



Jan van Riebeeck's Journal

Month-by-month version

Contents – September 1652

Food remains a problem, but 2 400 harders caught in one day to increase the men's food portions per meal. Insubordination from men causes a lot of issues and Van Riebeeck found that the thick blubber and skins of seals can be used for trading. Read all of this and more in this monthly version of Jan van Riebeeck's Journal written exactly 370 years ago. Welcome to all our new subscribers. Remember to forward a copy to your friends. If you prefer the Old Dutch version with Afrikaans notes, request your copy [here](#).

All the best,
Rian Maartens (Executive Editor)

This monthly newsletter is extracted from:

"Journal kept by the senior merchant Jan Anthonissen van Riebeeck¹, who sailed as commander with the ships Drommedaris, Reijger and Goede Hoop² from Texel for Cabo De Boa Esperance, in the service of the General United Dutch Chartered East India Company under the Chamber of Amsterdam³"

Who was Jan van Riebeeck and what is the source? See the detailed introduction [here](#)

1 – 30 September 1652

SEPTEMBER 1652

Primo Stormy, wet weather with very severe, heavy squalls, so that the yacht was again in great peril.

2nd Weather and wind as before.

3rd Calmed down somewhat, but cold, windy weather continues from the S.E. and again some men have gone to bed sick.

4th Fine, bright, sunny weather; calm. Gathered the first green peas and have eaten some carrots about the thickness of the little finger; we sowed these as an experiment when we first arrived. Those that were sown this month and last month are also growing splendidly, as well as the turnips, cabbage, wheat, barley and marrow-peas.

To-day the corporal of the soldiers Joost van der Laeck, being drunk, very arrogantly misbehaved himself by using rude and foul language and opposing the Senior Merchant Riebeeck, on account of which he was placed under arrest for the time being¹.

5th and 6th Fine, warm weather as before; many whales in the bay. Have again sown some carrots, turnips, beans and lettuce which produce here as fine heads as in the Fatherland; but the beans seem to have been completely spoilt. Making tests, however, to see whether they will come up. The endive is also growing so well that it is a pleasure to see. *Item* also the Roman or large beans which are beginning to freshen with the warm weather.

1. About Van der Laeck's offence and trial see C. 1: Res., C. of P., 1651–1663, pp. 17–18; C. 326: Attestations, 1652–1665, pp. 1–5; and C. J.1: Criminal and Civil Proceedings, 1652–1673, pp. 1–6. All in C.A. From these documents it appears, *inter alia*, that Paulus Petkov of Danzig was provisionally appointed as corporal in the place of Van der Laeck. On 1 January 1653, however, Van der Laeck was re-appointed to his position. See Journal under this date.

Summary:

- First green peas gathered
- Joost van der Laeck insults the Commander
- Van Riebeeck visits Robben Island
- Dates carved on trees
- Discovery of arable land and good pastures
- Desertion of four men
- Scarcity of victuals
- Dissatisfaction among men

Have already sown some Turkish beans, but they have all been destroyed by the heavy rain. With the coming warm weather will make further tests.

7th Wet, humid weather and N.W. wind. For insolent conduct etc. the aforementioned Van der Laeck was suspended from the office he was holding, as the minutes and the definitive sentence passed on this date will show more fully.

8th Weather and wind as before until evening when it changed to fine, warm and calm. *Item* on the

9th and 10th when there were many whales in the bay.

To-day sent the yacht to the Robben Island to inspect the situation there; but as the wind veered to W. at midday and it began to look rather bad, she was forced to return to the roadstead towards evening without having completed her voyage. The next day, the

11th the weather being somewhat better and the wind S.W., she set off once more for the aforesaid island, where she came to anchor towards evening on a sandy bottom about half a mile from shore, lying off a beautiful sandy bay¹ opposite the mainland.

To-day sowed one bed with beet and another with mangelwurzel which do well here as we notice from those we sowed earlier.

12th Warm, calm weather.

13th *Idem*. The yacht returned from the Robben Island bringing back about a hundred black birds called duikers², which taste good; *item* some penguins and about 3,000 eggs, all of which we distributed among the men to serve to some extent as refreshment and by way of a change. It was very welcome, as the supply of stockfish has been exhausted and very little has been caught in the seine of late. The skipper of the yacht, Sijmon Turver, also brought a live young seal back and reported that seals were only moderately abundant on the island and that they had no blubber from which train-oil could be extracted. *Item* also that there was no fresh water obtainable, but penguins and black duikers in abundance. Although (judging by the fat of the young seal brought back) the report appeared to be correct, the Senior Merchant Riebeeck, considering the amount of train-oil annually extracted from seals in Muscovy³, would not leave it at that but decided to go there himself to-morrow in order personally to investigate all possibilities. So on the

1. This "beautiful sandy bay" (*fraije sandbajj*), situated on the east side of Robben Island—more or less opposite the present Blauwberg beach—was the natural place of call on the open, unprotected coasts of the island. In the course of time a little house was built there and a well sunk. Later on the Journal has a number of references to the "little sandy bay". See Chart 30. C.A. During the British régime it received the name of Murray's Bay.

2. Lit.: divers—plungeons or cormorants. Afrikaans: *duikers*.

3. Russia. During the sixteenth century the English Muscovy Company collected a large quantity of train-oil on the coasts of Russia, but the Dutch later drove the British out of the Russian commerce. Cf. Williamson, *A Short History of British Expansion*, I, pp. 86—91 and 233.

14th with a fine S.W. wind set sail for the island in the said yacht, taking along both the sloops with a number of casks and tubs to bring back eggs, penguins and other fowl for the men to eat, as the supply of groats and peas is beginning to run low and the natives from Saldania have not yet appeared with any cattle.

Anchored in the lee of the Robben Island in the afternoon on a sandy bottom. Went ashore and found that the gulls had carried off and eaten all the eggs at the northern corner after the duikers had been driven from their nests the previous day by the men from the yacht. We then went to the southern corner where we found plenty of eggs, but it became so late that we took aboard only 500 to 600 as well as 25 birds. Left 6 men ashore to gather the rest of the eggs on the

15th first thing in the morning (the wind blowing fairly hard from the S.E.). When they arrived there to do this, however, they found all the nests had been emptied by the gulls as before; this we saw for ourselves when we went ashore. So, not being able to find anything else, drove about 600 penguins to our vessels: they allowed themselves to be driven like sheep.

Meanwhile the Hon. Van Riebeeck had 6 seals—of which there was a great abundance—killed and flayed. They had quite thick blubber and fine thick skins so that not only train-oil but also good skins were to be had, possibly to the great profit of the Hon. Company. Went right round the island and across a few times and found it in many places quite sandy and covered with small bush; some places had a fair amount of grass and all sorts of pretty, sweet-smelling herbs and flowers. *Item* at several places streamlets of fresh water welled from the earth, trickling down to the beach and over the rocks into the sea. One need not suffer from thirst for there is enough water, and if wells were dug a larger supply would probably be found.

To-day it blew so hard from the S.E. that in the evening the said Riebeeck did not wish to risk boarding the sloop but sent the skipper with a few men to his yacht as there were only 3 men aboard. He himself with 15 or 16 men remained on land for the night, and on the

16th the weather having calmed down, went on board with all the penguins and set sail. Landed at the Fort of Good Hope towards evening, where it had blown as violently from the S.W. the previous night as it had ever done before. It can be observed from this that usually when it blows quite hard here the wind is still moderate at sea or a mile or 2 off the coast.

17th In the morning fine calm weather but at midday it suddenly began blowing with great violence and raining heavily out of the S.W.; towards evening quiet again.

18th Wind *ut supra* S.W. and squally, but not strong.

To-day the Senior Merchant Riebeeck and the carpenter went inland behind the Table Mountain to find out whether there were any other forests nearby apart from those found before, as the timber brought from the Fatherland has been

mostly cut up. It is also rather light for the construction of permanent dwellings etc. in view of the hard gusts of wind from the mountain which sometimes threaten to blow everything down to the ground. This can already be observed from the dwellings constructed of the light wood; we dare not leave even the heaviest without supports. So, as already stated, went to look for heavier timber. About $1\frac{1}{2}$ miles from the fort, on the slopes on the other side of the Table Mountain and in some of the kloofs, we found splendid forests with thousands of fine, thick, fairly tall and straight trees. It is of a kind almost like beech and ash, rather heavy and difficult to transport, but obtainable in case of need. Brought 2 fine pieces along, about 2 feet in circumference, to be made into pins on which to place the sentry-boxes.

About $\frac{1}{4}$ of an hour further on and a little higher up the mountain we found hundreds of such groups of trees, and even larger clumps, where so many fine, large, tall and upright trees were growing that one could get thousands of complete masts for ships from them—although it would be difficult to remove them—as well as from the forests found previously, about 2 miles further on. In the former forest found on a few trees the dates 1604, 1620 and 1622, so that they had already been found at that time, but by whom we could not determine¹.

All of this makes us greatly wonder why many experienced East India voyagers have always maintained that no wood is to be had here, as, besides the large forests, there are numerous thickets of short, crooked trees near the watering place where the fort now stands, most suitable for firewood, producing coals as fine as the best charcoal in the Fatherland. They have to be brought from the slopes of the Table Mountain about $\frac{1}{4}$ of an hour away—but this is a small matter for those in need of them.

In this search for forests, we also found at several places the finest and richest arable and pasture land in the world, wide and level, through which many fine, indeed countless, fresh rivulets wind. The largest of these², about half as wide as the Amstel³ and quite deep, flows into the Salt River, and if the Salt River had been as deep, it would have been navigable for rowing boats. On account, however, of the numerous sandy shoals and rocks in the Salt River one could hardly get so

1. To Van Riebeeck and his men it must have come as a surprise to see these dates on the trees and to realise that other Europeans had been there so long before them. It is difficult to say with certainty who had carved the dates, but there are several possibilities: in 1604, for instance, Steven van der Hagen was in the Cape waters with a large fleet; in 1620 the English navigators, Andrew Shillinge and Humphrey Fitzherbert, arrived in Table Bay and came across a large number of Dutch vessels here (some of the masters of the ships also declared that they had reconnoitred the land in the vicinity); and in 1622 another Englishman, Captain Johnson, visited Table Bay. See Theal, *Hist. of S.A. before 1795*, I, pp. 352—353, 369—371 and 373—374.

2. i.e. the Liesbeek River.

3. The Amstel, well-known small Dutch river. In Amsterdam it is split into a number of canals and in this way empties itself into the sea.

far up the river except in a small punt at spring tide. It is a pity that the land in that vicinity cannot be cultivated owing to lack of labour. Chinese or other free men could easily work it and comfortably earn a living¹.

Harts, hinds, small roe, eland, hares and other game are seen in large numbers every day now, but they are so shy that they cannot be approached with either dogs or guns; neither can we get hold of the geese, duck, partridge, snipe and numerous other large and small fowl which abound here, as they are too wild. Perhaps, if one had implements and people with knowledge of making bird-cages, etc., one would be able to catch them, as there are several places on the many fresh rivers behind the Table Mountain suitable for the purpose.

19th, 20th 21st Fairly good weather but rather cold; keen air and westerly wind. To-day 2 persons were punished for fighting².

Sunday 22nd Amsterdam Fair³. Bleak, windy weather from the N.W. Likewise on the

23rd To-day a cadet named Bartholomeus Claessen died from dropsy. There are still some sick in bed both from fever and dysentery.

24th Weather and wind *ut supra*. Resolved, in order to prevent idleness, as there is little here for the yacht *Goede Hoop* to do, to send her to the bays of St. Helena and Saldanha and the islands there to explore the coast, etc. and mainly to see what could be done there for the profit of the Hon. Company in the way of trade or otherwise—as recorded more fully in the resolution adopted by the Council on this date⁴.

Also sent some men into the thickets to-day to get laths for covering the guard-house, as most of our planks and other wood have been cut up and become unsuitable through moving, etc. and the bulk of it has been used for the storehouse.

25th In the morning misty, calm weather. Learned that 4 men had absconded during the night, namely Jan Blanx of Mechelen, arquebusier on the yacht, Willem Huijtjens of Maestricht, sailor, Gerrit Dirckssen van Eltsen of Maestricht and Jan Janssen of Leijden, soldiers stationed here on shore. Do not know where they have

1. The possibility of having Chinese gardeners and European free burghers was discussed as early as 21 and 27 April. See under those dates.

2. These two persons were Jan van Leijden and Michiel Gleve. For their punishment see C.J. 780: Sentences, 1652—1697, pp. 7—8. C.A. Michiel Gleve (of Stralsund), however, was again appointed as provost-marshal (*geweldig*) on 5 December 1652. See Journal.

3. In many of the Dutch cities, e.g. Amsterdam, Delft and The Hague, fairs or festivals were regularly held. The Amsterdam fair lasted three weeks. It began on the first Sunday after the festival of St. Lambert, which was celebrated on 17 September. This can also be seen from the Journal. Prof. D. Bax of the University of Cape Town was kind enough to draw my attention to the following sources: Wagenaar, *Amsterdam in Zijne Opkomst, Aanwas, Geschiedenissen*, etc.; Schotel, *Het Oud-Hollandsch Huisgezin der Zeventiende Eeuw*; and Ter Gouw, *De Volksvermaken*.

4. Cf. C. 1: Res., C. of P., 1651—1663, pp. 18—20. C.A.

gone or what they intend doing. For this reason the Hon. Van Riebeeck had the skipper come ashore in order with the Council to attend to this matter and, if possible, to obtain information on various points. A few persons were therefore summoned, when it was learned that Pieter Janssen Brackenier, arquebusier, stationed here on land, had said this morning: "The anchor is gone, the cable will soon follow; they have gone now, others will soon follow." *Item* while they were talking in the tents this morning about those who had run away, he had also said: "Would that I were with them"—according to attestations requisitioned by the court¹. The said Brackenier, when summoned and questioned, would not admit this. He denied everything, and was thereupon provisionally put under arrest and imprisoned.

To-day also, by placcaat read to the men, warned them against desertion on pain of the punishment decreed for deserters, and made known that those who disclose any conspiracy or intended treachery will be rewarded with 50 guilders. In addition, if they are guilty, they will be exempted from punishment, and if they are not guilty, they will receive double that amount as well as promotion to the first vacant office, etc., as set out more fully in the placcaatbook under this date².

26th During the night it rained fairly heavily, with stormy N.W. winds to-day, so that there was little progress with our work. The men are beginning to grumble at the continual and difficult work on the fortifications and the digging of the lands, also at the food they are given, as the supply of stockfish is exhausted. On some days, when no fresh fish can be caught, they can be given food only twice a day, namely groats in the morning and peas in the evening. Also they grumble that to-day, as happened once before and will necessarily have to happen more often (if none of the ships which left the Fatherland in the May-time arrive), a meat or bacon day is saved by using fresh fish or fowl in order to make the provisions—of which more than half has already been consumed—last a little longer. For the meat and bacon will not supply us until the arrival of the return fleet from India if in the meantime no ships arrive from the Fatherland or no cattle are obtained from the natives; much less the supply of peas and groats, which will last at the utmost another two months. The bread ration will also have to be reduced to 3 lbs. per week. The men have been acquainted with this—as much as they should know—and satisfied so far. At the same time a few of the main articles from the general *Artikel-brief*³ were read to them: how every one shall be bound by honour and oath—as

1. In this connection see the statement of Willem Gerritsen and Teunissen Pijl, C. 326: Attestations, 1652—1665, p. 7. C.A.

2. See relevant placcaat in Kaapse Plakkaatboek, I (1652—1707), pp. 5—6. A guilder is a Dutch silver coin worth 1/8 (To-day about 2/-, owing to devaluation.)

3. i.e. the general instructions of the Company. Godée Molsbergen calls it the "general law-book for Company's servants". Jan van Riebeeck, p. 225, Appendix XII. It contained a variety of instructions in connection with all the important aspects of the Company's service, e.g. discipline among its servants, religion and religious exercises, salaries, private trade, rations, arms

far as the rationing of what there is to eat and drink is concerned—to submit to the arrangements decided upon by those in command according to prevailing circumstances; and how without protest everyone shall be bound to work on the Company's fortifications and other necessary works, and also do guard duty and undertake expeditions of whatever nature and wherever the need or occasion at any time may demand.

As there must of necessity be some person who is the instigator of this grumbling, we have done our best to trace that person and to this end have promised the informer 2 cans of wine and that his name will not be disclosed, in order that this instigator may receive the punishment he deserves. *Item* hope that the Almighty will send us relief soon, either by ships from the Fatherland or cattle etc. from the natives, as the crops of carrots, turnips, cabbage, etc. have not been in the ground long enough for the fruits to be enjoyed yet. Meanwhile we do our best to catch fish with the seine every day, but are, however, not always successful: yesterday we caught only about 100 small steenbras and as many harders, as large as herring, and hardly enough for 2 midday meals; to-day went fishing again but caught nothing at all. We do our best, nevertheless, to give the men good heart by letting them labour as little as possible; but if the discontent grows, shall have to consider granting them daily allowances above their stipulated wages, on the understanding that if no ships arrive, the quantity of food and rations will have to be reduced owing to the shortage. *Idem* will pray God our Lord to provide these in time.

We are not a little apprehensive, in view of the desertion of the aforesaid persons, that there may perhaps be more trouble and that there may be others too who have something odd in mind. We have therefore doubled the guards and are having the rounds done at short intervals during the night by reliable persons (at least those we consider such) and strict enquiries made into all conspiracies among the men, in order to prevent as far as possible further inconvenience. May the Almighty grant us His assistance in this regard. Amen.

Meanwhile we have been informed that Eems Harmen Vogelaer of Lubeck, cadet stationed here, was alleged to be the instigator of the discontent over the food etc. Had strict enquiries made into this. Several attestations¹ were taken upon which to interrogate him and—once we have thoroughly armed ourselves with documentary evidence—to take such action as need and circumstance will dictate with a view to ensuring the greatest measure of peace.

and ships' instruments, wills and deceased estates and oaths of officials. General instructions were issued five times: in 1601, 1634, 1658, 1672 and 1742, on each occasion with some additions and modifications. Jan van Riebeeck, at this stage (September 1652), naturally used the *Artikelbrief* of 1634. The complete text is to be found in Van der Chijs, *Nederlandsch-Indisch Plakaatboek*, 1602—1811, I (1602—1642), pp. 309—369.

1. Declarations of Valentijn Lehman, Pieter Witsinck and others. C. 326: Attestations, 1652—1665, pp. 9—11. C.A.

27th Variable weather with rain showers.

28th Hard, dry, cold S.E. winds.

Questioned several persons to-day about the aforesaid deserters and the discontent, and learnt this much that the said Brackenier, according to his own confession, had said that he wished he were with the deserters, but that he had said it mockingly; however, he explicitly denied having said: "The anchor is gone and the cable will soon follow ¹."

Aforesaid Harmen Vogelaer also confesses having said amongst other things: "If we are not given meat as well as fish—but meat and bacon are always saved by using fish—I wish that no fish were ever caught or that there were no more fish in the river." On account of these and other subversive words conducive to revolt among the men, he was condemned by the Council, as a deterrent to others, to receive one hundred lashes ². The case of Brackenier is suspended until a later date. They remain under arrest in order that as much further information as possible may be obtained in the meantime.

Heavy S.E. gale during the night and it seemed that everything would be blown down.

Sunday 29th Lovely, calm, sunny weather. To-day our assistants and 9 other persons—eleven of them—together with the Hottentot who speaks a little English ³, ascended the Table Mountain. As a signal that they had reached the top, they lit a fire which we saw. The mountain is very difficult to ascend and descend and flat on top with little green growth, about as wide and 3 times as long as the Dam of Amsterdam ⁴, with a few pools of fresh water.

30th Fine weather as yesterday, with a slight breeze from the S.E. To-day, in view of the fine weather, the men dared to suggest to the Hon. Van Riebeeck that they would be inclined to go out fishing, provided he undertook not to give them fish in lieu of bacon. To this they received the reply that they would be sent out fishing if there were time and His Honour thought fit, and that as far as the withholding or economic use of meat, bacon and other provisions was concerned, proper arrangements would be made according to time and circumstances.

Meanwhile noticed plenty of fish close in opposite the fort, so had the seine drawn and in one quick sweep caught over 1,400 harders. The skipper of the yacht,

1. Cf. declarations of Brackenier and Jan Vis, C.J. 2952: Confess. and Interrog., 1652—1673, p. 13. C.A.

2. Cf. C.J. 780: Sentences, 1652—1697, pp. 9—10. C.A.

3. With regard to this native, see again 7 April 1652 and the relevant note.

4. i.e. the square in front of the Royal Palace (the former town-hall) in Amsterdam. A detailed historical treatment, together with pictures of the Dam in the seventeenth century, is to be found in Brugmans, *Geschiedenis van Amsterdam*, I, pp. 277—292 and 293; and II, pp. 267 and 325.

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on his way to the river with the sloop to collect reeds, caught another 1,000 there in 2 draughts, so that we were well supplied once more. Had some served at noon and in the evening, and gave orders for the same to be done to-morrow at noon and in the evening, in lieu of bacon and peas, to make these last a little longer: namely, at each meal for all the men at least 300 harders so that each man may receive approximately 3 fishes mostly a foot long. Although this arrangement was not entirely to the satisfaction of the men, we let it stand, both to make our Dutch victuals last longer, as stated above, and to show that no laying down of the law by the common herd would be tolerated, etc.

In the meantime we once more heard and questioned the aforementioned Pieter Brackenier, who was unwilling to admit anything more than before, notwithstanding the attestations made against him. His case was therefore again postponed until to-morrow.

Next Edition...

October 1652

Highlights to look forward to:

- Inspection of Hout Bay
- Resolution regarding boilers at Salt River
- Return of four deserters
- Journal kept by them
- Abundance of salt
- Arrival of Saldanha Khoekhoe
- Deserters sentenced
- Fear of English competition
- Dinner prepared from Cape produce
- Soundings of the bays
- Cattle trade with Saldanha natives
- Cannon fired at walrus
- Worn-out state of wheelbarrows

Final Words...

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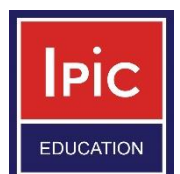
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