

Henry Hudson's Footprints

Pinpointing the location where Henry Hudson first stepped foot in the New World is a very difficult task. Many towns along the Hudson River, on both banks, claim that Hudson was the first European to walk there.¹ However, the most likely place for Hudson's first steps onto the soil of the New World was along the coast of Staten Island.² Additionally, this location was probably where the first meeting between Hudson and the Native Americans took place. Besides making several trips onto shore, the *Half Moon* anchored at many points in the Hudson River itself. The difference being, that when Hudson went ashore he actually left the *Half Moon* in order to explore and meet with Native Americans. Whereas anchorages occurred when Hudson's crew dropped anchor and spend the night aboard ship.

This paper will therefore discuss the various points at which Hudson anchored in the Hudson River. I have used Hudson's first mate, Robert Juet's, logs concerning distances traveled on the river. Additionally, Vernon Benjamin, a professor of history at Marist College, has graciously supplied his calculations concerning the locations of Hudson's anchorages.³

¹ The Town of Haverstraw is just one example.

² Cited in both Russell Shorto, *Island at the Center of the World: The Epic Story of Dutch Manhattan, the Forgotten Colony that Shaped America*, (New York: Doubleday, 2004), 19 and Donald S. Johnson, *Charting the Sea of Darkness: The Four Voyages of Henry Hudson*, (New York: Kodansha International, 1995), 20.

³ These calculations were provided in an e-mail to the author and will be available in Prof. Benjamin's upcoming work on Hudson: Vernon Benjamin, *The Hudson Valley: From Wilderness to Woodstock*, to be published by Overlook Press.

As mentioned previously, the first anchorage for Hudson and his crew was most likely along the coast of Staten Island. Here the crew of the *Half Moon* noticed the appearance of the Native Americans who inhabited the area. This is probably where Hudson left the *Half Moon* and stepped foot on land to meet the Natives. This is most likely the spot where Hudson's crew found fish in abundance.⁴ From here Hudson explored the rest of the Staten Island coast and parts of the New Jersey coast. He then sailed up river and anchored along the Verrazzano Narrows.⁵

In the middle of September, around the fifteenth of that month, Hudson sailed further upriver. He continued to anchor at night near Indian Point and Catskill.⁶ Based on Juet's calculations we can assume that, along these areas, Hudson and his crew would note the rolling hills and fertile land. Additionally, by using Hudson's logs and Juet's calculations we can also conclude that Hudson meet with the Native Americans in these regions as well.⁷ It was also at this anchorage that Hudson greeted the Native Americans aboard the *Half Moon* for the first time. The crew was quick to note the amount of furs the Natives had to trade and were correct in judging the potential for trade and profit. The soundings Hudson's crew had taken of the river led Hudson to believe that this was the Northwest Passage had been searching for.⁸ However, at anchorages further upriver, Hudson would come to realize that this was not the Northwest Passage.

Later in September, as Hudson moved slowly up the river, the soundings became much more shallow. Between September nineteenth and the twenty-second, Hudson used

⁴ Johnson, 98.

⁵ Vernon Benjamin, *The Hudson Valley: From Wilderness to Woodstock*.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Johnson, 120. Hudson in his journal noted the great abundance and variety of products the Natives offered to trade.

⁸ Ibid, 119.

a small craft to explore the river north of Albany.⁹ Also on the twenty-second of September, the *Half Moon* ran aground in the shallow waters of the river. With the combination of shallow soundings and the ship running aground, Hudson realized he could go no further upriver. Hudson recorded in his journal that the sounding craft had “been up 24 to 27 miles in which there was only seven feet of water and unconstant soundings.”¹⁰ By using Juet’s logs, Benjamin has estimated that Hudson sailed approximately 141.6 miles upriver before turning around.¹¹

On September twenty-third, Hudson turned the *Half Moon* around and sailed back down the river. As he sailed down river, Hudson took the opportunity to have meetings with other Native American tribes that lived along the river. The majority of meetings with the Natives were peaceful and beneficial for both sides. However, a meeting near present-day Peekskill ended in violence. On the morning of October 1st, the Indians of the area were welcomed aboard the *Half Moon* to trade. As Hudson and his crew were busy trading, one of the natives snuck into Hudson’s cabin and stole, “my pillow, two shirts, and two bandoliers.”¹² Hudson fired on the native as he attempted to escape. Seeing this, the other Native Americans fled as well, some jumping over the side of the ship and swimming to their canoes or shore. This was to be Hudson’s final encounter with the Native Americans of the river.

After the incident at Peekskill, the *Half Moon* quickly headed for the mouth of the river. On October fourth, the *Half Moon* left the river and New York Bay and sailed out

⁹ Benjamin, *The Hudson Valley: From Wilderness to Woodstock*.

¹⁰ Hudson’s journal cited in Johnson, 122.

¹¹ Benjamin, *The Hudson Valley: From Wilderness to Woodstock*.

¹² Hudson’s journal cited in Johnson, 125.

into the Atlantic Ocean.¹³ From there, Hudson stopped in England where he was detained by authorities (because he sailed for the Dutch on this particular voyage England decided to detain him in order to confiscate all of his materials relation to his most recent voyage) and all of his maps and charts were confiscated. While Hudson was under house arrest, his discoveries were greatly publicized in the Netherlands where a great interest was created for the river Hudson had found.

Through the use of Juet's logs and the journals of Hudson and his crew, one can reconstruct the voyage of Henry Hudson upriver. Therefore, the most likely place which Hudson first stepped foot in the New World was on Staten Island. Hudson's voyage upriver also marked a turning point in history. His meetings with the Native Americans set the basis for the relationship between Dutch settlers and Indians in the New World.

¹³ Benjamin, *The Hudson Valley: From Wilderness to Woodstock*.

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