

(1983)

A Dutch - Kilwa Coin Hoard from Northern Australia.

Dr. W. J. Mira. Sydney. ©

European contacts with the Southland are well documented; in the west, Dirk Hartog 1616, Houtman 1619 made early landfalls; in the north, the "Duyfken" 1605; in south, Thussen 1627 and Tasman 1642; Torres, 1606, in the north east may well have glimpsed the continent's mainland as he inched his way into the strait that still bears his name .

These 17th. century voyagers gave the cartographers sufficient data to produce an outline, incomplete indeed, of the west, north and south of the unknown Terra Australis. The final piece in the jigsaw had to wait until the voyage of James Cook in the "Endeavour" in 1770. Cook charted in broad outline, the continent's east coast.

Were these seamen however, the first to have knowledge of the southern land mass? Researchers over many years have gradually built up a picture which, beyond any reasonable doubt, indicates that Macassan's were aware of the north and north-west coast, at least as early as the Dutch explorers, if not earlier.

From a date not yet known with certainty, until 1906, proas from the Macassan states of Gowa and Tallo, and to a lesser degree the Bughis states of Bone, Wajo and Sopping, sailed annually to the north west coast (Kayu Jawa) and the northern coast (Marege') as far as the bottom of The Gulf of Carpentaria, to gather "trempang", (beche de mer, sea cucumber, sea slugs). These marine creatures were collected, taken ashore, gutted, boiled in large shallow copper dishes, buried in sand pits to dry out and then taken back to Macassar where they were sold to the Chinese traders for shipment to China. Here they were considered a delicate additive to the Chinese cuisine. In June 1818, Lt.P.P.King on <sup>✓</sup> voyage of survey along the western coast in H.M. Cutter "Mermaid", reported from Timor: "...from a conversation I had with the Rajah of a fleet of proas.... who fish on the coast of Australia every year... the coast is called Marega and the natives Maregas". The voyages continued until 1906 when the South Australian Government (the Northern Territory was administered by S.A. from 1863 until 1911) ceased to issue licenses for Macassan trempang boats.

Although regular visitors to the Australian coast (about 70 processing sites have been located and confirmed in the north), no attempt was made at permanent settlement nor is there any substantiated evidence of intermarriage with the aboriginal population, although some aborigines did make the trip to and from Macassar; thus, though the contacts were impermanent, they were however substantial and regular, with long periods of residence on the continent's north and north western shores. The authoritative work on the subject is "The Voyage to Marege", by C.C. Macknight, a historian from The Australian National University, Canberra, who has carried out a vast amount of background research in Indonesia and on Dutch records, as well

②

as archeological investigations of several trepang processing sites. It is used extensively as a source in this paper. Fireplaces, broken bottles and pottery, fish hooks, graves, have been located, examined and documented. Six coins have also found, all are Dutch doits, the earliest date being 1742.

(Reference numbers are those used by C.C. Macnight in his thesis "The Macassans - A Study of the early trepang industry along the Northern Territory coast")

S54 . AE Doit. V.O.C. 1790 - Scholten 316 or 745c

316 - struck at Utrecht 1790 to be sent to the Indies.

745c - struck by official mints at Batavia and Surabaya in 1840-43

S55 . AE Doit - Zeeland - 1790 - Not located in catalogues

S56 . AE Doit 1838 Scholten 735a or 735b

735a, 1735b - struck at Surabaya in 1838

S97 . AE Doit VOC, 1742 Scholten 88

Struck at Dordecht, Holland 1742

S111 . AE Doit VOC, 1780 Scholten 114

- struck at Dordrecht; Holland 1780

The sixth coin, dated 1779, was reported in 1943 - no other details are available.

It is interesting - that all the attributable coins were specifically struck for the Dutch colonies.

Although the time this industry ceased is known with certainty, its beginning is not nearly as clear. Macknight, assessing all the available evidence, pottery dating, radiocarbon studies on the remains of fires etc., concludes that it began somewhere between 1650 and 1750, with the most likely period being 1650 - 1700. With regard to the artifacts he adds "at least they date the operation of the industry not its origin". The radio carbon dating of charcoal from fireplaces directly concerned with trepang processing, saw some results which were surprising and difficult of explanation. Samples from three separate sites gave answers suggesting an age of 800 years, two others 400-500 years whilst a sixth was modern. As Macknight stresses, this is the age of the wood, mainly mangrove, used to stoke the fires and cannot be taken as an indicator of when the first visits were made. The above is a brief background which may be linked with a small coin hoard (nine pieces) found on Marchinbar Island in The Wessel Group, off the north east point of Arnhem Land, in 1944.

#### The Wessel Islands.

A group extending, in a chain for a distance of about 75 miles north east of Napier Point, in north-eastern Arnhem Land, Northern Territory. They were marked on early Dutch charts and the name was endorsed by Mathew Flinders in 1803. Several of the Islands are renowned for their aboriginal rock-paintings. In particular there is on North Wessel Island the Cave of the Rainbow Serpent, a recess containing a large and strikingly coloured representation of a serpent with a forked tail. (Australian Encyclopedia.)

During World War 2 the 312 Radar Unit was stationed on the southern end of Marchinbar Island as a forward warning point for any attempted raids on Northern Australia by Japanese aircraft, surface vessels and submarines. The Island at this point is only a few hundred yards wide, has a rocky east coast and a sandy western shoreline, with tides up to 14 feet. It is also the only spot on the Island where fresh water is available from an underground spring.

A member of the unit was M.I. who spent his spare time wandering about the coast. At the southern end of a long sandy beach was a tidal creek with deep water running inland for about 40 yards, here he used to fish and one day noticed four green circular objects on the sand about 4 feet below highwater mark, he picked them up, determined they were coins and poked around in an area of about twelve square feet and found five more. Having no interest in numismatics at this time he looked no further, but did put the coins in an airtight match tin; this went into his kit bag and returned with him to Australia. It lay forgotten until late 1979, finding it again he cleaned the coins sufficiently for the design to appear, mentioned them to a friend G.K. who brought their existence to the writer's attention. M.I. gladly made the pieces available for study. It is these nine coins that have prompted this paper.

#### THE COINS

##### Low Countries

- A) AE. Doit : 20mm : Gelderland - 1690  
(D/GEL/RIAE)
- B) AE. Doit : 22mm : ZEELAND - 1724 : (Craig H2)  
(ZEE/LAN/DIA)
- C) AE. Doit : 21mm : ZEELAND - 1784 : (Craig H2a)  
(ZELAN/DIA - in cartouche)
- D) AE . liard : 23mm : Liege - 1745 (Craig 1a)  
(Johann Theodor von Bayern - bishopric of Liege)

##### Reference

W.D. Craig. "Coins of the World 1750-1850" Western Publishing Co. U.S.A. 1971.

##### Kilwa Sultanate (East Africa)

- 1. AE, 3.1 grams, Sulaiman ibn al-Hasan (14<sup>th</sup> century)  
Obv. Sulaiman ibn al-Hasan Sa'ida  
Rev. Yathiku bi Maula'l-Minan 'Azza  
Sulaiman son of Hasan (may he be happy) trusts in the Master of Bounties  
(He is glorious)  
As Walker III and IV (Plate VIII, 3 and 4,) but dies in another hand.

2. AE, 2.35 grams, 22mm.

As 1, but dies in yet another hand

3. AE, 2 grams, 20mm. 'Ali ibn al-Hasan (late 10<sup>th</sup> Century) <sup>early 12<sup>th</sup> Century - Crawford 1968</sup> X.P.-Gr. 1987

Oby. 'Ali ibn al-Hasan Sa'ida

Rev. As 1 and 2

As Walker XIII (Plate VIII, 9)

{ More recent evidence suggests that this  
dates to the late 10<sup>th</sup> century.  
(Freeman-Grenville 1987)

4. AE, 1.45 grams, 21mm.

As 3, but reverse die in another hand

The small filans and the hand of the obverse die of 3 and 4 recalls  
Walker XIV, but this lacks Sa'ida etc.

5. AE, 2.25 grams, 23mm. al-Hasan ibn Sulaiman (14<sup>th</sup> Century)

Oby. al-Hasan ibn Sulaiman 'Azz Nasrahu

Rev. Yathiku bi'l-Wahid al-Mannan...

al-Hasan son of Sulaiman (may his victory be glorious) trusts in  
the One (God), the bountiful...

While the reverse is softly struck and corroded, the strokes that  
are clear are consistent with the above reading. The reverse, however,  
is off-centre at 6 o'clock and it is uncertain whether Walker XVIII  
(without 'azza), XVII (Plate IX, 13) (with 'azza) or XXIV (with 'azz  
nasrahu) is the case. A hint of reverse beading also suggests Walker  
XXIII, but the reverse is without ornament and slightly differently  
arranged - if this has any real significance in a crude Islamic series.

#### References

Walker, J. 1936. "The History and coinage of the Sultans of Kilwa".  
Numismatic Chronicle Vol.XVI, Series V, pp. 43-81, plates  
VIII and IX.

Walker J. "Some new coins from Kilwa." Ibid.

Mitchiner, M. 1977. "Oriental Coins and their Values" Vol. 1 "The  
World of Islam". Hawkins Publications; London. Page 225.

It may be of significance that the European coins in this hoard are  
all of continental issue, (of The Macknight series.)

Attribution of the Kilwa pieces was made possible by Mr R. Domrow, Brisbane,  
Australia, and Mr N.M.Lowick, The British Museum, London. The data recorded above  
was supplied by R.Domrow, who added the following comments,

"The sultans were, by tradition, a Persian (Shirazi) dynasty and ruled at Kilwa  
from the late 10th Cent, till the arrival of the Portuguese in the late 15th.  
At least 10 sultans from the late 13th century issued coins, characterised by a  
rhyming couplet divided between the obverse and reverse, with a wish (about the  
ruler) and a statement (about Allah) often at the bottom of obverse and reverse.

Four of the 6 undoubted Kilwa hoards listed by Walker all show the above 3 sultans most commonly represented. These hoards also contained occasional coins of the Mongols of Persia (13-14th cent.), various Islamic (including Persian) coins, Sung dynasty Chinese cash, Portuguese coins (Alfonso V, 1438-81) and Islamic glass weights, a fair indication of broad acceptance of any likely sort of "coin".

In the Indonesian area this is also true. Scholten, C., 1953, "The Coins of the Dutch Overseas Territories" J. Schulman: Amsterdam, p. 31, says "cob reales were popular in the area until the 19th cent". From my many visits there, this is certainly true, of both cob and later round pieces-of-eight. Fractions however, were usually cob issues. I have also come across fair sized wash basins from up country full of coppers, all doit sized, Batavian Republic, Louis Napoleon, British Occupation of Java, EIC Issues, Singapore tokens and official native issues, all gloriously jumbled together".

How can one interpret the significance of these 9 pieces? They encompass a period from C. 10<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> century however as noted above, variety and wide time spans are no strangers to Indies' coinage. The presence of the low value Netherlands pieces is not unexpected, the surprise however is the five Kilwa coins. The Kilwa Sultanate, located about 200 miles south of Zanzibar on the East African Coast, was at its zenith from AD 1200 - AD 1350 but gradually declined, probably due to unstable government and the rise of Mombasa to the north as a commercial center.

#### Questions?

Are the coins Macassan in origin-

- a) a wreck and the coins washed ashore?
- b) lost during the stay of the crew ashore?

If not Macassan, from whence did they come? *Is there a Portuguese connection*

If Macassan in provenance

- a) were Kilwa coins common in Macassar at some point in time?
- b) if not, why do they form over half those found?
- c) were all the coins deposited at the same time?
- d) were Kilwa coins copied in some area of the Indies as a result of some past migration of coin or people?

e) *Why has only one Kilwa coin been found outside its immediate East African environs?*

#### Comments.

- 1) Torres Strait was a regular shipping path between the Colony of New South Wales and Batavia (after 1788); ships were lost without trace on uncharted reefs and through the fierce tides and rips. Cumberland Strait, between Marchinbar and Guluwuru Islands is particularly dangerous, ~~and lies only 50 miles from where the coins were found (Maps 4 and 5)~~
- 2) The Hydrographic Section of The Royal Australian Navy has indicated that no detailed survey of this area has been carried out and there is no information

- 3) Movement of coin may well have been by Arab traders before the coming of Europeans; ocean going <sup>vessels</sup> ~~ships~~ from Zanzibar travelled north with the monsoon, sometimes taking only two weeks to reach the Persian Gulf; as the winds changed they made the return voyage. ~~Only one other Kilwa coin has been found outside the immediate environs of Zanzibar.~~
- 4) Portuguese influence in Mozambique and Kilwa was established by Vasco de Gama in 1502 and by 1509 had extended to Cochín and Ceylon. In 1510 Goa was occupied and in 1511 Malacca. The latter was to become a focal point of the Portuguese East Indies trade.
- 5) As Portuguese power waned, the Dutch followed the same general track until the introduction of Brower's southern route in 1611. In the early period the Dutch tended to keep east of Madagascar, refurbishing at Mauritius. (Map I)
- 6) Both Portuguese and Dutch may have acquired coin they knew to have wide acceptance, namely Islamic, obtainable at Kilwa. With the eclipse of the Portuguese, Dutch influence was wide ranging in the east Indian Ocean. Scholten lists Persian rupees countermarked "Djawa", in circulation prior to 1760; he also emphasises a chronic shortage of low value specie.
- 7) <sup>Taking into account the remains of the island</sup> It seems beyond logic that the coins were left intermittently over a period of almost 500 years. The latest date, 1784, seems to place their time of deposition as somewhere after this, how far is really anyone's guess.
- 8) This site is not a recorded processing site but the safe anchorage and the presence of possible "tamarind" trees makes this feasible. (M.I. observed trees about ten feet tall with an edible fruit). These may be tamarinds which are not indigenous to Australia being of Indonesian origin. The presence of these trees is often a good indicator of Macassan visitors in years past. Also to be noted is the availability of fresh water.

In his thesis Macknight records "according to Djinggulul (an aboriginal informant), there was a Macassar trepanging ground in an inlet called Lemba Pauwerri, and the name of Marchinbar Island, which has no trepang was Pata Mariki". Lemba Pauwerri (Lemba == bay in Macassanese) is to the south west of Marchinbar with Galuwuru in between. Lemba Pauwerri is 17 Nautical miles from the coin site, to reach the latter from the former it would be necessary to pass through Cumberland Strait.

- 10) Perhaps an answer to part of the problem may lie in Matthew Flinders' monumental treatise on his voyages of survey of the coast of New Holland: "A Voyage to Terra Australis" (1814) volume 2. Pages 344/5. Flinders was charting the North East and Gulf of Carpentaria of Carpentaria shores in the "Investigator" and on 28/29 October 1803 he recorded.

"At one o'clock the Wessel's Islands came in sight, and I hauled more up, wishing to ascertain their extent to the northward; but the wind being at E.N.E., we could not pass to windward before dark, and therefore steered for an opening between the two outer Islands. There were strong rippings and whirlpools of tide at the entrance of the opening, with very variable soundings between 5 and 16 fathoms; and finding we could not get through in time, the sun being then

near the horizon, an anchor was dropped near a small beach on the north <sup>island</sup> side, in 4 fathoms, out of the set of the tides.

Next morning I landed on the northern Island, to take bearings and search for water, and the boat's crew had axes to cut some fire wood. Four or five Indians made their appearance, but as we advanced they retired; and I therefore left them to themselves, having usually found that to <sup>begin</sup> ~~begin~~ an interview with the Australians, it was best to seem careless about it.

A Malay prow had been thrown on the beach, and whilst the boat's crew was busied in cutting up the wreck for fuel, the Indians approached gradually, and a friendly intercourse took place; but as no water could be found, and time was more precious than the company of these people, they were presented with our axes after the work was done, and we got under way soon after ten o'clock."

Could this proa have foundered off south west Marchinbar Island, its crew and cargo, including the coins, tossed into the sea and the vessel ultimately thrown ashore on the other side of the Island.

Flinders does not give a map reference for the spot he refers to, but we know he was approaching from the east, did not enter Cumberland Strait and that the crew landed on a small beach on the northern Island (Marchinbar).

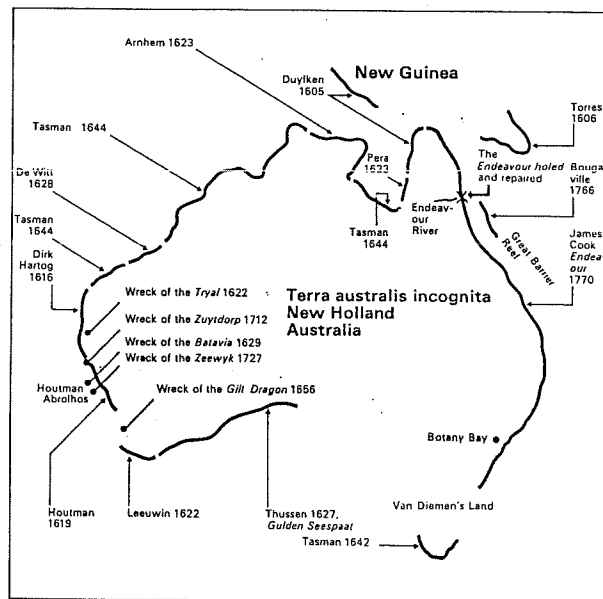
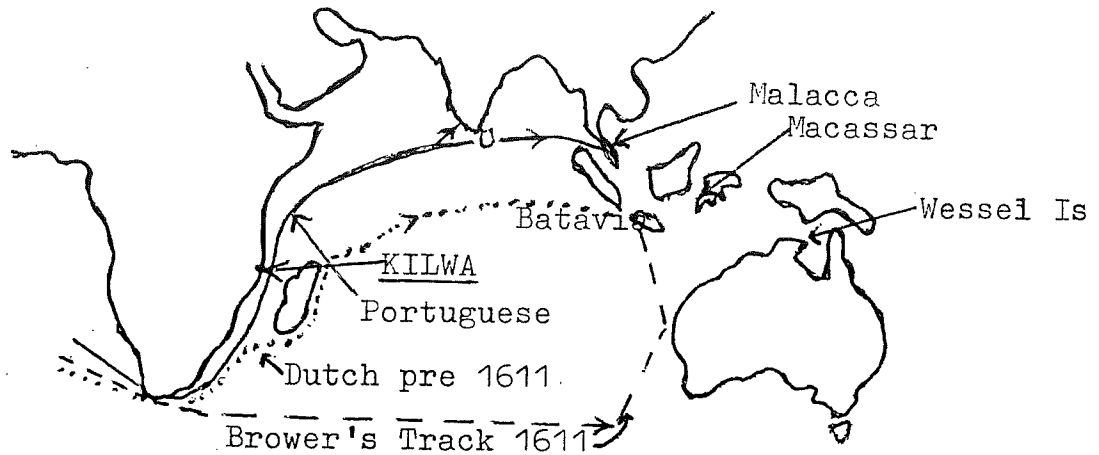
The only site to satisfy these criteria is at 463/532 - point "A" on map 5. The coins however were "washed" ashore ~~on the western side of the Island (through Cumberland Strait)~~ on the western side of the Island (through Cumberland Strait). The interesting question is whether a wooden vessel could be carried by the currents from <sup>Sensen Bay</sup> ~~the~~ to the beach at "A". Flinders states that he was prevented from passing through Cumberland Strait because of E.N.E. winds and "strong rippings and whirlpools of tide at the entrance". This confirms that he was opposite Cumberland Strait. Regarding the proa, there is little doubt that it was a derelict; he uses the words "thrown" and "wreck" and certainly would not have converted it into firewood if there had been any chance it had been beached and the crew somewhere in shore. That he considered it an old wreck is substantiated by him not making any attempt to search for survivors.

Proas are quite substantial vessels, wooden hulled and up to 60 feet in length with a super structure also of wood and bamboo. Such a wreck would float and if caught in the ambit of the Cumberland rips would sweep through the strait and on reaching the eddies and whirlpools of the south east could easily have been cast ashore on the beach described by Flinders. The time, of this wreck, probably in the 1790's, fits quite neatly with the last dated coin - 1784. *However, does it explain 10k + 15m coins & African Spire?*

The obvious way to obtain more data would be to visit the site, nowever due to the Islands remoteness and inaccessibility, this would be a costly and difficult task. It is unlikely that a definitive answer will ever be found for this "hoard", however its presence raises interesting possibilities on Australia's pre European history.

Early Routes to the Indies

(1)

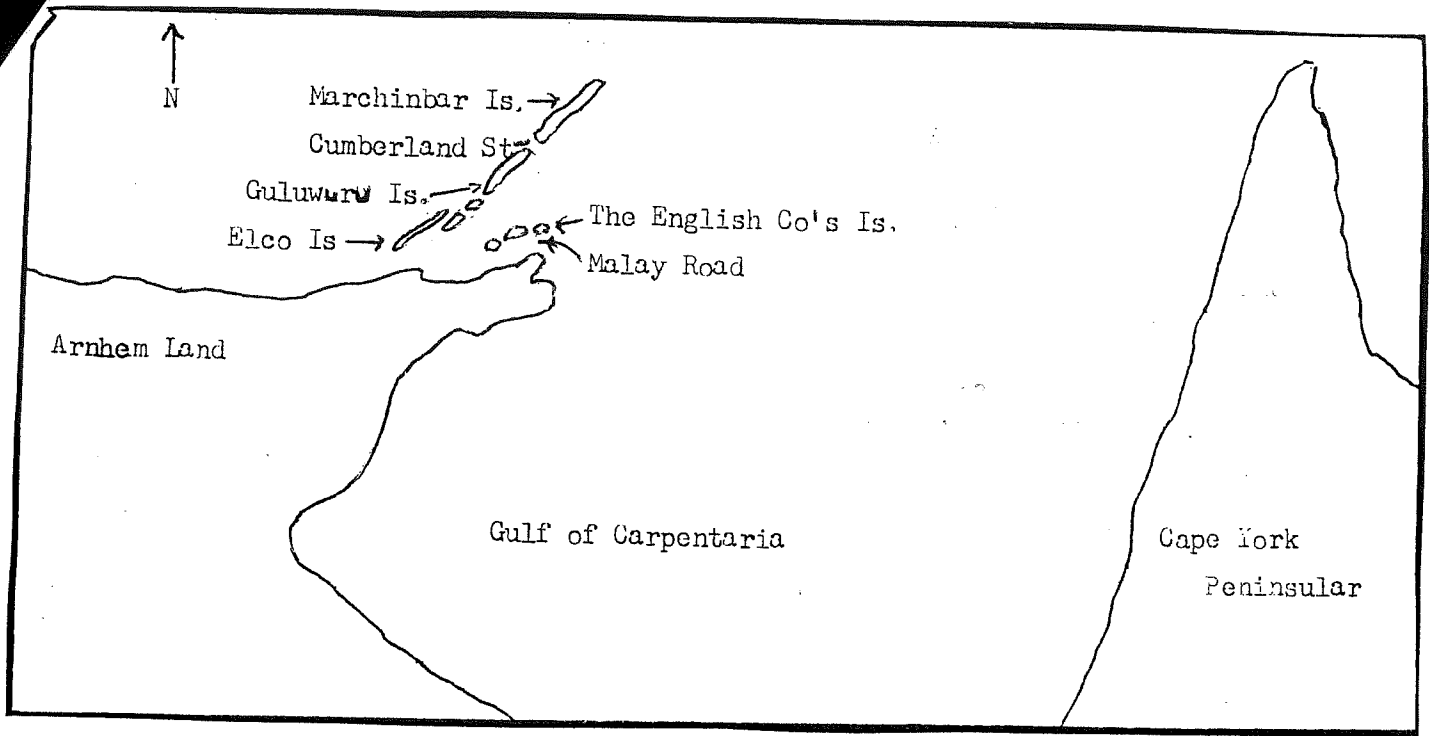


(2)

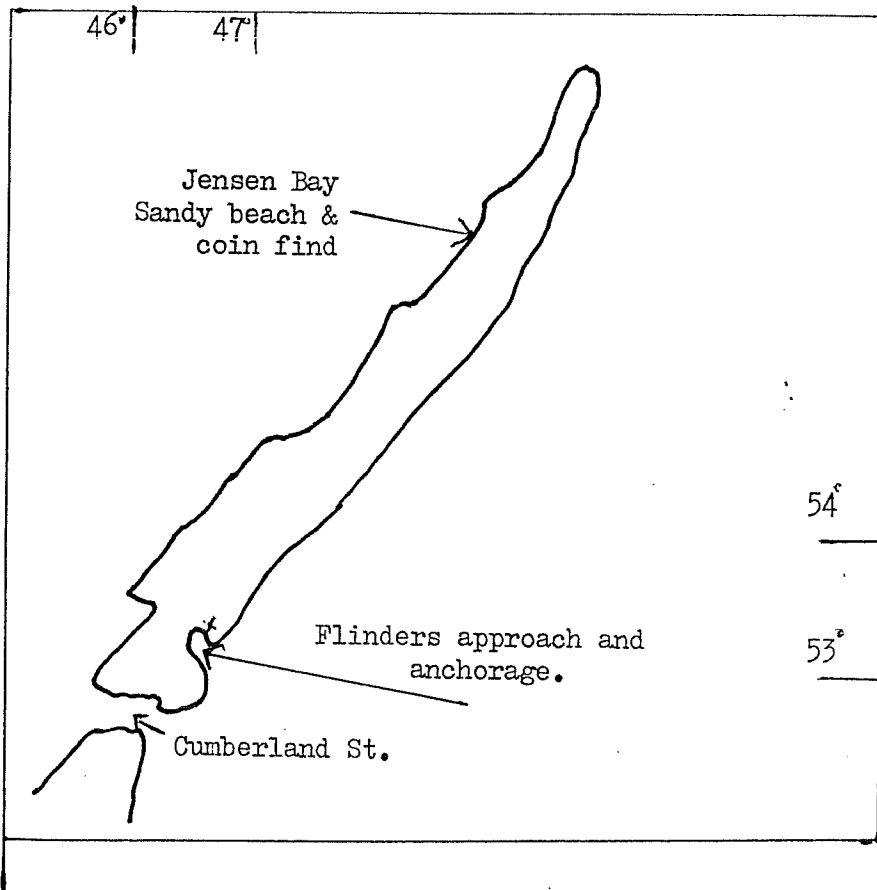
The gradual discovery of Australia by seamen and explorers from Portugal, Spain, Holland and France took place one strip of coast at a time. Cook's landing on the east coast closed the cartographers' void and revealed the general outline of the new continent.

Bower's southern route had created new hazards for the Dutch East Indiamen. Primitive logging of distance saw these vessels miscalculate the point at which they had to turn north, several were wrecked on the unknown reefs off West Australia. Their skeletons and cargoes, including many coins are still being surveyed and catalogued by The Fremantle Maritime Museum and The University of West Australia.  
 (See: "The AVOC Jacht Vergulde Draeck", Jeremy Green: BAR Supplementary Series 36; Vols. 1&2..1977 )

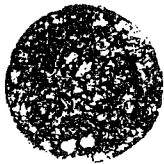




Marchinbar Island



The authoritative work on the subject is by a historian from The Australian National University, Canberra, who has carried out a vast amount of background research in Indonesia and on Dutch records, as well



B1

1.



B2

2.



A1

3.



A2

4.

- The Coins of the  
Dutch - Kilwa  
beach find  
on  
Marchinbar Is.



C1