

Closing in on the Fortuyn Project

Adventures in the Indian Ocean

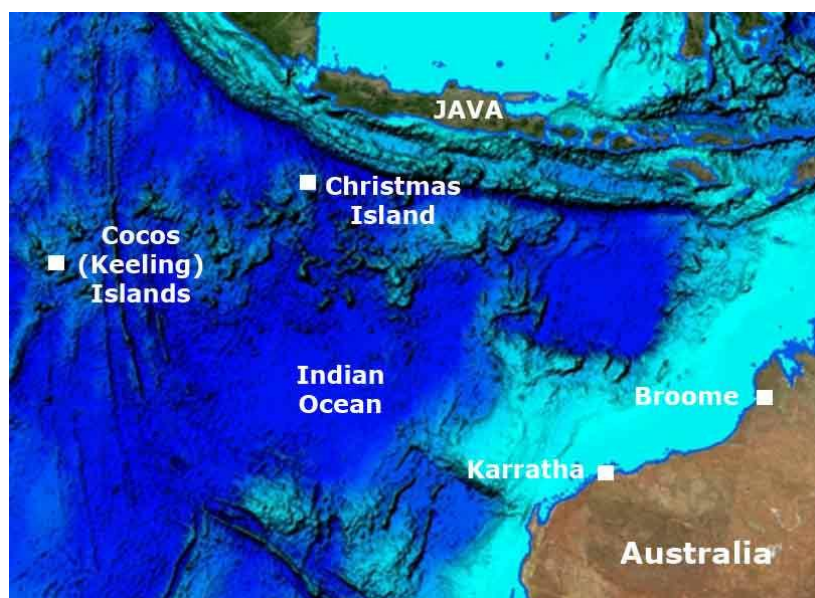
James Parkinson

Christmas Island

January and February 2015 saw six intrepid explorers travel to the Australian Territories of Christmas Island and Cocos (Keeling) Islands in the Indian Ocean to conduct a remote sensing survey to try and locate the Dutch East Indiaman *Fortuyn*. The expedition was named ‘Closing in on the Fortuyn Project’ and has followed years of historical research by expedition leader Graeme Henderson. The primary target of the 2015 fieldwork season was to try and locate the Dutch East Indiaman *Fortuyn* that went missing with all hands in the Indian Ocean during 1723.

The *Fortuyn* was a ship owned by the Chamber of Amsterdam of the Dutch East India Company (VOC) and was on its maiden voyage. The vessel reached the Cape of Good Hope in January 1723; it then set sail for Batavia, present day Jakarta and was never seen again.

The secondary target for the expedition was the *Aagtekerke* a Dutch East Indiaman that went missing in 1726 also on its way to Batavia. Expedition members for the Christmas Island leg included a legend of maritime archaeology in Australia Graeme Henderson, Andrew Viduka, Alex Moss and myself (James Parkinson) with David Steinberg and Amer Kahn joining the expedition for the Cocos Keeling Island leg.



The ‘Closing in on the Fortuyn Project’ is part of commemorating 400 years since Dirk Hartog’s 1616 landing in Western Australia. Project Sponsors included the Maritime Program of the Cultural Heritage Agency of the Netherlands Ministry of

Education, Culture and Science; the embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in Canberra; John and Jacqui Mullin of the Silent World Foundation; and Parks Australia. (Moss 2015)

The Australian Territories of Christmas Island and Cocos Keeling Islands have an extraordinary history, which has been unfortunately neglected over the past couple of decades due to the Australian Government's controversial refugee policies. The islands contain a diverse cultural heritage, which is mirrored in the rich and vibrant island demographic.

The story of these islands contains shipwrecks, mutiny, great sea battles, gritty entrepreneurship, slavery and isolation. The primary focus of the expedition was to locate the *Fortuyn* but the expedition members discovered the true beauty and enormous historical importance of these territories to all Australians.



Figure 1. Christmas Island. Flying Fish Cove and The Settlement. A.Viduka

The primary focus of the expedition was to conduct a magnetometer survey in areas identified as hot spots from historical analysis undertaken by Graeme Henderson utilizing historical records and the CLIWOC Project logbook data of inbound and outbound Dutch East Indiamen leaving Batavia and transiting close to Christmas Island and Cocos (Keeling) Islands. (Henderson 2014)

The expedition team flew from Perth into Cocos (Keeling) Islands for a brief layover before continuing onto Christmas Island. As we were coming into Christmas Island I was struck by the sheer beauty of this volcanic rock piercing the turquoise Indian Ocean and covered in layers of emerald green jungle.

Landing at the airport on Christmas Island can sometimes be difficult with flights from Australia having to be diverted through Jakarta on occasion. The entire team was relieved to be on the ground and the work of the expedition could begin in earnest.



Figure 2. Expedition team members discussing survey methods. J.Parkinson

Christmas Island is an isolated limestone-capped volcanic island, being the top of a submerged seamount rising 4,500 metres from the ocean floor the predominantly basaltic rock is capped by a sequence of tertiary limestone with embedded volcanic rocks (Grimes 2001). Most of the coastline features a sea cliff of approximately five metres. The cliff is undercut in many places.

There is a submarine terrace or shelf with a width and depth that varies greatly. In Smithson Bight the underwater topography varies greatly, with the shelf plunging straight down in one section, whilst elsewhere it slopes gently down for 250 metres, to reach a depth of 50 metres before plunging down to the ocean floor. (Moss 2015)

The expedition team set up in a hotel near Flying Fish Cove, in The Settlement before beginning to familiarise themselves with their beautiful surroundings. Arriving just after the famous red crab migration the team began to acclimatise to working in and around the millions of red crab spawn that had hatched a few weeks before we had arrived. They could be observed marching back across the island after exiting the ocean. Christmas Island locals are extremely proud of this remarkable event in nature and justifiably so. We soon became very quickly accustomed to having to do a u-turn to avoid the rivers of crab spawn and supervising adult red crabs that casually meander wherever they please.



Figure 3. Flying Fish Cove. J.Parkinson

Parks Australia had kindly provided survey vessel for the Christmas Island leg and another vessel for Cocos (Keeling) Islands leg of the expedition. Both vessels were in survey and the perfect platform for survey operations. Once familiarized with the survey vessel and other equipment the expedition team began the labour-intensive process of mating electronic equipment with the proton magnetometer that had been kindly lent to the project by the Maritime Archaeology Association of Victoria (MAAV).



Figure 4. The expedition team besides Parks Australia survey vessel.

The big challenge for the project team prior to the expedition commencing was being able to convert the analogue signal of the magnetometer to a digital format, which could be analyzed at a later date. An analogue digital converter called a Labjack Pro was purchased before the expedition and the first couple of days on Christmas Island were spent painstakingly trying to get the technologies to work in sync. After many hours of frustration combined with small amount of success Alex Moss and I were able to have everything working together in a format where we could use the analogue magnetometer, have the millivolt variations (Nano tesla) recorded digitally, running concurrently with time stamped GPS data. Lucky for the expedition these

couple of days set us up for the rest of the survey and as the weather was not ideal for survey, so we had timed it well.

As the physical recording was to be taking place, an electronic signal was sent from the Labjack Pro to a Motion Tablet (hand-held computer with inbuilt GPS functionality running an ArcGIS software program), which was mounted on the windscreen. The tablet recorded the fluctuations in millivolts every 500 milliseconds. This allowed the detection of rise in millivolts to be placed in the exact time, allowing placement of this event in mapping software during post-processing. (Moss 2015)



Figure 5. Data processing. A Viduka

With the complex electronics working in base camp it was time to begin the survey and iron out any cobwebs that still might be present in the complex data collection systems. It was truly amazing to finally be on the water exploring the marine coastline of an island that is rarely circumnavigated. The magnetometer, Labjack Pro and motion tablet were working really well and the expedition team began to survey in some of the more promising locations identified in research by Graeme Henderson. (Henderson 2014)

Critical to the success of the remote sensing survey of Christmas Island related to a team member Alex Moss being able to obtain LIDAR imagery of the coast which could be used to identify the most ideal survey depth which helped create survey transects that optimized the limited time the expedition was able to spend on the water.

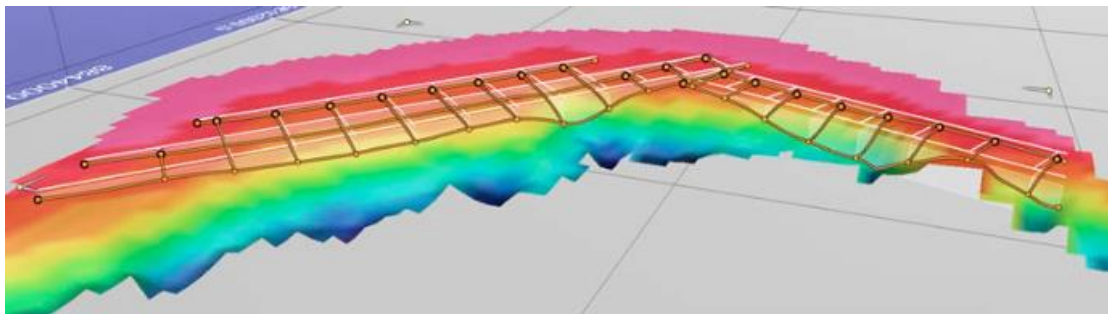


Figure 6. LIDAR graphic of southern coast of Christmas Island showing survey lines. A.Moss

The skipper from Parks Australia was absolutely brilliant and accommodated the expedition needs throughout the survey. The team members spent many hours over the next couple of weeks monitoring the magnetometer and occasionally jumping into the gin-clear Indian Ocean to cool off and snorkel with the odd whale shark.



Figure 7. Whale shark off the southern coast, Christmas Island. A.Viduka

On foul-weather days the team took the opportunity catch up on post processing data collected during the survey and to explore the amazingly rich history of the Island.

Christmas Island has layer upon layer of rich cultural heritage spanning hundreds of years. Captain William Mynors of the *Royal Mary*, an English East India Company vessel named the island after he sailed past in 1643, on Christmas Day. William Dampier in the English ship *Cygnets* made the earliest recorded visit in 1688 setting two crewmen onto the island.

Another 150 years would pass before the crew of the *Amethyst* explored Christmas Island in the 1850s. The discovery of pure phosphate of lime attracted the attention of the British crown which led to its annexation in 1888.

Phosphate workers indentured from China, Singapore and Malaysia began working the mine on the island from the 1890s. Thousands of miles from their home countries it was hard to imagine difficulties of mining in such a remote, humid, inhospitable environment. Scattered all over the island are small temples left by the indentured workers as the phosphate mining moved to different locations on the island.

From the outbreak of the Southeast Asian theatre of World War II in December 1941, Christmas Island was a target for Japanese occupation because of its rich phosphate deposits. A naval gun was installed under a British officer and four NCOs and 27 Indian soldiers. The first attack on the island was carried out on 20 January 1942, by the Japanese submarine *I-59*, which torpedoed a Norwegian freighter, the *Eidsvold*. The vessel drifted and eventually sank off West White Beach. Most of the European and Asian staff and their families were evacuated to Perth.



Figure 8. Naval gun over looking Flying Fish Cove. A.Viduka

In late February and early March 1942, there were two aerial bombing raids. Shelling from a Japanese naval group on 7 March led the district officer to hoist the white flag. But after the Japanese naval group sailed away, the British officer raised the Union flag once more. During the night of 10–11 March, a mutiny of the Indian troops, abetted by Sikh policemen, led to the murder of the five British soldiers and the imprisonment of the remaining 21 Europeans. At dawn on 31 March 1942, a dozen Japanese bombers launched the attack, destroying the radio station. The same day, a Japanese fleet of nine vessels arrived, and the island was surrendered. (Klemen 2000)

About 850 Japanese men of the 21st and 24th special base forces and 102nd Construction Unit came ashore at Flying Fish Cove and occupied the island. They rounded up the workforce, most of who had fled to the jungle. Sabotaged equipment was repaired and preparations were made to resume the mining and export of phosphate. Only 20 men from the 21st Special Base Force were left as a garrison.

Isolated acts of sabotage and the torpedoing of the *Nissei Maru* at the wharf on 17 November 1942 meant that only small amounts of phosphate were exported to Japan during the occupation. In November 1943, over 60% of the island's population was evacuated to prison camps in Surabaya, leaving a total population of just under 500 Chinese and Malays and 15 Japanese to survive as best they could. In October 1945, *HMS Rother* re-occupied Christmas Island. After the war, seven Indian mutineers were traced and prosecuted by the Military Court in Singapore. In 1947, five of them were sentenced to death; however, following representations made by the newly independent government of India, their sentences were reduced to penal servitude for life. (Klemen 2000)

In 1957 The English Government transferred sovereignty to Australia. In the late 1980s and early 1990s refugee boats travelling from predominantly Indonesia began to arrive on the island. In 2001 Christmas Island was the center of the *Tampa*

controversy and has ever since been reluctantly linked to Australian Governments controversial refugee policies.

When exploring the island the expedition team discovered the sad history of the refugees that have perished trying to make land fall through the extremely treacherous coastal environment on the island. Accommodation for the expedition was situated directly above the location where *SIEV 221* broke apart against razor sharp cliffs in 2010, tragically killing 48 refugees who were trying to make land fall in Flying Fish Cove. Team members were also able to visit the memorial to *SIEV X* that sank in 2001 off Christmas Island killing 146 children, 142 women and 65 men.



Figure 9 Teams members inspecting the memorial to SIEV 221. A.Viduka

Red crabs and immigrations officials make up the majority of the islands personnel at present with the island trying very hard to reinvent its character after the controversial and sometimes extremely tragic circumstances of the past 20 years.

On one of our waiting-on-weather days the expedition team also conducted a terrestrial magnetometer survey of one of the very few locations along the treacherous Christmas Island coast that may possibly have been linked to a shipwreck survivors' camp. Using historical research and LIDAR data, Dolly Beach was identified as a likely location. The hike into the beach was ably led by Graeme carrying the magnetometer with team members occasionally getting lost in the dense humid jungle while disturbing 1000s of the 50 plus varieties of land crab that own the island.



Figure 10. Expedition members conducting magnetometer survey on Dolly Beach. A.Moss

The hike into Dolly Beach gave the expedition members a much greater understanding of the grim conditions that would have met any survivors after being wrecked on the island.



Figure 11. Team member conducted circle search, Smithsons Bight. A.Viduka

The sea-born magnetometer survey of Christmas Island was a huge success with the survey team managing to completely circumnavigate the island with the remote sensing equipment. A number of promising locations were also dived briefly to get an understanding of the subsea morphology and test search techniques that will possibly be used in future expeditions.

After spending countless hours watching electronic read outs, exploring, and data processing the expedition team was ready for the next leg of the Indian Ocean adventure. After packing up all the equipment and saying farewells the team made

their way to the airport to fly to the Cocos (Keeling) Islands with Andy skillfully dodging the 50 varieties of land crabs on the way.....most of the time.

Cocos (Keeling) Islands

The expedition was unfortunate to lose Alex Moss for the Cocos (Keeling) Islands leg but gained Amer Kahn and David Steinberg. After arriving on West Island the team met with Parks Australia and began to unpack and test equipment preparing for the long days of remote sensing around the many islands that make up the Cocos (Keeling) group.

Graeme Henderson had identified the Cocos (Keeling) Islands as a possible second target for the wreck of the *Fortuyn* and the *Aagtekerke*. The CLIWOC Project logbook data also showed that the vessels would possibly have taken a route close to the Cocos. (Henderson 2014)



Figure12. Expedition members at the Cocos Airport.

Before the survey began the expedition team utilized a good weather day to attempt to reach North Keeling Island 30 kilometres north of the main island group to attempt to investigate the wreck of the *Emden* sunk in the early part of the WW1 on the southern shore of the island. The *Emden* wreck site is renowned for its difficulty to access. Upon reaching the island after many hours battling through unpredictable Indian Ocean swell the team was unable to dive the site because the prevailing swell coming in from two directions made the shallow water wreck impossible on the day to access safely.



Figure 12. Teams members on Cocos discussing Emden. A.Viduka

Cocos (Keeling) Islands are a territory of Australia and are situated midway between Australia and Sri Lanka. The islands are made up of 27 coral islands of which two are inhabited with a population of 600.

The Cocos (Keeling) Islands consist of two flat, low-lying coral atolls with an area of 14.2 square kilometres, 26 kilometres of coastline, the highest elevation is five metres and is thickly covered with coconut palms and other vegetation. The climate is pleasant, moderated by the southeast trade winds for about nine months of the year and with moderate rainfall. Tropical cyclones may occur in the early months of the year.

The islands were first discovered by Europeans in 1609 and were annexed by the British in 1857.

The Cocos (Keeling) Islands have an extremely colourful history and like Christmas Island it has been perhaps tarnished by recent Australian Government policies on refugees. The island group, like Christmas Island is volcanic but that is was the similarities finish. Cocos are your typical tropical island atoll, very beautiful but with nowhere near the ecological diversity as its Indian Ocean neighbour.

The (Keeling) Islands was launched onto the international stage on the morning of 9 November 1914, the islands becoming the site of the Battle of Cocos, one of the first naval battles of World War I. A landing party from the German cruiser SMS *Emden* captured and disabled the wireless and cable communications station on Direction Island, but not before the station was able to transmit a distress call. An Allied troop convoy was passing nearby, and the Australian cruiser HMAS *Sydney* was detached from the convoy escort to investigate.

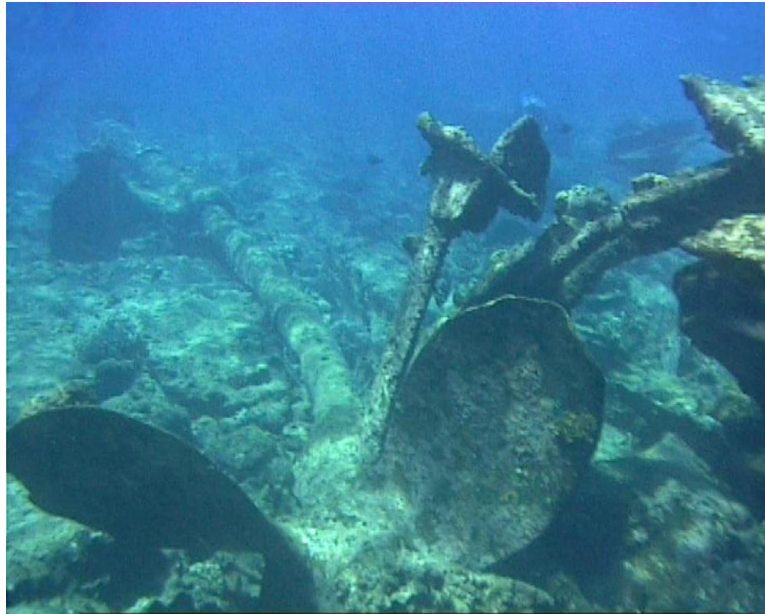


Figure 13. *Emden*. Photo taken on previous expedition.

HMAS *Sydney* spotted the island and *Emden* at 09:15, with both ships preparing for combat. At 11:20, the heavily damaged *Emden* beached herself on North Keeling Island. The Australian warship broke to pursue *Emden*'s supporting collier, which scuttled herself, the *Sydney* then returned to North Keeling Island at 16:00. At this point, *Emden*'s battle ensign was still flying: usually a sign that a ship intends to continue fighting. After no response to instructions to lower the ensign, two salvos were shot into the beached cruiser, after which the Germans lowered the flag and raised a white sheet. *Sydney* had orders to ascertain the status of the transmission station, but returned the next day to provide medical assistance to the Germans. (Klemen 2000)

134 personnel aboard *Emden* were killed, and 69 were wounded, compared to only 4 killed and 16 wounded aboard *Sydney*. The German survivors were taken aboard the Australian cruiser, which caught up to the troop convoy in Colombo on 15 November, then transported to Malta and handed over the prisoners to the British Army. An additional 50 German personnel from the shore party, unable to be recovered before *Sydney* arrived, commandeered a schooner and escaped from Direction Island, eventually arriving in Constantinople. *Emden* was the last active Central Powers warship in the Indian or Pacific Ocean, which meant troopships from Australia and New Zealand could sail without naval escort, and Allied ships could be deployed elsewhere. (Klemen 2000)



Figure 14. North Keeling Island showing swell over *Emden* wreck site. A. Kahn

After the Fall of Singapore in 1942, the islands were administered from Ceylon (Sri Lanka) and West and Direction Islands were placed under Allied military administration. The islands' garrison initially consisted of a platoon from the British Army's King's African Rifles, located on Horsburgh Island, with two 6-inch (152.4 mm) guns to cover the anchorage. The local inhabitants all lived on Home Island. Despite the importance of the islands as a communication centre, the Japanese made no attempt either to raid or to occupy them and contented themselves with sending over a reconnaissance aircraft about once a month. (Klemen 2000)



Figure 15. Horsburgh Island showing gun emplacement. D. Steinberg.

On the night of 8–9 May 1942, 15 members of the garrison, from the Ceylon Defense Force, mutinied under the leadership of Gratien Fernando. The mutineers were said to

have been provoked by the attitude of their British officers and were also supposedly inspired by anti-imperialist beliefs. They attempted to take control of the gun battery on the islands. The Cocos Islands Mutiny was crushed, but the mutineers killed one non-mutinous soldier and wounded one officer.



Figure 16. Team members conducting Magnetometer survey. A.Viduka

Seven of the mutineers were sentenced to death at a trial that was later alleged to have been improperly conducted. Four of the sentences were commuted, but three men were executed, including Fernando. These were to be the only British Commonwealth soldiers executed for mutiny during the Second World War. On 25 December 1942, the Japanese submarine *I-166* bombarded the islands but caused no damage.

During 1945 the Cocos (Keeling) Islands was home to thousands of allied personnel that operated defensive gun emplacements an airstrip and flying boat base. The expedition team was able to re locate and survey Catalina JX 435 which crash landed in the lagoon during 1945 while transporting material to Cocos.



Figure 17. Crew of JX 435. RAF 240 Squadron.

Attached to RAF 240 Squadron JX 435 The wreck of the Catalina is spread out over 450 metres and consists of two engines sitting upright on the lagoon seabed. Expedition members were able to dive, survey and conduct corrosion potential measurements on sections of the wreck site. The most striking part of the wreck site is the engines and pilots seats. (McCarthy 2005)



Figure 18. Catalina JX 435 engine. Photograph taken by Cocos Dive Services

With the primary focus of the expedition being the magnetometer remote sensing survey, once a daily survey had been completed the team was able to conduct cultural heritage assessments of a number of the identified maritime heritage sites that are scattered around the island group. This was for a number of purposes that included expanding on the data collected by West Australian Maritime Museum maritime

archaeologist Mack McCarthy's expedition to the island group in 2005. It also aimed to take corrosion potential measurements from a number of different metals to expand on the current national database and lastly to map the known heritage sites for educational purposes.



Figure 19. Corrosion survey being conducted on the shipwreck *Phaeton*, Cocos Island. D.Steinberg

Cocos (Keeling) Islands are the closest Australian Territory to Sri Lanka and has seen many refugee vessels making landing on the remote island group. The expedition team was able to dive the burnt out remains of one of these vessels and while surveying, the dive team was visited by the solitary Dugong that inhabits the islands.



Figure 18. Team member with Dugong on the Sri Lankan refugee boat wreck site. A.Kahn

Using the GIS software on the motion tablet the team was able to identify a number of points of interest in the shallow lagoon of Cocos. One of these locations was dived after the magnetometer survey was completed and identified as a landing barge. The barge was an open decked landing barge measuring 19 metres in length and 5.9 metres wide. It sits upright in 7.8 metres of water. (Steinberg 2015) It may be related to WW 11 operations, or to when Australian and English forces occupied the island due to its strategic importance.

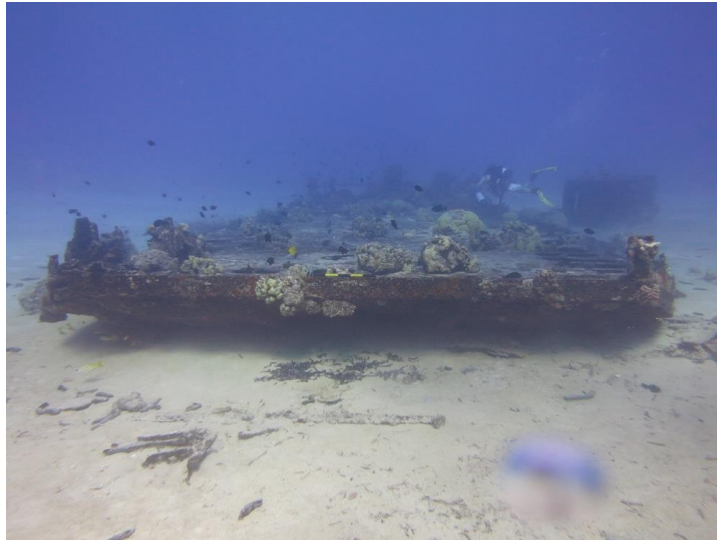


Figure 19. Unidentified landing barge. Cocos Lagoon. D. Steinberg

Another interesting facet of island history that the expedition team was able to investigate was the cable station on Direction Island. In the early 1900s Direction Island was connected to Cottesloe in Western Australia by way of an undersea telegraphic cable. From Cocos the cable to Rodriguez island near Mauritius and onto England. The cable station on Direction Island was an extremely important link for Australia with the rest of the world and it was this strategic importance that brought the *Emden* to the islands in 1914. Expedition members were able to locate and document the cable in shallow water off Direction Island.



Figure 20 Telegraphic Cable in shallow water near Direction Island. D.Steinberg

Conclusion

The ‘Closing in on the Fortuyn Project’ expedition to Christmas Island and Cocos (Keeling) Islands was extremely successful. The expedition team was able to identify numerous targets of interest during the remote sensing survey that will hopefully be investigated during future expeditions. (Moss 2015).

These remote Australian territories have a remarkable story to tell. I feel extremely privileged to have been part of such an exciting enterprise. The expedition team was

an extremely passionate and professional team of individuals and I'm very much looking forward to the next chapter in the hunt for the *Fortuyn*.

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