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## TALK OF THE TOWN: WANDERER OF THE LONELY SEAS – Here lies Captain

[Independent on Sunday, The](#), [Feb 27, 2005](#) by [Cathy Pryor](#)

A vast, dull sky, no seabirds in sight: a vast, grey sea, waves surging rather too close. The sight has made me feel a little anxious – and I'm looking at it on a screen, in a warm museum with classical music playing gently in the background and enticing smells coming from the cafe at my left. What would it be like to confront the reality, out in the ocean, in a tiny boat crammed with desperate men, with only five days' food and water, and no help for thousands of empty miles?

This was the view faced by Captain William Bligh in 1789, after he was deposed by Fletcher Christian on the Bounty, forced into the ship's lifeboat and set adrift in the Pacific with 17 of his crew. Their journey has been recreated by artist David Cotterell in Latitude 2005, nine hours of simulated footage based on the terse navigational notes Bligh made during the ordeal. Taking in weather conditions, wave patterns and currents, the size of the boat and the way it would have moved, Cotterell has tried to depict the shifting horizons Bligh and his men would have seen. His "panoramic video projection" is part of Dead Reckoning, an exhibition at the Museum of Garden History that marks the 250th anniversary of Bligh's birth.

Though Latitude 2005 is oddly hypnotic, I doubt that anyone would want to endure watching its empty skies and seas for nine hours. Bligh and his men were stuck with them for a full 41 days as, armed only with a sextant and grim determination, Bligh steered the boat to a Dutch colony at Timor. Near the screen there's a map, showing the 3,600-mile journey – a desperate slog across what still seems like the utter ends of the earth. Only one man died along the way.

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The Museum of Garden History might seem an odd venue for a nautical exhibition. But Bligh played a part in the history of horticulture. The Bounty was in search of Tahitian breadfruit. In 1791 – after the Navy had exonerated him over his loss of the Bounty – Bligh made a second, successful voyage, bringing back several breadfruit species for the botanical gardens at Kew. Moreover, the Bligh family were parish members of St-Mary-at-Lambeth, the former church that houses the Museum, and Bligh's body is buried there.

His grave lies at the back in a formal knot garden. It's hard to miss the monument – large, well kept, with a stone breadfruit on top. Though the garden's pretty, it's not quiet: it's close by Lambeth Bridge and there's constant uproar from passing buses and trucks. Not much rest, nor peace. But then, Bligh was used to that.

‘Dead Reckoning’: Museum of Garden History, London SE1 (020 7401 8865), until 1 April

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