
Document 1568D

Mendaña expedition—Background to the expedition and report by Mendaña himself

Sources: 1) Anonymous account of the voyage in *Col. de Indias*, Vol. 5, pp. 210-212; 2) BN Madrid Ms. 10.645, folios 159-166v; published by Justo Zaragoza in *Historia del descubrimiento de las regiones australes hecho por el General Pedro Fernández de Quirós*, Vol. 1, Madrid, 1876, pp. 18-19; 3) RAH, tomo 36 of the Velázquez Collection; published by Zaragoza in *op. cit.*, Vol. 2, 1882, pp. 15, 40-43; already translated by Lord Amherst of Hackney and Basil Thomson in *The Discovery of the Solomon Islands by Alvaro de Mendaña in 1568* (Vol. 1, London, Hakluyt, 1901, pages 158, 184-186).

Background to Mendaña's first voyage.

Captain General Alvaro de Mendaña set out from Callao, the port of Lima, Peru, on 19 November 1567 with two ships, the flagship **Los Reyes**, whose tonnage was 7,000 arrobas, and the *almiranta* **Todos los Santos**, whose tonnage was over 3,000 arrobas. The cost of the fleet amounted to 10,000 pesos in gold ingots; this included not only the price of the ships, but also food for one month, the munitions, soldiers' pay, [religious] ornaments, medicine and spares, but excluded the seamen's wages.

The anonymous account further says: "Over 70 soldiers were rounded up for this voyage. When the sailors and servants are added, the number of men came up to over 150. Castro appointed Alvaro de Mendaña, his nephew, as General of this fleet, Pedro Sarmiento as Captain of the flagship¹, Don Fernando Enriquez as Lieutenant General, Pedro Juarez Coronel as Captain of the Artillery, Hernán Gallego as Chief Pilot, with 3 other pilots² and 4 religious of the Order of St. Francis."

The purpose of the expedition was the discovery of the Austral continent reputed to exist SE of New Guinea. The expedition discovered at least 16 islands during the voyage, mostly in the Solomon Islands. On the return leg of the voyage, the ships discovered the island of Namu in the Marshalls and Wake Island.

1 Ed. note: He was later moved to the *almiranta*.

2 Ed. note: The other pilots were: Juan Enriquez, Pedro Rodriguez and Gregorio Gonzalez.

Summary of the return voyage.

There exist primary accounts by Mendaña himself, one (or two done anonymously) by Captain Sarmiento, by Chief Pilot Hernán Gallego, by the steward, Gómez [Hernández] Catoira, and by an anonymous Franciscan friar. Amherst and Thomson have summarized these accounts as follows:

"On September 17th, they sighted the Musquillo Atolls¹ of the Ralick Chain (Marshall Group), and called them **San Mateo Shoals**, though Gallego seems to have identified them with the island of San Bartolomé which Toribio Alonso de Salazar professed to have discovered in 1535, in lat. 14° N. Gallego gives the correct latitude of these islets, and his accurate description of them leaves no doubt as to their identity. Ortega and Henriquez landed in the boat and explored a village from which the people had fled, apparently to sea, for a canoe was sighted making off under sail. They found food "of bad taste and smell" (fermented pandanus² fruit), a fermented drink "like *chicha*"³, brewing in a hole in the ground (coconut toddy), and a cock, but they found no water. They noticed, however, that the people obtained their water from holes scooped out of the stems of the palms, exactly as they do at the present day. But their strangest discovery was a chisel, made of an iron nail, from which they concluded that a ship from the Philippines had either visited the island or been wrecked there..."

"Finding no bottom even close inshore, the ships resumed their northerly course, and on October 2nd [rather 3rd], in 19° 20' N. lat., they discovered the loneliest of all the atolls of the Pacific, **Wake Island**, which they named **San Francisco**. Ships in need of water could have lighted on no more unpropitious spot. Not a coconut nor a pandanus has found a footing there: the only vegetation is a stunted shrub; the only living things are sea-birds. Bitterly disappointed, the Spaniards bore away, and cut down the daily ration to one pint of water, and 12 oz. of bread, though there were still more than 4,000 miles of ocean to cross."

1 So named by Captain Bond who visited them in 1792.

2 Ed. note: More probably breadfruit.

3 Ed. note: I have lived in Peru, so I know what *chicha* is; it is a lemonade-like drink made from the juice of purple corn, with some water and sugar added.

“The pilots of the two ships compared notes every two days, laying their course, as they believed, for the Cabo de Fortunas [in California], though differing in their estimate of its bearing, owing no doubt to the inaccuracies of their charts of the Californian coast, and their uncertainty regarding their longitude. All went well until October 16th [rather 17th], when the *almiranta*, which had been continually dropping astern, owing to her bad sailing qualities, parted company altogether.¹ The *capitana* [flagship Los Reyes] lay to for many hours to wait for her, and, as she did not appear, Mendaña concluded that Pedro Sarmiento, whose conduct more than once had verged upon mutiny, had deliberately had the course altered. When we remember that the two ships, unequal in size and speed as they were, had contrived to keep together by day and night in all winds and weathers for so many months, we may allow that his suspicions were not without reason.”²

“That afternoon, as they lay in the trough of the sea, a hurricane from the north-east struck them, and laid them on their beam ends. If the hatches had not been closed and caulked, the ship must have gone to the bottom, for her port deck was under water to the combings of the hatches. Seeing that she would not right herself, Mendaña ordered the main-mast to be cut down, and it went over the side with all its yards and sails. The boat followed it, and the ship, relieved of their weight, began to right herself little by little. The people below, up to their necks in water, had abandoned hope, and were listening to one of the friars, who, though himself face to face with death, was calmly exhorting them to die like Christians, repenting of their sins. The foresail was now shaken out to steady the ship, but the wind tore it to ribbons, and the sea carried away the stern-cabin. Setting a blanket and a bonnet as storm sails, they rode out the storm for three days. “The wind came on us with such fury,” wrote old Gallego, “as I had never before seen, although I have been 45 years at sea, and 30 of them a pilot. Never have I seen such heavy weather, although I have seen storms enough.” Under nothing but the fore-courses, the ship gave convincing evidence of her bad sailing qualities...”

“Two whole months elapsed before they reached the shores of California...”

-
- 1 Ed. note: The ship Todos los Santos, Captain Sarmiento de Gamboa, reached the port of Navidad independently. Sarmiento was a good pilot who invented in the 1570s a rudimentary method of measuring longitude. In 1580, he sailed from Peru to Spain by the Strait of Magellan and corrected the longitude of Ascension Island in the South Atlantic. For details, see Navarrete's *Historia de la Náutica*, Vol. 77 of the Ribadaneira Collection (Biblioteca de autores españoles, Madrid, 1964), pp. 369-371.
 - 2 Ed. note: According to Navarrete (op. cit., p.369), Pedro Sarmiento was a native of Pontevedra and had begun serving in the Spanish Navy in 1550. He went to the South Sea in 1557 and it was he who, ten years later, proposed the voyage to Licentiate Castro, then interim Governor of Peru. The latter offered the leadership of the expedition to Sarmiento who declined in favor of Mendaña, the nephew of the Governor, in order to get better supplies and ensure the success of the venture. Castro was no fool as he instructed Mendaña to follow the advice of Sarmiento very closely. Hence the hostility between the two men.

Letter from Mendaña to King Philip II, dated Lima 11 September 1569

Catholic Royal Majesty:¹

If I may be allowed enough discretion to do so, it would certainly give me much pleasure to report to Y.M., in this brief narrative, about the discovery that, in my capacity as General, I made in the South Sea by order of the Licentiate Castro, Governor of Peru, as I had faith and goodwill to offer my person to confront the hardships and dangers of this voyage, in order to serve Y.M. Given that the goodwill of those who are not called upon to serve as they wish should be considered, I beg Y.M. to consider my goodwill in place of my labors, paying attention to the faith with which I served Y.M.

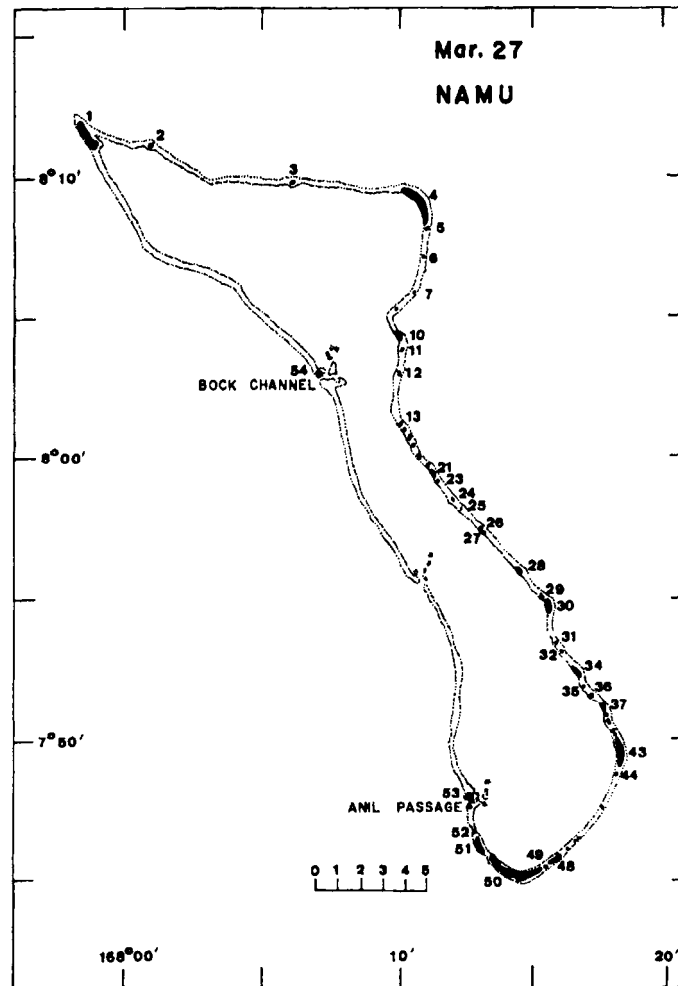
We embarked in Callao, the port of the City of the Kings, on Wednesday reckoned as the 19th of November, and although we set sail we did not get out of the port, as it was late, until the next day at dawn, reckoned as the 20th of the said month and year of 1567, and we took the WSW heading...

...

We left the Port of La Visitación [Solomon Is.] on Wednesday, 11 August, of the year 1568; we were seven days in doubling the island of San Cristobal, and those of Santa Ana and Santa Catalina, for the wind was SE and contrary. After doubling them we steered NE until we were 35 or 40 leagues east of the island named Jesus, and there the wind changed to NE so that we were able to steer SE by E, and then I gave orders to turn. This wind lasted but a short time, and, as it was already near the Equinox², and the wind in these regions changes with it, as we had found in the month of March, it was now unsettled preparatory to settling in one quarter. Consequently, every time that the wind served for steering SE and ESE, I ordered the ships to be put about in order that we might sail according to the wind. We had already met with rough weather, and, during a storm the main yard of the ship broke and the sail was torn to pieces. Seeing that I persisted in following a SE course, and in sailing by the southern route and not the northern one, they decided among themselves to make a representation to me, which they did. Seeing that I would not follow the advice of the pilots, the soldiers came to me, and begged me for the love of God not to order the navigation in a direction in which we must all perish and be drowned, for the pilots said that it was impossible to sail by the southern route and come out alive, and that I was repaying them badly for working with me in the service of Y.M., if I would reward them by taking them to their death. The sailors clamored also, and they were so weak that they could hardly manage the sails. Seeing that they all thought it an error on my part not to follow the opinion of the pilots, I replied that my sole intention was to pursue a prudent course of navigation; and since they all thought that the pilots were right, they might proceed in

1 Ed. note: I follow the translation by Amherst and Thomson, except for editorial changes.

2 Ed. note: Before 1582 and the change in the calendar, the autumn equinox actually occurred on or about 11 September.



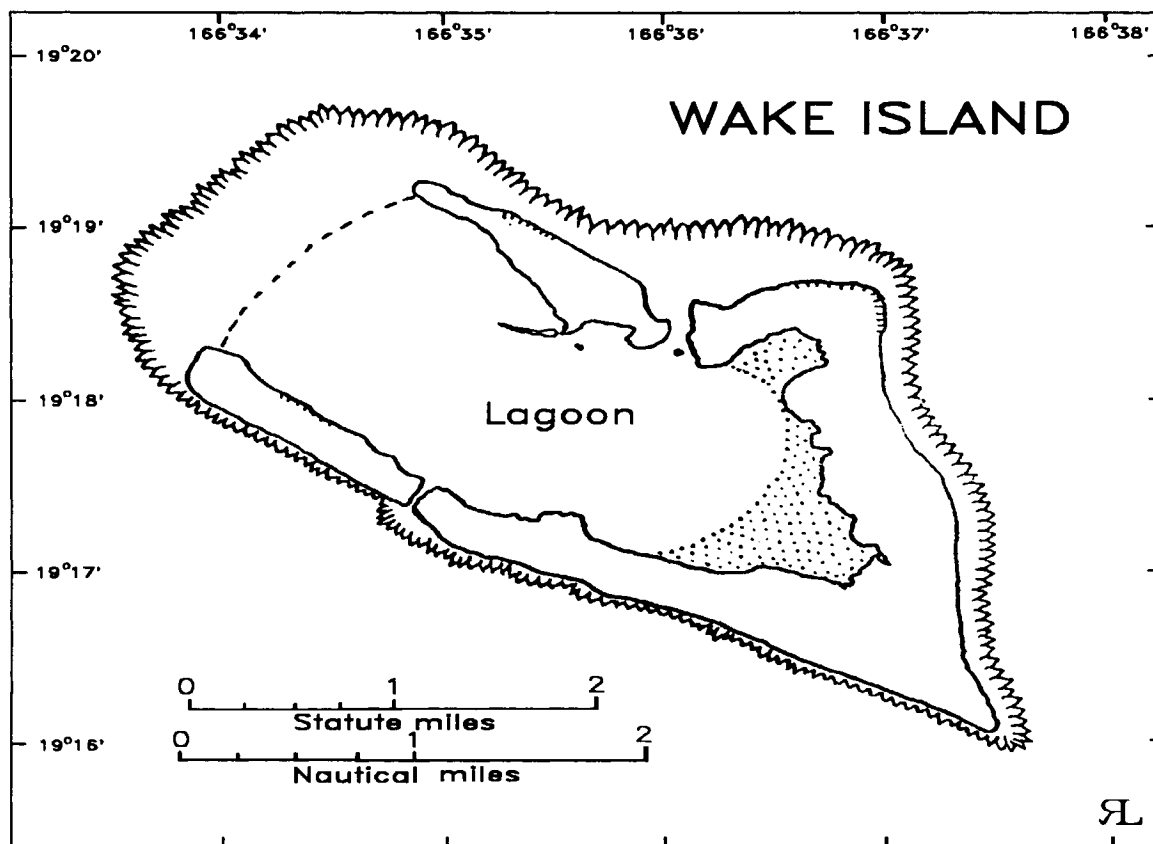
Namu, discovered by Mendaña on 17 September 1568.

peace; but I bade them remember that time would bear me witness in the hardships which we should have to endure. The joy of all was so great at seeing that I had resolved to steer for New Spain, that it seemed to restore life to all.

[Discovery of Namu]

After we had crossed the equinoctial line, and, upon reaching 8-1/2 degrees of north latitude, we discovered some shoals and small islands, which numbered more than 15 or 16. All these islets, some of which are a little more than a league in circumference, are surrounded by a reef. Pedro de Ortega and Don Hernando Enriquez landed upon them.¹ Some of these islands are inhabited and, though there were houses and fire in

¹ Ed. note: Namu Island, at the NW corner of Namu Atoll, lies at 8°12'N.



Wake Island, discovered by Mendaña on 3 October 1568.

the place where they landed, they saw no inhabitants for they had fled. Among the reefs and islands we saw three sails, like those of a raft, and I suspected that the Indians of that island had put out to sea. Leaving these islands, which to our knowledge had not been seen by any of the fleets which had been to the Philippines, we gave them the name of **San Mateo Shoals**.¹

[Discovery of Wake]

We reached the latitude of 19-1/2 degrees, where we discovered another island, which I judged to be 8 leagues in circumference; it is very low land. We approached it with the ships to see whether we could find an anchorage, and to take in water if there was any

¹ Ed. note: As we saw in Doc. 1566C, they may have been visited by the mutineers of the Pericón expedition, witness the chisel and pieces of rope other narrators say were found there. As for Gallego, he thought they had reached the island of San Bartolomé, the Taongi of the Loaysa expedition, but he does not mention the name of San Mateo. There is no explanation for this name, as the feast day of St. Matthew is not the 17th of September but the 24th of February.

there, for we were in great want of it, having found none at the former reefs. We made the circuit of the island, and saw that the sea entered it in some parts, and that it was completely deserted, containing but sea birds; bramble bush was the only vegetation. Finding that it was useless, and that there was no water, we passed it by and cut down the rations, giving to each a pint of water and 12 ounces of bread [per day]. We gave it the name of **San Francisco**, because it was discovered on the eve of his feast day.¹

On leaving this island we steered NNE and N, and sometimes NNW because the *al-miranta*, which could not keep her luff as we did, so that we were driven upon her; and upon these courses, we reached 32-1/2 degrees of north latitude, where I asked the pilots at what point we were. The pilots of the flagship found that we were 70 degrees from the coast of New Spain, and those of the *almiranta* found that we were nearer.

We continued in this latitude all night, and in the morning we could not see the *al-miranta*, and so we furled our large sails to wait for her. We continued thus until noon, but, as she did not appear, I ordered all the sails to be furled, and so they remained until sunset, when we saw her to windward, but she was hardly visible because of a mist which had fallen. As it was night, in order not to lose way, we set our foresail and mizzen, and so continued until the morning of the next day, which was the eve of St. Luke's day, the 17th of October, when a violent hurricane arose...²

1 Ed. note: St. Francis Day is celebrated on 4 October.

2 Ed. note: The separation occurred on 17 October, the eve of St. Luke's Day which is 18 October.