



*Sweers Islands Unveiled:*  
***A local study***  
***illuminating the wider picture***

**Tiny Sweers Island in the South Wellesley Group in the Gulf of Carpentaria is not a place that hits the news every day. It houses a small fishing resort run by Tex and Lyn Battle since 1987, and is mainly part of the Aboriginal trust area belonging to the Kaiadilt. A recent study of the Bonaparte Tasman map, owned by the Mitchell Library in Sydney since 1933, quite literally places Sweers Island on the map. – In placing a small part of the Australian coastline under the microscope, the authors of *Sweers Islands Unveiled* have advanced our understanding of Abel Tasman’s great voyage of 1644, says Senior Curator Paul Brunton of the Mitchell Library at the State Library of New South Wales.**

*Sweers Islands Unveiled* is a book about places named after Salomon Sweers, an official of the Dutch East India Company at Batavia (Jakarta) in the seventeenth century. – Salomon Sweers was the uncle of one of my ancestors, says main author Carsten Berg Høgenhoff of Oslo, Norway. An "occupational hazard" is that sometimes one comes across themes that go far beyond the narrow area of genealogy. Together with the Battles of Sweers Island, genealogist Annette Sweerts of Amsterdam, The Netherlands and historian Bob Forsyth of Mount Isa, Qld., he has followed the paths of Australian explorers Abel Tasman and Matthew Flinders. The combining factor has been places named after Salomon Sweers, in Tasmania, the Bismarck Archipelago and in Queensland.

– This might appear a book of only local interest, but it is a splendid example of a good local study illuminating the wider picture, says Senior Curator Paul Brunton of the Mitchell Library. When he was presented with a draft version of the book in January this year, Mr. Brunton immediately saw that some of the conclusions made in this book advance the understanding of Abel Tasman’s voyages in the 1640s. In particular, the book reveals that some tiny parts of the so-called Bonaparte Tasman map are much more accurate than previously believed.

– *Sweers Islands Unveiled* has provided further evidence that the Bonaparte Tasman map, one of the few pieces of evidence for Tasman’s 1644 voyage, is in fact a contemporary document of the 1640s, says Mr. Brunton.

The book can be read on many levels. 2006 is the 400th anniversary for the Dutch mapping of Australia, most of which was performed by ships run by the Dutch United East India Company (VOC), and the book gives a brief, but solid introduction to the VOC’s important role. Following one particular individual in Tasman and Flinders’ nomenclature of Australia, it also gives an interesting insight into their journeys. For example, present-day Sweers Island in the Gulf of Carpentaria has its own, very special place in Australia’s history. In 1802, Matthew Flinders finally answered one of the old questions about New Holland, as Australia was known by at that time: Was it one continent, or were the eastern and western parts divided by



sea? Flinders conclusion that it was indeed one continent was made while he stayed on Sweers Island in 1802.

The only Sweers Island which today retains Salomon Sweers' name is in the Gulf of Carpentaria. It was named by Matthew Flinders after his 1801–1803 circumnavigation of Australia. This was one of many tributes by way of nomenclature which he paid to the Dutch contribution to the charting of Australia. From 1642–43, Abel Tasman was the first to circumnavigate the continent, discovering Tasmania and New Zealand, and he sailed along Australia's north coast in 1644. He named places both in Tasmania, the Bismarck Archipelago and the Gulf of Carpentaria after Sweers, but none of these remain. Even more picturesque is the fact that the so-called Sweers Islands in Tasmania – they were really not islands, but high headlands – have found their way into *Gulliver's Travels*, Jonathan Swift's popular novel from 1726, where they are charted as some islands not far from Houyhnhnms Land where the Yahoos lived.

– With the time difference between Norway, the Netherlands and Australia, it meant that one of us was constantly at the computer or reference book, says Sweers Island resident Lyn Battle, describing how the work has devolved over the last year. – It was perfect. In spite of the distances, we had a global team that cc'd each other on every mail, so we had everyone's input. We might as well have been sitting around a table with our notes and coffee cups.

– In fact, adds Annette Sweerts and Carsten Berg Høgenhoff from Amsterdam and Oslo simultaneously, – without the Internet, *Sweers Islands Unveiled* would probably never have been written.

*Sweers Islands Unveiled* will be available at selected outlets around Australia and online from [www.sweers.com.au](http://www.sweers.com.au)

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