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James Cook

James Cook was born on 27 October 1728, at Marton in Cleveland. His education was basic and mainly self taught. At the age of twelve, he was bound as apprentice to the shopkeeper in Staithes, near Whitby. His apprenticeship did not last long when there was a disagreement between apprentice and master. In 1746, Cook took another apprenticeship in a Whitby shipping company involved with the east coast coal trade. Cook stayed with this firm for several years. Cook had a natural aptitude for mathematics and he quickly became a skilful navigator. In 1755, Cook's ambitions outgrew the merchant navy, and although he was offered his first merchant command, he volunteered for the Royal Navy as an Able Seaman on board the HMS *Eagle*, under the command of Captain Hugh Palliser.

Cook's qualities quickly brought him advancement, and in July 1757 he was appointed as Master of HMS *Pembroke*, after only two years in the service. Cook's efficiency was noted while surveying the St. Lawrence River; this survey played a decisive part in the capture of Quebec and the conquest of Canada. After the fall of Quebec in 1759, Cook was appointed Master of HMS *Northumberland* under the command of Captain Lord Coleville and was engaged in further survey work of the St Lawrence River, Nova Scotia and Newfoundland coasts. Cook arrived back in Britain in October 1762 and after a brief encounter, married Elizabeth Batts of Barking on 21 December. In April 1763, Cook was appointed by the Admiralty to survey the coast of Newfoundland and Labrador. Cook was given command of a schooner HMS *Grenville* to undertake this work until 1767. During 1766, he made observations of an eclipse of the sun visible in Newfoundland; this and other findings were communicated to the Royal Society and, along with personal recommendations, his reputation grew. During this period of surveying, his wife Elizabeth also gave birth to two sons and a daughter during the limited time available to him at home.

The Royal Society with the Admiralty began to draw up plans for an expedition planned to Tahiti to record observations of the transit of Venus across the sun during 1769. The Society initially nominated Alexander Dalrymple to lead the expedition, but the Admiralty refused to allow a non-naval person to take command of a naval vessel. Cook, already being a warranted officer, was an acceptable alternative. Cook received a Lieutenant's commission on 25 May 1768, and was given command of a bark, HMS *Endeavour*. Before leaving Britain, his wife Elizabeth gave birth to another son.

The scientific expedition to observe the transit of Venus was extended, through secret orders from the Admiralty, as a voyage to search for the southern continent Terra Australis Incognita, a landmass believed to exist in the southern hemisphere. Cook was also to explore the coast of New Zealand, which was still thought to be part of a much larger landmass, before returning to Britain. *Endeavour* sailed from Plymouth on 25 August 1768 and arrived at Tahiti on 10 April 1769. Cook was very strict on cleanliness on board ship and ensured his crew had a good diet consisting of citrus juices, among other things, that prevented the outbreak of scurvy on the voyage.

The transit of Venus was successfully recorded on 3 June. Cook then departed on the second mission of the voyage and arrived at New Zealand on the 7 October 1769. He then sailed round both islands and disproved the theory that

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the country was part of a larger southern continent. On his return to Britain, Cook chose to go via the Cape of Good Hope exploring and charting the east coast of New Holland (Australia). He intended to head for Van Diemens Land (Tasmania) thought to be connected to Australia, but gales drove him northward and he arrived at Point Hicks on the SE corner of Australia on 21 April 1770. He anchored at Botany Bay and it was here where the first native Aborigines were encountered.

Cook continued to sail northwards until he reached the Great Barrier Reef where the *Endeavour* got stuck in the coral reef. After successfully refloating the ship and undertaking repairs, the voyage continued 6 August. Cook sailed round the remainder of the east coast, and once completed, decided to determine whether Australia was separated from New Guinea. Cook then explored and charted the Endeavour Strait before sailing to Batavia, arriving there on 10 October 1770.

Despite general good health throughout the voyage, outbreaks of malaria and dysentery spread amongst the crew while they were at Batavia and many died before the ship sailed again. *Endeavour* arrived back in England on 12 July 1771. Cook's voyage had made significant discoveries in relation to the lands, waters, people and places of the southern hemisphere but had not disproved the existence of Terra Australis Incognita. On his return, Cook found his family had been depleted during his absence in that two of his children, Joseph and Elizabeth, had died.

The *Endeavour* was refitted and made two voyages to the Falkland Islands with supplies before being sold and returned to the merchant service as a collier.

A second voyage was planned to continue to search for the Terra Australis Incognita, and if found, claim it as a British possession. Lord Sandwich, First Lord of the Admiralty, appointed Cook to lead the expedition and he was promoted to the rank of Commander. Two ships were to sail on this adventure; Cook was appointed to HMS *Resolution* and Captain Tobias Furneaux was to accompany him in HMS *Adventure*. The voyage began on 13 July 1772. On board *Resolution* was a copy of the chronometer invented by clockmaker John Harrison and was to undergo trials for the calculation of longitude on the voyage.

Cook sailed south east in an attempt to locate Bouvet Island previously discovered in 1739 and thought to be part of a large southern landmass. Cook discovered that it was in fact only an island. Sailing further south, the voyagers became the first to cross the Antarctic Circle in January 1773. After continuing to sail a course along the 60 degree latitude of almost one third of the globe's circumference, Cook proved that no southern continent could exist.

In February, the two ships became separated and later reunited at a preordained rendezvous at Queen Charlotte's Sound, New Zealand in May. In early June, the two ships departed New Zealand and headed eastwards towards Pitcairn Island in uncharted waters. Striking north, he then headed once more for Tahiti, arriving on 16 July 1773 for rest and replenishing. In early September, the ships left heading towards the Society Islands (which Cook had renamed the Friendly Islands). After a brief stay, Cook then headed towards the Tonga Islands and then in October, the ships headed back towards Queen Charlotte Sound for a second sweep along the Antarctic. The ships again became separated. Furneaux left New Zealand in December 1773 and sailed back to Britain via the Cape of Good Hope and became the first circumnavigator to cross the world in an easterly direction, arriving back at Britain on 12 July 1774.

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Meanwhile, Cook continued to explore the Antarctic region and finally put to rest the theory of a southern continent. Before returning to Britain, Cook decided to explore uncharted Pacific waters, making accurate charts although not making any new discoveries. In December 1774, he headed homeward. Before reaching the Cape of Good Hope, he came upon some previously unknown islands that he named South Sandwich Islands. The ship arrived in Portsmouth on 29 July 1775, a year after the return of Furneaux.

Shortly after his return, Cook was appointed as a Captain at the Greenwich Hospital. He was also elected as a Fellow of the Royal Society and gave a paper on the health of seamen. He was awarded the Society's annual prize, the Copley Gold Medal, in 1776. He was also promoted to the rank of Post-Captain and asked to advise on planning for a new expedition to search for a north-west passage from the Pacific to the Atlantic. Initially, Cook was not intended as the expedition leader, but at a meeting at the Admiralty, much jubilation greeted his spontaneous announcement that he would indeed lead it.

Cook's ship, *Resolution* was to be accompanied by HMS *Discovery* for this third, and ultimately final, voyage. His friend, Captain Charles Clerke was appointed to command *Discovery*. Another member of the officers selected for the voyage was William Bligh, who, like Cook himself, was a skilled navigator and cartographer. Bligh was appointed as Master in the *Resolution*. Cook departed from Plymouth on 12 July 1776 without the *Discovery* as Clerke had been imprisoned on account of debts left by his brother. Cook left orders for *Discovery* to meet the *Resolution* at Cape Town as soon as possible. Both ships were in a poor shape and difficult to sail. They made their way to Tasmania and the Queen Charlotte Sound before heading for the Society Islands and Tahiti. Leaving Tahiti in December 1777 and pausing at Christmas Island, they continued northwards until they reached an uncharted group of islands which was Hawaii. Cook continued towards America and made a detailed survey of the coast of Alaska. He returned to the Hawaiian islands and surveyed the coast there. In January 1779, the ships anchored in Kealākakua Bay. On the islands, Cook was greeted like a god by the Polynesians. The need for the natives to furnish this "god" with their gifts placed a heavy burden on the island resources and there was great relief from the natives when Cook's ships departed on 4 February.

The islander's relief was shortlived. On 8 February, after a brief stop to collect wood and water, the ships were hit by a fierce gale that split the foremast of the *Resolution*. Cook decided to risk going back to Kealākakua Bay to avail himself of all the resources that could be found there. This time, the relationship between the ships and the natives was strained. The Polynesian's habits of stealing items from the ships increased and on 13 February, tools being used to repair the ship were stolen. The native who was thought to be responsible was flogged by Clerke, but it was later found that another native had stolen them. A party was sent to pursue the offender, but this incensed the natives and the naval party were attacked and only just managed to escape. When the *Discovery's* cutter was also stolen, Cook went ashore with a party of marines to take the native's Chief back as a hostage. The Chief was prepared to go but a large group of natives grew hostile and attacked Cook, forcing him to fire a warning shot to ward them off. The attack increased in violence and Cook was attacked with clubs and stones driving him to the ground. He was last seen by the naval party being bludgeoned and stabbed to death. His body was dismembered and eaten by the natives.



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Captain Clerke, assuming command of the expedition, refused to leave the island without Cook's remains. Finally, what remained of Captain Cook was returned to the ship and they were committed to the sea with full naval honours on February 22. Clerke was suffering from tuberculosis and delegated the navigation of the remainder of the voyage to William Bligh. The ships sailed on 23 February and returned to Britain on 4 October 1780, bringing the sad tidings of not only Cook's savage death but the death of Captain Clerke on 22 August 1779. The voyage had not successfully found the elusive North West passage – that was for future generations to find.

The Royal Society struck a gold medal in Cook's honour, to go with that struck to commemorate his departure on his second voyage. His wife, Elizabeth, survived him by fifty six years, having spent only four years of their married life together. She was to witness the loss of their two eldest sons at sea and the loss of their last while at studying at Cambridge. In November 1874, an obelisk was placed near the spot where James Cook was murdered.

Note: The use of the abbreviations HMS in this information sheet is to clearly define the ships of Royal Navy. The abbreviation did not come into common use until c.1790s