

Beyond Cook: Explorers of Australia and the Pacific

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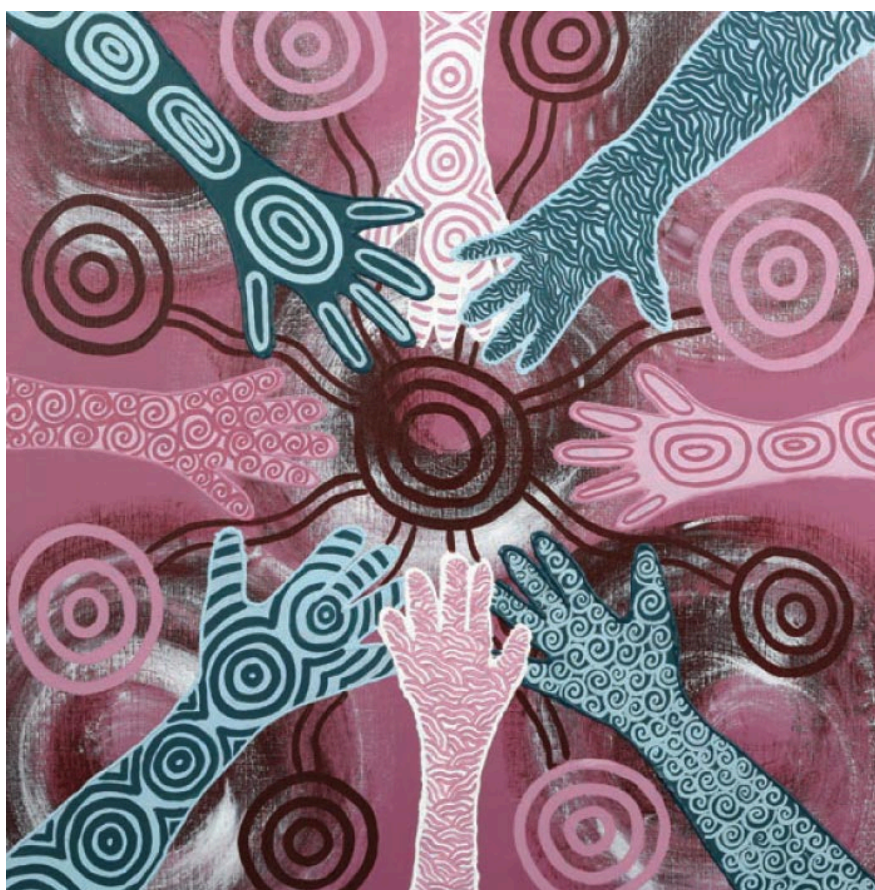
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Contents

Acknowledgment of Country	vii
Introduction	1
Navigating Beyond Cook	4
 PART I. <u>INITIAL EUROPEAN ENGAGEMENT WITH THE PACIFIC</u>	
1. Medieval European conceptions of the world	7
2. Europeans reach the Pacific	14
3. Conquistadors, traders, and pirates seek their fortunes in the Pacific	21
 PART II. <u>INCREASED LINKS BETWEEN EUROPE AND THE PACIFIC</u>	
4. Europeans explore (and imagine) the Pacific's islands	31
5. Cook, and his place in the Australian imagination	38
6. Science, and the Pacific's role in European thought	45
 PART III. <u>AUSTRALIA TAKES SHAPE</u>	
7. Europeans begin to explore the Australian continent	52
8. Aboriginal engagement with European exploration	59
9. European engagement with the Australian continent	63
10. Non-British European expeditions to the Australian continent	70
 PART IV. <u>THE OTHER(ED) EXPLORERS</u>	
11. Pasifika explorers	78
12. Women explorers	83
13. Animal explorers	89
14. Wooden explorers	95
 PART V. <u>THE ORIGINAL EXPLORERS</u>	
15. The Pacific's first navigators	102
16. Rediscovering the discovery of a sea of islands	108
17. Discovering Australian deep time	114
 PART VI. <u>CONCLUSION</u>	
18. Conclusion	120

Acknowledgment of Country

James Cook University is committed to building strong and mutually beneficial partnerships that work towards closing the employment, health and education gap for Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Our students come from many backgrounds, promoting a rich cultural and experiential diversity on campus. We acknowledge the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the Traditional Custodians of the Australian lands and waters where our staff and students live, learn and work. We honour the unique cultural and spiritual relationship to the land, waters and seas of First Australian peoples and their continuing and rich contribution to James Cook University and Australian society. We also pay respect to ancestors and Elders past and present.



Kassandra Savage (JCU Alumni), 'Coming Together and Respecting Difference', acrylic on canvas, 2014, 90cm x 90cm. © Kassandra Savage, reproduced with permission of the artist.

Introduction

The story of Pacific and Australian exploration by Europeans is a story of interpersonal and cross-cultural encounters. As European technology changed, and European explorers set out to discover the world, they found they were not the first people to discover the islands of the Pacific or the Australian continent. The places the explorers came to already had a human past, and the explorers' own histories meant they arrived with pre-conceived ideas of what they would find. This meeting of cultures has left fascinating records, in the form of the journals and maps created by European explorers. The European discovery of an already discovered region is a curious history of encounter, misconception, conflict, adjustment, and engagement.

While explorers might seem readily identifiable, the terms 'explorer' and 'exploration' are difficult to define. Since the 1980s, historians have interrogated the ways in which the terms are applied, and their analyses recognise the links between exploration, empire building, publication and self-promotion, collection of samples and specimens, and ties to significant institutions within the explorers' home countries. The situation is further complicated by the term only gaining its current sense in the Victorian period, and by the blurriness of the distinction between exploration and travel. Explorers tended to be leaders of their expeditions, and to publish accounts of their travels, but these elements were not universal. However, all explorers were connected in some way to their home communities, either by being forerunners of settlement or colonisation, or representatives of the state, or connected to significant institutions, or authors of widely read books. Travellers might have similar connections, but explorers could distinguish themselves by deliberately facing danger, or at least undergoing physical suffering during their expeditions.

Most explorers cemented their status by publishing accounts of their expeditions, leaving us intriguing documents. When we read the journals written by the explorers and when we examine the maps constructed from the information they collected on their travels, we peer at the past through distorted lenses. We can glimpse Indigenous societies and individuals during the period of contact (and then during the period of growing familiarity with Europeans), and we can also catch glimpses of the documents' authors. European records of island societies can offer windows on Pacific pasts, offering observers in the present a view of Pasifika ancestors and their achievements. The records of exploration also offer us views of the explorers' own societies, and their expectations of the world based on their previous experiences, hopes, and fears. The journals and maps are both windows and mirrors: they contain observations of the world beyond Europe, and they reflect European preconceptions and European systems of thought.

land unknown by humans' before the Age of Exploration

Indigenous people throughout Australia and the Pacific quickly began to use European vessels to tap into new opportunities for travel and for paid labour.

The establishment of the Port Jackson colony (now Sydney) marked an important shift in the European presence in the Pacific, and the beginning of settler colonialism in the region. The relationship between exploration and colonisation in Australia was generally reversed, and European settlement frequently preceded European exploration: the first colony was founded before the outline of the continent was known. Across the Pacific, European empires claimed island groups as their own, a process that had started at first contact although it was some time before those initial claims could be enforced. Like the Australian continent, Aotearoa (New Zealand) and Hawai'i experienced settler colonialism; other islands were drawn into empires and experienced other forms of European colonial influence and control.

The links between politics, exploration, and colonisation are yet to be fully resolved. The large-scale exploration of the Pacific was conducted by representatives of European governments: that political element influenced the agendas of explorers, and limited who was able to be an explorer. European expeditions of exploration were almost exclusively the preserve of white men, something that becomes most obvious when looking at the role of other groups, and the difficulties they faced in being recognised as explorers. More recently, a growing awareness of the injustices of empire and a quest for social justice and reconciliation has extended the story of Australian and Pacific exploration to recognise the groups of people who actually discovered these regions of the world and who already knew and cared for them when Europeans were only just learning they existed.

Navigating Beyond Cook

This Open Education Resource (OER) seeks to place the experiences of James Cook in their proper context. In Australian society, Cook is disproportionately famous. While his *Endeavour* voyage made a significant contribution to European knowledge of the Pacific region and mapped a portion of the coast of the Australian continent, he was neither the first nor the last European explorer to travel through the region and record his observations. Putting Cook in his place allows his experiences to come into focus and raises questions about his prominence in popular histories of Australia.

In its examination of Australian and Pacific exploration beyond Cook, this OER is divided into five parts. The first part examines who the Europeans who reached the Pacific were, and how they came to be there. It looks at the imaginings of the region that European peoples held before their explorers reached the Pacific Ocean, it identifies the first Europeans to visit this already inhabited region, and it raises questions about how the rivalries between European states influenced European behaviour in the Pacific.

The second part of this OER engages with the ways in which the Pacific has infiltrated European thought. The Pacific informed European ideas about the structure of the world and became a place of intense scientific scrutiny. Some Pacific Islands (particularly Tahiti and Hawai'i) are widely known despite being small, remote, and only able to support limited populations. These places have fired imaginations in Europe, and later worldwide. Our imagined Pacific Island paradises result from Europeans using the Pacific as a laboratory, first for thinking about European societies, then for understanding the physical world. Cook takes his place in this section dealing with European ideas projected onto an imagined Pacific, and his achievements and his legend are examined side by side.

Australia lurks at the edge of the Pacific, and the third part of this OER turns to this continent. The continent's first European name was New Holland; after Cook's *Endeavour* voyage, the east coast carried the name New South Wales. This section of the OER examines the process of turning those two coastlines into the continent of Australia. While this section of the OER sets off overland it continues to explore familiar themes: what were the experiences of contact between explorers and the people who already knew the regions being explored, what opportunities did the explorers represent for Indigenous people who wished to travel, how did the preconceptions held by European explorers influence their behaviour, and how were European rivalries played out on the far side of the world?

The fourth part of this OER raises questions about the structure of exploration by looking at the groups who were excluded. Logistical requirements made exploration of the Pacific and Australia largely a project of governments: the ships which charted the Pacific belonged to large national companies or navies, the expeditions which crossed the Australian continent were largely funded by colonial governments. As a result, organised exploration generally excluded those who were not white and not male. Despite this deliberate exclusion, the presence of Pacific Islander voyagers, women travellers, animal companions, and the influence of the ships themselves can be detected within official records, despite their systemic marginalisation.

The fifth part of this OER examines stories of the original human exploration of the Pacific and Australia. European explorers of the Pacific recognised the cultural connections that spanned Polynesia, and that an extraordinarily large region of the planet had been settled by a single group of people. Unearthing the

processes that allowed successful exploration of the world's largest ocean excites archaeologists, and since the late twentieth century the success of the Pacific's first navigators has prompted justified pride among their descendants. In Australia in the twenty-first century, the depth of human presence on the continent is being explored by archaeologists and historians. Recognition of Aboriginal knowledge and ownership of country is an important project in a nation seeking to come to terms with its colonial history.

Each section of this OER includes links to original (primary) sources, to video material that offer other views on the topic being addressed, and to secondary sources. This OER introduces intriguing aspects of exploration and encounter in Australia and the Pacific, but rather than simply answering questions it seeks to provide readers with ways to explore topics further. At the end of this OER there are discussion items with questions for each chapter, to promote the reading of sources in ways that cast new light on the past. The journals written by explorers remain fascinating documents: the text of this OER seeks to guide engagement with the journals and maps which are now freely available online. The journals themselves, when read with some sense of their historical context and what they might reveal of their authors as well as of their subjects, unfold in intriguing ways. The maps linked to this OER are things of beauty and offer insights into European preconceptions, the difficulties of exploration, and the ways in which explorers often worked at the very limits of the technology of the time.

I hope you enjoy exploring *Beyond Cook*.

PART I

INITIAL EUROPEAN ENGAGEMENT WITH THE PACIFIC

CHAPTER 1

Medieval European conceptions of the world

When Europeans set out across the Atlantic they were equipped with ideas of what they would find, and those ideas were largely medieval. The medieval period in Europe lasted roughly 1000 years, beginning with the disintegration of the western Roman Empire, and ending as European exploration of the wider world gathered pace. While medieval Europe spanned a long period of time, a large geographic area, and a range of cultures, it was unified by a Christian worldview, by common political structures, and by a recognition of Europe as a meaningful entity. This worldview influenced how Europeans behaved in new places, and how they interpreted what they found there.

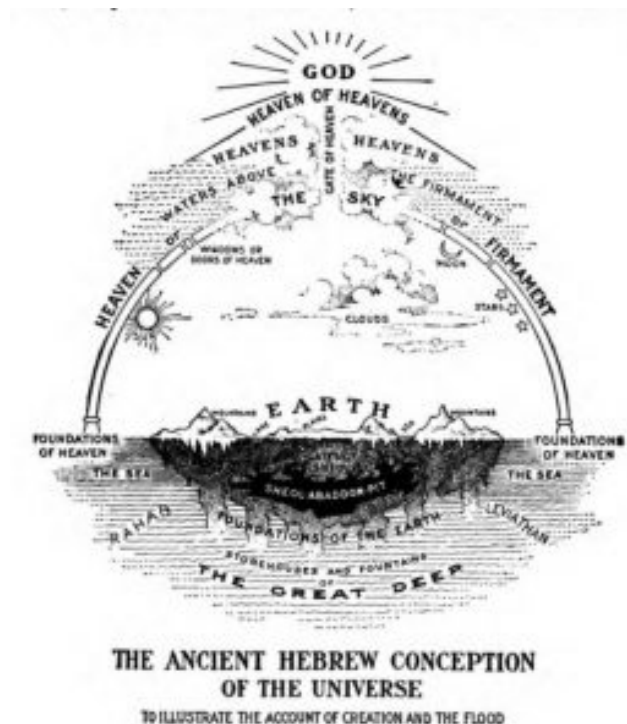


Figure 2: *Photograph of the Hereford Mappa Mundi. c.1290. From Unesco and [Wikimedia Commons](#). Public Domain*

Medieval European understandings of the wider world can be traced in the maps produced in that period. Mappae mundi (world maps) of the period depict the important elements of the world, although they sought to explain the world rather than to serve as a basis for navigation. Other medieval maps engaged with physical geography, among them the Catalan Atlas (which followed the style of nautical charts). Both types of map

offer insights into how Europeans viewed the world beyond Europe, and both indicate the limited extent of European knowledge. The mappae mundi are particularly fascinating as they offer insight into what Europeans believed, hoped, and feared about the wider world.

A variety of sources were consulted in the construction of mappae mundi. The Hereford mappa mundi is a large and elaborate world map that was produced in the British Isles in c.1290 and has been held by Hereford Cathedral since 1682. At the centre of this map is Jerusalem, and a large number of biblical sites (including the Tower of Babel) can be identified. The map provides insight into medieval European minds: the wealth of biblical sites indicates the significance of Christianity, while the presence of buildings the map-makers knew no longer existed indicates that such maps offered a view of the world that was about more than mere physical reality.



*Figure 3: Illustration of an understanding of the structure of the universe drawn from the Old Testament of the Bible, published in George L. Robinson, *A Brief History of the Hebrews: from the earliest times to the downfall of Jerusalem, A.D. 70*, New York: Young Men's Christian Association Press, 1907. From the University of Illinois Library and the [HathiTrust](#). [Public Domain](#)*

The significance of the Bible as a source of geographical knowledge was problematic, as its text is largely unconcerned with the physical structure of the world, although it contains sections that hint at it. Those hints, expanded and connected, indicate that the world is flat and stationary. Despite this, while some medieval Europeans might have lived on a flat earth, knowledge of Greek thought and mathematics permeated medieval Europe, and medieval kings grasped orbs to show their power over a spherical world. Even the disc shape of mappae mundi is misleading—those creating the maps sought to depict the interesting parts of a globe, while making good use of a flat surface. Including featureless ocean would have wasted map making materials.



Figure 4: Image of Henry IV, Holy Roman Emperor, holding an orb and sceptre. The image is contained within a medieval chronicle. c.1114-1125. From Corpus Christi College and [Wikimedia Commons](#). Public Domain

Instead of being taken entirely literally, biblical influences on European understanding of geography were powerful but indirect. Christian logic is apparent in depictions and descriptions of the world. As a result of that logic Jerusalem is the centre of a world girt by the ocean sea, and so routes to it necessarily travel uphill. Similarly, the Garden of Eden exists in the east, but in order to make it impervious to Noah's flood it floats above the surface of the world. And as a result of the significance of the Bible, Asia dominates the world maps produced in medieval Europe because of the region's profusion of biblical sites, and because of the wealth it was known to contain. Other sources also informed mappae mundi. Popular stories about Alexander the Great contributed famous people and fabulous animals (sometimes expanding on characters present within the Bible) to the maps. Arabian tales led to the inclusion of legendary islands off the coast of India.

Written accounts of travel also informed medieval geographers: accounts of the travels of Marco Polo and of Sir John Mandeville were both popular late in the medieval period. Polo's account of his travels as far as China were first published in c.1300. While his account is now recognised as providing accurate information about China in the late thirteenth century, in medieval Europe many considered it unbelievable as it did not accord with expectations of the region. In contrast, the *Travels of John Mandeville* appeared in c.1360. That account of a journey around the world and back again included descriptions of the wondrous animals and people familiar from mappae mundi, and it was generally accepted as a truthful account of the wider world. Polo's and Mandeville's accounts were both consulted by Columbus, and both were familiar to European explorers in the early modern period.

Other accounts of real travels received less attention than Mandeville's fictional travels. Within the Icelandic Sagas are two accounts of Leif Erikson and his expedition reaching Vinland (North America) in c.1000. Archaeological evidence indicates there was a Viking presence in Newfoundland at that time, although the onset of the little ice age and the increasing difficulties of navigating the Atlantic near the Arctic Circle meant

that presence was only temporary. The Icelandic accounts of Vinland did not influence medieval European views of the way in which the world was structured.

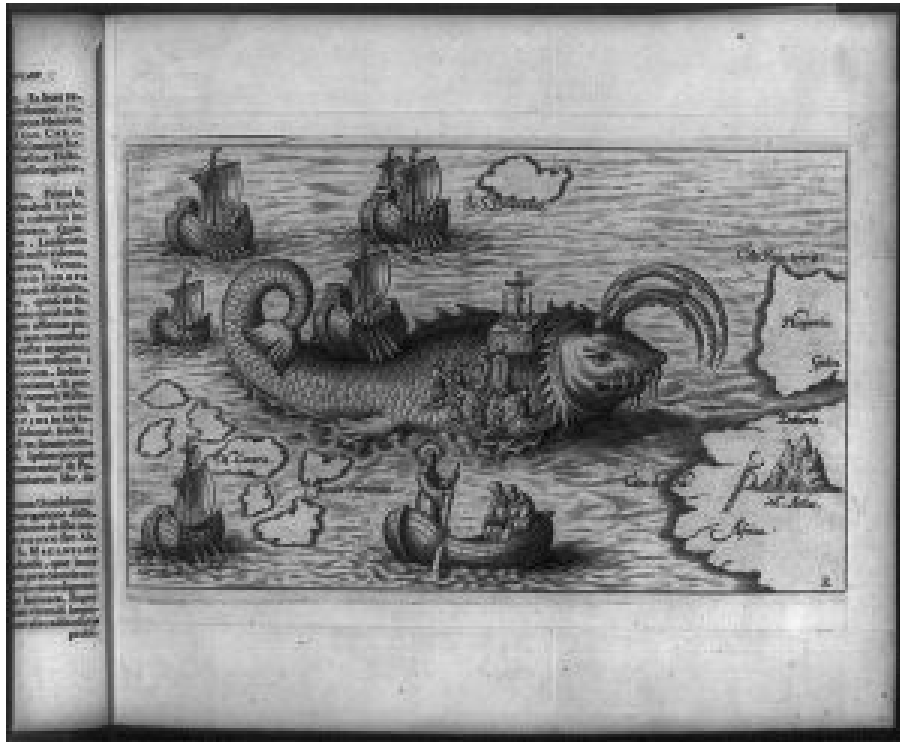


Figure 5: Image of mass being conducted on the back of a whale (officiated by St Brendan). 1621. From [Library of Congress](#). [Public Domain](#)

The sagas were not the only written traditional stories that dealt with travel across the Atlantic. The story of St Brendan of Ardfert and Clonfert (recorded as *Navigatio Brendani* in the eleventh century) hints that the Irish discovered the Americas. Born in 484, St Brendan was reported to have undertaken a seven-year voyage that included celebrating Mass on the back of a whale and finding a brightly lit land with a great river that he explored for 40 days without finding its other coast. St Brendan's Isle regularly appeared on European maps until the sixteenth century. Similarly, a fifteenth-century story had the Welsh Prince Madoc discovering the Americas in 1170.

The maps and tales produced in medieval Europe provide insight into the expectations of the European explorers who first crossed the Atlantic and who then entered the Pacific. They also provide insight into their motivations: Asia looms large on medieval world maps. It is the source of desirable goods, and the east held the promise of wealth and adventure. Medieval European maps might populate the rest of the world with strange beasts and men, but Asia's wealth made it worth reaching. When Constantinople fell to the Ottoman Turks in 1453 Europe's main trading route with Asia was severed, and European efforts to find other ways to access the wealth of the East triggered European exploration of the wider world.

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Video Material



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://jcu.pressbooks.pub/beyondcook/?p=5#oembed-1>

[Introduction to the Catalan Atlas \(in French\), presented by Emmanuelle Vagnon, the Biblioteque Nationale de France, and the University of Sorbonne.](#)



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CHAPTER 2

Europeans reach the Pacific

Europe does not border the Pacific, and reaching the Pacific Ocean required European explorers to either pass around or across the Americas, to navigate around the tip of Africa and through the Indian Ocean, or to traverse Asia by land. Despite the significant obstacles, and the length of the journey from Europe to the Pacific, it was not long after Christopher Columbus crossed the Atlantic that Europeans began to explore the Pacific Ocean.



Figure 6: Reproduction of a sketch of the three vessels of Columbus's first voyage across the Atlantic, possibly drawn by Christopher Columbus. 1893. From [HathiTrust](#). [Public Domain](#)

European determination to reach the wealth of Asia had led Columbus to 'voyage west to reach the east', a voyage sponsored by the Spanish monarchs Ferdinand of Aragon and Isabella of Castile in 1492. Columbus had previously promoted his ambition to reach China by sailing west to other European monarchs, but they had not supported his plans. Those monarchs were unenthusiastic not because of the prospect of sailing off the edge of a flat earth, but because they were reliably informed that Columbus had miscalculated the circumference of the world, and as a result had significantly underestimated how far he would have to sail to reach Asia.

When Columbus returned from his first voyage, he was convinced he had succeeded with his plan. How long he remained convinced of an Asian landfall is disputed by historians, and he may not have realised he had found something new and unexpected even after his fourth return voyage across the Atlantic. The prospect of having discovered a 'New World' (a term used to refer to the Americas, and one that distinguishes it from the 'Old World' of Europe, Asia, and Africa) was difficult to grasp as it seemed to contradict both the Christian Bible and previously trusted authorities on the structure of the world.



Figure 7: Nineteenth-century image depicting Vasco Nunez de Balboa reaching the Pacific after crossing the Darien Isthmus. c.1893. From the [Library of Congress](#). Public Domain

Despite this cosmological discombobulation, the Spanish moved quickly to try and find ways to profit from the newly encountered regions: colonisation and conquest followed contact. Columbus first encountered the Americas in 1492, and he attempted to found a European settlement on the island of Hispaniola during that first voyage. Further contact followed, and a permanent settlement was established on the island in 1496. With a foothold established in the Caribbean, the Spanish then attempted to colonise the mainland. It was by travelling over land that the Spanish first reached the Pacific: Vasco Nunez de Balboa led an expedition that crossed the Darien Isthmus in 1513, looking for the great ocean local people had told him about. That isthmus is the present-day site of the Panama Canal and is a narrow strip of land that separates the Pacific from the Atlantic Ocean. On 29 September 1513 Balboa waded into the saltwater of the Gulf of San Miguel to claim the 'southern' sea for Spain (by a quirk of geography the Darien Isthmus runs east to west, and Balboa was facing south when he first saw the Pacific: the origin of the term the South Seas).

Spanish interest in the Americas continued to increase throughout the sixteenth century, and other Spanish conquistadors made their way to the Pacific coasts of Mexico and Peru. Between 1519 and 1521 Hernan Cortes famously conquered the vast Aztec empire. He then went on to claim approximately 500 leagues of the shores of the South Sea in 1594, and to explore along the Californian coast in 1539. In the early 1530s Francisco Pizarro emulated Cortes by conquering the Incan empire in Peru. That empire was oriented towards the Pacific, with mountains blocking the coastal plain from the interior of the South American continent. Pizarro's successful campaign exploited coastal connections, cementing the significance of overland routes to the Pacific. The conquest of Peru was linked to that first glimpse of the Pacific by the Spanish: Pizarro had been a member of Balboa's 1513 expedition.



Figure 8: Illustration of Magellan entering the Pacific, published in Theodore De Bry, *America part IV*, 1594. From [Bodmer Lab](#), [Fondation Martin Bodmer](#), and [Universite de Geneve](#). [Public Domain](#)

Despite these overland routes, it is the 1519 voyage of Ferdinand Magellan that is commonly associated with the entry of Europeans into the Pacific. Magellan entered the Pacific after working his way through the Straits of Magellan in the far south of South America. Magellan's voyage left Europe with 237 members and five ships; by the time it returned to Europe at the end of its circumnavigation, it consisted of 35 men and one ship, and Magellan himself was not among the circumnavigators. He had been killed during a battle with an indigenous ruler in the Philippines, possibly as the result of a plot by an enslaved member of his expedition, Enrique. Enrique may well have been the first person to circumnavigate the planet: while not originally from the Philippines, Enrique was Malay. He was able to communicate with local people in the Philippines because he had returned to a trading region that stretched through southeast Asia.

Despite the horrors of Magellan's voyage, which included inadequate rations, scurvy, mutiny, the desertion of a ship while the expedition was still in the Atlantic, the violent death of the captain, and conflict with the Portuguese in the Spice Islands, the voyage made a profit by returning with a ship loaded with spices. Of significance for the subsequent history of European exploration of the Pacific, Magellan's expedition marked the Straits of Magellan on European maps, creating a sea route from Europe to the new ocean. And Magellan's voyage marked the first circumnavigation of the world by Europeans, a remarkable event.



Figure 9: Map showing the route taken by the Magellan expedition. 2008. By Semhur and from Wikimedia Commons. CC BY-SA 3.0

In the wake of Magellan other Spanish navigators sailed the Pacific. Some entered through the Straits of Magellan, thought to offer a narrow passageway between the Americas and the Southern Continent. Other navigators travelled a familiar route between Acapulco (in Mexico) and Manila (in the Philippines) as Spanish colonists in South and Central America sought to convert American silver into the desirable Asian goods that had prompted Columbus's first voyage. The ships that sailed this annual trading mission along known latitudes were collectively known as the Manila Galleon, and the route was regularly employed between 1565 and 1815 (a period of 250 years). The wealth extracted from the Americas by the Spanish, and its concentration on board these ships, served to entice navigators of other nations into the Pacific.

Exploration of the Pacific in the period immediately after Magellan's voyage was conducted by captains employed by Spanish monarchs (or by their representatives in South America). It was limited in extent, and in the knowledge of the Pacific it generated. Voyages set off directly from Spain or departed from Spanish Peru, but difficulties in determining longitude meant that the Pacific could not be accurately charted. The route of the Manila Galleon in the north Pacific did not lead to new knowledge of the region as captains followed known routes along known latitudes precisely to avoid contact with the unknown.

However, the Pacific was not to remain (from the European perspective) a 'Spanish Lake'. The prospect of crossing the Pacific to access the known wealth of Asia, the presence of American gold and silver concentrated on Spanish vessels or in Spanish coastal settlements, and the persistent myth of a treasure-laden Southern Continent, served to draw other navigators to the region.

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Video material



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CHAPTER 3

Conquistadors, traders, and pirates seek their fortunes in the Pacific

Spanish possessions in the Americas (and the desire to convert American silver into Asian goods) led to a growing Spanish presence in the Pacific during the sixteenth century. The wealth of the New World, and the possibility of trade routes reaching from Europe to Asia, were of interest to Europeans. In 1494, in response to Christopher Columbus's first voyage, the Spanish and Portuguese monarchs signed the Treaty of Tordesillas and divided the unknown world between them. That Treaty represented increasing European interest in reaching and exploiting the world beyond Europe, and in the decades after its signing Spain succeeded in deriving wealth from its American possessions, and Portugal from its trading posts in Asia. Such successes drew other European states to the shores of the Pacific, and across that ocean.

The known wealth of Asia and the recently discovered mines of the Americas reinforced European expectations that profit would reward exploration. Medieval maps and tales had created the notion of a rich southern continent to balance the known landmasses in the northern hemisphere, and exploration of the South Sea promised to reveal that continent and allow access to its resources. In the wake of Ferdinand Magellan, other Spanish explorers ventured into the Pacific, and often they found signs that confirmed European expectations of wealth waiting to be discovered.



Figure 10: Map of New Guinea and the Solomon Islands. 1600. From The Hague Historic Maps Collection and [Princeton University Library](#). [Public Domain](#)

Spanish explorers set out across the Pacific Ocean in the 1520s, scouting for a viable route between Mexico

and Asia. As a result, they encountered the coast of New Guinea, and the islands near it. In 1528 Spanish navigator Álvaro de Saavedra Cerón named islands close to New Guinea the Islas de Oro (Golden Isles). New Guinea itself was named by Iñigo Ortiz de Retes in 1545, and that name first appeared on a map in 1569. Both Spanish names indicate that Spanish explorers sought (and thought they had found) gold in the Pacific (the name New Guinea refers to Guinea in Africa, a region known for its gold). In 1567 Álvaro de Mendaña de Neira was the first European to record seeing the Solomon Islands, and he named them for the biblical figure of King Solomon, thinking he had located the source of Solomon's legendary wealth.

Analysis of Mendaña's voyages provides insights into both European expectations and the difficulties of accurately charting a large ocean with the technology available. Mendaña's first voyage left Peru in 1567, in part inspired by Incan traditions of wondrous islands to the west. That voyage lasted twenty-two and a half months, with six of those months spent in the Solomon Islands. That extended contact with the region and the local people led to instances of cultural misunderstanding, disputes over local resources, and violent conflict. Despite his experiences in the Solomon Islands, and despite a lack of concrete supporting evidence, on his return to Spanish possessions in the Americas in 1569 Mendaña praised his discoveries, and they were widely believed to be rich in gold and spices. In addition, Mendaña misplaced the Solomon Islands on Spanish maps: imperfect technology allowed him to underestimate their distance from Spanish possessions in the Americas.

Mendaña was eager to return to the islands he had located, but his second expedition to the Pacific did not set out until 1595, 26 years after his return from his first expedition (and after Francis Drake had completed his circumnavigation). Indicating the difficulties of navigating the Pacific in this period, when the expedition reached the Marquesas Islands Mendaña feared they had travelled too far west and had missed re-visiting the Solomon Islands. (In fact, the Solomon Islands are located c.6500km west of the Marquesas Islands.) The Spanish spent two weeks in the Marquesas Islands and caused approximately 200 deaths. The Spanish voyaged on, and reached Santa Cruz (now part of the Solomon Islands, but unfamiliar to the Spanish). There Mendaña died while his attempted colony descended into violence and chaos. Command quickly passed to Mendaña's widow Isabel Barreto de Castro and the pilot Pedro Fernandez de Queirós, and the expedition was forced to abandon its hopes of establishing a colony. It sailed for the known port of Manila.

Queirós returned to explore the Pacific in 1603, seeking the Southern Continent. His expedition encountered a number of islands in central Polynesia, then travelled on to the New Hebrides where he attempted to found a colony. That colony failed, and Queirós returned to the Americas, although one of the expedition's ships, under the command of Luís Vaz de Torres, instead sought refuge in the Philippines. Not discouraged by his two Pacific experiences, Queirós sought to return, but he could not find backers for a further voyage.

After the experiences of Mendaña and Queirós there were no further Spanish attempts to found colonies in the Solomon Islands. However, the Manila Galleon continued to ply its route across the north Pacific Ocean. Spain's settlements on the Pacific coast of South America, and the concentration of American silver in the Galleon lured voyagers from other European states to the Pacific. Among those voyagers were English navigators, and while they often operated with at least some veneer of legality, they came to the Pacific intending to seize American silver and gold from the Spanish.



Figure 11: Map showing Dampier's contact with the Australian continent during his first circumnavigation. 1729. By William Dampier and from [National Library of Australia](#). Public Domain

The first in a series of English voyagers was Francis Drake, whose expedition was the second European circumnavigation of the globe. Drake at times operated as a pirate, a privateer (someone with a government license to loot representatives of an enemy state), and a captain of the British Navy. In 1577 Drake set out from England with a fleet of ships intending to reach the Pacific. After passing through the Straits of Magellan he was driven far enough south to realise that South America was not connected to the Southern Continent, thwarting his plans of establishing trade with its inhabitants. Instead, Drake set about plundering Spanish ports in Peru, and captured a galleon on its way to join the Manila Galleon fleet. He then sought to return to Europe by finding the northwest passage thought to exist in the north of North America. No navigable northwest passage existed at that time, and after spending a month in the region of California he set off across the Pacific, unable to return the way he had come because of the Spanish reaction to his Peruvian raids. On his return, Drake increased England's knowledge of the wider world, mostly through information stolen from captured Spanish and Portuguese vessels. His voyage distracted the Spanish from Pacific exploration, as it demonstrated that Spain's New World possessions were no longer protected from Old World rivals by distance alone.

Drake was not the last Englishman drawn to the Pacific by Spanish American silver. He was quickly followed by Thomas Cavendish, who entered the Pacific in 1587, captured the Manila Galleon, and circumnavigated the earth. The next Englishman to emulate Drake was William Dampier, who first entered the Pacific in 1683. Dampier completed four voyages to the Pacific, and circumnavigated the world three times. Like Drake and Cavendish, Dampier was at times a pirate, at others a privateer, and even sometimes a naval captain. Like Drake and Cavendish, he succeeded in capturing a Manila Galleon, and like Drake and Cavendish he largely operated in known regions of the Pacific. However, Dampier was a gifted observer and writer and his 1697 book *A New Voyage Round the World* was a best seller. That book included mention of New Holland, and Dampier was the first English navigator to visit the Australian continent.

Dampier was followed by George Anson, who circumnavigated the world between 1740 and 1744, and also succeeded in capturing a Manila Galleon. While Anson was a naval captain, and ended his career as Admiral of the Fleet, his actions in the Pacific were of a pattern with those of Drake, Cavendish, and Dampier, marking over a century and a half of English interest in the Pacific as a source of plunder from Spain's American possessions.

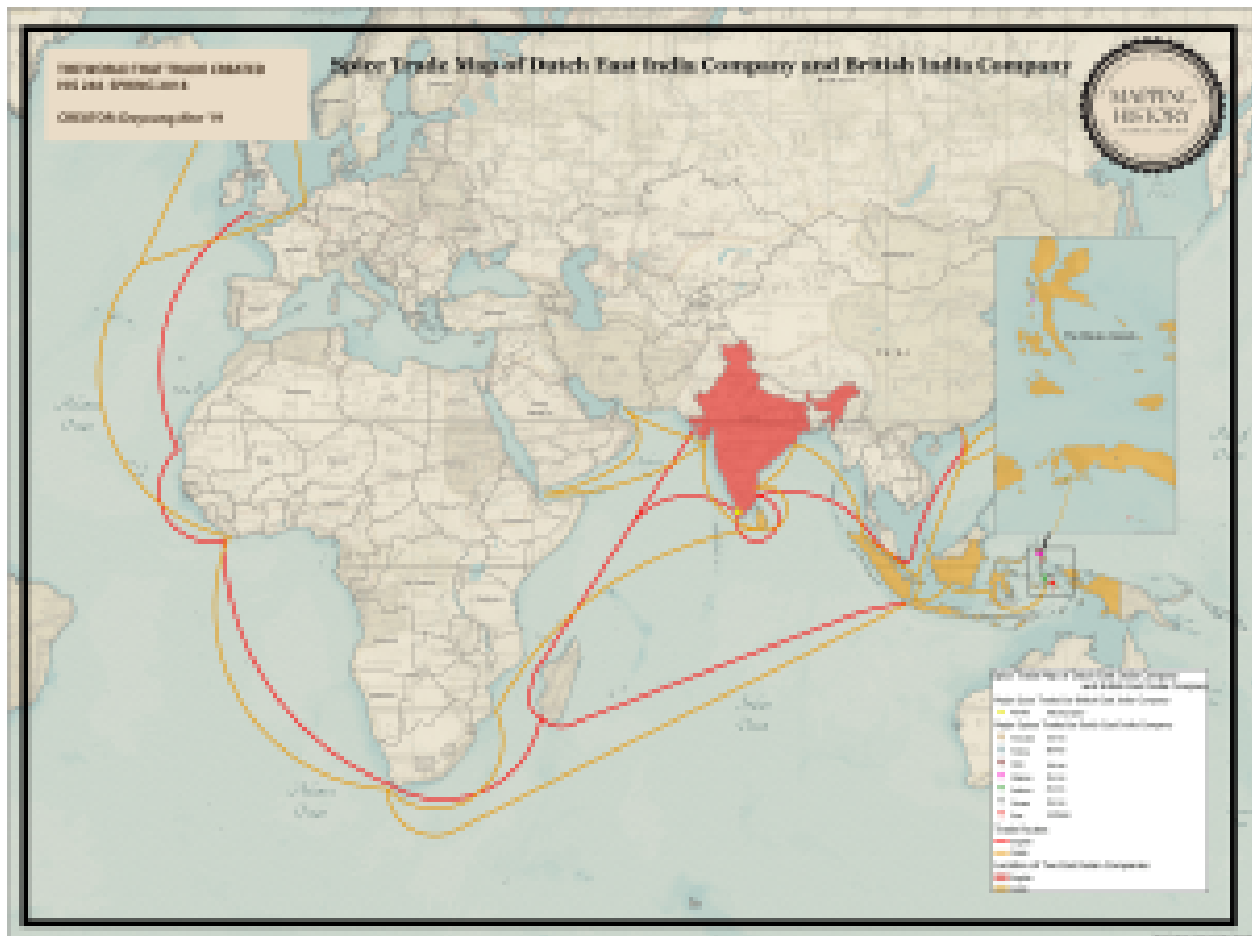


Figure 12: *Spice Trade Map of The Dutch East India Company and British East India Company*. 2019. By Doyoung Ahn and available in Elya J. Zhang's [Mapping History](#). Used with permission

At the same time that Spanish success in extracting precious metals from the Americas drew the English to the Pacific, the prospect of trade with Asia drew other groups of Europeans to the edge of the Pacific Ocean, and into encounters with the Australian continent. When the Netherlands declared its independence from Spanish rule in 1581, Philip II of Spain sought to exclude Dutch merchants from the trade with Asia they had previously enjoyed through their Portuguese and Spanish connections. Dutch voyagers sought to find routes to access known trading ports: they searched for a northeast passage, evaluated the Straits of Magellan, and investigated a route around the southern tip of Africa. From 1595 Dutch ships reached the East by way of the Cape of Good Hope at the southern tip of the African continent.



Figure 13: Painting of shields representing the Dutch East India Company and the port of Batavia. c.1651. From *Europeana and OMNIA*. [Public Domain](#)

In 1602 the United East India Company (VOC) was founded in Amsterdam, and given a Dutch government monopoly on war, commerce, and trade between the Cape of Good Hope and the Straits of Magellan. Approaching from the west, the Dutch established a long-lasting presence in Asia, founding the port of Batavia (now Jakarta) in 1619. While the Dutch were focused on profiting from familiar Asian resources, their base at Batavia facilitated some expeditions of exploration, and the need to navigate to it safely prompted the mapping of the coast of New Holland (now Western Australia). Dutch mariners were generally disappointed in their encounters with New Holland, and sought to chart it in order to avoid it. Some Dutch explorers skirted around the south of the Australian continent, in rare Dutch attempts to locate the Southern Continent.

Spain's interests in the Americas led to increasing European familiarity with the Pacific. As Spain extracted wealth from its American possessions, and used that wealth to promote trade with Asia, other European states were drawn to the fringes of the Pacific, and into the Pacific itself. English and Dutch voyages in the region differed in their objectives, but their presence marked an end to the early Spanish monopoly on European Pacific exploration.

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PART II

INCREASED LINKS BETWEEN EUROPE AND THE PACIFIC

CHAPTER 4

Europeans explore (and imagine) the Pacific's islands

Captain Cook's *Endeavour* voyage in 1770 was part of a growing European presence in the Pacific from the late eighteenth century onwards. While the Manila Galleon had plied its familiar route since 1565, Spanish exploration of the region was limited. Similarly, English pirates might have pursued the Galleon, but they had not mapped the Ocean. And despite the voyages of Abel Tasman and Jacob Roggeveen into the Pacific itself, the Dutch presence had largely remained west of the Australian continent, and had concentrated on avoiding undesirable landfall, rather than exploration. This changed as European technology improved and European explorers became better able to meet the challenges of reaching and navigating Oceania. But while their technology had improved, in many ways European explorers in this period were seeking the same things in the Pacific as their predecessors, and they were similarly guided by preconceptions when interpreting and reporting their Pacific encounters.

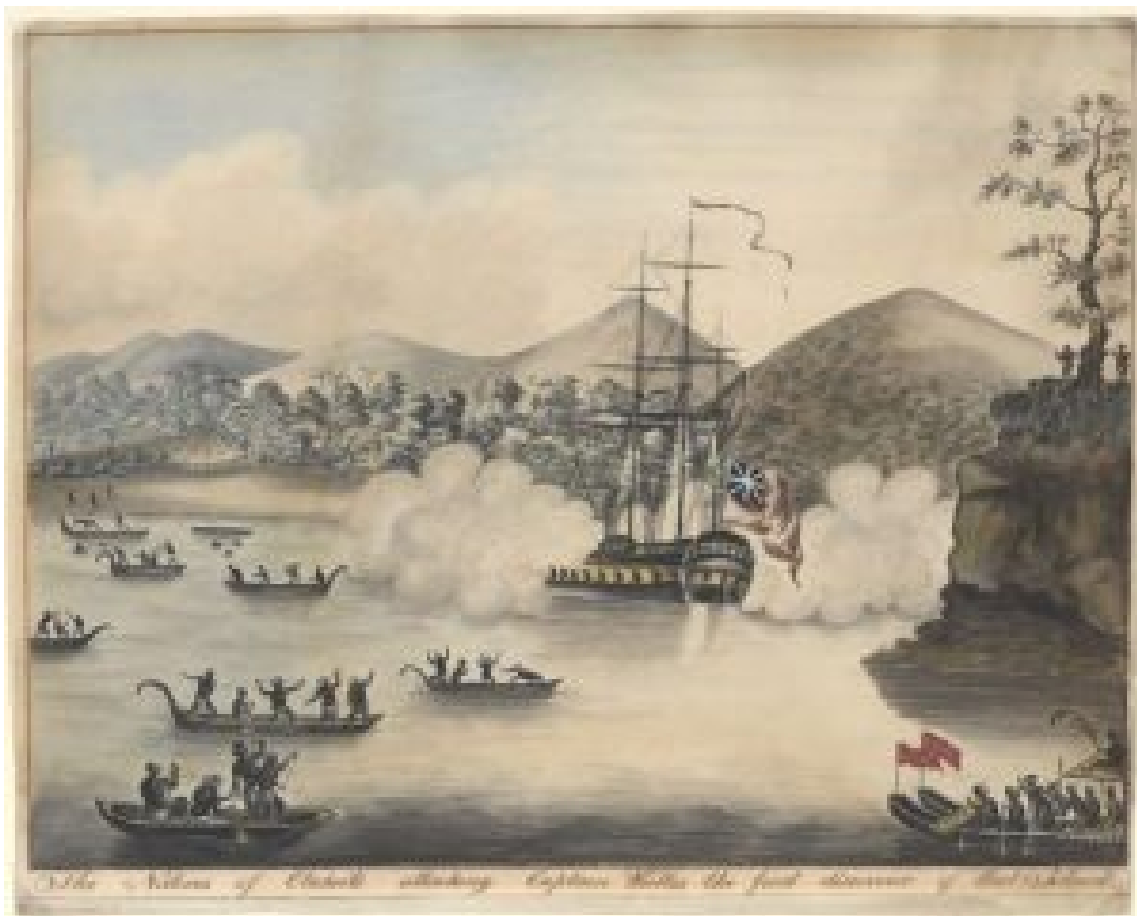


Figure 14: Painting showing violent conflict between Wallis's ship and Tahitians. c.1767. From [National Library of Australia](#). Public Domain

In the late eighteenth century, the number of Europeans entering the Pacific increased markedly, and European exploration of the region became more systematic. As a result, more islands were encountered, and the positions of those islands began to be calculated and recorded with some degree of accuracy. Key in this process of increasing contact between Europeans and Pacific Islanders was the island of Tahiti. That island was first encountered by Europeans on 18 June 1767, when it was sighted from the *Dolphin* (a ship under the command of Samuel Wallis). The *Dolphin* was on its second voyage to the Pacific, the first had taken place in 1764-5 under John Byron. While European vessels were beginning to reach the Pacific repeatedly by this point, they were often short of food supplies and drinking water during their voyages across the vast ocean. When it reached Tahiti in 1767 the *Dolphin* was in desperate need of supplies, and the officers could not determine how far away the nearest known port lay. As a result, the desperate crew resorted to violence in the face of local people who asserted their control over their land and resources. After suffering significant casualties from European canons and firearms, the Tahitians sought to control their insistent guests through overwhelming hospitality. In doing so, they helped create a persistent European myth of luscious Pacific places and people.

On the *Dolphin's* return to England Tahiti was identified as an excellent location from which to observe a rare astronomical event, the transit of Venus. Accurate measurements of the transit, taken from widely flung regions of the planet, would provide data for calculations to determine distances between the sun and its planets. The *Endeavour* was dispatched in 1768 for what would be a three-month stay in Tahiti. During that time Tahiti was accurately charted, and its longitude calculated, meaning that it could be placed on European maps with certainty.



Figure 15: Illustration of a Tahitian dance performance. 1784. By John Webber, John Keyse Sherwin and from [Te Papa](#). CC BY 4.0

In the time between the voyages of the *Dolphin* and the *Endeavour*, the French naval explorer Louis-Antoine de Bougainville also 'discovered' Tahiti. Informed by their encounter with the English, the Tahitians placated their visitors from the very first, and created a perception among the French voyagers that a place of free love and plenty of the type only dreamed of in Europe actually existed in the Pacific. Thus, the myth of Tahiti took root in Europe, bolstered by multiple accounts from different voyages that either ignored the violence of Wallis's initial encounter, or were ignorant of it. In creating the myth of Tahiti, Europeans continued a tradition of using recently encountered societies to critique their own: while European philosophers might speculate on the benefits of living closely with nature and participating in free love, they were basing their ideas on vague impressions, not close and accurate observations of island societies. Their assessments were of European civilisation and of their own societies, and their knowledge of Pacific Islanders was slight.



Figure 16: Travel poster promoting Hawai'i. c. 1950. By Joseph Feher and from [FreeSVG](#). CC0 Public Domain

The perception of Tahiti as an earthly paradise continues to the present, supported by a tourism industry that deliberately feeds these old European myths. And Tahiti is not the only region of the Pacific to have been interpreted as paradise by European visitors. Hawai'i became a significant resupply port in the fur trade between North America and China, and was annexed by the United States in 1898. By the time of annexation, the islands were already a tourist destination and were connected to the United States by subsidised steamship lines. Hawaiian tourism intensified through the twentieth century, and the image of Pacific Island paradises persists into the twenty-first. Recent tourism campaigns by Pacific Island nations tap into very old European ideas about the regions at the edge of the map, and what might be found there.

The inhabitants of different regions of the Pacific were interpreted differently, in line with Europeans' varied expectations of 'savages'. Tahitians, Hawaiians, and at times Samoans were interpreted as 'soft' savages and subjected to a range of related interpretations. These islanders were interpreted as close to nature, useful and diligent (suitable as servants, but not equal to Europeans), and often as being at risk of decline or dying out through their contact with European civilisation. This fear of the Pacific representing a fading golden age, often associated with Europe's classical age, was persistent and is exemplified in Paul Gauguin's images of Tahitians, painted in the late nineteenth century. In other places explorers recognised that they were unwelcome, and typified Pacific Islanders as 'hard' savages who were warlike, uncivilised, and unfriendly. In those places Europeans tended to interpret Pacific Islanders as leading lives that were 'solitary, poore, nasty, brutish, and short' in line with Thomas Hobbes's earlier description of what it was to live without effective government. These visions of Islanders had their origins in Europe, rather than the Pacific.

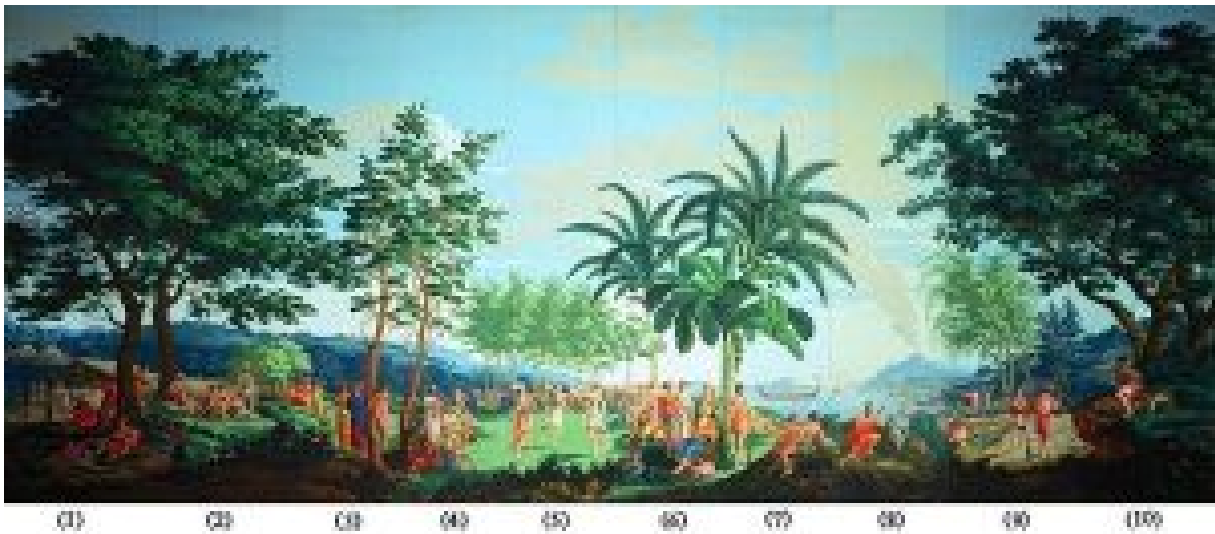


Figure 17 (Part 1): Wallpaper produced by Jean Gabriel Charvet, based on explorer accounts of the Pacific. c.1804-1806. From [Wikimedia Commons](#). Public Domain



Figure 17 (Part 2): Wallpaper produced by Jean Gabriel Charvet, based on explorer accounts of the Pacific. c.1804-1806. From [Wikimedia Commons](#). Public Domain

The journals kept by European explorers record the early period of contact between Europeans and Pacific peoples. They are remarkable documents that provide eyewitness accounts of eighteenth-century island societies, but their contents record a reality filtered through European expectations. Since the 1960s anthropologists, historians, and other scholars of the Pacific, have worked to decode these observations, highly coloured by European preconceptions, and to understand the island societies of that time in their own terms. Despite the European expectations that coloured explorer observations, recent scholarship has demonstrated that the explorers' journals offer insights into Islander experiences of this period of encounter and shed light on the way in which European misunderstandings at times led to offence and conflict as they unwittingly insulted their island hosts or acted in culturally unacceptable ways.

The late eighteenth century marked an acceleration in contact between European and Pacific peoples. European technology allowed voyaging to become more manageable and the location of islands to be recorded with some accuracy. However, Europe's embrace of science and technology did not free Europeans of their expectations, and European explorer journals from this period offer insight into both Pacific and European societies. The Pacific that was becoming known to Europe was in many ways a distorted reflection of European societies, as Europe used the Pacific to think with. The images of island paradises that European

thinkers built using explorers' accounts of their experiences were sufficiently compelling that they can still be detected in the present.

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CHAPTER 5

Cook, and his place in the Australian imagination

James Cook's name and image are familiar to most Australians. He is present in the title of this work, and in the name of the institution that supports it. Yet despite the prominence given to Cook in Australia, he visited the continent only briefly. He returned to Aotearoa (New Zealand) more often than to Australia, and he spent much more time there. Cook is remembered in Aotearoa, but is not considered the island group's European discoverer, and his legacy is debated in historical terms. In Australia, Cook's cultural significance is different for different groups of Australians: to some he is a founding hero, to others he marks the start of an invasion. Both interpretations have spread well beyond the limits of his actual presence on the continent and highlight the way in which his imaginative presence on the Australian continent is far greater than his physical presence ever was.



Figure 18: Engraving of a widely reproduced image of Cook ascending to heaven after his death in Hawai'i. c.1793. By J Thane (firm) [from a design of P. J. de Loutherbourg, R. A. The view of Karakakooa Bay is from a drawing by John Webber R. A. (the last he made) in the collection of Mr G. Baker] and available from the [National Library of New Zealand](#). Refer to NLNZ for usage rights

Cook's encounter with the Australian continent during his lifetime was limited. He travelled north along the

east coast of the continent in 1770, and named the coastline he mapped New South Wales. He was the first European to record the eastern edge of the Australian continent, and the western region retained the name New Holland until after the voyages of Matthew Flinders. Cook's ship the *Endeavour* collided with what is now known as the Great Barrier Reef (a name later suggested by Flinders) and Cook and his crew spent seven weeks repairing his ship in what is now the far north of the state of Queensland. Cook recognised his good fortune in being able to repair his ship, make his way through the rest of the reef, and escape Australian shores. He returned briefly to what is now considered Australia when he visited the island now called Tasmania on his third voyage to the Pacific. By 1786, when the British government made the decision to establish a penal colony on the coast mapped by Cook, Cook was already dead. He had been killed in Hawai'i in 1779 and as a result was unable to offer advice to the British government on its plans for colonising New South Wales.



Figure 19: Photograph of Captain Cook's cottage, Melbourne. 2004. By CloudSurfer and from [Wikimedia Commons](#). CC BY-SA 3.0

Despite Cook's limited contact with Australia, the continent is home to many memorials to him. Some of those memorials are of questionable authenticity, such as Captain Cook's cottage in Fitzroy Gardens, Melbourne. The cottage was painstakingly transported from the United Kingdom in 1934, and reassembled with attention to authenticity that extended to the plants climbing its walls. However, Cook never lived in the cottage (he may have visited his parents when they lived there), and he never visited the region that is now Victoria. Other Australian Cook monuments are large and startling, such as the privately-owned, 8m-tall, fibreglass Captain Cook that graced the streets of Cairns between 1972 and 2022. Canada, Aotearoa, Britain, and the United States of America (particularly the state of Hawai'i) are also home to Cook memorials, but those memorials tend to be more closely linked to places visited or frequented by Cook during his life.



Figure 20: Photograph of a large, privately-owned statue of Captain Cook located in Cairn. 2007. By Fosnez and from [Wikimedia Commons](#). CC0 Public Domain

Australia's Cook memorials reflect the ways in which Cook has become an important figure in popular Australian history. Spanish encounters with Australia occurred before Cook's visit, and the Dutch mapped substantial portions of the north and west coasts. These European contacts with the Australian continent are not associated with the founding of the nation of Australia in the same way as Cook's comparatively brief visit. Even the Englishman William Dampier's visits to the continent in 1688 and 1699 fail to feature in national mythologising about Australian origins. Settler Australia tends to seek its origins in 1770 and the *Endeavour* voyage, despite the brevity of the visit and Cook's lack of enthusiasm for returning to the region. In the present, Cook's only competition as the founder-hero of the Australian nation comes from the legendary Anzacs.

Historical assessments of Cook have gathered pace since the 1960s. While his skills in navigation and cartography remain lauded, his interactions with the local people he encountered during his travels have been reassessed. He is generally considered to have attempted to behave humanely, but since the 1960s there has been growing recognition of violent interactions between Cook and the traditional owners of the places he visited, of his misbehaviour (through cultural ignorance or because of perceived threats to his ships or crews), of his failings as a captain on his third Pacific voyage, and of Cook's own deliberate violence towards members of his crew and Islanders who committed acts he considered crimes. These reassessments of Cook also include appreciation that his legacy lies in the accurate maps he produced of the Pacific, and in his facilitation of the work of scientists travelling with him. Rather than locating places completely unknown to Europeans, Cook eliminated phantom islands and continents, and competently mapped islands that had been glimpsed by earlier explorers. Cook's talent was in pinning places to the map and making it possible for Europeans to revisit them at will.

Anthropologist Deborah Bird Rose has found that Cook is an important figure in Aboriginal stories about the establishment of settler Australia, even in parts of the country that Cook never visited. Stories from a wide range of places in northern Australia, including the Kimberley, Arnhem Land and Queensland feature Cook as

a villain. Like the national myths of European Australians, these stories hold Cook responsible for the arrival of settler colonialism in Australia. And like the stories told by Australians of European descent, these stories have Cook actively involved in the establishment of European settlement in Australia.

Cooktown, located in far north Queensland, actively promotes itself as the place where Cook spent most time while in Australia. It is visited by tourists drawn by its name and history. The heritage efforts of the town are an interesting reflection on Cook's significance. While the town trades on Cook, it also promotes other forms of heritage including Aboriginal culture, the history of Aboriginal engagement with the *Endeavour's* crew, and a multicultural past that highlights Chinese gold miners drawn to the Palmer River goldfield. The promotion of this array of heritage elements, including the possibility of reconciliation both in the past and in the present as represented by an incident that occurred during Cook's visit, is a sign of the way in which Cook still looms large in the Australian imagination. In many ways, Cooktown is creating the heritage that Australia needs for an inclusive and diverse future, but without challenging the significance of Cook as a foundational figure for Australia.

Captain Cook looms large in European exploration of the Pacific. While he discovered few places that were entirely new to Europe, his voyages came at the time when technological developments were changing the ways in which Europeans navigated and recorded the region. He made contributions to European cartography, and other quickly evolving sciences including astronomy and biology. Captain Cook also became a myth. His time in Australia allowed him to be perceived as the founding father of the nation that emerged from European settler colonialism on the continent. The actions of the historical Cook are in some ways insignificant in comparison to his roles as a national icon and a clear founding moment for the Australian nation that was formed in 1901.

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CHAPTER 6

Science, and the Pacific's role in European thought

The number of European expeditions entering the Pacific increased markedly towards the end of the 1700s, and there was a notable shift in both the objectives and methods of European exploration of the region. Europe was going through a period of significant change, and science was taking up a prominent role in European thinking, a role it still holds. European science shaped exploration of the Pacific, and the Pacific shaped significant aspects of European science. The Pacific offered a region for study, became a laboratory, and played a major role in European thinking about the world.

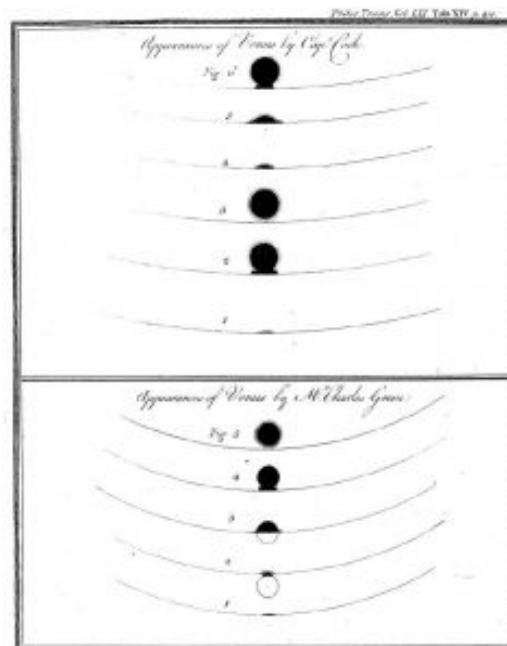


Figure 21: Drawings of the 1769 Transit of Venus by Lt James Cook (top) and Charles Green (bottom) made in Tahiti. 1771. From [Wikimedia Commons](#). Public Domain

The start of science-driven exploration of the Pacific is generally associated with the *Endeavour* voyage. That voyage was sponsored by the Royal Society, an institution established in 1660 that was central to the development of scientific methods and thinking. The Society's motto 'Nullius in Verba' translates as 'take nobody's word for it' and marked a significant shift in thinking as it endorsed observation and experiment (in contrast to tradition and authority) as sources of knowledge. The Society's journal *Philosophical Transactions* established the model of peer-reviewed scientific publication that remains central to research to the present day.

Science was at the heart of the *Endeavour* voyage. One manifestation was in astronomy. The transit of the

planet Venus across the sun that was due to occur in 1769 marked an opportunity to calculate the distance between the earth and the sun that would not be repeated for 120 years. The successful calculation of that distance required astronomers to observe and record the transit at widely spaced localities. Samuel Wallis arrived in England with news of Tahiti at the perfect moment for it to be chosen as a site for European scientific observation and to play a role in establishing the earth's place in the solar system.

The *Endeavour* carried a range of scientists, among them Cook who was both a skilled astronomer and an excellent cartographer. The expedition also included an astronomer appointed by the Royal Society, Charles Green. Connections between the expedition and the Society also manifested in the person of Joseph Banks. Banks was a wealthy gentleman, a fellow of the Royal Society, and sufficiently influential to join the voyage in the service of science, and to bring a team of artists and scientists with him. In 1778 Banks became president of the Royal Society, a post he held until his death in 1820. In the wake of the *Endeavour* the advancement of science became a recognised goal of Pacific exploration by European powers.

And the *Endeavour's* scientists made significant contributions to Europe's scientific knowledge. The *Endeavour's* astronomers recorded observations of the transit of Venus from two locations in Tahiti, and those observations played a role in the subsequent calculations that determined distances between objects within the solar system. Banks and his scientists collected 30,000 plant specimens, 1,000 animal specimens, and prepared many scientific drawings. Those collections increased the number of the world's known plants by one quarter. After his return to Europe, Banks acted as a patron of scientific research, and his Pacific collections both advanced European knowledge of the world, and helped Banks establish his position as a scientific gentleman of renown.



Figure 22: Photograph of type specimen of *bougainvillea*, collected by Philibert Commerson at Rio at 1767. 2009. From [Museum National d'Histoire Naturelle](#). CC BY 4.0

England was not the only European state interested in scientific exploration of the Pacific. In 1764 France founded a colony in the Falkland Islands as a place of resupply for ships bound for Asia. The location of the Falkland Islands promised France control over shipping in the south Atlantic, but the islands' location near the Straits of Magellan quickly made them significant for Pacific exploration. Louis-Antoine de Bougainville was involved in the French settlement of the Falkland Islands, and in conceding their sovereignty to the Spanish in 1767. His 1766-9 voyage first travelled to the Falkland Islands to formally hand them over to Spain, then continued to the Pacific. Bougainville's voyage combined politics, survey, and science: among those travelling on his two ships were the naturalist Philibert Commerson, and his assistant Jean(ne) Baret. Bougainville's voyage marked an incomplete shift to science as a rationale for Pacific exploration: Commerson made collections and observations, but he did not represent a formal connection between the voyage and scientific institutions in France. He might better be considered a transition between Pacific science undertaken from personal interest, as exemplified by William Dampier, and the formal science of the *Endeavour* voyage. Even that shift to formal science was incomplete, and science and politics remain tangled. Staking a claim to scientific aims could allow naval ships to move through regions claimed by other European nations, even while at war as scientific passports were widely, although not universally, respected. In addition, claiming a national interest in advancing science was a source of national prestige, particularly for the British and French.

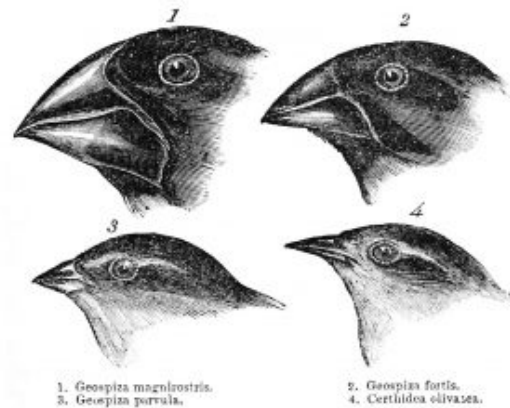


Figure 23: This finished drawing by John Gould illustrates varieties of finches Charles Darwin collected in the Galapagos. 1845. From [Wikimedia Commons](#). Public Domain

The *Endeavour* was followed by many vessels carrying scientists and collecting specimens and observations. The voyage of the *Beagle* in 1831-6 is famously associated with Charles Darwin and the theory of evolution. Many of the observations that informed Darwin in his development of the theory of evolution by natural selection were made during his time in the Pacific. In particular, the finches he observed in the Galapagos Islands provided an excellent example of adaptive radiation. While Darwin's theory was controversial when first published, it soon became widely accepted and at the time of his death Darwin was accorded a state funeral. The voyage of the *Beagle* has its place in European mythology: in 2005 a Mars lander was named *Beagle 2* in honour of Darwin's voyage and in expectation that it too would make significant observations of previously unfamiliar environments. Exemplifying the hazards of exploration, it was destroyed on impact with the Martian surface.

However, the *Beagle's* voyage was in the service of cartography, and Darwin's presence was the result of the captain's desire to take a companion for the long voyage. Robert Fitzroy feared that loneliness (as captain he was unable to socialise with those of other ranks) might lead him to suicide, and Darwin was present to provide him with conversation. Through Darwin, the Pacific played an important role in formulating European ideas about the natural world, and through Darwin travel became clearly associated with the pursuit of science. However, Darwin's presence on the *Beagle* was more a continuation of the tradition of Dampier and the interested observer than a shift to voyages of exploration pursuing explicitly scientific objectives.

The rise of scientific thinking in Europe changed the way Europeans approached the Pacific. Voyages became more frequent (in part because of changes in technology), and more closely linked with national navies and national prestige. Science became an important element of European voyages within the Pacific. As a result of the rise of scientific thinking the Pacific took on a new role in the European imagination—that of a laboratory full of curious and revealing facts. And the Pacific helped Europeans find their place in the solar system, and in the natural world.

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PART III

AUSTRALIA TAKES SHAPE

CHAPTER 7

Europeans begin to explore the Australian continent

European exploration of the Australian continent mostly followed colonisation, rather than colonisation following exploration: when Sydney was founded in 1788 not even the outline of the continent was fully known. At that time, for Europeans, there was the possibility that New South Wales (the eastern edge of which had been mapped by James Cook) was not the same landmass as New Holland (the western portion of the continent, with a coastline in part mapped by Dutch navigators). The Sydney settlement was slow to spread inland, and in its early years was more tightly tied to the Pacific on its doorstep than to its continental hinterland. As other British colonies were established on the continent that pattern was repeated: colonisation led to exploration, not the other way round.



Figure 24: Map of Australia published in Matthew Flinders' account of his voyage. 1814. From the [State Library of New South Wales](#). Refer to SLNSW for usage rights

As the edges of the Australian continent were being charted by ocean-going explorers and voyagers, the continental interior remained a blank space on European maps. Famously, James Cook produced a detailed

map of large portions of the east coast during his 1770 voyage along it, and by the time of Cook's *Endeavour* voyage portions of the north, west, and south coasts had been surveyed and partially mapped by a variety of European explorers. The establishment of Sydney did not immediately lead to increased European knowledge of the continent. A quirk of geography meant that the settlement was able to spread only a short way inland before being caged in by the hills and mountains of the Great Dividing Range. The settlement initially spread to encompass the welcoming, coastal Cumberland Plain, but then faced significant barriers before it could tap into resources further inland. Early Sydney sought its supplies in Tahiti and Aotearoa (New Zealand) and those vital connections confirmed the colony's position: it was a coastal rather than a continental settlement, and the Pacific on its front door step was of greater significance to its survival than the continent behind it.

Once Sydney was established as a European base, coastal exploration of the Australian continent intensified. In 1795 coastal exploration to Sydney's south by Matthew Flinders and George Bass established that the scrap of coast mapped by Tasman (named Van Diemen's Land) was part of an island (in 1856 that island became a colony separate from New South Wales and officially took the name Tasmania). The charting of Bass Strait (between Van Diemen's Land and the continent) promised quicker transit from Britain to Sydney by sea. Between 1801 and 1803 Flinders captained an expedition that undertook the first close circumnavigation of the Australian continent. His journal and the map he constructed were not published until 1814. They contained the first clear map of the coast of the Australian continent, and a proposal that it be named 'Australia'. As a result of Flinders' 1801-3 voyage it was finally clear what landmass was in the process of being colonised by the British, although that map only clarified the coast, and left the inland almost entirely blank.



Figure 25: Photograph of terrain typical of the Blue Mountains west of Sydney. 2019. By Abracadabra68 and from [Wikimedia Commons](#). CC BY 4.0

The settlement of Sydney soon sought to break out of the Cumberland Plain, but European explorers struggled to find a way through the Great Dividing Range—that extensive range of mountains and hills that divides the

east coast of Australia from the interior and that marks the watershed of the eastern continent. The settlers of Sydney had made multiple attempts to find a way through the Blue Mountains to the settlement's west, but only succeeded in 1813. Once that barrier had been successfully crossed (25 years after the establishment of the Sydney colony), European exploration of the interior could begin.

British interests had not waited for exploration of Sydney's hinterland before establishing other colonial outposts along the continent's coast. In 1802 the British formalised their claim to Van Diemen's Land, in response to concerns about the motives behind Nicholas Baudin's expedition, a French circumnavigation of the Australian continent that occurred at the same time as Flinders'. British claims to that island were then cemented with the sending of convicts to the Derwent River to establish an outpost in 1803, and the establishment of a second convict settlement on the Tamar River in 1804. Both settlements had unknown hinterlands when established, and were only connected by an overland route in 1807.

In 1823 the Brisbane River and Moreton Bay region were mapped by John Oxley, and again British claims were cemented by dispatching convict settlers. A first attempt at European settlement in the region was made in 1824 at Moreton Bay, but that settlement needed to be relocated in 1825, at which time it was renamed Brisbane. In 1826 a military outpost was established at Albany in the southwest of the continent, and in 1827 Britain claimed the west of the continent, sending convicts to establish a settlement at King George Sound. In 1827 the Swan River was explored, and Perth was established in 1829 as a free settlement (it became a penal settlement in 1849). Similarly, the region that is now South Australia was not staked out using convicts, but still followed the typical Australian pattern of settlement being followed by exploration, rather than the other way around. As did Victoria: Melbourne was first established in 1835 by private settlers. When Australia's colonies were first established they were fictions and hopes marked onto maps, they did not reflect real European control of the region being claimed.

Once planted, settlements promoted exploration as they sought resources to become self-sustaining. Many European exploring expeditions were pragmatic in their aims: they sought to locate reliable water sources, to map rivers to unlock routes into the interior and provide reliable means of transport, to locate good pasture (generally in association with rivers), and sometimes to locate other natural resources, including minerals. This process was repeated at each new settlement, and those settlements were at first connected by coastal shipping, not by overland routes. The frontiers of European settlement spread inland slowly and unevenly. In Australia, often the frontier spread independently of government control as pastoralists sought resources for their animals while government survey and official land alienation trailed behind.

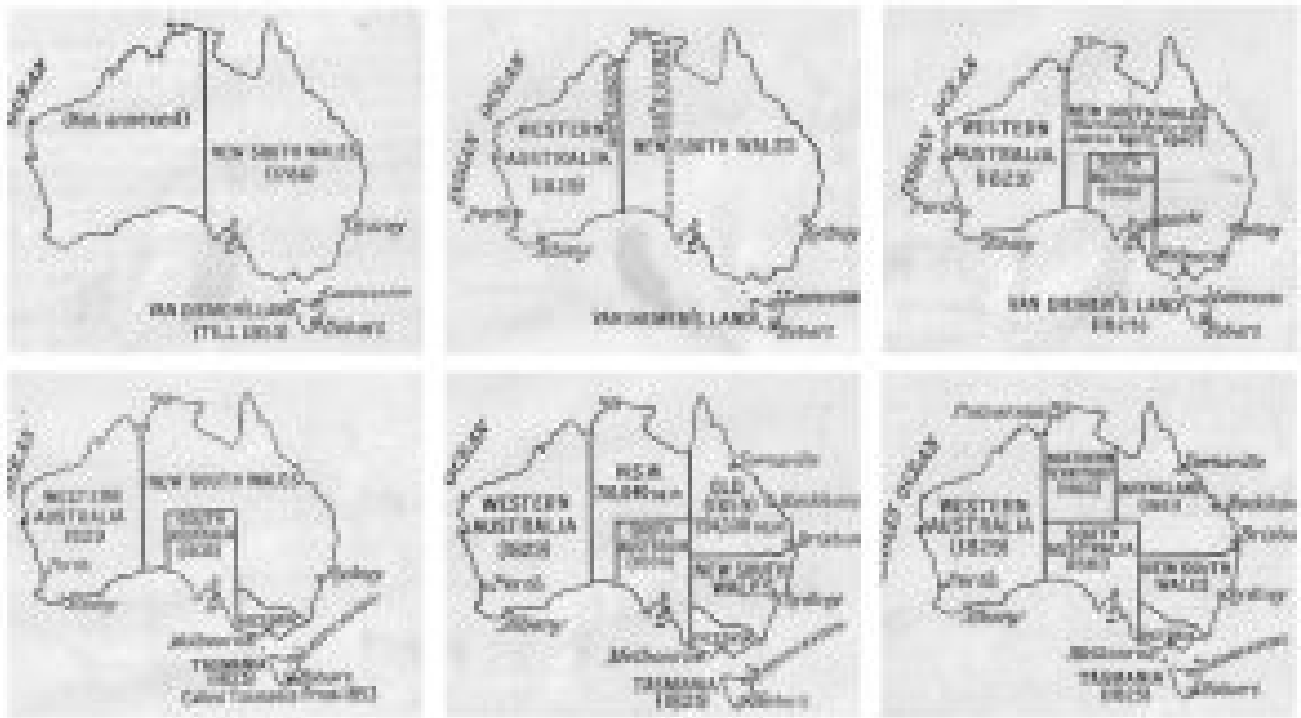


Figure 26: Montage of maps showing progress of Australian settlement. 1916. Images by Ernest Scott (montage by Claire Brennan) and from [Project Gutenberg](#). [Public Domain](#)

Cook's New South Wales came to be divided among the emerging colonies, reflecting the progress of European settlement on the Australian continent. The settlements in Tasmania had occurred early in the colonial process, and in 1825 Van Diemen's Land separated from the colony of New South Wales. In 1829 Western Australia was proclaimed as a colony, the only Australian colony to form without taking land from New South Wales. In 1834 the province of South Australia was officially proclaimed. In 1841 New Zealand formally separated from New South Wales, following the 1840 signing of the Treaty of Waitangi. In 1851 Victoria separated from New South Wales as European settlement there intensified. And in 1859 Queensland separated from New South Wales. Those dates, while referring to political acts, reflect the staggered arrival of the frontier in different regions of Australia.

But even as settler Australia divided up the continent, it was not not fully explored and known by Europeans. By the late nineteenth century the hope of finding new pastoral regions was dead, and exploration instead used science for its rationale. The difficulties of travelling through the extensive arid regions of the continent (and the lack of tangible rewards for doing so) meant that significant geographical features of the Australian continent remained unknown until the advent of aerial photography. The aerial photographic survey of Lake Eyre in 1922 was a logistical feat, and a milestone in beginning to finalise the map of the interior of the Australian continent. Aerial surveys revealed significant landscape features previously unknown to Europeans, but no new fertile regions came to light. Australian settlement remains largely restricted to narrow bands along portions of the continent's coast and aerial mapping has finally destroyed the prospect of Australia being the lavish southern continent long imagined by Europeans.

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CHAPTER 8

Aboriginal engagement with European exploration

Just as had been the case in the Pacific, when European explorers of the Australian continent set out into their unknown they entered a place that was already well known to its inhabitants. European exploration along the coast revealed unmistakable evidence of human habitation and often involved contact with Indigenous inhabitants. As European explorers travelled into the interior they travelled into populated regions. Some encounters between European explorers and Traditional Owners were distant, some confrontational, and some cooperative.

When the Australian continent was first glimpsed by European explorers it was clear it was a peopled place. Signs of habitation (including fires and the smoke from fires, dwellings, tools, and graves) were visible, even when people were not. And early contact with the Australian continent included contact with Indigenous people. In the north and west Dutch voyagers recorded their acts of violence and their confusion when trying to establish contact. Similarly, the early English explorer William Dampier was contemptuous when Aboriginal people judged his trade goods not worthy of working to obtain. On the east coast James Cook speculated about the virtues of Aboriginal ways of living, and during extended contact in the region of the Endeavour River he demonstrated his ignorance of local customs and resource management.

The establishment of the Sydney settlement brought more extended interactions between Europeans and the Aboriginal groups of that area. As expeditions set out from Sydney to explore first the coast, and then the interior of the Australian continent, Aboriginal people from the Sydney region travelled as guides. Like Tupaia (the Tahitian priest, navigator, and linguist who travelled on the *Endeavour*), such guides travelled beyond the bounds of their own country, but they had knowledge and skills that remained useful. Bolanderee and Colbee travelled with Watkin Tench in 1791 on an early overland expedition to explore Sydney's hinterland. Guringai man Bungaree travelled with Matthew Flinders on his voyages to Moreton Bay in 1797, and around the continent in 1801-3, almost certainly becoming the first Indigenous person to circumnavigate the Australian continent.

Such guides did not share a language with all the people they encountered, but they understood cultural protocols and were able to guide the Europeans in behaving appropriately and being acceptable visitors. They also had bushcraft skills useful to the Europeans with whom they travelled. Those skills included tracking lost members of their party, human as well as animal. Many Aboriginal guides were valued by their companions for their personal attributes, as well as their value as workers. Aboriginal guides remained essential to European exploration until the middle of the nineteenth century, when improved technology and bushcraft meant that European explorers were able to survive without them. The Burke and Wills expedition of 1860-1 was the first European exploring party to dispense with permanent Aboriginal guides, and while that expedition ended in disaster it marked a turning point in the relationship between European explorers and Aboriginal people.

Exploring parties also made use of temporary guides. Aboriginal people at times joined expeditions, acted as guides in their own country, and left when their interest in the expedition waned. Most of the Aboriginal people involved with European explorers were men, suggesting that Aboriginal people saw the explorers

as potentially dangerous. There were exceptions, including Wiradjuri woman Turandurey who acted as a temporary guide for Thomas Mitchell's expedition in 1836. Such temporary guides probably acted from a range of motives, which may have included curiosity about the newcomers, a desire to move the explorers out of their country as quickly as possible, and the need to guide explorers away from sacred sites.

As European explorers travelled inland they encountered many people. When John Oxley pressed inland in 1817 he liked the country he was travelling through and acknowledged that it was already inhabited by people. Oxley recognised Aboriginal knowledge of country in that he considered the presence of people a clear indication of land rich in water, grass, and animals. Similarly, Hamilton Hume and William Hovell in 1824 noted that they actively looked for Aboriginal campfires as a way to find good country. Mitchell was able to claim a region as new, while also recording traditional names for its features and noting the presence of people. At times European explorers travelled along well-trodden paths linking important resources, and learned the names of significant landscape features from local informants: all inescapable signs that the country they were exploring was already well known.

Traditional Owners reacted to the presence of European expeditions in a variety of ways. Sometimes they simply kept their distance, at other times they interacted with explorers or with Aboriginal guides and shared resources, and at times explorers were made to feel unwelcome. Local people could use burning practices and the production of smoke to make explorers uncomfortable, speed them along, or exclude them from some areas. Some groups met explorers with threatening displays, including the shaking of weapons, and unnerving noises close by during the night. And sometimes local people attacked explorers, wounding or killing them. Explorers were constantly aware that they were in peopled places, and that they were outnumbered. Early explorers required guides to act as negotiators and peacemakers, later explorers were better able to depend on weapons to enforce their intrusions.

European explorers could not ignore the presence of people, but their reactions to the people they met varied depending on their preconceptions and circumstances. Some Aboriginal guides, and some of the people encountered, fitted European expectations of noble savages and the records of them in explorer journals are glowing and recognise their physical beauty, grace, and skills. When explorers were made to feel unwelcome, or when resources were scarce, the people they encountered were described quite differently. When there was conflict, violence, or the threat of violence, European explorers considered the people they encountered to be ignoble savages and tended to compare them to demons and wild animals.

While an Aboriginal presence throughout the Australian continent is clear in the journals written by European explorers, it was until the late twentieth century that historians subjected the interactions between Aboriginal and European explorers to sustained scholarly scrutiny. The cooperation of Aboriginal guides with explorers who brought settler colonialism in their wake requires thoughtful interpretation. The worldviews of Aboriginal guides were complex and coherent, as were their motivations. Their actions were at times heroic, and their loyalties reflected their circumstances. The actions of Aboriginal guides, and of the Aboriginal people encountered by explorers, are known to us by reports written from a European viewpoint. Despite their distortions, the reports contained within explorer journals allow us to glimpse Traditional Owners, and offer us an opportunity to interpret their reported actions while considering their probable motivations, respecting their intelligence, and seeking to understand their cultural context.

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CHAPTER 9

European engagement with the Australian continent

European exploration of Australia was prompted by hope, and that hope was generally betrayed by reality. Recognizing the shape of the real continent took time and involved disappointment. European explorers of Australia were guided by the experiences of explorers in other parts of the world: their lack of knowledge about the physical conditions of the continent misled them, and they grasped at any evidence that promised to support their preconceived ideas of abundant resources waiting to be exploited. Despite generally returning without rich discoveries to report, explorers have long been seen as heroes who suffered in pursuit of knowledge. As a result, the achievements of those explorers who succeeded in mapping out large regions are often less well known than the experiences of those who suffered through their encounters with the Australian continent.

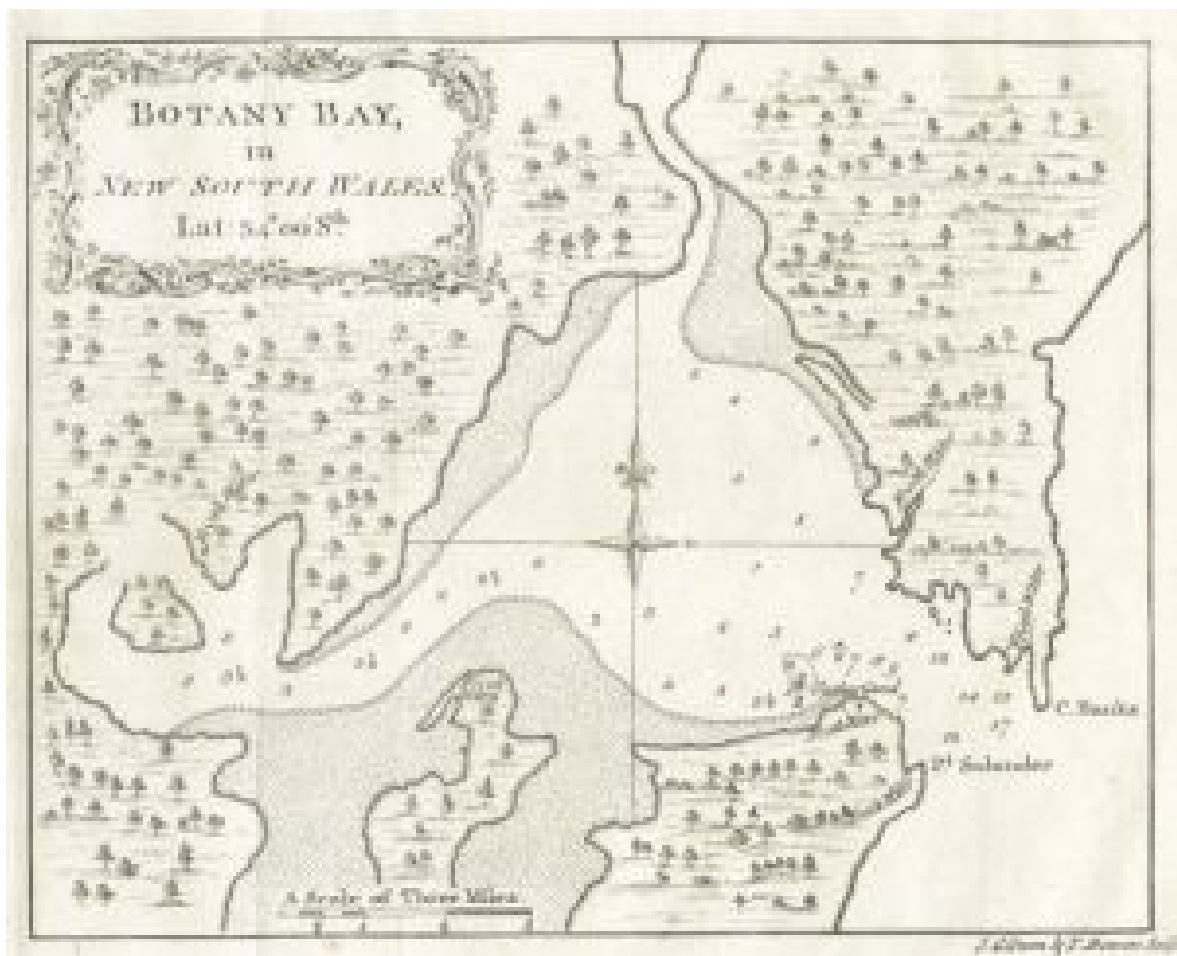


Figure 27: Map of Botany Bay region from the Endeavour voyage. 1773. By James Cook, John Gibson, Thomas Bowen and John Hawkesworth, and from [State Library of Queensland](#). Refer to SLQ for usage rights

Sydney was founded on the basis of the *Endeavour's* reports of conditions at Botany Bay, and those reports were misleading. The *Endeavour* spent eight days in the Botany Bay region in April and May 1770. James Cook reported the presence of woods, lawns, marshes, grazing animals and tall trees to provide good timber. He praised the prospect of easy cultivation given the lack of undergrowth, and the quality of the soil. While Cook encountered the country's Traditional Owners throughout his stay, he considered the population of the area to be sparse. Cook's report of the region—with lush grass, full creeks, and few people—was not the experience of the convict settlers who arrived in January 1788. But the failure of reality to live up to expectation in the case of the first region of Australia to be settled did not deflate European hopes for the interior.

The physical size of the Australian continent has often been misinterpreted as an indication of economic potential. Much larger than Europe, and only fractionally smaller than North America, the potential indicated by Australia's expanse is undermined by its lack of rain. Australia is the world's driest inhabited continent, and large areas are barely populated because they are too dry to support sizeable human populations and their endeavours. However, the early European explorers of Australia were not in a position to predict that rain did not fall over most of the continent on a reliable basis. Instead, the location of Sydney made a number of rivers visible to settlers. That those rivers were smaller than might be expected did not lead to the conclusion that comparatively little rain fell on the continent, instead it led to speculation about where the continent's waters might be found.

European experiences in the exploration of other continents reinforced expectations that exploration in Australia would both reveal rivers and be aided by them. In North America European explorers had earlier exploited rivers, including the Mississippi, Missouri, and Dehcho (Mackenzie River), finding them navigable and valuable. In Africa, exploration occurring at much the same time as the European exploration of Australia made use of the Niger, Zambezi, and Congo as routes into the interior of the continent. For explorers, rivers held the prospect both of relatively easy travel and of the well-watered lands they wished to find.

It was logical for explorers within Australia to seek to use rivers as a way of locating useful resources and penetrating the inland. In 1817 John Oxley led an expedition to trace the course of the Lachlan River. In 1818 he set out along the Macquarie River. In both instances he found his way blocked by impenetrable marshland. Oxley concluded that the Australian interior was useless marsh, but rivers continued to offer explorers hope that the Australian continent could be profitably explored.

In late 1828 Charles Sturt set off during a drought to explore the marshlands located by Oxley. He located a river he named the Darling, part of Australia's most extensive river system. However, the drought had shrunk the Darling and what water it contained was salty. He returned to explore further in late 1829, and encountered other rivers within the Murray-Darling Basin including the Murrumbidgee. Expecting to be able to use rivers to explore, Sturt had brought a whale boat with him. He was able to use it to explore the Murrumbidgee and reach a river he renamed the Murray (as well as having Indigenous names, the river had been named the Hume River in 1824) which he followed to Lake Alexandrina (very nearly the sea). Sturt and his men suffered considerable hardships, and located southeast Australia's significant river system. While Sturt's account led to further settlement in the region, in comparison to the great rivers of other continents the Murray-Darling is long, but does not carry a large amount of water, or support a large human population.

Thomas Mitchell, a pragmatic and efficient surveyor and explorer, continued official exploration in the interior of New South Wales. Several of Mitchell's expeditions were prompted by the hope of a large river flowing north from northern New South Wales. Such a river would provide both an explanation of where the rain expected to fall to the west of the Great Dividing Range went, and a convenient route between New South Wales and India. In 1831 Mitchell led an expedition in part prompted by the account of a recaptured convict, George Clarke. Clarke had spent time with Aboriginal people, and claimed to have seen the 'Kindur', a great river that flowed north. While Clarke's testimony was not consistent across his various interviews with colonial authorities, it accorded with expectations at the time that Australia's large rivers remained undiscovered. However, on his 1831 expedition, Mitchell ascertained that the Kindur did not exist. In 1835 Mitchell set off again hoping to find

that the Darling led north. He discovered that it did not, although he set out again in 1836 to more fully explore the Murray and the Darling. In 1845, after spending time in England, Mitchell again set out hoping to find Australia's great, northward flowing river. This time he located a river he named the Victoria, which he thought ran north. Further investigation by Edmund Kennedy in 1847 found that river (the Barcoo) turned south and joined Cooper Creek, ultimately draining into Lake Eyre.



Figure 28: Map of Australia titled "Sketch of the Coasts of Australia and the Supposed Entrance of the Great River Principally Designed to Illustrate the Narrative of M. Baudins Voyage on the West and N.W. Coasts." 1831. By T.J. Maslen and Charles Joseph Hullmandel, and from the [State Library of New South Wales](#). Refer to SLNSW for usage rights

Speculation about the prospect of as-yet-unknown rivers enriching and unlocking the Australian continent, coupled with subsequent disappointment, was not limited to the east of the continent. In the west, George Fletcher Moore, a settler interested in Noongar language and culture, considered the absence of large rivers combined with Aboriginal stories to be convincing evidence of a nearby inland sea. He published the book *Evidences of an Inland Sea* in 1837. In 1836-7 and 1839 George Grey led two expeditions in Western Australia looking for the western equivalent of the Murray River. Despite Dutch explorers earlier rejecting the potential of western Australia, Grey hoped to find a well-watered interior, fed by the rivers that had not been found entering the ocean. Grey was enthusiastic about his finds, but the rivers and pastures he located were seasonal, and no western version of the Murray exists.



Figure 29: Photograph of gibber plain in Sturt's Stony Desert. 2014. By Mark Marathon and from [Wikimedia Commons](#). CC BY-SA 4.0

In 1844 Sturt set off from Adelaide, and took with him a boat to sail the inland sea. Sturt's belief in the existence of an inland sea was unusual, and other explorers and geographers tended to pin their hopes for the Australian continent on large rivers, rather than an extensive lake. Sturt's expedition travelled as far as Sturt's Stony Desert, but even there the prospect of Australia's inland sea did not completely evaporate. Faced with the desert, Sturt consoled himself with the thought that while the inland sea might not exist anymore, it had existed in the distant past. He also expressed hope that it might still exist further north. Those hopes were finally destroyed by the crossing of the Australian continent in 1860. The parallel expeditions of Burke and Wills and John McDouall Stuart crossed the continent from south to north and confirmed the absence of permanent large rivers and lakes.

Overall, European explorers in Australia did not find what they were looking for. Australia's limited and unreliable rainfall makes it an unusual continent. Long, large, and navigable rivers unlocking a hinterland with agricultural potential do not exist in Australia as they do in other continents. Near the Australian coast there are well-watered pastures and well-timbered forests, but they had been quickly located by European surveyors and colonists. Exploration continued, but in many ways it became a test of hardiness and the ability to suffer in pursuit of a noble aim rather than an economic project.

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CHAPTER 10

Non-British European expeditions to the Australian continent

In the end, colonisation and exploration of the Australian continent was largely a British project. Large parts of the coastline had been mapped by Dutch voyagers in service of Dutch East India Company interests in Asia, some land expeditions (most notably those of Ludwig Leichhardt) included Europeans of non-British origin, but the history of Australian exploration and increasing European knowledge of the continent is a largely British one. That was not a foregone conclusion: other European powers were involved in Pacific exploration, and French explorers surveyed the Australian coastline and were seen as threatening British colonial projects on the continent.

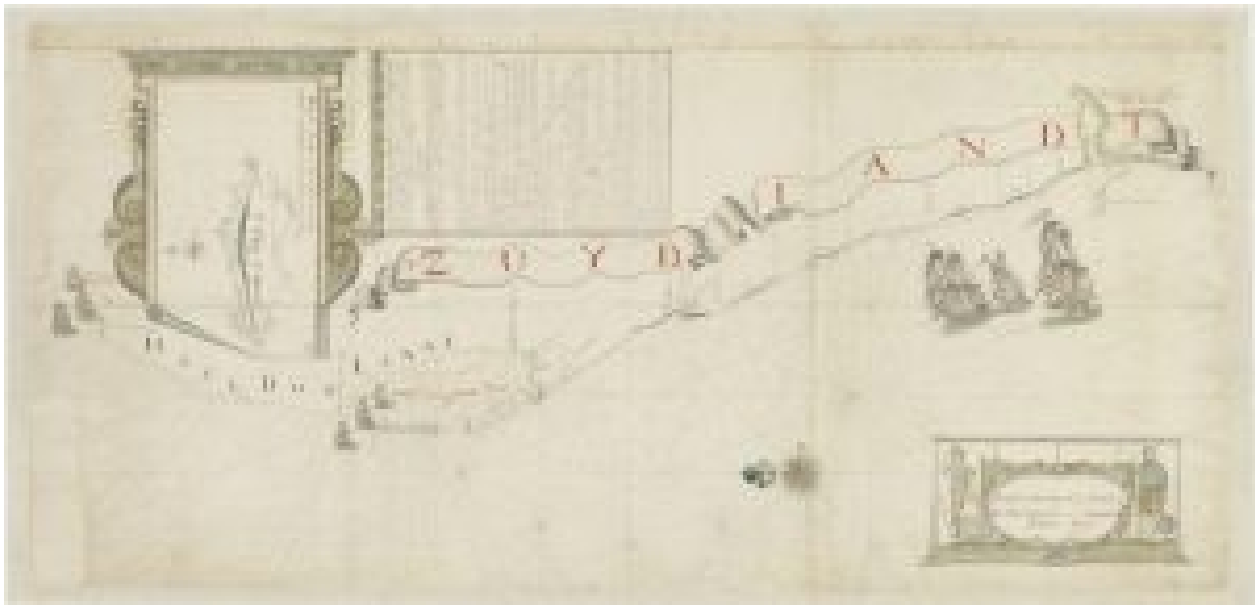


Figure 30: Dutch map of western Australian coast produced from Willem de Vlamingh's expedition. 1697. From [National Archives of the Netherlands](#). CC0 Public Domain

Britain was not the only European state interested in the potential of colonisation. The Dutch had partially mapped the northern, western, and southern fringes of the Australian continent before Cook's charting of the east coast. The knowledge obtained by the Dutch-led them to avoid the continent, rather than seek to set up trading posts or colonies. Within the Pacific, Britain was only one of several European states to engage in exploration and annexation. In particular, the frequency of French expeditions increased from the late-eighteenth century onwards, and France sought to claim places judged to be of ongoing value. For French explorers, interest in the Pacific led them to explore portions of the Australian coast.

Two French expeditions to the Pacific around the time of Cook's *Endeavour* voyage skirted the Australian continent. During his 1766-9 circumnavigation of the world, French navigator Louis-Antoine de Bougainville

saw sections of what is now known as the Great Barrier Reef. Despite sighting, naming, and mapping several reefs in roughly the region where the *Endeavour* soon after experienced severe difficulty, Bougainville did not chart or claim the east coast of the Australian continent. While some of Bougainville's sailors claimed they sighted land, Bougainville protected his ships by declining to explore further. French navigator Jean-François de Surville's 1769-70 voyage to the Pacific overlapped with Cook's *Endeavour* voyage. De Surville and Cook narrowly missed encountering each other in Aotearoa (New Zealand). Before reaching Aotearoa, de Surville had passed between New Caledonia and the Australian coast: de Surville remained further from the continent than Bougainville but his was another French voyage that skirted Australia's east coast before Cook mapped it.



Figure 31: Image of early Sydney created by an artist with the Spanish Malaspina expedition. 1793. By Fernando Brambila and from the [British Library](#). Public Domain

Australia was also visited by a Spanish expedition shortly after the establishment of the colony at Sydney. Alejandro Malaspina (himself Italian) sailed from Spain in 1789. He explored the coasts of North and South America, followed the traditional Spanish route across the Pacific to Manila, but took a more southerly route on his return. He visited the new British colony in New South Wales, then called at islands in central Polynesia, before returning to Spain in 1794.

The French presence in the Pacific increased from the late eighteenth century onwards. In the period between Cook's *Endeavour* voyage and the establishment of the Sydney settlement, the French navigator Marion Dufresne skirted the south of the Australian continent, landing in what is now Tasmania in 1772 (Cook visited Tasmania in 1776). The southern outline of that island had already been mapped by the Dutch explorer Abel Tasman in 1642. French navigators visited other parts of the Australian coast previously mapped by the Dutch, and in 1772 French navigator Louis François Marie Aleno de Saint Aloüarn landed on Dirk Hartog Island, and claimed New Holland for France.

The settlement of Sydney marked a shift in exploration of the Pacific as it was a European port on the western edge of the Pacific Ocean. The establishment of Sydney also marked the consolidation of British claims to New South Wales, and subsequently the Australian continent, following James Cook's claim of possession in 1770. The arrival of the First Fleet in Botany Bay in 1788 was followed eight days later by that of the French

navigator Jean François de Galaup, comte de Lapérouse. The presence of the First Fleet was significant in two ways: it marked Britain's claim to the region of New South Wales, and (despite the First Fleet being in the process of shifting its colonisation attempt from Botany Bay to Port Jackson) it made the site enough of a European port that Lapérouse was able to leave a copy of his journal there to be returned to Europe. Before his arrival in Botany Bay Lapérouse had undertaken extensive exploration in the Pacific, after his departure he was shipwrecked at Vanikoro (now part of the Solomon Islands) and lost from European knowledge until 1826. Sydney's role as a European port meant that Lapérouse's earlier observations survived the destruction of his vessels.

In 1791 French explorer Bruni D'Entrecasteaux was sent to the Pacific to search for Lapérouse. D'Entrecasteaux landed in Tasmania in 1792, then completed a very loose circumnavigation of the Australian continent, passing closer to New Caledonia than to the Australian coast, visiting the Moluccas, then landing on the western coast of the Australian continent before returning to Tasmania and then landing at New Caledonia. The expedition did not visit Sydney. D'Entrecasteaux died during the voyage, which was further disrupted by European politics in the aftermath of the French Revolution. Loyalties within the expedition were split, and the expedition's records were claimed by various foreign powers. In 1796 the records and specimens taken during the expedition finally arrived in France, in part through the intercession of Sir Joseph Banks.



Figure 32: Map of Australia from the Baudin expedition, drawn by Louis de Freycinet. 1811. From the [National Library of Australia](#). Public Domain

In 1801-3 Matthew Flinders' expedition mapped the coastlines of New South Wales and New Holland, and confirmed those two regions were part of one continent. That voyage was shadowed by a French scientific expedition under the command of Nicholas Baudin. Baudin's expedition departed France in 1800, explored the western, northern, and southern Australian coasts, and encountered Flinders' expedition in Encounter Bay. After that encounter Baudin's ships headed to Sydney, where the expedition remained for several months before returning south to complete exploration of the region around Van Diemen's Land and along the southern coast of the continent. The expedition's interest in Van Diemen's Land triggered a hastily arranged

expedition from Sydney that consolidated Britain's claim to the southern portion of New South Wales. While Baudin's expedition did not circumnavigate the continent, it resulted in the first published map of what the French named Terre Napoleon and Flinders suggested be called Australia.

French interest in the Pacific continued throughout the nineteenth century, and French expeditions continued to visit Australian shores. Louis de Freycinet's 1817-20 voyage around the world visited the northwest coast of Australia, and the settlement at Sydney. De Freycinet was a veteran of the Baudin expedition and had visited Sydney previously. French explorer Louis Isidore Duperrey visited the western and southern coasts of Australia, as well as calling in at Sydney, during his 1822-5 circumnavigation of the world. Hyacinthe de Bougainville (veteran of the Baudin expedition and son of Louis-Antoine de Bougainville), visited the west coast, Van Diemen's Land and Sydney during his 1824-6 circumnavigation of the world. During his 1826-9 Pacific expedition Jules Dumont d'Urville (veteran of the Duperrey expedition) called at King George Sound, Westernport, Jervis Bay and Sydney before exploring the Pacific. That expedition visited Hobart while conducting a loose circumnavigation of Australia before returning to Europe. During his 1837-40 circumnavigation of the world d'Urville visited Hobart twice. Cyrille Pierre Théodore Laplace landed in both Van Diemen's Land and Sydney during his 1830-2 global circumnavigation.

The presence of French voyagers on Australian shores before 1840 marked the dual colonising interests of the two European powers. In Australasia Britain outmaneuvered France, at times establishing colonies precisely to thwart French interests. This was the case in Aotearoa in 1840 when the British signed the Treaty of Waitangi to claim sovereignty over the islands in the face of French interests that extended to land purchase and plans for a French colony at Akaroa. Inspired by the apparent success of Sydney as a colony and a solution to the management of criminals, in 1864 France established New Caledonia as a penal settlement, only 1500km from the Australian coast.

British and French ambitions in the Pacific were linked, as European states competed for colonies throughout the world in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. From the late eighteenth century European technology made navigation of the Pacific more reliable, and Britain and France both turned to scientific survey and exploration as a way to establish national prestige. That the Australian continent would be fully claimed by Britain was not a foregone conclusion, and the continuing presence of French explorers along its coast links the history of Australian exploration to that of the Pacific, and to the European rivalries that played out there.

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Further videos:

A lecture on French Encounters in New Holland, presented by Shino Konishi and Global Encounters & First Nations People, https://vimeo.com/519309370?embedded=true&source=vimeo_logo&owner=13123923

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PART IV

THE OTHER(ED) EXPLORERS

CHAPTER 11

Pasifika explorers

Europeans and their vessels were objects of great interest to people in the Pacific. Throughout Polynesia, islanders quickly recognised the value of Europeans' metal tools and sought to exploit their ocean-going prowess. Ahutoru (a Tahitian) reached France in 1769, courtesy of Louis-Antoine de Bougainville's expedition. He was the first Tahitian explorer to set off for Europe, but not the last. Other Tahitians, quickly followed by people from other island groups, seized early opportunities to travel on European vessels. As European voyages to the Pacific increased in number and frequency, Pasifika began to travel widely and to exploit new opportunities for employment, and for adventure.

When Europeans arrived in Oceania they encountered societies with strong cultures of voyaging and exploration. The islands of the Pacific were peopled because islanders were skilled navigators who both travelled between the island groups of central Polynesia and undertook adventurous voyages into previously unknown regions. Voyaging to the far corners of Polynesia—Hawai'i, Rapa Nui (Easter Island) and Aotearoa (New Zealand)—no longer occurred by the time of European arrival in Oceania, but Polynesian vessels were capable of reliably covering enormous distances. When European vessels began to call at Pacific Islands, they represented a new means of travel, but not a new relationship with voyaging.



Figure 33: Portrait of Mai. 1780. By Johann Jacobe, John Boydell, Joshua Reynolds, and from the [National Library of Australia](#). Public Domain

Ahutoru was the first Tahitian to reach Europe and remained in France for a year. He enjoyed his time there, feted as an intriguing and attractive exotic specimen, but died during the voyage meant to return him to Tahiti. The second Tahitian to set off for Europe was Tupaia, accompanied by his servant Taiata. Tupaia was a priest and navigator who played an important role in the *Endeavour's* voyage in the Pacific, but neither Tupaia nor Taiata survived the voyage to Europe. The third attempt by Tahitians to voyage to Europe resulted in a successful return voyage by Mai. While Cook did not consider Mai to be the intellectual equal of Tupaia, he was handsome and caused a sensation on his arrival in England in 1774. Mai returned to Tahiti in 1777.

Early travel by Tahitians to Europe fitted with the cultural expectations of both parties. The Pacific has strong traditions of travel; Europeans have a long history of curiosity about people from elsewhere, and a history of importing humans as curiosities for examination and public show. The experiences of the first Tahitians to reach Europe were enjoyable: they were feted and treated well, and at the conclusion of their time in Europe efforts were made to return them home. This was not the experience of all 'human specimens', and while the Tahitians travelled willingly, other travellers to Europe had been kidnapped, deceived, or otherwise exhibited without full consent. Indigenous peoples from the Pacific, and then from Australia, continued to be of interest to European audiences, but the hospitality accorded to Ahutoru and Mai was not extended to later travellers. The European (and then North American) appetite for human exhibitions was such that between 1800 and 1958 35,000 individuals were exhibited around the world, and those people were seen by over one billion spectators. However, many of those individuals were coerced to travel, and many did not survive to return home.



Figure 34: Portrait of Hitihiti. 1775. By William Hodges and from [National Library of Australia](#). Public Domain

Not all the Pacific travellers who used European expeditions of exploration as transport chose Europe as a destination. Joining the same expedition as Mai, the Tahitian travellers Porio, and then Hitihiti, travelled on the *Resolution* with Cook. Porio (and a woman who stowed away) travelled within the Tahitian group. Hitihiti visited Tonga, Aotearoa, voyaged in Antarctic waters, visited Rapa Nui, the Marquesas Islands and the Tuamotu Archipelago, then returned to Tahiti. Cook's third voyage also attracted Pacific hitchhikers, in this case Te Weherua and Koa who travelled from Aotearoa to Tahiti. While Hitihiti did not join Cook's third expedition he became a useful contact point for Europeans in Tahiti. He met with Cook during Cook's 1777 visit to Tahiti,

advised William Bligh in 1788, and travelled with Edward Edwards on the *Pandora* in pursuit of the *Bounty* mutineers. Such travellers might not have reached Europe, but they put Europeans and their technology to good use within the Pacific in the late eighteenth century.

Travel aboard European vessels quickly became normalised within the Pacific, particularly after Sydney was established as a permanent European port. As European missionaries entered the Pacific from the 1790s, Pasifika travelled with them as guides and as recently-converted teachers. Whaling ships also came to the region from that period onwards, and Pasifika signed on as crew. Sydney itself became a significant destination where Pasifika could observe a European settlement and access European technology, species, and goods.

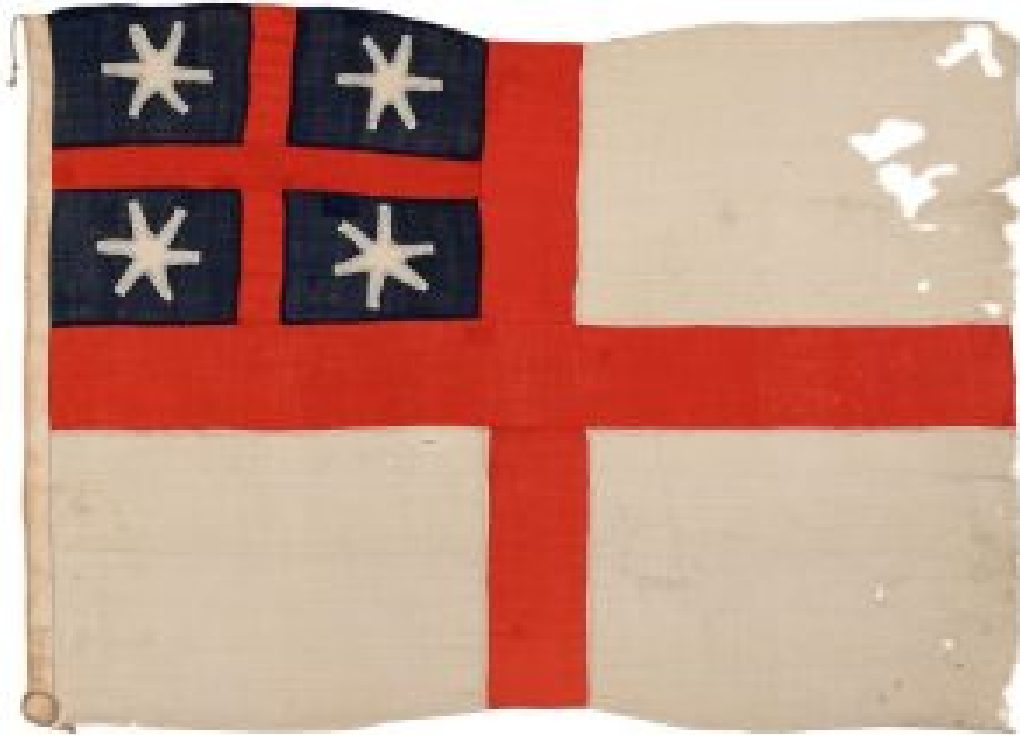


Figure 35: Flag of the United Tribes of New Zealand flown by the New Zealand Company. 1839.
From [Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa](#). CC BY-NC-ND 4.0

As opportunities arose, large numbers of islanders chose to travel. Hawai'i was the first island group to experience the willing departure of many members of its population, and by the 1840s over 1000 Hawaiians a year left to work. Many Hawaiians worked in the North American fur trade, travelling widely within that continent. The presence of Pasifika sailors on European ships quickly became common as islanders were skilled workers willing to undertake wage labour while embracing the opportunity to travel. European technology enabled Islander travel and was adopted by them. In 1834 the United Tribes' flag was adopted to register Māori owned vessels of European design.

Aboriginal Australians also travelled on European ships and with European explorers. Bennelong travelled from Sydney to England in 1792 and returned in 1795. His travelling companion Yemmerrawanne died in England. Aboriginal people travelled on vessels exploring the coast of the Australian continent, and they explored the Australian continent as members of colonial expeditions.

Islanders seized the opportunities that European ships represented. They travelled widely, and quickly began to explore Europe. The establishment of the Sydney colony accelerated travel by people from the Pacific. Sydney became a destination in its own right as a window onto European culture and behaviour, and a place to access European resources. Sydney increased the number of European ships in Pacific waters by providing a safe harbour. And Sydney acted as a transit point for Islanders to travel to other European ports worldwide.

Islanders quickly began to travel in considerable numbers, exploiting new opportunities for exploration, trade, and paid employment.

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CHAPTER 12

Women explorers

Women are rarely mentioned in histories of Australian and Pacific exploration. A few individual women managed to make their ways onto the ships that explored these regions, but they are often overlooked. The absence of women is itself worth examining, as it raises questions about the way exploration is gendered. The exclusion of women from both sea and land exploration in the Pacific and Australia was the result of structural factors, of expectations surrounding exploration, and of the cultural significance of exploration in European societies. Adventurous European, Pasifika, and Aboriginal women who succeeded in joining expeditions make it clear that women were actively excluded rather than incapable of participation, as do the women who participated in the exploration of other parts of the world. The exploration of the southern continent of Antarctica has been undertaken more recently, and the place of women in that process raises interesting questions about the ways in which exploration frequently remains a masculine enterprise.

When the Pacific was a Spanish Lake, women were at times present on Spanish ships. The early Spanish expeditions were conducted by men alone, but as the Spanish began to seek to establish new colonies in the Pacific women became part of that process. Doña Isabel is notorious as a powerful figure on Álvaro de Mendaña de Neira's second voyage to the Pacific in 1595-6; she was the wife and heir of the captain. As the Dutch began to intrude on the western edge of the Australian continent, their ambitions for European communities in their trading centres meant that women sailed on the vessels of the Dutch East India Company (VOC). The voyages of the VOC were not strictly voyages of exploration, instead carrying trade goods between Europe and the VOC's base in Batavia. The 1629 shipwreck of the ship *Batavia* on the western coast of the Australian continent provides a glimpse of the people onboard the Dutch ships skirting the continent; in the aftermath of that disaster a group of mutineers terrorised other survivors, among them women and children.

The expectation that women would form part of European enterprises in the Pacific shifted as exploration became formalised. This process began in the late eighteenth century, and Cook's *Endeavour* voyage was an early example of the new style of European voyages taking place within the Pacific. At this time, Pacific exploration became the preserve of European navies, and in this period there were no formal roles for women aboard naval vessels. As a result, women were excluded from exploration.



Figure 36: Image of arrival of at Timor in which Rose de Freycinet is clearly visible. 1927 publication of Rose de Freycinet's journal. From [National Library of Australia](#). Public Domain

Despite the structural exclusion of women from Pacific exploration, some women managed to travel on European vessels in the Pacific. French naval vessels carried the best-known examples of European women who made their way to the Pacific. Jeanne Baret managed to board Louis-Antoine de Bougainville's 1766-9 circumnavigation as the assistant and valet of the expedition's naturalist Philibert Commerson. She began the voyage posing as a man, and was unmasked only after it was too late for Bougainville to return her to France. Marie Louise Victoire Girardin successfully signed on to Antoine-Raymond-Joseph Bruny d'Entrecasteaux's 1791-3 voyage to search for the lost ships of Jean François de Galaup, comte de Lapérouse. She presented herself as a male steward, and died during the voyage. Mary Beckwith, a convict, managed to leave Sydney aboard Nicolas Baudin's voyage in 1802. Rose de Freycinet accompanied her husband Louis de Freycinet during his 1817-20 circumnavigation. Her courage was widely feted, but the voyage took a heavy toll on her health.

The English Navy supported fewer unexpected women voyagers. Joseph Banks arranged to attempt to smuggle a woman onto James Cook's second voyage to the Pacific, but was himself excluded from the voyage before his plan could unfold. Matthew Flinders attempted to smuggle his wife Ann aboard his ship in 1801 when setting out from England to explore the Australian coast. The subterfuge was detected before Flinders' ship left England, and it is possible that Ann intended to journey only as far as Sydney. A 14-year-old girl was successfully concealed on board the *Bathurst* at the start of Phillip Parker King's 1821 marine survey of Australia. The girl remained concealed until after it was too late for the ship to turn back, but she had an unpleasant voyage as she suffered from seasickness and had to share the rations of the person who smuggled her onboard.

While the ships were within the Pacific, women at times boarded them. During Cook's second Pacific voyage his ship the *Resolution* hosted many Tahitian women. One stowed away on board, in order to travel between islands within the Tahitian group. While sailors sought to welcome women aboard, the lack of women on European vessels at times confused the Europeans' island hosts.

As European exploration of the Australian continent began in earnest in the wake of the establishment of the Sydney settlement, exploration retained its formal, military connections. Within the colony itself, women were a minority. However, women still played roles in the exploration of Australia. During his successful expeditions Thomas Mitchell made extensive use of Aboriginal guides. The guides that signed on for the entirety of his expeditions were male, although Mitchell's guide, Wiradjuri man Piper, was accompanied by his wife, Kitty, during his travels. Mitchell also made use of temporary guides. In 1836 the Wiradjuri woman Turandurey acted as a temporary guide while Mitchell's expedition crossed her country. She was able to act as a guide while travelling with her small daughter, Ballandella. Elsewhere in Australia, Ludwig Leichhardt suspected that his progress during his 1844-6 northern expedition was impeded by interactions between his permanent Aboriginal guides and local Aboriginal women. Leichhardt thought his party was greeted with hostility because of his guides' behaviour.



Figure 37: Photograph of May French Sheldon. 1897. From [Wikimedia Commons](#). Public Domain

The Australian situation was extreme in its exclusion of women from recognised roles in European exploration. Australia was far from Europe, and even getting to the starting point for exploration was expensive. As a result, exploration was firmly under government control. During the period in which Australia was explored the Royal Geographical Society in London was experiencing financial difficulties and unable to offer monetary support to the project of Australian exploration, meaning a major private source of funding was unavailable. In contrast, the African continent was less expensive for European explorers to reach, and more attractive to privately funded expeditions. Women were involved in some famous African expeditions: Lady Florence Baker was recognised as accompanying Sir Samuel White Baker in the 1863 quest for the Nile, May French Sheldon

circumnavigated Lake Chala in 1891, and Mary Hall traversed Africa from the Cape of Good Hope to Cairo in 1904.

The gradual inclusion of women in the exploration of the southern continent of Antarctica offers insight into the exclusion of women from exploration in earlier periods. Antarctic exploration remains a concern largely under government control (Antarctic bases are funded by a variety of national governments and reaching them generally requires the use of military transport). The admission of women scientists to Antarctic research projects was a slow process, and women have encountered barriers based on their gender. One of those barriers is a sense that Antarctica is a place for masculine adventure, and that the presence of women diminishes the heroism displayed by male, polar heroes. Such a consideration might earlier have excluded women from the adventure of exploration: their presence threatened to make it look too easy.

Women were largely effectively excluded from the European exploration of Australia and the Pacific. Some women managed to participate in various ways, but taking up a formal role on naval vessels and government-sponsored expeditions was almost impossible. Some European women managed to disguise themselves (or otherwise conceal their presence aboard) until the ships carrying them had passed the point of no return. Some indigenous women both in Australia and the Pacific managed to join expeditions in temporary capacities. The presence of these adventurous women, and of women scientists who have overcome gendered barriers to participate in polar research, points to the way in which exploration is not naturally an exclusively male adventure, but one from which women have been actively excluded.

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CHAPTER 13

Animal explorers

Animals may not have been deliberate explorers but they were vital to European expeditions of exploration. Animals were present on European ships from their first entry into the Pacific, and they were essential to the overland exploration of the Australian continent. Their abilities facilitated expeditions, their needs (and the disruptions caused by their behaviour) were consuming concerns for many expedition leaders, and the independent advance of feral species into new regions offers a chance to reflect on what exploration actually is.



Figure 38: Photograph of Statue of Trim the cat in Donington, Lincs. at the feet of his master, Matthew Flinders. 2006. By Rodney Burton and from [Wikimedia Commons](#). CC BY-SA 2.0

Animals were a familiar presence on the European vessels that came to the Pacific. They were so familiar that they were rarely recorded within voyage accounts, and they are absent from most modern histories of exploration, and from reconstructed vessels (displaced by a need to find room for modern sanitation and safety requirements). Animals formed part of expeditions' supplies (producing eggs, milk, and meat), they were tools (cats managed vermin), companions (sailors made pets of cats, dogs, parrots, and monkeys), and some animals were present independently of their human hosts (attracted by the prospect of food). Yet, despite their presence they only occasionally appear in journals, generally when they startled indigenous people, when their requirements affected the operation of the ships, or when they suffered accidental death.

Animals were an important part of a functioning ship and supplies of desirable animals were replenished wherever and whenever possible. Pacific explorers stocked up on animals at ports passed on the way to the

Pacific: the Cape Colony, and Batavia. Ships traded for animals within the Pacific: Tahiti was particularly valued for its supplies of pigs, while its chickens did not adapt well to shipboard life. And animals were captured when possible: James Cook's crew captured turtles during their time at the Endeavour River, an act which caused conflict with the local people for whom the turtles were an important source of food and which they reasonably considered to be under their control.

European ships in the Pacific deposited animals, as well as collecting them. Various expeditions left living animals on islands in hope of enriching the lives of local people, while also establishing a supply for later European visitors. Tahiti was an early beneficiary, receiving a turkey and a goose from the *Dolphin*; cattle, pigs, dogs, goats from Domingo Bernardo de Bonechea Andonaegui's 1772-3 expedition; and spaniels, goats, pigs, a goose, sheep, peacocks, turkeys, ducks, cows and a bull, horses, rabbits, cats, poultry, a monkey, and goats from Cook during his various sojourns there. On his voyage aboard the *Resolution* Cook also gifted Tahiti European rats, putting down a gangplank in an attempt to encourage them to leave his ship. In Aotearoa (New Zealand) some types of feral pigs are still referred to as Captain Cookers, and may well be descended from the pigs introduced by Cook, or by the French explorer Jean-François de Surville.



Figure 39: Image from Mitchell's published account, showing the cattle that powered his expedition. 1848. From [Project Gutenberg Australia](#). [Public Domain](#)

Overland expeditions set off with animals as motive power and walking supplies. Exploring the Australian continent while attempting to live off the land tended to be unsuccessful, and driving animals with them allowed explorers to move more quickly than if they attempted to hunt along the way. Some overland expeditions had the delivery of stock to European outposts as their primary concern and conducted exploration as an afterthought. Different explorers used different types of animals, and all had their strengths and weaknesses: horses could move quickly, but required good feed; cattle were more robust, but slower; sheep were manageable but provided only food and not motive power; and camels were robust, strong, and fast but less readily available and less familiar to most European explorers. And all these species of animals had a tendency to stray, and dictated the resources that explorers needed to provide to them. Finding sufficient water to maintain their animal companions in good health was a particular challenge for Australia's European explorers.



Figure 40: Image of the departure of the Burke and Wills expedition from Melbourne, showing some of the expedition's animal members. 1887. From [State Library Victoria](#). [Public Domain](#)

Three expeditions in northern Australia provide examples of the significance of animal explorers. In 1844 Ludwig Leichhardt set off from the Darling Downs to find a route to Port Essington on the north coast of the continent. He intended to travel light and live off the land, but quickly found that he had underestimated his need for animals. On 3 November 1844 Leichhardt sent two human members of his expedition back to civilisation as his initial party of 16 cattle, 17 horses, and 10 men had too high a proportion of men. In 1845, Thomas Mitchell's well-planned and extensive expedition within tropical Australia set off with 80 bullocks, 13 horses, 250 sheep, and 29 men. As had been the case with Leichhardt, the party's progress depended on how long the men needed to spend searching for straying animals, what resources they needed to locate, and how much rest the animals required. The 1864 expedition led by Frank and Alexander Jardine is notorious for the violence it directed at the local populations of the regions it traversed. It is also notable for its commitment to cattle: the expedition was sent to supply the settlement of Somerset on Cape York with a permanent beef supply. The records it produced of country previously only known by its traditional owners was a by-product of its intent to move cattle. The expedition set off with about 250 head of cattle, 41 horses, one mule, and 10 men.

In Australia, animals quickly escaped the control of European settlers. The Cowpastures region near Sydney is named for cattle that escaped from the settlement, multiplied, and were rediscovered by European settlers in 1795. That herd of cattle escaped from the control of its European handlers and 'explored' a previously unknown region of New South Wales. The animals that accompanied explorers, or that lived outside the officially colonised regions of Australia, altered the landscape making their roles as colonisers and settlers in their own right murky. Animals could also act as living markers of the human settler colonial project, allowing explorers to judge the edges of 'civilisation' through signs of their presence. In colonial Australia, European civilisation was marked out with animal dung.

European exploration of Australia and the Pacific occurred at a time when animals were present in human lives as tools and essential supplies. On both ship and shore they served essential services as well as providing spiritual sustenance as companions and sources of cultural reassurance. Early European exploration of the continent would have been impossible without animal horsepower. Some animals were present against human wishes, and some animals absconded from human settlement projects, acclimatising themselves in

new habitats without direct human support. Non-human animals played varied and vital roles in exploration, but have generally been ignored.

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CHAPTER 14

Wooden explorers

Without the ships there would have been no European expeditions to the Pacific. The wooden vessels that carried the explorers both facilitated and limited European activities in the region. Changing technology facilitated navigation, the preservation of sailors' health, and the increasing significance of science in European objectives, but the wooden bubbles that carried Europeans across the Pacific were fallible. Many voyages did not return, and those that did had often narrowly escaped disaster, highlighting the significance of their wooden life support systems. Ships might not qualify as explorers (they lack agency), but they were essential to the European exploration of the Pacific and mapping of the outline of the Australian continent.

Shifts in European ship building technology were essential in allowing Europeans to sail the Pacific. The European discovery of the Americas hinged on the development of ships able to cross the Atlantic and able to endure the difficult conditions of the seas around the southern tip of South America. While the Dutch presence to the west of the Australian continent did not require them to cross the Pacific, that presence also depended on ships able to brave the Atlantic and to cope with the seas around the Cape of Good Hope at the tip of the African continent.

The caravels that took to the Atlantic at the end of the medieval period were heirs to a range of European ship building traditions, and of navigational tools that had become common in Europe. They drew on sturdy engineering first developed for the ships that plied the North Sea, made use of rudders rather than steering oars, and included sails with a lateen rig that allowed them to sail at an angle to the wind. The compass and the astrolabe may have come to Europe by way of the Islamic world, but they had been widely adopted by European navigators by the time Europeans began to explore the Pacific.

As European shipbuilding and navigational technology improved, European naval interests pushed into the Pacific. James Cook's *Endeavour* voyage occurred early in a new phase in European Pacific voyaging, as the relevant technologies became more reliable and voyages more frequent. But even in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries voyages to the Pacific remained risky, and the technologies that supported them continued to limit what it was possible to dare and to achieve.

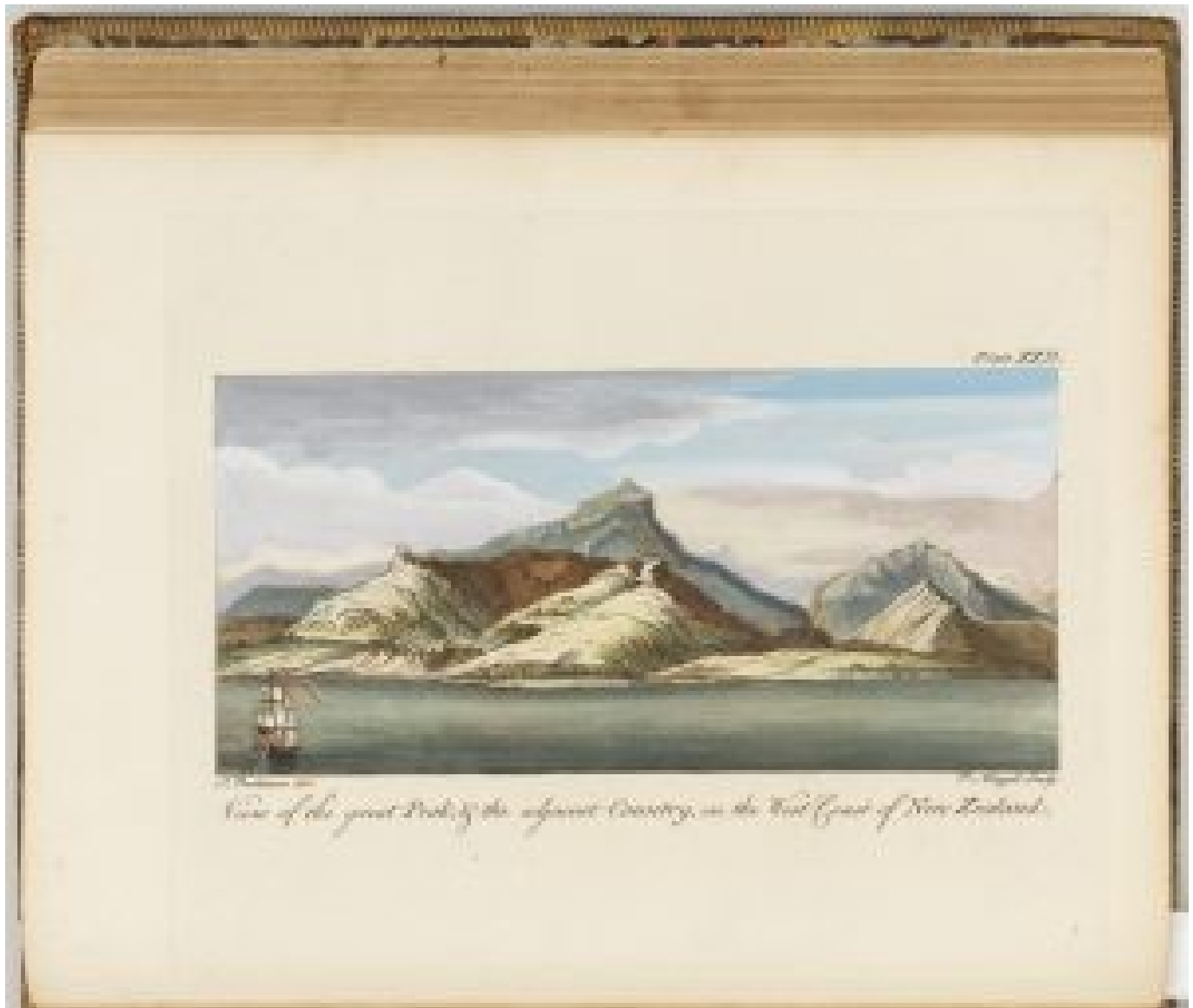


Figure 41: A view of the Endeavour off the coast of New Zealand by Sydney Parkinson, 1784. From the [State Library of New South Wales](#). Refer to SLNSW for usage rights

The *Endeavour* offers a compelling example of the ways in which vessels were central to European exploration. The ship was selected for its Pacific voyage because of its physical attributes: it was able to sail in comparatively shallow water and had room for stores, meaning the ship and could traverse waters of uncertain depth and could voyage independently of regular resupply. These attributes also meant the ship was comparatively slow and unwieldy, factors that limited its ability to travel where its captain wished it to go. Ultimately, the *Endeavour* could only sail where the wind allowed, a fact evident in the journals from the voyage, and in the tracks of its route that Cook included on his maps.



Figure 42: *Depiction of the wreck of Matthew Flinders' ship the Porpoise. 1802. By William Westall and from the National Library of Australia. Public Domain*

The absolute centrality of the ship to exploration is apparent in surviving (and lost) records of exploration. The *Endeavour* narrowly escaped shipwreck on a number of occasions, and its encounter with a coral reef came close to destroying the scientific records that the voyage is famous for. Other vessels were lost, taking their European crews and their records with them: the records of the voyage of Jean François de Galaup, comte de Lapérouse end at Sydney. He took the opportunity of his encounter with the First Fleet to send a copy of his voyage records back to France, but the details of the final leg of his voyage are lost. Captains needed to balance the purpose of their voyages (exploration) against the need to return, and after the *Endeavour* voyage Cook denounced the dangers of sending a single ship to sail uncharted waters. He sailed with two ships on both his subsequent Pacific expeditions.

As Pacific voyages of exploration became the preserve of governments from the late eighteenth century onwards their connections to European institutions affected their voyages. Joseph Banks and Daniel Solander could only botanise at Rio de Janeiro for one day, and only by stealth, as the Portuguese Viceroy there was suspicious of the motives of a British naval voyage. Within the Pacific, interactions with islanders were also influenced by European military considerations. European ships in the Pacific were armed, and in the period of naval exploration those arms were very effective and the damage they could inflict was considerable. In Tahiti, the observatory used to record the transit of Venus was placed where it could be secured by the *Endeavour's* guns, linking a scientific mission with a military operation. In Aotearoa (New Zealand) concerns about the security of his ship meant that Cook fired guns even when not directly under attack.



Figure 43: Cook's map of the Endeavour River. This version published 1893. By James Cook and from the [National Library of Australia](#). Public Domain

And the needs and security of the ships shaped voyages. In the *Endeavour's* case, records of the east coast of the Australian continent reflect the ship's needs. At the conclusion of the *Endeavour's* time in New Zealand the ship was in too poor shape to press southward and search for the Southern Continent, but in too good shape to simply head for the nearest known port and then begin the journey back to Europe. That the *Endeavour* pressed west across the Tasman, and that the east coast of the Australian continent was mapped by Cook, resulted from the physical condition of the ship. The length of time spent in different regions of the east coast was dictated by the ship. The need for fresh water to supply the ship's crew forced the *Endeavour's* rapid progress north. The ship's need for repair led to the seven-week stay at the Endeavour River. Because of the *Endeavour's* wooden frailty, the records of Australia made by members of the *Endeavour's* company are largely records of the region that is now far north Queensland. The ship is also present in Cook's detailed charts of sections of the east coast: its track is recorded, but more fundamentally, the information contained in those charts is the information needed for safe navigation of those regions by European ships.

While ships were not exactly explorers they were exploration's enablers. Without their ships, Europeans could not have explored Oceania. The abilities, limitations, and needs of their ships shaped European encounters within the Pacific, and the ships advanced European scientific understanding of the region by carrying records and securing sites for observation. The ships also limited expeditions, preventing access to island groups without safe anchorage, and reducing the time that scientists could spend ashore as politics, or the needs for resupply, or the need to move with the wind forced ships to move on. At times the ships were unequal to the conditions they faced, sinking entire expeditions and destroying the records and collections they had amassed.

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PART V

THE ORIGINAL EXPLORERS

CHAPTER 15

The Pacific's first navigators

European explorers, working at the limits of their technology and pushing beyond the edges of their known world, were regularly startled to find Polynesians already inhabiting the islands they had only just been able to reach. The term 'Polynesia' is a European one, and it reflects the experience of the European explorers who recognised that the people they encountered in this watery section of the planet shared elements of culture and language. Startled that other people could navigate the region earlier and more thoroughly than they had yet managed themselves, Europeans speculated on how the Polynesians had arrived. Interest in that story of human discovery continues and the story of the original exploration of the Pacific is continually being refined by archaeologists.

Early European explorers were perplexed by the presence of Polynesians on widely scattered islands and sought to explain it. In 1722, Dutch explorer Jacob Roggeveen raised the possibility that the inhabitants of Rapa Nui (Easter Island) had been created there or otherwise directly placed there by God. Europeans, struggling to reliably reach previously visited Pacific Islands, also tended to discount the navigational abilities of Islanders, leading to the enduring idea that the Pacific Islands had been discovered and settled by survivors of vessels blown off course and out to sea. In the nineteenth century there was also some enthusiasm for the idea that the islands of Polynesia were the remnants of a sunken continent which had left only its mountaintops above sea level, holding survivors of a lost civilisation. Some early observers put forward the idea that Polynesians had migrated from Asia, an idea familiar in the present. During the nineteenth century, migration theories proliferated and variously suggested Aryan, European, and Semitic origins for Polynesians, as well as raising the prospect of waves of migration by different peoples across the Pacific at different times. The possibility of a South American origin for Pacific migration was also put forward, supported by biological evidence (in the form of sweet potatoes) of pre-European contact between Oceania and the Americas.

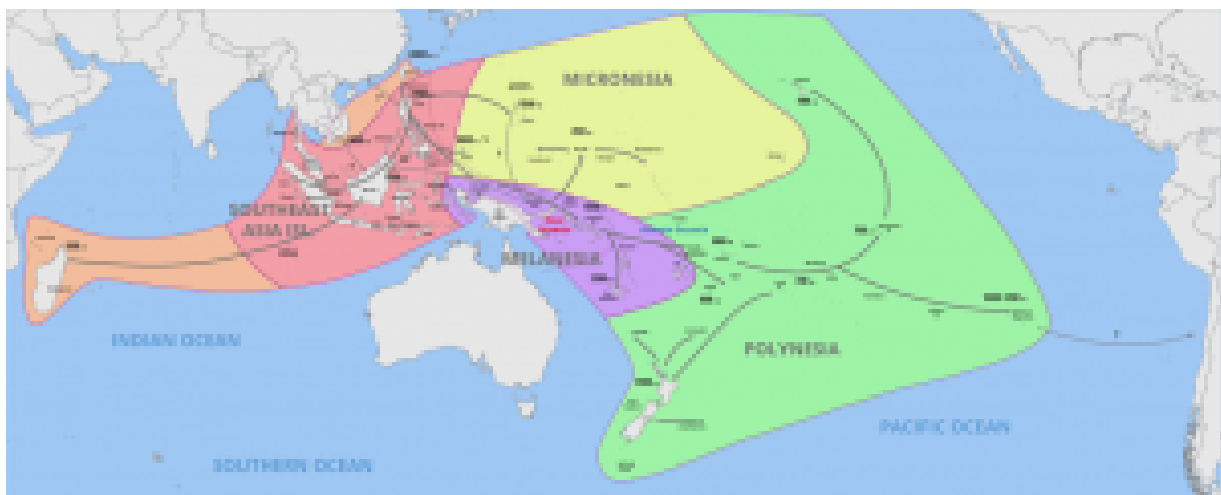


Figure 44: Map showing the progress of human exploration of the Pacific. 2022. By Pavljenko and from [Wikimedia Commons](#). CC BY-SA 4.0

The development of the discipline of archaeology has changed the way in which the question of Polynesian origins is addressed, as have improved understandings of the ways in which the world itself has changed over time (the prospect of a sunken continent has been destroyed). When human beings first set out into the Pacific the region was physically different from the way it is now. Lower sea levels made the region more accessible from the west, and large amounts of evidence has led archaeologists to believe that the ancestors of Pacific Islanders came from southeast Asia. Approximately 30,000 years ago, when sea levels were at their lowest, people settled the Bismarck Archipelago and the northern Solomon Islands. Low sea levels had made those regions more accessible, and people arrived.

About 26,000 years ago sea levels began to rise with global temperatures, and about 3,500 years ago a new phase of Pacific exploration began. This was a distinct phase of Pacific exploration, as rising sea levels had made islands smaller, and distances between them greater. Despite these challenges, people reached the islands of western Polynesia, and archaeologists associate this period with a range of artefacts that they think come from a distinct culture. The Lapita people are named after the archaeological site at which their distinctive pottery was first found, and further Lapita sites have been located within Oceania. Archaeologists have identified variations in decorative motifs and artefacts between remains at western and eastern Lapita sites, and between remains from different time periods. Lapita artefacts seem to have stopped being made about 2,000 years ago. Archaeologists find Lapita remains exciting because they indicate the existence of cultural connections across a wide swathe of the Pacific, and because they are traces of people who travelled out into the Pacific even when the land they were heading towards was out of sight over the horizon. Quite who the Lapita were, and what their connections with present-day Pacific Islanders might be, remains unclear, but their presence in the Pacific is part of the human history of the exploration of that ocean.



Figure 45: Cast of a fragment of Lapita pottery with typical motifs. Cast c.1950. From [The Met](#). CC0 Public Domain

The Lapita did not reach beyond western Polynesia, and archaeologists have two sets of theories about how the remaining expanses of ocean were settled. One school of thought holds that people took an 'express train', directly from south China or Taiwan to the far reaches of Oceania, while the other holds that people travelled by a 'slow boat' in a process involving populations moving in multiple directions and cultural mixing occurring between culturally distinct populations. These theories are supported by various types of evidence: linguistic,

physical remains, and more recently genetic evidence, including analysis of genetic material belonging to the non-human species that travelled with the Pacific's first explorers. The ongoing debate about the details of human migration to the far reaches of Polynesia demonstrates that interest in Polynesian origins remains strong. But, while details remain unclear, there is general agreement about the Asian origins of the Pacific's first people, and about the times they arrived at the different island groups of the Pacific.

The story of the original exploration of the Pacific is told by archaeologists rather than historians. As a result, it is a grand story of human endeavour, and lacks the presence of individual people making decisions or engaging with their environments. That is the nature of archaeology: it can reveal the actions of societies and guess at their communal beliefs and concerns, but without written texts it cannot reveal the actions and thoughts of individuals. Archaeologists engage with past societies through the physical traces they leave behind, and those traces are often things that have been deliberately discarded (rubbish). This approach allows archaeologists to voyage into parts of the past that historians cannot visit and go beyond the written record, but it limits what they can detect there.

The journals, maps, and other records created during the European exploration of the Pacific capture only parts of the last 500 years of the Pacific's past. However, those written sources allow us to peer inside the minds of the explorers themselves, and to catch glimpses of island societies as Europeans first encountered them. Historical sources, like the sources used by archaeologists, only offer glimpses of the past, but those glimpses are fascinating and valuable for understanding both Islander and European perspectives of the events unfolding, and for offering chances to step inside the minds of people in the past. Archaeological techniques can take us further back into the past, but they can cast only limited light on the first human exploration of the Pacific Ocean.

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CHAPTER 16

Rediscovering the discovery of a sea of islands

Published in 1993, the book *A New Oceania: Rediscovering our Sea of Islands* marked the re-imagining of the Pacific as a network of islands, resources, people and innovations, rather than a largely empty ocean dotted with small and isolated specks of land. That reimagining of the Pacific (which included the re-writing of Pacific discovery to include the point of view of islanders and the recognition that the Pacific had already been thoroughly explored before the arrival of Europeans) was a product of the late-twentieth century and the emergence of Māori and Pasifika voices and sensibilities.

The reanalysis of explorers' journals that began in the 1960s offered new insights into Islander experiences when encountering Europeans. The timing of this scholarship was significant, as was its determination to strip away European preconceptions and projections in order to understand the behaviour of Islanders as rational actors with their own world views. It came as indigeneity became a source of pride, as university education become more widely available, and as the presence of historians and anthropologists who were themselves Islanders increased. The expansion of academic institutions to include more diverse scholars was of immeasurable benefit in furthering understandings of the past (and of the present).

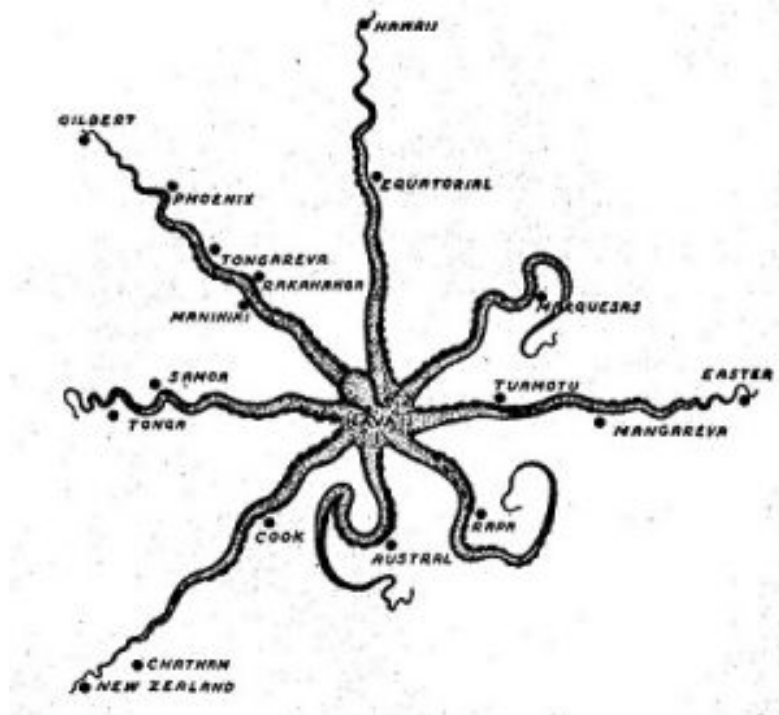


Figure 46: Diagram from the book *Vikings of the Sunrise* showing pre-European connections within Polynesia. First published 1938, this edition 1964. By Te Rangi Hiroa and from [Victoria University of Wellington](#). CC BY-SA 3.0

Even in the first half of the twentieth century the significant Māori scholar Te Rangi Hīroa worked to reclaim the power of Māori tradition and to assert the achievements of Pacific navigators. His book *Vikings of the Sunrise* was published in 1938 during his tenure as the director of the Bishop Museum in Honolulu. During the course of his career Hīroa practised medicine, served as a member of the New Zealand parliament, served with the Māori Battalion (including at Gallipoli), worked in public health, and then developed his interests and expertise in the practice of anthropology. *Vikings of the Sunrise* included biographical reflections, and a passionate account of the skill and daring required to discover the islands of the Pacific. While some of the details of Hīroa's account have been refined by later archaeologists and anthropologists, his account remains eminently readable and reasonably accurate in outline. Its assertion of pride in the skills, courage, and achievements of the ancestors make it part of the rediscovery by Pasifika of the significance of their place in the world.

Hīroa was an early herald of a Māori renaissance that became more pronounced after 1960. The American civil rights movement had an influence in Aotearoa (New Zealand), and in Aotearoa land rights became a prominent point of discussion. Linked to issues of historical grievance and the need for redress were actions that aimed to secure taonga (Māori cultural treasures), including the promotion of Te Reo (the Māori language). The Treaty of Waitangi, signed in 1840 by many Māori chiefs and by representatives of the British Crown, gained new significance in political life in the late twentieth century. In 1975 the Waitangi Tribunal was established by the government, in 1985 it began investigating historical land claims, and in the late 1980s the process of recognising and enacting the provisions of the Treaty began. That process included the return of land and resources, and the recognition and protection of taonga.



Figure 47: Newspaper reproduction of a famous nineteenth-century painting by Louis Steele and Charles Goldie depicting the arrival of a canoe of desperate people in Aotearoa. 1925, original image 1898. From [City of Vancouver Archives](#). Public Domain

The work of Hīroa was exceptional, and until late in the twentieth century other authors often represented Pacific navigators as stumbling across land while in distress, rather than deliberately exploring the Pacific. This interpretation of Pacific exploration was supported by evidence of the distress of European explorers as they struggled to cope with navigating the vast Pacific, and by lack of evidence in the form of traditional Polynesian voyaging canoes. Within the Pacific, Islanders had quickly adopted European technology including shipbuilding methods, and after the early period of contact traditional craft were no longer used for significant journeys within Polynesia. During the 1970s movements to recapture traditional navigational techniques and voyaging technology became part of the cultural renaissance taking place within the Pacific, particularly in Hawai'i.

Academics played a role in recognising the persistence and reliability of traditional navigation techniques still used in some parts of Micronesia, and in locating descriptions of traditional Polynesian canoes present within the journals of the European explorers.



Figure 48: Photograph of Hōkūleʻa. 1976. By Phil Uhl and from [Wikimedia Commons](#). CC BY-SA 3.0

Hawaiʻi was an important centre for the rediscovery of Pacific navigation: the Polynesian Voyaging Society was founded in Honolulu in 1973, and in 1975 the *Hōkūleʻa* was launched. That vessel was built on traditional lines using modern materials. In 1976 it completed a return voyage between Hawaiʻi and Tahiti using traditional navigational techniques and demonstrating that traditional vessels and traditional navigators could reliably cross the vast distances of Polynesia. The *Hōkūleʻa* has continued to undertake significant journeys, and other traditional vessels have been built throughout Polynesia.

Reconstructed voyaging demonstrates the reliability of Polynesian canoe building and navigation. It is a source of mana (prestige), and a reminder of the adventurous nature of the first exploration of the Pacific. Traditional voyages have also supported a pan-Oceanic identity, connecting Polynesian people across a range of island nations. Cooperation based on a common tradition has been made visible in flotillas of traditional vessels originating from different islands. The connections created through traditional voyaging are part of a response by Pacific peoples to European colonialism, and mark a reclaiming of their disrupted histories. The connections forged by traditional voyaging reach across national borders and include indigenous people on the fringes of the Pacific. The location of the Polynesian Voyaging Society within the United States, and the need for large trees from which to create canoes, has led to the involvement of Alaskan first nations groups within the voyaging movement, and those ties now extend from Alaska throughout the Pacific.

The emergence of Covid-19 disrupted plans for commemorating the 250th anniversary of James Cook's *Endeavour* voyage in Australia in 2020. Commemorations had already occurred in Aotearoa before Covid-19 required the cancellation of large public events. Those commemorations included debates about the significance of Cook's arrival, about the colonial history that followed first contact, and about the appropriateness of celebrating Cook's journey when it involved violence and miscommunication, and acted as a forerunner to settler colonialism. A highly visible part of the commemoration was the Tuia 250 fleet, comprised of traditional vessels and tall ships. In addition, in Aotearoa Cook commemorations of the *Endeavour's* voyage built on a growing awareness of the significance of the Tahitian navigator Tupaia to its success.

Across the Pacific, the history of Pacific exploration is being rewritten. European explorers and their journals

have a role to play in that history: their efforts and experiences are intriguing and confronting, and the records they created provide a cloudy window into the societies they encountered and the traditions of navigation that facilitated the original exploration of the Pacific. That original exploration was an astounding feat of technical skill and courage, and it is now a source of pride for people across the Pacific.

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CHAPTER 17

Discovering Australian deep time

As had been the case in the Pacific, when European explorers reached the Australian continent they reached a known, inhabited place. It has taken time for outsiders to come to understand just how long Aboriginal people have lived in what is now Australia, and Australian deep time has become an area of intense interest for Australia's historians as well as its archaeologists. Dealing with the depth of human engagement with the continent includes investigating the ways in which humans have shaped the Australian continent, grappling with the reality of Australia's period of settler colonialism, recognising the on-going repercussions of settler colonialism for all members of the modern Australian state, and determining a just path forward. These are difficult projects, unlikely to be resolved quickly.

When European explorers arrived on Australian shores they saw clear evidence of human inhabitation and often encountered Traditional Owners. However, Europeans struggled to engage meaningfully with local people. In the north and west the Dutch and the Englishman William Dampier found their attempts to engage in transactions with local people (by trading European goods for help in obtaining water and food) did not meet with success. Later, James Cook also struggled to engage with the people he met during his voyage along the east coast of the continent. This was despite the presence of Tupaia on board the *Endeavour*. Tupaia was Tahitian, and while he did not share a language or culture with Indigenous groups in Australia, he was a gifted linguist and diplomat. However, in Australia he was unable to facilitate communication and engagement between Europeans and the local people they encountered. After the settlement at Sydney was established, contact and interaction between Europeans and Aboriginal people increased. European colonisation tended to precede exploration in Australia, and while respect, friendship, and love was present across racial divides, many interactions instead involved violence and misunderstanding as Europeans began to colonise the continent.

Aboriginal stories of the origins of Australia's people were very different from Polynesians' accounts of their arrivals on their islands, and settler speculation about Aboriginal origins drew on different theories to those used to explain Polynesian origins. In the Pacific Islanders spoke of their ancestors arriving from other places, and told stories of heroic voyaging; in Australia connection to country extends back to creation. Settler and scientific speculation from the nineteenth century onwards included the possibility that Aboriginal people evolved within the Australian continent, often drawing on then-popular ideas about Australia as an evolutionary backwater with peculiar, unevolved flora and fauna. Other ideas proposed external origins for Aboriginal people, although those ideas recognised that Australia had been peopled for a long time. Both sets of ideas were influenced by racial theories that saw the Australian continent as a refuge for plants, animals, and people that had been superseded elsewhere. In the present, archaeologists and historians exploring Australia's deep past are working in new ways that seek to respect the depth of connection between Aboriginal groups and their country, and that recognise the sophistication and value of Australia's traditional cultures.

In the twentieth and twenty-first centuries archaeologists have located evidence that shows humans were present in Australia 50,000 years ago, and likely even earlier. This represents an extremely long period of human habitation, but the exact time of human arrival on the continent will never be known with certainty. The

evidence located by archaeologists can offer insights into Australia's human past, but changing sea levels and climate mean that much evidence has been destroyed over the millennia. Traditional ownership of country extends through periods that were significantly different in terms of climate and environment, and Aboriginal cultures in present-day Australia draw on an extensive heritage. Those cultures remain dynamic, and while aspects of Australia's long human history can be told in the present, some can be known only in outline.

Current historical interest in Australian Deep Time is part of a reckoning with Australia's colonial past. While history examines the past, it is written in the present and deals with the present's concerns. In Australia, work exploring the long human history of the continent is part of an on-going process working out what it means to be Australian and how to reckon with the histories of frontier warfare, massacre, displacement, child removal, and disadvantage visited on many Aboriginal groups and people. The history wars in Australia have been rolling on for decades, and despite progress in the late-twentieth and early-twenty-first centuries, matters of sovereignty and reconciliation remain to be resolved. The 1967 referendum that changed the Australian constitution was a popular affirmation but largely symbolic in its outcomes. It indicated a desire within settler Australia to begin resolving the injustices caused by settler colonialism. It was not until 1993 that legislation prompted by the 1992 Mabo Decision formally recognised the existence of native title in Australia. In 2008 Prime Minister Kevin Rudd delivered an apology for past government actions that resulted in the removal of Aboriginal children from their families. That apology made reference to Australian Aboriginal cultures as *the oldest continuing cultures in human history*. From 2021, the wording of the national anthem changed, removing a reference to Australians being 'young'. The investigation of Australian deep time has ramifications for Australian politics and the recognition of Aboriginal sovereignty, making it a political undertaking as well as intriguing history writing.

In 1901, when the British colonies within Australia federated to form a new state, Cook and other European explorers provided comfortable and heroic founding fathers for the new nation. The explorers themselves tended to engage in a form of double think: both proclaiming the newness of their discoveries and recording the presence and knowledge of the people already inhabiting the areas they were travelling through. As with the Pacific, the records of the explorers of Australia require careful reading to pull apart their layers of observation, interpretation, and assumption. They are part of Australian history, and they indicate the recent arrival of European colonisation in known and peopled country. While historians of Australia grapple with the deep human past of the continent, these records of encounter offer insights into more recent Aboriginal history. Reading them with careful attention to the biases of those producing them allows us glimpses of individual human beings and specific cultural groups within the landscape of Australia, and contributes to the perpetual rewriting of history required by a living and evolving nation.

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PART VI

CONCLUSION

CHAPTER 18

Conclusion

This Open Education Resource (OER) draws on the traces left by European explorers, and examines what they can tell us about the past. These documents are not simple records of facts, they are rich interpretations of extraordinary events. The exploration of Australia and the Pacific was not a simple matter of investigating unknown regions and recording them for the future; rather, the explorers entered peopled places and their records contain glimpses of the societies they encountered. Explorers' records also illuminate their own preconceptions and those of the societies they represented.

When explorers entered the Pacific, the region was not a blank expanse. The ideas explorers carried with them shaped their vision. Those ideas, and their hopes, had led to their very presence in the region. Explorers were not disinterested observers, even those who made scientific records. Most came expecting to find what they were looking for. The rigours of their journeys meant they were often sick, desperate for supplies, anxious, and fearful. Their vision was already clouded by expectation and distress, and the records of their experiences and actions are further distorted by their need to please their patrons and funders.

Explorers did not just shape the records that would inform history, they also shaped the futures of the regions they visited. They acted as probes for interested states and organisations; they were forerunners of empire throughout the Pacific, and of settler colonialism in Australia, Aotearoa (New Zealand), and Hawai'i. The definition of explorer used in this OER (explicated in the introduction) reflects the strength of connection between explorers and Europe.

Determining quite what makes an explorer an explorer (and not simply a traveller) is difficult. Attempts to identify explorers by their connections with written records and publications are partly successful but gather in many travellers and exclude some people recognised as explorers. Such a definition risks excluding Sir Francis Drake, whose journal was lost by Queen Elizabeth I (an account was later written by his nephew and published nearly half a century after his return). And such a definition excludes the explorers who first located Aotearoa (the stories of Maui and Kupe were not committed to writing, and were published only much later as myths). Rather than being identified by their relationship with publishers, explorers can be identified by their strong links to their home societies which supported their endeavours, and which they in turn informed of new places and opportunities.

That connection to their home societies means that European explorers are problematic figures in the present. They are tarred by their association with colonial expansion, by their willingness to resort to violence against local people, and by the cartographic problems they left in their wake as they assigned new names to geographical features. These issues may disrupt previous interpretations of explorers as heroes, but they make explorers more interesting to students of history.

And explorers and their records are very interesting to students of history. Explorers' journals are both windows and mirrors, offering distorted visions of the societies they encountered and glimpses of their own. Modern scholarship has proved the value of explorers' journals as records of Pacific societies at the time of

contact with Europeans. Recreated vessels draw on images created by the artists associated with explorers. And hidden in unassuming details we can detect elements of exploration that did not seem worth recording at the time, including the presence of other species and the significance of the vessels themselves.

The figure of James Cook is widely familiar in Australia, but his history is less well known. He is an important figure in the exploration of the Pacific, but he is important as an example of shifting European approaches to the region. The technology available to him, his skill in using it, and his methodical approach to navigation and record keeping mean that he can be used as an anchor for the explorers who went before him, and who came after him. He may have mapped the Pacific (although he left Matthew Flinders to fully map Australia), but nowhere was he the first human to make landfall. For Europeans, he placed some new regions on the map, but more importantly he removed phantom islands, a drifting continent, and an iced-over strait. Cook marked the start of accelerating European engagement with the Pacific Ocean and then the Australian continent, and he forms part of a long and intriguing history of culture contact across a huge portion of the planet. Placing him firmly in the broader history of Pacific and Australian encounter, and engaging with the myths that surround the process of exploration, allow us to appreciate the records explorers have left for us, and to read them against the grain to learn new things about the past.

Acknowledgements

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