

Captain James Cook was a navigator and commander of incredible skill. He charted more of the globe than any man before him and his maps were used by navigators for decades after they were created.

A new exhibition, the Antarctic and Southern Ocean Exhibition, to open at the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery in March, 2006, will look at Cook's voyage into Antarctic waters in 1773.

James Cook 1728-1779

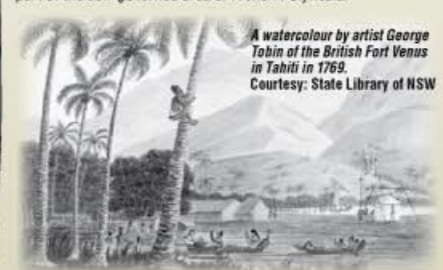
- 1728** Born October 27 in Marton, Yorkshire.
- 1736** His family moved to nearby Great Ayton, Yorkshire.
- 1740** Finishes school and goes to help his father on Aireyholme Farm.
- 1745** Starts work as a clerk in a grocery and drapery store at Staithes.
- 1746** Takes up an apprenticeship as a merchant sailor at the port of Whitby. His first ship is a Whitby coal carrier known as a "cat".
- 1755** Leaves the merchant navy to join the Royal Navy.
- 1757** Reaches the rank of master.
- 1758** Sails for Canada to join British forces fighting the French. Cook takes up surveying and produces his first map of the Bay and Harbour of Gaspey.
- 1759** Surveys the St Lawrence River.
- 1762** Returns to England and marries Elizabeth Batts.
- 1763** He joins an expedition for Canada as official surveyor to map Newfoundland and its surrounding islands.
- 1768** Back in England he is promoted to Lieutenant and placed in command of the HM Bark Endeavour. In August, the Endeavour sets sail on a voyage to Tahiti to observe the Transit of Venus, and secret orders to explore the south seas to search for a great southern continent.
- 1769** Arrives in Tahiti, makes observations of the Transit of Venus and spends time charting its coast. He then heads for New Zealand.
- 1770** The Endeavour sails along the east coast of Australia. He arrives in Botany Bay in April 1770. Afterwards, he sails through Torres Strait around New Guinea arriving in Batavia in December 1770.
- 1771** The Endeavour returns to England and Cook is promoted to Commander. Despite the disappointing results of his Transit observations, Cook is appointed to conduct a second voyage.
- 1772** Cook sails on the Resolution, accompanied by the Adventure, to look for the southern continent.
- 1773** Cook abandons his search for Cape Circumcision (Bouvet Island, near Antarctica), believed to be part of the southern continent. He heads east hoping to find land but failing that sails for Van Diemen's Land (Tasmania) and then New Zealand, where he arrives in March. In June he goes east across the Pacific in another attempt to find the continent, noting several uncharted islands on the way.
- 1774** After crossing into the Antarctic Circle again in his search for the continent he heads north again to explore the Pacific finding more uncharted islands - Easter Island, the Marquesas and New Hebrides.
- 1775** Arrives back in England in July.
- 1776** Embarks on a third voyage attempting to find a northwest passage between America and Asia through the Arctic.
- 1777** Visits Christmas Island, charts the Sandwich Islands and visits Hawaii.
- 1778** He returns to Hawaii where he is killed in February 1779 after an altercation. His crew continues without him attempting once again to make it through the northwest passage.



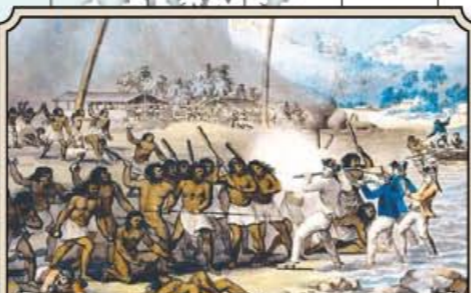
Cook's voyages

Cook was sent to Tahiti to observe the Transit of Venus across the face of the sun in 1769. An accurate measurement of this phenomenon was considered useful to astronomers and as an aid to sea navigation. Unfortunately there were problems with their measurements, making the visit almost useless.

Cook was not the first European to visit Tahiti but he was the first to accurately survey and chart the island. In his time on the island he also had problems with thieving Tahitians and developed a method of dealing with trouble from natives - taking people hostage - that he would employ elsewhere not always with positive results. He also had problems with his own crew mixing with the Tahitian women. Cook would return to the island on later voyages. Tahiti later became a French colony and is now part of the self-governed area of French Polynesia.



A watercolour by artist George Tobin of the British Fort Venus in Tahiti in 1769. Courtesy: State Library of NSW



A watercolour by John Cleveley circa 1784 showing the killing of Cook in Hawaii

When Cook first landed in Hawaii in 1778 he was probably not the first European to visit but was the first to chart it and named it the Sandwich Islands after his friend the Earl of Sandwich. Cook was welcomed as a god but when he returned in 1779, he overstayed his welcome and a fatal battle ensued with the natives. Hawaii would later be annexed by the US and in 1956 became the 50th state.



The port and town of Whitby, Yorkshire, England. Courtesy: Historic Houses Trust, Cook's Sites

James Cook was born and raised in Yorkshire and it was in the North Yorkshire port of Whitby that he first experienced life aboard a ship. Cook joined the merchant navy as an apprentice aboard ships known as Whitby Colliers or "cats". Sailors knew Whitby as the only safe place of refuge between the Humber and Tyne rivers on the east coast of England. It therefore became a centre for shipping mainly coal and alum. But men of Whitby sent ships around the world and Cook would no doubt have heard tales of faraway places when he worked there.

Whitby

Those he left behind

James Cook married Elizabeth Batts in December 1762 and in April 1763 sailed off to Canada where he stayed for several years. He would spend more time at sea than at home with his family, yet while at home he was a devoted father. When Cook died, Elizabeth was granted a pension by the government. The couple had six children only three of whom survived beyond infancy. Two of Cook's sons died at sea and the other died while studying to enter the clergy. Mrs Cook died in 1835 at the age of 93.



In Cook's time there were only two ways around the Americas to the Pacific. One was the south via Cape Horn and then west into the Pacific the other was south around Africa into the Indian Ocean and then east. For years the Europeans sought a passage around North America through the Arctic and the Bering Strait (between Russia and Canada). Cook also tried, but started from the Pacific. He mapped parts of the North American coastline but the supposed northwest passage was blocked by ice. After Cook's death in 1779, Captain Charles Clerke, commander of the Discovery, made one more attempt but also failed. Clerke died at sea six months after Cook. The Discovery and the Resolution made it back to Britain in 1780.

Northwest passage

"The risk one runs in exploring a coast in these unknown and icy Seas, is so very great, that I can be bold to say, that no man will ever venture farther than I have done and that the lands which may lie to the South will never be explored."

Captain James Cook

Cooks ships

For his voyages of discovery the admiralty had given Cook command of former Whitby colliers - known as "cats". These broad-beamed, flat-bottomed, sturdy ships were excellent negotiators of difficult coastline and shallow waters - perfect for survey and exploration. The navy referred to them as barks, meaning any broad ship of three masts. After her voyage the Endeavour was sold by the navy and is believed to have been scuttled or deliberately sunk in an American harbour. The Resolution possibly suffered a similar fate. Attempts to find them have proved unsuccessful.



Tall ship replica HM Bark Endeavour



The monument marking visits by Captains James Cook and Tobias Furneaux at Adventure Bay, Bruny Island.

Cook's 1772-75 expedition: Resolution and Adventure

Following his 1770 success at Botany Bay, NSW, in claiming Australia in the King's name, the British Admiralty sent Cook to determine the existence of the Great South Land. He was to claim possession for Britain. Cook's brief was to venture as far south as he could and, if possible, circumnavigate the globe.

In 1772 he set off in the Resolution, accompanied by the Adventure, for what was to be a three-year voyage.

In January 1773 the expedition crossed the Antarctic circle, probably the first ever to do so. Soon after, the Adventure anchored in Adventure Bay, Bruny Island.

During this voyage Cook completed the first circumnavigation of the Antarctic continent and proved that the lands and island that had previously been discovered were not part of a still undiscovered southern continent. In thick fog, the Resolution and Adventure lost contact in 1773 near New Zealand. The Resolution returned to England in July 1775. Cook has held the honour of being the first to circumnavigate Antarctica, but this honour should in fact go to Cook's 2nd in Command, Furneaux, who returned to England on October 14, 1774.

Cook concluded that there was no great South Land, just a useless land of ice. But his recordings of large numbers of seals and whales ensured that not everyone shared that view.

Australia and Antarctica

Cook visited New Zealand several times on his voyages. His first was during October 1769 to April 1770. His initial encounters with the natives were not friendly, several Maoris were killed in the clashes. Cook thereafter limited his contact with them as he circumnavigated the islands, mapping them as he went. He found refuge at Queen Charlotte Sound on the north of the South Island, where he claimed the islands for Britain, in spite of what the inhabitants thought about his intrusion. He later used Queen Charlotte Sound as a place to refit and replenish supplies on future voyages.

New Zealand was eventually colonised by the British, and was originally administered by the governor of New South Wales. In the 20th century, it gained full independence but remains part of the commonwealth of nations formerly under British rule.

New Zealand