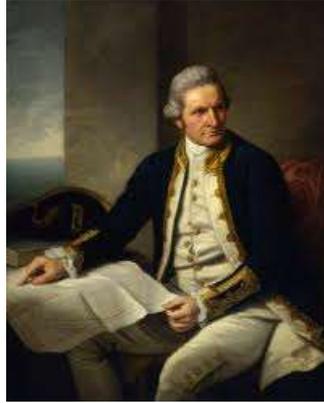


WHO WAS JAMES COOK AND WHAT DID HE ACHIEVE?

by

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There is some discussion of late regarding Captain James Cook and the first European discovery of the eastern coast of Australia then known as New Holland. On the 6th May 1770, after landing at Botany Bay some days earlier, he left to continue his amazing voyage. His visiting of Botany Bay prompted Governor Arthur Phillip to first go there and then on the 26th January 1788 settle at Sydney Cove.

Moves to remove his statue from various sites throughout Australia, including Bruny Island, have been heard. Yet, what do they know about this man? Some are confused with Governor Arthur Phillip who came 18 years later. It is time to look at the man and his achievements.



Captain Cook's Statue, Sydney. Reg Watson photo

On the 26th August 1768, one of the world's greatest explorers, James Cook, left Plymouth England on the bark, *The Endeavour*, of 370 tons, originally called *The Earl of Pembroke*. Then a lieutenant (commissioned by King George III) and not captain, this Yorkshireman of forty years of age was ordered to sail to Tahiti where the transit of Venus was observed the 3rd June 1769. It was hoped that by doing so, the distance could be worked out between the sun and the earth. Navigation depended on astronomy, so besides being a voyage of exploration it was also a scientific one. On board with Cook were some notable people, such as astronomer, Charles Green, two well-known naturalists, Swedish Dr Daniel Carl Solander and 25 year old Joseph Banks together with assistants and artist John Reynolds and artist and naturalist Herman Sporing. There were also a crew of 71 and 12 marines, making a total of 93 men.

Cook was also innovative in that he took measures to prevent scurvy (lack of vitamin C) in his men, making sure they ate fresh meat, fruit, vegetables, pickled cabbage and vinegar where ever possible. He looked after the men's clothing, so they would have dry and warm things to wear in the cold latitudes. He also took musical instruments, books and fishing lines for the men to use in their time off.

Opening his sealed orders after the transit, he was told to explore the existence of any great land south of Tahiti to latitude 40. Leaving the south Pacific island he took a chief with him named Tupaia. Not finding any great south land he sailed for New Zealand. There he met the local natives, which was a peaceful encounter, leaving on the 1st March 1770 after five months sailing around the two islands. He then had to make a decision to return directly to England via Cape Horn or to go home via Cape of Good Hope. So, on 1st April 1770 the *Endeavour* sailed westward towards Van Diemen's Land. On the 20th April, second-in-command, Lieutenant Zachary Hicks sighted land which was on the north-east coast of Victoria. Cook named it Point Hicks. Nine days later, 29th April, following the coast, he anchored for the first time in Australian waters at a spot known as Kurnell a site on Botany Bay. Cook ordered his wife's cousin Isaac Smith to "*jump out*" and set foot on land. Therefore Able Seaman Smith was the first recorded Englishman to set foot on Australian soil. The following day, in the afternoon, Cook, Banks, Solander and Tupaia landed. Here they met some aborigines and a minor altercation occurred, but efforts of friendship were fruitful. They stayed for a week. During this time, Seaman Forby Sutherland died of illness on the 2nd May and became the first European known to die on the shore. Sutherland District takes his name. Also one sailor deserted and what became of him no one knows.

There are numerous memorials to the landing, sometimes confusion with the date. This is because Cook's log dates are a day behind calendar dates. After leaving, further exploration and landings occurred. Port Jackson, Port Stephens, Cape Hawke, Moreton Bay, Cape Townhend, the Barrier Reef, Magnetic Land, Whitsunday Passage and many other points and localities were named. Off the coast of Queensland the *Endeavour* struck a reef and after 23 hours on the rocks, Cook succeeded in heaving her off into deep waters. He did this

by throwing overboard guns, ballast, casks, decayed stores, in an effort to lift the ship off the coral on the next high tide. Initially he was unsuccessful; finally in a higher tide the *Endeavour* was free and floating. In his journal he gave the overall name of “New South Wales.” He then sailed through the strait between Australia and New Guinea and landed at Batavia, where a number of his companions and crew died from malaria. Finally Cook returned to England where he became the hero of the day.

So what was done to celebrate and highlight this remarkable man and most important historical voyage to our land? Very little I am afraid, whereas New Zealand planned substantial events. Here we are bereft of leadership on the issue. The replica of the *Endeavour* was to sail around Australia for the anniversary, when in actual fact, it only sailed the eastern coast. This will not go ahead because of the current situation. There were planned a number of exhibitions. How can such a powerful event be down-played by the nation?



Cook's Cottage Melbourne. Reg Watson photo

Cook, as we should all know, had two more voyages and after the second voyage he was made a Fellow of the Royal Society. He died 14th February 1779 while in Hawaii on his third voyage.

How do we sum up Cook? His meticulous maps of his discoveries and his humanitarian treatment of both his crew and the people he came in contact with have given him a heroic reputation which has lasted for centuries.



Cook plaque, St David's Cathedral, Hobart. Reg Watson photo