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Endeavour at Batavia and beyond

Introduction

Batavia¹ is certainly a place that Europeans need not covet to go to; but if necessity obliges them, they will do well to make their stay as short as possible, otherwise they will soon feel the effects of the unwholesome air of Batavia, which, I firmly believe, is the Death of more Europeans than any other place upon the Globe of the same extent.

So wrote Captain James Cook in his journal on December 26 1770 as the *Endeavour* was about to sail from Batavia on Java bound for the Cape of Good Hope and on to England. This rather gloomy paragraph here serves as an introduction to the calamitous last part of the voyage of the *Endeavour*.

Cook left Possession Island on August 23 1770 and sailed west into the Arafura Sea between New Holland and New Guinea. In some ways Cook and his crew and passengers would be justified in feeling proud that a great deal had been accomplished over the previous two years. They had largely disproved the existence of a large southern continent east of 180°; they had observed the transit of Venus at Tahiti; they had mapped the two large New Zealand islands; they had mapped over three thousand kilometres of the previously unknown east coast of New Holland and they had proved that a strait existed between New Holland and New Guinea. Importantly Cook had achieved this with minimal loss of life due to sickness in his crew, including no lives lost to scurvy. Other lives lost to sickness included Andrew Buchan who seems to have brought a serious stomach disorder on board and John Reading who died from an over dose of rum.

¹ Batavia is the old name for Jakarta

Now the ship was sailing in previously explored waters and all that remained to do was to call into the Dutch port of Batavia where the ship could be properly repaired and then sail home to England and report the amazing success of the voyage. But things do not always go as planned.

Voyage through the Dutch East Indies

From August 23 Captain Cook took the *Endeavour* through what we now know as the islands of Indonesia. In 1770 these were the Dutch East Indies and Cook was headed to the major city, Batavia. On the way he landed on the southern coast of New Guinea on September 3 and at Savu Island off the south west tip of Timor on September 17. Both Cook and Banks left us accounts of Savu Island where they took aboard fresh provisions and sailed on September 21 bound for Batavia. While at Savu Banks on at least two occasions, mentions that there were sick on board, but does not suggest that it is serious. Most likely this represents early stages of scurvy:

Before we had been long there it began to grow dark and we returned on board, having only just tasted their Palm wine which had a very sweet taste and suited all our palates very well, giving us at the same time hopes that it might be servicable to our sick, as being the fresh and unfermented juice of the tree it promised ante-scorbutick virtues.

Banks's detailed account as they arrived off Batavia includes some comments of interest concerning the state of health of the crew. On October 9 off Batavia the *Endeavour* had a visit from an officer of an anchored Dutch ship. Banks described the visit as follows:

A boat came immediately on board us from a ship which had a broad Pendant flying, the officer on board her enquired who we were etc. and immediately returned. Both himself and his people were almost as Spectres, no good omen of the healthiness of the country we were arrived at; our people however who truly might be called rosy and plump, for we had not a sick man among us, Jeerd and flouted much at their brother sea mens white faces.

So in summary, Banks tells us that the ship's company, before landing at Batavia, was generally in good health.

Scurvy

Before discussing the situation at Batavia it is worth looking at scurvy on the *Endeavour* voyage. Cook is often given credit for solving the problem of scurvy on long distance voyages. However there is no doubt that scurvy was present on *Endeavour* in 1770. Cook introduced several antiscorbutic foods and drinks such as sauerkraut and lemon or lime juice which he forced his crew to consume. More recent research suggests that these were not as important as previously thought, but that he deserves credit for enforcing cleanliness as well as frequent replenishment of fresh food and greenstuffs wherever possible. Also he prohibited the consumption of salt fat skimmed from the ship's copper boiling pans, then a common practice elsewhere in the Navy, and which has been shown to cause health problems (*Wikipedia* 'Scurvy').

However there is no doubt that Cook had several cases of incipient scurvy during the *Endeavour* voyage, but there were no deaths and apparently no serious cases. Virtually all ships calling in to Batavia at this time had many deaths from scurvy. In his journal Cook says:

I had forgot to mention, that upon our arrival here [Batavia] I had not one man upon the Sick List; Lieut. Hicks, Mr. Green, and Tupia¹ were the only people that had any complaints occasioned by a long continuance at Sea.

Having said all that, there is no doubt that on the voyage of the *Endeavour*, scurvy was much less a factor than on many comparable voyages of the time.²

¹ Lt Hicks suffered from the advancing effects of tuberculosis over the voyage, Green, according to Cook, 'had long been in a bad state of health, which he took no care to repair, but, on the contrary, lived in such a manner as greatly promoted the disorders he had had long upon him', and Tupia is thought to have suffered from the shipboard diet.

² See also Jonathan Lamb, 2011 -02-17, *Captain Cook and the Scourge of Scurvy*, BBC, History

Batavia

The city of Batavia was founded in 1619 by the Dutch East India Company, (Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie), generally known as **VOC**. The Company, which was the largest company in the world, made its enormous profits from the trade in spices such as tamarind, mace, cloves and nutmeg – once worth more, per gram, than gold. The city of Batavia was built on lowland marshland in a sheltered bay and had several canals running through the city. The climate was tropical, hot and wet. It was notorious for diseases such as malaria (spread by mosquitoes), dysentery and cholera (spread by organisms in the water), so much so that it was known as the ‘cemetery of Europeans’. A posting from Holland to Batavia was regarded as almost a death sentence. The more well-to-do lived in areas of higher elevation or well away from the city.



City of Batavia 1780 (Wikipedia)

One thing Batavia could claim was an excellent shipyard, in fact the only one in the region. Cook was well aware of the dangerous environment, but had no other option to have proper repairs made to the ship before undertaking the long voyage to England via the Cape of Good Hope.

On October 10 the *Endeavour* arrived in the busy harbour of Batavia Bay. Cook's journal recounts: *Wednesday, 10th [October 1770], according to our reckoning, but by the people here Thursday, 11th. At 4 o'Clock in the P.M. Anchor'd in Batavia road, where we found the Harcourt Indiaman from England, 2 English Country Ships, 13 Sail of large Dutch Ships, and a number of small Vessels. As soon as we Anchor'd I sent Lieutenant Hicks a shore to acquaint the Governor of our Arrival, and to make an excuse for not Saluting; as we could only do it with 3 Guns I thought it was better let alone.*

Cook received the following report from John Satterly the ship's carpenter:

The Carpenter now deliver'd me in the defects of the ship, of which the following is a copy:—

"The Defects of His Majesty's Bark Endeavour, Lieutenant James Cook, Commander."

The Ship very leaky (as she makes from 12 to 6 Inches water per hour), occasioned by her Main Kiel being wounded in many places and the Scarfe of her Stem being very open. The false Kiel gone beyond the Midships (from Forward and perhaps further), as I had no opportunity of seeing for the water when hauld ashore for repair. Wounded on her Starboard side under the Main Chains, where I imagine is the greatest leakes (but could not come at it for the water). One pump on the Starboard side useless, the others decayed within 1 1/2 Inch of the bore, otherwise Masts, Yards, Boats, and Hull in pretty good condition.

Cook and his officers agreed that it was not safe to proceed to England with the ship in its present condition. He had an interview with the Governor and it was agreed that the ship could be repaired as required, and that Cook could purchase provisions for the crew and for the journey home. However inspection in the Onrust Island docks showed that the *Endeavour* was in even worse condition than they imagined:

Friday, 9th. In the P.M. hove the Larboard side of the Ship, Kiel out, and found her bottom to be in a far worse condition than we expected; the false kiel was gone to within 20 feet of the Stern post, the main Kiel wounded in many places very considerably, a great quantity of

Sheathing off, and several planks much damaged, especially under the Main Channell near the Kiel, where 2 planks and a 1/2, near 6 feet in length, were within 1/8th of an inch of being cutt through; and here the worms had made their way quite into the timbers, so that it was a matter of surprise to everyone who saw her bottom how we had kept her above water, and yet in this condition we had sailed some hundreds of Leagues, in as dangerous a Navigation as in any part of the World, happy in being ignorant of the continual danger we were in.

They were in for a long stay. On October 18 Cook moved the ship to the facility on the island of Onrust in Batavia Bay where repairs commenced a few days later. On October 25 a ship departed for Europe carrying a copy of Cook's journal and charts.

Sickness begins

Under the heading 'October 10 – 20' Banks writes:

Ever since our first arrival here we had been universaly told of the extreme unwholesomeness of the place which we, they said, should severely feel on account of the freshness and heal[t]hiness of our countenances. This threat however we did not much regard thinking ourselves too well season'd to variety of Climates to fear any, and trusting more than all to an invariable temperance in everything, which we had as yet unalterably kept during our whole residence in the warm latitudes so had small reason to doubt our resolutions of keeping for the future. Before the end of this month however we were made sensible of our Mistake. Poor Tupias broken constitution felt it first and he grew worse and worse every day. Then Tayeto his boy was attackd by a cold and i[n]flammation on his lungs; then my Servants Peter and James and myself had Intermitting fevers and Dr Solander a constant nervous one; in short everyone on shore and Many on board were ill, cheifly of intermittents¹, Occasiond no doubt by the lowness of the countrey and the numberless dirty Canals which intersect the town in all directions.

Cook reports on 26 October:

Friday, 26th. Set up the Ship's Tent for the reception of the Ship's Company, several of them begin to be taken ill, owing, as I suppose, to the extream hot weather.

On October 28, Banks commented:

The Seamen now fell sick fast so that the tents ashore were always full of sick, and on 30th Banks is ill, almost certainly malaria: . . . after a stay of two days I left Tupia well satisfied in Mind but not at all better in body and returnd to town where I was immediately seizd with a tertian², the fits of which were so violent as to deprive me intirely of my senses and leave me so weak as scarcely to be able to crawl down stairs.

On November 7 the deaths began. Cook reports:

We had the misfortune to lose Mr. Monkhouse, the Surgeon, who died at Batavia of a Fever after a short illness, of which disease and others several of our people are daily taken ill³, which will make his loss be the more severely felt; he was succeeded by Mr. Perry, his mate, who is equally as well skilled in his profession.

And then on November 9:

¹ Alternately ceasing and beginning again.

² The most common form of malaria, it is rarely fatal but is the most difficult to cure, and is characterised by fevers that typically occur every other day.

³ Almost certainly malaria.

. . . a number of Slaves¹ were employ'd bailing the water out of the Hold. Our people, altho' they attend, were seldom called upon; indeed, by this time we were so weakned by sickness that we could not muster above 20 Men and Officers that were able to do duty, so little should we have been able to have hove her down and repair'd her ourselves, as I at one time thought us capable of.

Tupia died on November 11.

Banks's situation improved dramatically on November 13:

As Dr Jaggi had all along insisted on the Countrey air as necessary for our recovery, I immediately agreed with my Landlord Vn Heys for his countrey house, which he immediately furnishd for us . . . This countrey house tho small and very bad was situate about 2 miles out of town in a situation that preposest me much in its favour, being situate on the banks of a briskly running river and well open to the sea breeze, two circumstances which must much contribute to promote circulation of air. . . . Accordingly, Dr Solander being much better and in the Drs opinion not too bad to be removd,



The Tijgersgracht Canal, Batavia

we carried him down to it this day, and also receivd from the ship Mr Sporing our writer, a Seaman, and the Captains own servant who he had sent on hearing of our melancholy situation; so that we were now sufficiently well attended, having 10 Malays and 2 whites besides Mr Sporing. This night however the Dr was extreemly ill, so much so that fresh blisters² were applyd to the inside of his thighs which he seemd not at all sensible of; nevertheless in the morn he was something better and from that time recoverd tho by extreemly slow degrees till his second attack. Myself, either by the influence of the Bark³ of which I had all along taken quantities or by the anziety I sufferd on Dr Solanders account, Miss'd my fever, nor did it return for several days till he became better.

This is interesting. Apparently Banks and his group were able to take advantage of the much more healthy climate inland, although Banks and Solander were to suffer from malarial attacks for some weeks. Apparently Banks had a supply of Quinine bark. The stay in the country did not provide Herman Sporing with any lasting benefit as he died on January 24. Cook stayed in town and had some illness, but was apparently reasonably well compared to others.

On November 14 Banks was pleased to report:

This day we had the agreeable news of the repairs of the ship being compleatly finishd and that she was returnd again to Coopers Island, where she provd to be no longer at all leaky. . . . This completion of our repairs gave us hopes that our stay here would be of no very long duration, as we had now nothing to do but to get on board our stores and provisions; but our hopes were not a little dampd by the accounts we every day had from the ship, where the people were so sickly that not above 13 or 14 were able to stand to their work. . .

¹ In the 18th century, it was estimated that over 60 percent of Batavia's population were slaves working for the Dutch East India Company. Laws protected slaves against overly-cruel actions by their masters; Christian slaves were freed after the death of their masters, (Wikipedia).

² ? possibly mustard plasters.

³ Quinine bark? The use of quinine bark to treat or prevent malaria was known from about the mid 1600s. It is not apparent whether the bark had any effect on Banks and there is no indication he shared it with others.

Dr Solander grew better tho by very slow degrees; myself soon had a return of my ague which now became quotidian¹, the Captain also was taken ill on board and of course we sent his servant to him, soon after which both Mr Sporing and our seaman were seizd with intermittents, so that we were again reduc'd to the melancholy necessity of depending intirely upon the Malays for nursing us, all of whom were often sick together.

Cook reported on November 17 that:

We are now become so sickly that we seldom can muster above 12 or 14 hands to do duty.

At sea at last

On Wednesday, November 26 Cook's journal reports:

In the P.M. myself, Mr. Banks, and all the Gentlemen came on board, and at 6 a.m. weigh'd and came to sail with a light breeze at South-West. . . . The number of Sick on board at this time amounts to 40 or upwards, and the rest of the Ship's Company are in a weakly condition, having been every one sick except the Sailmaker, an old Man about 70 or 80 years of age; and what is still more extraordinary in this man is his being generally more or less drunk every day. But notwithstanding this general sickness, we lost but 7 men in the whole: the Surgeon, 3 Seamen, Mr. Green's Servant, and Tupia and his Servant, both of which fell a sacrifice to this unwholesome climate . . .

In summing up their stay at Batavia, Cook has this to say:

We came in here with as healthy a Ship's Company as need go to Sea, and after a stay of not quite 3 months left it in the condition of an Hospital Ship, besides the loss of 7 men; and yet all the Dutch Captains I had an opportunity to converse with said that we had been very lucky, and wondered that we had not lost half our people in that time.

On January 1 Cook anchored under a high Island called 'Cracatoa'² and by the Indians 'Pulo Racatta'. On January 6 Cook anchored at Princes' Island in Sunda Strait and took aboard water and provisions. He describes the crew as being in a worse state of health than they were in Batavia. On January 24 marine John Truslove died and the next day Herman Sporing died. Cook was inclined to blame the water taken on board at Princes island, but the effects of malaria and dysentery contracted in Batavia seem more likely. On 26th they: *clear'd ship between Decks, and wash her with Vinegar.* The next day the talented artist Sydney Parkinson died – a tragic loss, and on 27th the astronomer Charles Green died, although in Cook's view it was partly brought about by his lifestyle. From here on more deaths are reported in Cook's journal at regular intervals. Four men died 'of the flux' on January 31 and Cook reported in his journal as having: *hardly well men enough to tend the Sails and look after the Sick, many of whom are so ill that we have not the least hopes of their recovery.*

This pessimism was justified as eight more died in the following days, although these were all men who had been sick for some time.

From January 12 to 31, Banks was sick which he ascribed to the flux. On February 2 Banks reported:

Fine brisk trade kept up our spirits and helpd to raise me fast. Two of the people died today Nevertheless. The next day he reported: Breeze continued today: the Surgeon began to think that the rapid progress of the disease was checkd by it but declar'd at the same time that several people were still without hopes of recovery and on the 3rd: Some of the people who were the least affected began now to shew signs of amendment but two of the bad ones died notwithstanding. Then on the February 5: Weather fine: as no one had been taken ill since we got the trade wind we were now well convin[c]d of its salutary effects.

¹ Bouts of fever occurring daily (24-hour periodicity) for a few hours.

² The island of Krakatoa is well known for the 1883 volcanic eruption in which the island exploded.

The last of the shipboard deaths was on February 27, although several were still sick.

The *Endeavour* arrived at Table Bay on March 14 and Banks reported: *Moor'd the Ship and Struck Yards and Topmast, and in the morning got all the Sick (28) ashore to Quarters provided for them.*

Cook wasted no time in getting fresh meat and greens for those remaining on board. On March 20 Cook wrote in his journal:

In the P.M. Sail'd the Houghton Indiaman, who saluted us with 11 Guns, which Complement we returned; this Ship, during her stay in India, lost by sickness between 30 and 40 men, and had at this time a good many down with the Scurvey. Other Ships suffer'd in the same proportion.

Showing that their problems were by no means limited to the *Endeavour*.

On April 16 the *Endeavour* sailed on the long homeward trip. Several of the crew were still sick and three died while at Table Bay, but additional crew were recruited. On April 16 the Master Robert Molineux died, partly at least according to Cook, from his poor lifestyle. Tragically Lieutenant Hicks a most competent officer, died from the long-term effects of tuberculosis on April 26. On April 17 Cook dispatched letters to the Admiralty and the Royal Society. From here it was more or less plain sailing home to England and acclaim.

In summary

The *Endeavour* sailed from England with a crew of 84 and 11 passengers (Wikisource 2022). When the expedition reached Batavia the people on board were largely in good health. However, while at Batavia and on the voyage home to England, 29 died from malaria or dysentery (in addition Lt Hicks died in May 1771 from tuberculosis contracted before the ship sailed in 1768).

On the whole voyage of three years, three drowned, two of Banks's servants froze to death in Terra del Fuego and three crew died from sickness before reaching Batavia. No one died from scurvy. The native Tahitians Tupia and his servant Tayeto both died from sickness at Batavia.

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