°20'. In the early afternoon, when they were just over half way between the Wallabi Group and the coast, Pelsaert reported seeing the mainland, 44 kilometres north by east. It was at this point I would suggest they saw White Cliffs and the Menai Hills. Being so distant from the coast, the first signs would be the highest landmarks. White Cliffs and the Menai Hills rise almost vertically, right on the coast, to 80-100 metres, peaking at 130-134 metres. There are a couple of landmarks of similar height a little to the south around Bowes River but these are situated one to two kilometres inland and do not rise steeply.[58]

Having now sighted the mainland Pelsaert sailed north by east toward those landmarks. As evening approached they decided to ensure they kept off the coast and so sailed away from the part of the coast they had seen. Hence they turned about from a bearing of north by east and sailed south by west, effectively backtracking. This trajectory took them into the Geelvinck Channel, between the Easter Group of the Abrolhos and the mainland where the depths accord with the 25 and 30 fathoms recorded around 9 or 10 pm.[59] At midnight they came about again and resumed the north by east track so that by the following morning they were 22 kilometres from White Cliffs and the Menai Hills. They continued and as they reached that area, passing by White Cliffs, they altered course, sailing north by west, close to the wind and parallel to the northern part of the Menai Hills. And so at this point the trend of the coast is close to north by

west and they are sailing north by west, exactly as Pelsaert indicated in his journal. This section of the voyage is shown on Map 3.



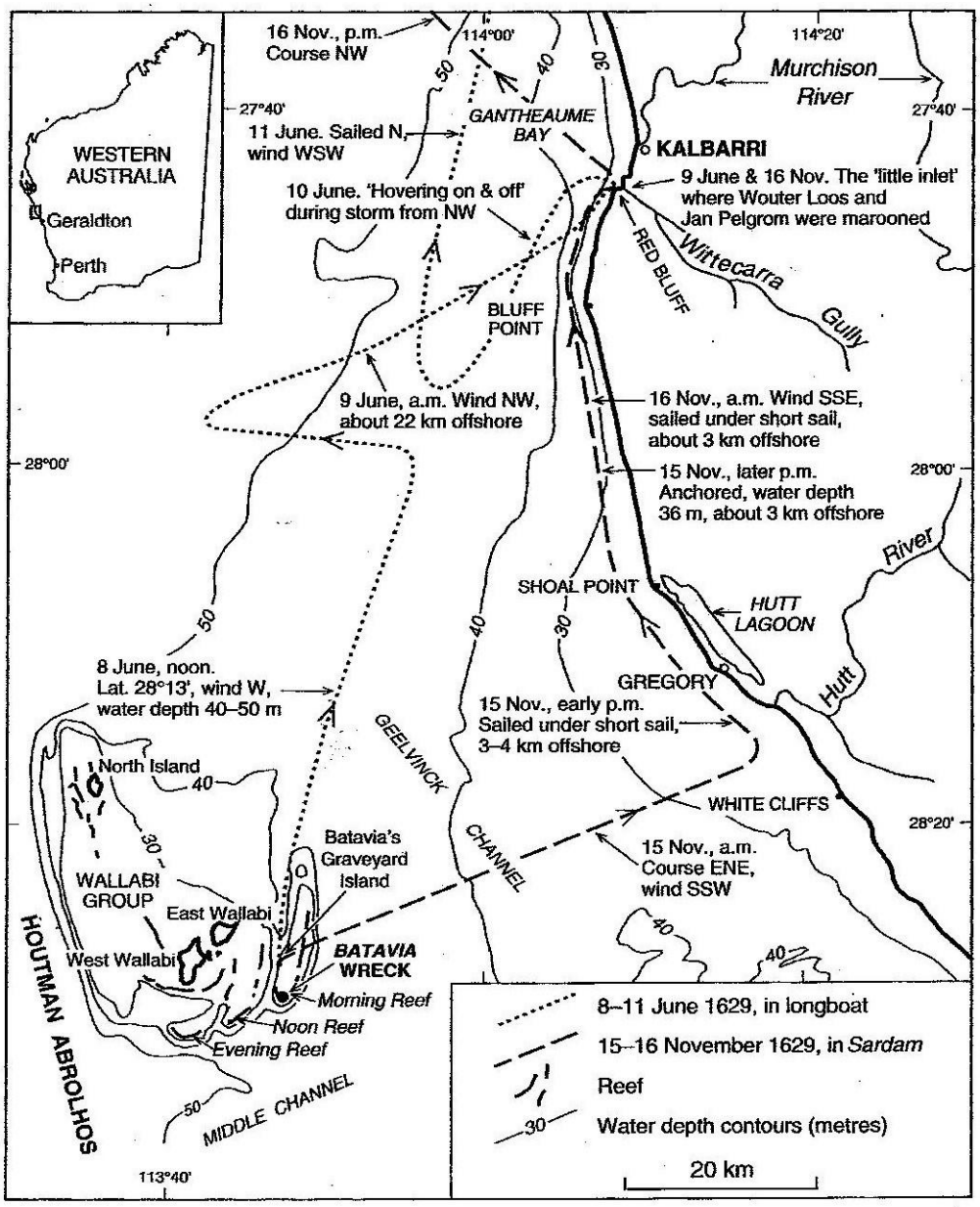
Map 3 – White Cliffs, Menai Hills and Broken Anchor Bay

It is here they sail past the ‘Rocky land without trees’ into the ‘small Inlet’, and see the dune land. The location is shown in Figure 10.

Figure 10 – Northern End of the Menai Hills, South of Hutt River
(*The Author*)

As they began to enter Broken Anchor Bay the surf, the breakers, the increasing swell and rising gale indicate a cold front was approaching, the 'North-west storm that fell upon us' as Pelsaert described it,[60] with a characteristic wind shift from west to north-west, and so they were forced to come about. They tried to maintain their position but the ferocity of the storm forced them to take down their sails and run before the wind. With a howling north-westerly I surmise they were driven south-east, following the general north-west by south-east trend of the coast. This is the origin of Pelsaert's comment that they 'could not get away from the coast'. Finally, with the weather calming after the passing of the cold front and the wind shifting to west-south-west, they then 'steered ...to the north' and continued in that general direction.

Playford, in support of the Wittecarra Gully case, has similarly endeavoured to recreate Pelsaert's course on his first and second voyages to the coast. Playford's reconstruction of Pelsaert's first voyage is depicted by the dotted line on Map 3 below.



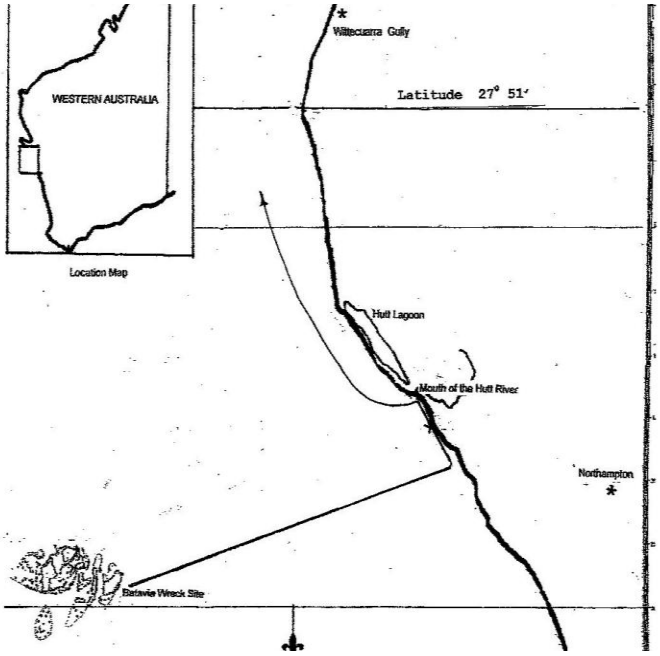
Map 4 – Playford's Recreation of Pelsaert's 2 Voyages
(Playford 1996, Map 10)

In this recreation, Pelsaert, in making for the 'main Southland', initially heads in a northerly, then north by east, direction. At noon they reach latitude 28°13' and just after noon observe the continent north by east, the direction in which they are sailing. Towards evening, with the wind from the west, Pelsaert bears west, recording depths of 25 and 30 fathoms [47-54 m] before turning and sailing toward the mainland at midnight on a north-east by east and then east-north-east course. On 9 June, as the landing site is approached, sailing north-east by north, the 'Rocky land without trees', the cliffs south to the south of Red Bluff are seen, and they round Red Bluff into Gantheaume Bay and the 'small Inlet' where the entrance to Wittecarra Creek and

the coastal barrier dune is observed. At this point they are hit by the rising swell and the north-westerly storm. They come about and sail out of the inlet at Wittecarra but the ferocity of the storm forces them to take down their sails and run before the north-west wind, heading west by south-west. And, as with the other reconstruction, with the wind shift to west-south-west the following day, 11 June, they turn and sail north.

Additional evidence relating to where Pelsaert sailed and approached the coast on his first voyage is contained in his distance estimates. He originally wrote at the commencement of his *Journals* that *Batavia* wreck site was '9 Mijlen' from the Southland, although when he reached Batavia to arrange the rescue voyage, and after he returned, he reported the distance to be '8 to 10 Mijlen'.[61] Translating these distances into modern terms gives a distance of between 57.6 and 74.0 kilometres. The distance from the *Batavia* wreck site to Hutt River is 64 kilometres, whereas Wittecarra Gully lies 91 kilometres away. This may have some bearing on distinguishing between the two alternative voyage recreations.

The recreation of the second voyage, indicated by the dashed line on Playford's map, although more clearly documented and straightforward, still has some uncertainties. The alternative I propose is shown in Map 5.



Map 5 – Pelsaert's Course 15-16 November 1629

The *Sardam* had been anchored near North Island but Pelsaert states on 14 November that they 'fetched the rest of the Folk from the Islands in order to go under Sail tomorrow'.[62] Consequently I assume they moved to close proximity of Beacon Island in preparation for their departure. It is from there that my reconstruction begins. Playford assumes a similar point of departure.

On the following day, Pelsaert indicates in his *Journals* that on leaving they were sailing 'away from these disastrous Abrolhos, to the continent, course ENEast.' Upon reaching the coast about noon, they sailed up the coast with 'small sail' as Pelsaert put it, looking for signs of the 5 crew lost on 14 October. They continued 'until the afternoon' when they saw the smoke on the heights, anchored in 21 fathoms (39.5 m), about 3.6 kilometres off-shore, and as 'no-one appeared on the beach' but the wind rose they stayed at anchor for the rest of the day. The next morning they proceeded, again under 'small sail', but with a 'topgallant gale', a stiff breeze, until 'towards noon' they encountered the 'small Inlet' and the location where they finally left the two mutineers to their fate.

By my reckoning, using a precise map,[63] if the *Sardam* sailed 'ENEast' they would have struck the coast at White Cliffs, 12 kilometres south of Hutt River. Confirmation of this is provided by Pelsaert's observation that shortly after arriving they saw 'on the heights a little smoke rising,' presumably referring the heights of the Menai Hills. They then turned north and sailing slowly under small sail, sometime after noon spotted smoke on top of the Menai Hills, which have heights of 130-134 metres, and so halted to investigate. There are beaches at many places along the base of the Menai Hills,[64] as can be seen in Figure 10. The depth they anchored in of 21 metres is no guide in these circumstances as there is a strip 4 kilometres wide and about 40 kilometres long following the coast here that has never been surveyed.[65] Next morning Pelsaert set sail, again under small sail, and 'towards noon' encountered Broken Anchor Bay and Hutt River. An important point to note here is that they were sailing under small sail, looking out for the lost crew, ready to halt fairly promptly if they sighted them. Given that they were sailing close to the coast in uncharted waters, it is highly likely that Pelsaert would proceed cautiously, not wishing to add yet another disaster to the wrecking of the *Batavia* and the Mutiny.

In Playford's recreation the *Sardam* sails to just south of Hutt River on 15 November and once there turns and sails in a north-westerly direction up the coast, sighting 'smoke rising from the hinterland'[66] as Playford terms it, and so anchor at 28^{o}. Along this part of the coast there are dunal ridges of 20 metres on the coast, while inland the edge of the Murchison Plateau rises to 80-100 metres, 5-7 kilometres from the coast.[67] Here the *Sardam* is placed 3.6 kilometres from shore in 36 metres of water, and it is in this location that they hope someone might appear on the beaches there.[68] On the following day they sailed up to Wittecarra Gully, which they encountered around noon, before abandoning Loos and de Bye.

A critical distinction between the two scenarios is sailing speed. The distance involved in the scenario where they strike the coast at White Cliffs and depositing the mutineers at Hutt River is 12 kilometres. In the scenario of the *Sardam* striking the coast just south of Hutt River and depositing the mutineers at Wittecarra Gully, the distance involved is 65 kilometres.[69] I would generously estimate that they sailed up the coast for a maximum of 3 to 4 hours on the afternoon of 15 November before anchoring, while on 16 November they probably sailed for a further 3 to 4 hours. This means they sailed for about a maximum of 7 hours before arriving at the landing site. With 7 hours sailing time along the coast on 15 and 16 November, this means the *Sardam* sailed from White Cliffs to Hutt River at a speed of 1.7 kmph according to my reconstruction, or at 9.3 kmph in accordance with Playford's. To provide some perspective on these sailing speeds it should be noted that on its return to Java, after abandoning the mutineers, the *Sardam*'s sailing speed under full sail and with favourable winds, as recorded by Pelsaert,[70] averaged only 10.1

kilometres per hour. The best it managed was 11.4 kmph on 24 and 30 November.[71] This needs to be taken into account in evaluating either scenario.

One final piece of evidence is available that has some bearing on this debate. An anonymous eyewitness report, only discovered in 1972, offers a tantalising, if inconclusive, new clue to the events of 1629. A letter, apparently written by one of the survivors of the Mutiny, possibly one of the soldiers, says:

> 'The others [mutineers] remained in irons, until we came to the main southland, which lies about 4 mijlen from there, where we set down the two Murderers, bringing the rest to Batavia.'[72]

The distance of 'four mijlen' is just over 29 kilometres. The actual distance to Hutt River is 64 kilometres, while Wittecarra Gully is 91 kilometres from the wreck site. This may have some bearing on judgements as to which location the marooning took place, but obviously is far from conclusive.

Conclusion

In conclusion it can be seen that there are two plausible theories supporting alternative views that Wouter Loos and Jan Pelgrom de Bye were marooned either at Wittecarra Gully or the mouth of the Hutt River on that fateful day in November 1629. What happened to them in the days and weeks, possibly years, following is one of the most fascinating mysteries of our time. We shall probably never know, but there perhaps are clues to be found in the traditional Aboriginal cultures of this region. Certainly the first European intruders who followed noticed some most unusual, atypical, aspects to those cultures, almost from the moment that contact took place. At Wittecarra Spring, for example, de Vlamingh's men in 1697 encountered a hut 'made of clay with a roof sloping down two sides'.[73] This was quite unlike the more temporary dome-shaped shelters of branches, bark or grass found in most other parts of Australia. But at Hutt River, a matter of only 200 metres or so from where the fresh water is located, Grey and his party in 1839 passed the first of 'two native villages, or, as the men termed them, towns, - the huts of which they were composed ... ... being much larger, more strongly built, and very nicely plastered over the outside with clay, and clods of turf ...'.[74] Such a settlement, estimated to have a population of 290, was virtually unique in Australian terms, particularly as it seems to have been supported by local yam fields of square kilometres in extent.[75] Of course occurrences such as these simply add to the mystery. We can only hope that one day we too will come to 'know once, for certain, what happens in this Land.'

Acknowledgments

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