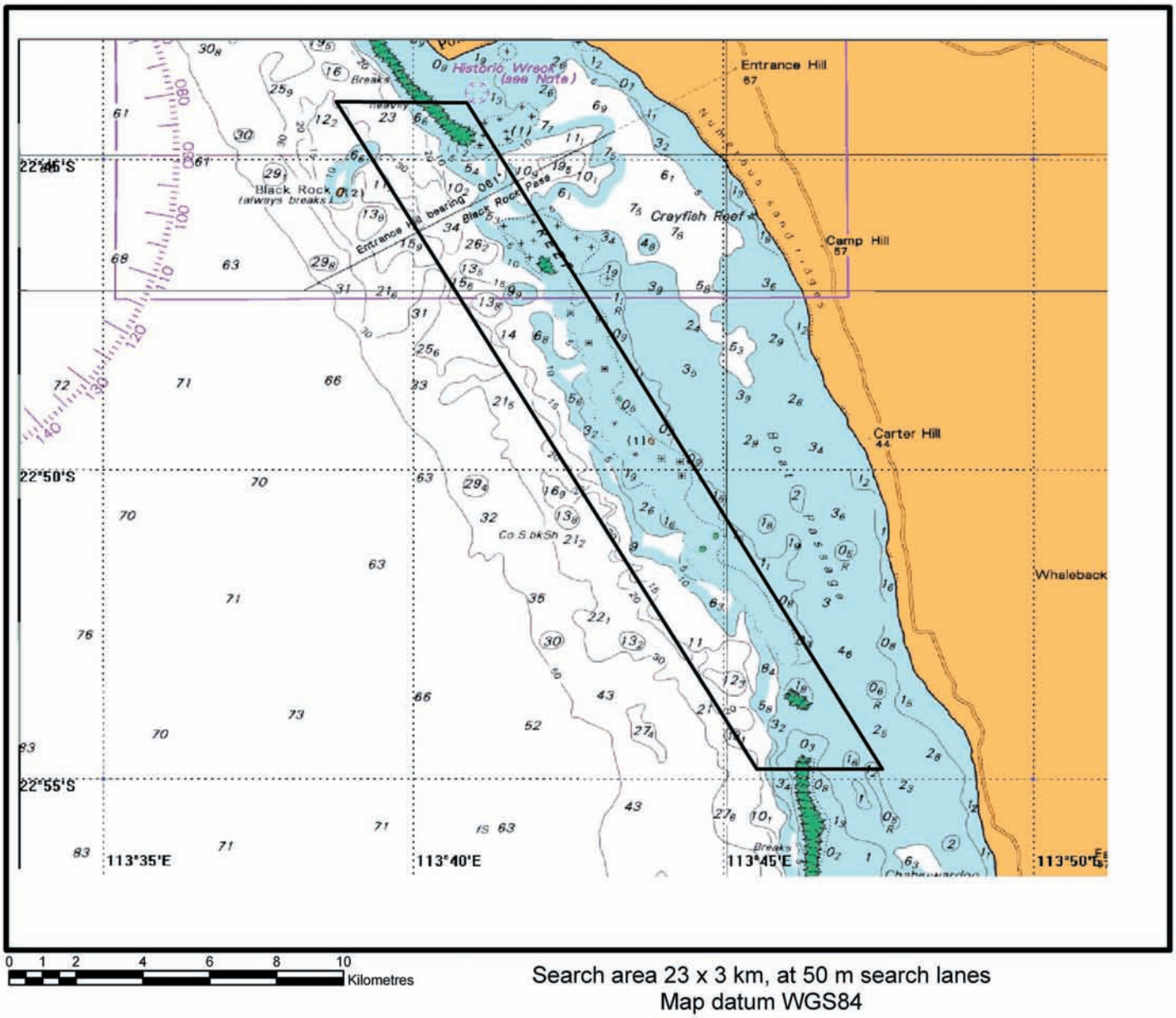
The search for the Correio da Azia



Search area 23 x 3 km, at 50 m search lanes
Map datum WGS84

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The search for the Correio da Azia, a proposal presented to Fugro by the Department of Maritime Archaeology Western Australian Maritime Museum

THE PROJECT

To locate the *Correio da Azia,* the earliest Portuguese shipwreck in Australia. It was an advice boat travelling from Lisbon to Macau in 1816 and was wrecked on Ningaloo Reef. Letters in the Lisbon archives include a report of the loss by the Captain and the report of a vessel, the *Emillia*, that was sent to chart Point Cloates, which at that time was a notorious navigational hazard for vessels sailing to China. These accounts provide clear details of the position of the site. It is located in a thick reef area in a depth of about 10 metres. Previous Museum expeditions have failed to locate the site because of adverse weather and the difficulty of searching this reef area with a magnetometer in a regular search pattern. Currently, the Museum is concerned that the site will be found by treasure hunters and will be

looted.

THE METHOD

Evidence from the Deepwater Graveyard has shown that an aerial magnetometer is an very efficient method of locating wreck sites. The system was able to detect the HMAS *Derwent* a 2100 tonne vessel sunk in 200 m of water off Rottnest (15 nTesla anomaly). Other, smaller vessels were located quite easily in 80 m of water. While the *Correio da Azia* is not an iron vessel, it is anticipated that it will have a considerable quantity of iron including anchors, anchor chain, guns and fittings. Probably a total of about 100 tonnes. This will be an easy target to locate given that it was known that when it sank , the survivors tied their boat to the masts over night. The search area is reasonably confined, we know that the vessel lies north of the northern end of the flat topped reef on Ningaloo Reef. Aerial magnetometer survey in this area should locate the site quite easily and there is also the potential for other sites too.

THE OUTCOMES

Prospero Productions, a major Western Australian quality documentary producer is planning to produce a 60 minute documentary as part of Part Two of the Shipwreck Detectives. The last series saw the intrepid detectives investigate the *Batavia* Grave site, unravel a mysterious tale of forgotten Dutch flying boats and discover an untouched Japanese World War II shipwreck in Micronesia. The new series will include the search for the *Correio da Azia* and its rumoured hold of treasure. The team then turn their attention to Sri Lanka where they will team up with legendary science fiction writer Arthur C. Clarke to explore the shipwreck strewn Galle Harbour and hunt for the lost 17th century Dutch 'jacht', *Dolfijin*. The Museum has benefited form a close relationship with Prospero, which through these documentaries is able to sponsor projects that with normal funding would be impossible. The programmes are to be shown on ABC (Australia), National Geographic Discovery Channel and the British Channel 4. If Fugro becomes involved with this project there will be significant publicity for the company.

THE SEARCH FOR THE *CORREIO DA AZIA*

Somewhere in the treacherous waters off the north west coast of Australia lies the lost wreck of the Portuguese ship the *Correio Da Azia* and its unknown cargo.

Where it sank and what it carried remains a mystery but what is known for certain is that this mysterious wreck will offer a valuable and fascinating glimpse of European colonial power during a pivotal moment in world history.

In 2003 a team of shipwreck detectives headed by renowned maritime archaeologist Jeremy Green will use the very latest in scientific and forensic technology to find the vessel.

The search area encompasses a long barrier reef exposed to the full swell from the Indian Ocean and is extremely dangerous for much of the year, making timing and accuracy some of the most important considerations for the project.

Fortunately, a state of the art magnetometer, which the team have already tested extensively in the waters off the coast of Perth, will for the first time enable them to pinpoint the exact location of the wreck from the air.

Once located, it will be an anxious wait for the right weather conditions before excavation work will begin. Only then will the wreck begin to reveal its rare Portuguese artefacts and only then will the Shipwreck Detectives discover if the ship did indeed carry a hold full of treasure.

Shortly after midnight on 26 November 1816, the Portuguese dispatch ship *Corrieo da Azia*, en route from Lisbon to Macau, struck Ningaloo Reef.

The crew survived by scrambling into the ship's launch and tethered it to the only section of the ship remaining above water, the mast. At daybreak, the survivors set off on the long and perilous journey to the southeastern coast of China and the Portuguese colony of Macau.

After raising the alarm, a search party including the captain of the *Correio da Azia* and some of his crew was sent back aboard the brigantine *Emillia* to identify and plot the wreck site in the hope that it could eventually be salvaged.

The wreck, however, was never spotted again but the records of both the *Correio da Azia's* commander Joa Joaquim de Freitas and *Emillia's* skipper Luis Antonia Da Silica Beltrao have survived in the Portuguese archives.

Fragmentary and often misleading, the documents are the only clues to the ship's final resting place so it's up to the team of maritime archaeologists to piece together the evidence that will help establish the search area.

According to historians, the vessel represents the only tangible reminder of Portugal's 400 hundred year involvement in China Trade on this coast.

Established by the Portuguese in 1557 and returned to the Chinese in 1999, Macau was the oldest permanent European settlement in Asia. In the 16th and 17th centuries it was ***the*** pioneer mercantile settlement on the trade route from Europe to the East and the Far East.

Merchants made vast fortunes trading in silk, silver, cloth, pearls, ambers, and spices but during the last quarter of the 17th century decline set in as other European nations, including the Dutch and the British set up trading colonies to rival the supremacy of Macau.

The loss of the *Correio da Azia* in 1816, however, occurred at a time of great change and upheaval in both Europe and the East.

After many years of recession and social isolation, Macau was enjoying a revival in its role as a great trading centre, capitalising on new trade links with the Chinese hinterland and expanding its role in the trade of new products such as tea, contract labourers and the illegal smuggling of opium.

In contrast, Portugal, the once great colonial power, was a land ravaged by war and instability. In 1807, when the armies of Napoleon amassed on its border, the royal family fled to Brazil leaving the French to invade before being defeated the following year by the British army led by the first Duke of Wellington.

In 1816, just months before the *Correio da Azia* smashed into the Australian reef, the exiled queen

of Portugal Maria I died and the Prince Regent Joao VI became king. Still ruling from Brazil he was powerless to stop the famous liberal revolution of 1820 which radically reduced the power of the monarchy and established the constitution of modern day Portugal.

If discovered the wreck would be the earliest Portuguese vessel found in Australian waters but despite several attempts in the past the exact location of the Correio da Azia remains a mystery

With the significance of the site and the growing interest in the project from both Australia and Portugal, the team from the West Australian Maritime Museum are determined they will succeed in pinpointing the wreck and unlocking its secrets.

The Search for the Correio da Azia will follow the detectives as they search the crystal clear waters of Western Australia's remote Ningaloo reef, one of the most stunning and untouched coral reefs in the world.

It will capture the anticipation, excitement, traumas and tension of a close-knit team of diverse characters who must decipher the clues to reveal the shipwreck's long lost resting place.

The intense characters, raw emotions and strong narrative of this modern day adventure story will be intertwined with dramatic reconstructions of the Correio da Azia's last moments and the crew's amazing struggle for survival.

But most importantly, the Shipwreck Detectives will take you beneath the waves to catch a once in a lifetime glimpse of an important historical artefact – unseen and untouched for almost 200 years.

Appendixes

Translations of original journals

Account of wreck by Joao Joaquim de Freitas, Captain of *Correio da Azia*

…this declaration made by Joao Joaquim de Freitas, Lt. Captain of the Naval Dept. of Goa, Commander of the ship (galera) that wrecked named *Correio da Azia*, owned by Joao Nunes da Silveira coming from Lisbon to Macau against weather, sea and wind, fire, shallows and coastal dangers and errors of Maps. On the 25th day of November of the Year of our lord Jesus Christ 1816, the aforementioned *Galera* running with sail, continuing along the Western coast of New Holland, at the distance from the same of seven to eight miles, having the said Commander and other Pilot officers affirmed the Sun on the 24th Astronomical day at the median terms of 3 latitudes South 24 degrees and 16 minutes, having lost sight at 21 hours of (*Bamin*—exact name unclear, could also be Barrin) Island which had been the first land sighted at 19 hrs 20 minutes of the same day and having been observed until 6 hrs of the afternoon of the aforementioned day (i.e. the 25th), the appointed way was by day NE quarter of N to N quarter of NE, always 32 miles of distance, the Coast 6–8 miles, denoting at that hour land from N and of the same to NE quarter of N and further, from S to SW quarter and 1/2 to S, the said Commander continuing to navigate in the direction N quarter of NE to N, 28 miles when at 10 hrs the bow lookouts and the other officials on the upper deck saw a white barrier (shoal?) on the same coast at a distance of little more than 8 or 9 miles, the adj. commander immediately ordering to haul up to NNW, having the wind blow away from West South East (sic) to the coast and continuing thus until mid—(unclear) night 5 miles and in that same hour the Coast could no longer be designated (seen) the adj. commander ordered to make way N quarter of NW for 1/2 hour, the ship traveling 16 miles per hour, and from that hour until 1, to N at the same 16 miles per hour, and at that same hour fire breaking out in the binnacle, persisting for a space of 1/4 hour, making it impossible to steer by the compass the course, determined by the Commander, and as soon as it, became possible to steer the determined way by the light of a lantern in the space of 1/2 hr it was denoted from the top deck by the Ensign (unclear), Jose Antonio Pinto, to the counter—master Pedro Fransisco a turbulence off the starboard of the prow, without the lookouts that had been designated by the Commander having taken notice of it, and the adj. Commander ordering the hauling up of the *balina* (sail) all the wind it would give, it being (the wind) at the same time W, and determining at the same time to place the anchor immediately since it continued with its flukes overboard and a cable of 20 lengths extended from stem to bow, and seeing the said turbulence to continue off the prow and just about to come about to the side (unclear), the ship hit twice, continuing however always to make some way without hitting, and wanting to turn the ship aside and starting again to make way, we, making the due maneuvers as also setting out (unclear) the prow sails, felicitously denoting (unclear perhaps—'clear water') to starboard and beginning even to make some way without there being seen any rough water off the prow, in hit and at the second (hit) its rudder failed and immediately crossed in the sea and turned on its port side and filled with water, bursting with such great force that (unclear) the ship from starboard to port immediately puncturing (unclear) from starboard to the (unclear—possible certain types of 'masts'— '*matarcas*') these falling and thus finally the Commander deciding for the best to launch the Launch in the sea so that we could save ourselves, all of us embarking immediately, and so we stayed until the breaking of day, tied off to the masts of the same, unable to cast off to the side due to the many rocks that appeared out of the water unable at this time to save anything except 3 barrels of biscuits and three (unclear—some form of measurement may be— '*almodas*' perhaps) of water that were in one of the Commanders jars and which was tied to the *Gatta* mast, that mast not having failed (unclear), casting of to sea, affirming all 3 pilot officials that we were 7–8 miles from the coast m the coast and that between the coast and the shallows there was a channel, since the tide was low and nothing like rocks or s and banks or rough waters could be seen there, but Yes everything from bow to stern were rock heads out of the water, extending out to sea for over 1 mile, and at 21 hors of the same day all three pilots worked to save us from the great danger in which we were in, given the breaking of that same day that in this fashion we saved ourselves from the shallows (unclear) people launch, (unclear) and as already declared navigating along the coast to the N until noon, observing the sun all three pilots found it to be 22 degrees latitude, 46 minutes S at the same

time it was observed from the Launch at 11 to 12 miles having navigated, it was still possible to divine the top of the '*Gatta*' (front) mast, that by this same navigation the aforementioned 'baixo' (Note: this could mean two different things and which is not exactly clear—it could refer to the fact that the ship is 'down' (*baixo*) or else to the shallows (*baixo*) on which the ship is down— the point may be academic since in the context, in either case, they seem to be trying to pinpoint as best they could the location) is at Latitude 22 degrees and 50 minutes S, With very little differences at the same time a large turbulence was seen to the NW of the '*Agulhas*' (Note: this probably refers to the 'Compass', although it is in the plural which is sort of odd and thus might refer to some topographical feature known as the needles) with a small island and several rock heads out of the water at the distance from the launch of 9—10 miles at the same time at a distance from the Coast of 6—7 miles such that the Commander and other Pilot officials were left certain— that it was the Island of Cloates and from the said coast ('was seen'? —unclear) a stretch of rock under the water with a large turbulence that extended out to sea for over 4 miles, and the said island found on all charts at latitude S 21 degrees 45 minutes and latitude east of London 108 (very unclear) degrees, 23 degrees and the afore mentioned stretch of rock was marked East of the '*Agulha*' (compass 'needles' see previous note) and the Island to West quarter of NW, and the launch (unclear) between the two dangers (unclear) Channel which was supposed to have water enough for a big ship, and continuing to navigate until midnight with the prow NNE, wind SW, and at that same hour we stayed stopped until the break of day, when 'We continued along the same coast at a distance of 5—6 miles and at 23 hrs the 26th (the day) we rounded the cape from NW and went along the Coast searching for an inlet, in this way to be able to arrange/fix the launch in a state to be able to cross the passage between the coast of 'New Holland and the Manchurian straits.

—the following 3 pages describe the repairs made to the launch, the fact that no natives were found on the island despite crew apprehension, and the departure of the launch without. two men who were supposed killed by animals or natives and could not be found, and the fact that they were picked up almost immediately by an American ship from Philadelphia named the —Caledonia

[Translation is picked up at point describing a conversation that took place between the two captains] that same Captain (of the *Caledonia*) stated that 5 or 6 years previously on that same an American ship from Boston, named the '*Rapid*' had wrecked on that same—shallow, and the same, captain was going to Canton in the, year 1815 on the 2nd of October coming from Philadelphia to Canton in the ship Caledonia having observed at the time the Sun was found at Latitude S 24 degree and navigating at a distance from the Coast of, New Holland of 8—10 miles of the North way, N quarter and 1/2 NE 26 miles and to the N quarter of NE, 18 miles until 15 hrs and 3 minutes he sighted an island of white sand on the coast, denoting it to NE, NE continuing more or less (unclear), there was a sailor atop the tri-mast who sighted a turbulence of the sea from N quarter of NE, to NE quarter of N a little more than a mile distant from the ship, he the said captain ordered hauling un the prow, to NW quarter of W, with wind from SW to S navigating 16 miles, and to NE half N unti1 17 and 1/2 hrs. So that. he found himself at the distance of 6—7 leagues from land which was, seen from (unclear) N to— NW and to S, SW, showing us his charts on which none of them was marked any such shallow and for observing the distance and at, the Latitude affirmed by day he found himself at Latitude S 22 degrees 50 minutes, all the charts done, of the coast of New Holland showing it further to the N 40 minutes than in reality it is, and 2 degrees 25 minutes West by the London Meridian and that he the Captain on one of his charts on this

Emillia Translation

The shallows of the reefs close to the coast extend northward in a 20° 00' NE direction, While We were steering SSE and SEbS, in order to seek the reef on which *Correo de Azia* was lost. According to the latitude in which the vessel was lost and the course taken by the launch in which the crew was saved they found themselves amongst this large rocky danger which extends seawards from the coast, (in my opinion the loss of the vessel was not due to a lack of knowledge, but by the proximity of the coast, and even more so at night when there is insufficient light to give adequate warning of dangers and so to avoid dire consequences): it was fortunate that when we sighted the large rock we also saw the large area of shallows at the point of land and extending well to seaward, while the depths were from 40 to 30 fathoms, sand and rock. At 21h 56m 13s-21h 58m 07s - 21h 59m 14s. Having taken the number of observations which you see, numbers 3 to 6, the mean Longitude was found to be (113° 47' 45"; later at 24h the observed Latitude was found to be 22° 48' 12". The reef or large rock which extends seawards from the coast bore 18° 00' NE and in distance more or less 9, and the reef on which it is believed Correo de Azia was wrecked 48°SE. The Latitude of the large rock, seaward of the coast should therefore be 22° 39' 30". According to what I have heard and from the officers themselves, ourt combined remarks and reflections are: the calculated longitude of the vessel from lunar distances to the sun, deduced from four observations is 113° 47' 45"; then the land should be in Longitude 113° 50' 46", with small errors latitude given above 22° 39'30".

7th June 1817. We continued on a NE tack, coasting along the large reef, but only areas awash were seen, while our depth was 37 fathoms, sand, rock and gravel, and the current carries us strongly towards the coast; this coast is of a good height the highest we had seen along the whole coast. The boat went to the shore, in it my commander who, because of the misfortune which had happened to him, would be able to recognise the position of the mishap in the same boat were some of the sailors who had been with him when he was wrecked. They enclrcled the reef and recognised the position, the exact site of their misfortune, with a bottom of rocks and a circle of rocks similar in appearance to a salt marsh. They were then sure that this was the position they sought. At 22h 00 I took a large number of observations and my commander an equal number, from which we deduced the calculated Longitude E of Greenwich as 113° 52' 47.07" as can be seen from calculations Nos 7 to l0 so that in this Latitude the Longitude of the coast should be 114° 00', due to the distance we were off it in my estimation; this should be accurate to plus or minus one minute. The extremity of the reef on Which the vessel *Correo de Azia* should be in Longitude 113° 52' OO" and the land on this parallel in 113° 55' 30". Therefore my work should serve from today onwards to assist my fellow seamen, completed by astronomical observations though without the aid of a chronometer. They should navigate with greet caution but sighting the large patch of vegetation which is situated in a mean latitude of 23° 51' 25" S and Longitude 113° 44'30" or even when finding themselves on the parallel of 24° 00'S and within sight of land, they should never steer E of a course 11° 15' even when the currents do not set them into dangers (if the SW monsoon is not blowing) lying between 23° 15' and 22° 57', they will encounter the one lying in 22° 39' 30", 113° 50' 46"