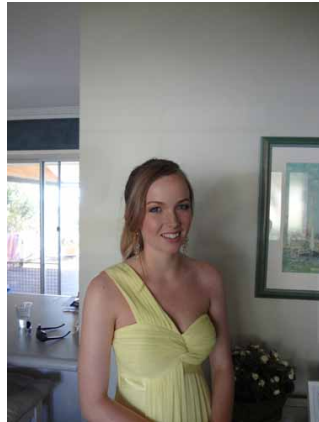
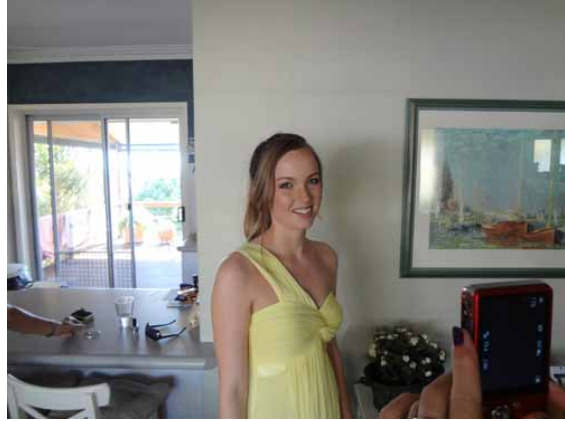
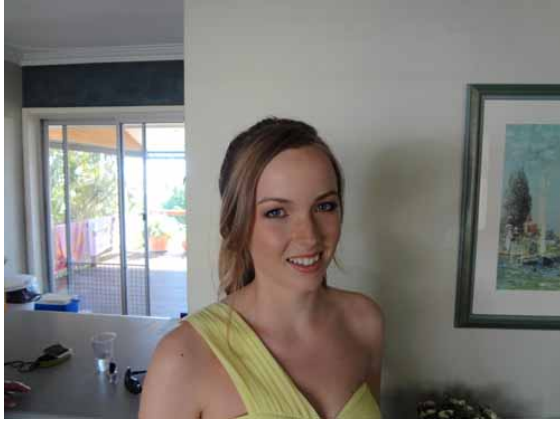


TRAVELS NOW AND THEN

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AUSTRALIA 2013





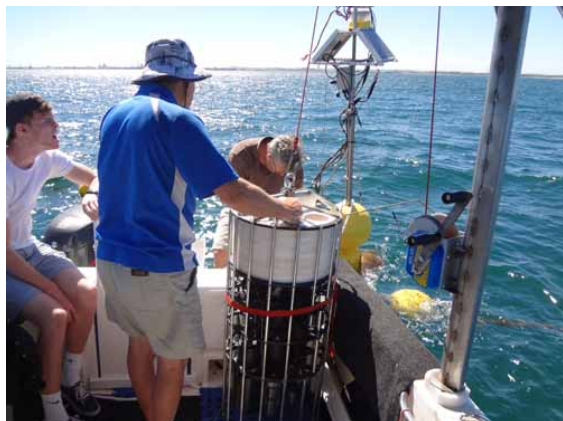


Jordan's graduation



Fremantle market





Research in Cockburn Bay





Riley's athletic meets



Celebrations



Nautical Museum, Fremantle

HOUTMAN ABROLHOS ISLANDS

Around 10,000 years ago, the Abrolhos Islands were attached to mainland Australia. The Abrolhos Islands are one of the most southern coral reef systems in the world.

With pristine waters, historic shipwrecks and an abundance of natural wildlife, the Abrolhos Islands lie 70km off the coast of Geraldton. Of the 122 islands, 22 are called home for the thriving rock lobster industry fishermen and their families for parts of the year. They are classed as an A grade reserve and are managed by the Department of Fisheries. No camping, fires or pets are allowed on the Abrolhos Islands.

The Houtman Abrolhos Islands were named after Dutch commander Frederick de Houtman, who by mistake, came across these low lying coral reefs in June 1619. The word Abrolhos is originally derived from the Portuguese expression *Abri voff olos*, meaning "Keep your eyes open."

The Dutch East India Company's vessels, the *Batavia* and *Zeewijk*, are probably the best known Abrolhos shipwrecks. The *Batavia* ran aground on Morning Reef in 1629, which followed a sickening mutiny of passengers and ultimately the betrayal of the VOC. Many years later in 1727, the *Zeewijk* struck Half Moon Reef in the Pelsaert Group.

Houtman Abrolhos Islands

Map showing the Houtman Abrolhos Islands, divided into the **WALABI GROUP** (28° 28' S, 113° 42' E), **EASTER GROUP** (28° 44' S, 113° 44' E), and **PELSAERT GROUP** (28° 44' S, 113° 64' E). Key locations include Morning Reef, Half Moon Reef, and various shipwreck sites like the *Batavia* (1629) and *Zeewijk* (1727). A compass rose is also present.

Geraldton Air Charters 08-9923-3434

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See POTATO HEAD HOTEL.

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05/03/2013

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Australia
+61899212455

Reservation

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Check-out: Friday, March 8, 2013

Number of nights: 2 Night(s)















Batavia graveyard (left: with Morning Reef behind)



Morning Reef and site of Batavia wreck (light blue spot)





From *Abrolhos Nightmare*:



Replica of the Batavia



Replica of longboat that sailed to Batavia

Despite the fact that the dangerous reefs of the Houtman Abrolhos islands were a documented hazard, in the small, dark hours of Jun.4, 1629, the "*Batavia*" with 322 people on board smashed into one of those reefs. She was the newly-built pride of the Dutch East India Company, 650 tons and 186 ft long. The Abrolhos are a collection of tiny coral reef islands at 28deg. 29' 25" S, 113deg. 47' 36" E, some 50 miles out in the Indian Ocean west of where the present town of Geraldton, Western Australia, is located. The *Batavia* was doomed though she stayed in tact on the reef (now known as Morning Reef) for some days allowing most of the 322 passengers and crew and large quantities of food and water to be transferred to a small nearby island in the ship's longboat and yawl. However, some 40 crew members were drowned as the ship broke up. The "*Batavia*" represented a huge investment for the Dutch East India Company and was loaded with treasure to be used to make an even greater profit from the spices it would carry back to Amsterdam. She had left that port at the head of a small fleet, with the expedition commander, Francisco Pelsaert, in charge while Ariaen Jacobsz served as captain of the "*Batavia*". Even before the wreck, Jacobsz and the expedition second-in-command, Jeronimus Cornelisz, had planned a mutiny which they hoped would make them very rich from the treasure in the hold. They recruited a number of fellow mutineers and had deliberately and surreptitiously separated the "*Batavia*" from the rest of the fleet. Moreover, they persuaded several of their fellow mutineers, including Jan Evertsz, to carry out a vicious gang-rape of one of the female passengers, Lucretia Jans. They hoped that this would produce an over-reaction from Pelsaert which, in turn, would allow them to entice the rest of the crew to rise up in mutiny. Pelsaert, however, shrewdly decided to wait until they reached their destination in the Dutch East Indies before resolving the matter. This intention was interrupted by the shipwreck.

At that time the mainland was an unknown, nearly-barren and waterless desert with only a sprinkling of aboriginal inhabitants; so there was no hope of rescue or succour there. Despite the huge distance, Pelsaert and Jacobsz with a number of passengers and sailors (including Evertsz) set off in the small 30ft longboat for the Dutch port of Batavia (now Jakarta, Indonesia), some 2000 miles to the north. In a remarkable feat of seamanship, they reached Batavia some 33 days later. The captain, Jacobsz, who was deemed responsible for the wreck was promptly jailed by the Governor of Batavia for his part in the planned mutiny while Evertsz was hung for his part in the rape.

Meanwhile, back in the Abrolhos, panic and chaos set in when it became clear that the water and food from the "*Batavia*" would only last a short time and there appeared to be very few resources on the tiny island (now known as Batavia Graveyard or Beacon Island) where they had been landed. The mutineer, Cornelisz, took advantage of this chaos to establish his own murderous dictatorship, aided and abetted by the other mutineers. Once he had marshalled all the food, weapons and rescued treasure under his control, he began a systematic program of murder and rape, designed to allow the food and other resources to last as long as possible. First, he had to deal with the threat to his plans posed by a small group of soldiers who had been on board the "*Batavia*". On the pretext of seeking their help to search for water on a nearby

island, he had them transported there in the only remaining boat, namely the small yawl. Cornelisz promised he would come and get them when they lit a fire signalling the end of their search. However, his real plan was to let them die of thirst and hunger on that nearby island so he did not respond as promised when the signal fire was lit. However, under the leadership of one of the soldiers, a man called Wiebbe Hays, the soldiers did not panic. Though they found no water on the original island to which they had been transported (known today as East Wallabi Island) they were able to wade to a nearby island (West Wallabi) where they found not only a natural well of fresh water but also a plentiful supply of food from seals, shellfish and even small wallabies that lived on the island. A natural leader, Hays organized his small band of abandoned men so that they not only survived but prospered.



Wiebbe Hays' Island & assault bay



Wiebbe Hays' fort

Back on Beacon Island, Cornelisz and his henchman began their program of murder and rape. All those who were not useful for their work in fishing and providing other services (including sexual services) were gradually eliminated and buried in shallow graves. This included many women and children. A few managed to escape to Wiebbe Hays' island. In this way the soldiers became aware of Cornelisz's horrendous pogrom and began to fashion crude weapons with which to defend themselves against the muskets and sabres of the mutineers. Cornelisz soon realized that he must make an effort to eliminate the soldiers in case any rescue vessel might turn up and reveal their horrific deeds. Hays and his men built small forts on top of the cliffs surrounding their island and fashioned catapults and pikes from driftwood material, some of which came from the wreck. When the first attack by Cornelisz's men was launched, the soldiers were ready. They bombarded the mutineers with catapulted rocks fired from behind the fort walls so that the mutineers fled before they even reached the shore. The second assault several days later was similarly repulsed. Then Cornelisz changed tactics and sought a parley with Hays and his men. With his fully armed henchmen Cornelisz landed on the shore of West Wallabi and attempted to gain military advantage by duplicity. But as soon as Cornelisz made the first move, Hays and his men overcame the mutineers, killed some and took Cornelisz prisoner. Just at that very moment, Pelsaert and his new crew appeared on the horizon in a rescue vessel; they had not only sailed south from Batavia but also managed to locate the tiny Abrolhos in the vast Indian Ocean. Both soldiers and mutineers raced from the islands attempting to be the first to reach Pelsaert. The mutineers had planned to overwhelm the rescuers and take over their vessel. However, Hays and his men got there first and, thus forewarned, the rescuers overwhelmed the mutineers and took them prisoner. The horrendous pogrom of murder and rape was finally over but there had to be some consequences.

Before leaving the Abrolhos, Pelsaert carried out a rigorous investigation of what had happened in his absence. The evil of Cornelisz was soon uncovered and Pelsaert felt he was empowered to mete out just punishment rather than try to transport a large number of dangerous men back to Batavia. Gallows were erected on a nearby island for the day of reckoning. There Cornelisz was hung after having his hands cut off. Some of his henchmen were similarly butchered before being hung. Two of the younger mutineers were set free on the mainland with a few provisions but were never seen again. Other, lesser mutineers were transported back to Batavia to await trial though most were ultimately hung. Of the original 341 people on board the *"Batavia"*, only 68 made it to their original destination.

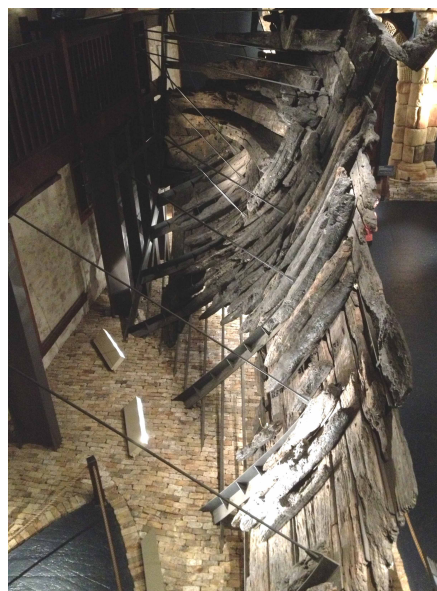
The only real heroes of the whole terrible affair were Wiebbe Hays and his assistants; they were rewarded by the Dutch East India Company but then faded from history. The forts they built are the oldest European structures in Australia and can still be seen today on West Wallabi Island. A statue of the revered Wiebbe Hays, a man from very humble beginnings, stands proudly in the city of Geraldton, a symbol of his strength of character, military ability, natural leadership, and courage.

Knowledge of the wreck site was rapidly lost though the story of the *"Batavia"*, the mutiny and the aftermath was preserved in the meticulous records of Pelsaert and some of the passengers. The remains of the *"Batavia"* (including many cannons and some unrecovered treasure) lay undisturbed in shallow water for over 300 years. Eventually, in the 1960s and 70s many of these artifacts were recovered and a surviving section of the hull was raised and reassembled in the Maritime Museum in Fremantle, Western Australia. Also reconstructed in the museum was a stone archway which had been destined for the Dutch East India Company headquarters in Batavia. Excavations on Beacon Island also uncovered many human graves and confirmed their violent deaths. The exhibit in the Maritime Museum also includes many other artifacts.

My visit there first brought the story to my attention. I bought a book that detailed the story and became fascinated by the saga; I simply had to see the Abrolhos for myself.



Archway intended for Batavia



The recovered remains of Batavia

On Mar.6, 2013, I drove 300 miles north from Perth to the town of Geraldton where Geraldton Air Charters run day trips by small plane out to the Abrolhos. A total of five of us had signed up for the *"Shipwreck Special"* the next day. I arrived at the Geraldton Air Charters office about half an hour early and chatted with others in the office/waiting room. Many of the Abrolhos Islands have leased properties where fishermen have built shacks and jetties for their boats. The fishermen and tradesmen who serve them use the air charter service for quick trips back and forth to the mainland. Moreover, there is a black pearl farm and a lively rock lobster fishing business on the islands. These are also served by the air charter company. One of the waiting passengers was a carpenter on his way to repair a shack; another was a fisherman off to his shack for the long weekend.

After a pre-flight briefing by the pilot and guide, Ben Joseph, the five of us, along with a co-pilot in training by the name of Jeff Lawrie, squeezed ourselves into the little plane and prepared for an exciting trip. It was a beautiful, West Australian day, with blue skies and just enough wind to freshen the air. We flew over Geraldton at an elevation of about *3500ft* and out over the Indian Ocean. Within 30 minutes we arrived at the most-southerly group of islands (the Pelsaert group) that make up the Abrolhos and the pilot took the plane down to about *500ft* so that we could get a good view. After circling over several of the Pelsaert Group of islands (Post Office Island, Pelsaert Island) as well as two wreck sites (Zeewijk in 1727 and Windsor in 1908) we headed north for the middle island group, the Easter Group that includes Rat Island, almost overrun by fisherman's shacks. Then north again to the northernmost group, the Wallabi Group where the *"Batavia"* was wrecked and the ensuing drama played itself out. At low altitude we passed over West Wallabi Island where Wiebbe Hays and his men survived; we even spotted one of the simple rock-walled forts that they constructed and the bay where they repelled the mutineers invasion. Then, circling to the north, we landed on the dirt landing-strip on East Wallabi Island and parked the plane among low brush.



Rat Island



Turtle Bay



Landed on East Wallabi



Map of the Wallabi Group, Abrolhos Islands

It was a beautiful day so it was a delight to disembark on this remote and pristine island. Just a short hike took us to Turtle Bay on the north side of the island, a magnificent bay and beach, where we took refuge from the sun under a small shelter. Only about 40 yards off-shore was a coral reef and we swam out with our snorkelling gear for a spectacular visit to the reef with its marvellous variety of life. This included the rockfish that are harvested on many of the other islands and shipped to mainland markets. After lunch, a short walking tour of northern point of East Wallabi Island found us a fish eagle, ospreys, and various seabirds as well as skinks, lizards, and, best of all, a collection of small wallabies, the descendants of those that sustained Wiebbe Hays and his men. Then back to the plane for another low altitude tour, this time of the islands that make up the Wallabi Group and that featured so dramatically in the "*Batavia*" saga. First over West Wallabi Island, Wiebbe Hays' stronghold, and then over to the Batavia Graveyard (or Beacon Island) itself, now the site of a number of fishermen's shacks. In the one view, we could see the relationship between the Graveyard, the nearby Morning Reef and Long Island, upon which the chief mutineers were hung in full view of the survivors of the massacre. As we circled over Morning Reef itself we could discern the precise location of the wreck since it has left a bare sandy spot (light blue in color) amid the dark sea grass just a short way behind the wave-break. It seemed an appropriate final view of the Abrolhos Islands as we turned for home after a spectacular day in a truly beautiful place. Strange to think of such horror in such a magnificent location.

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*Last updated 7/30/99.
Christopher E. Brennen*