



Capt. Cook

First sighting and landfall

James Cook's ship the Endeavour was a relatively small vessel of 368 tons, just 32 metres long and 7.6 metres broad. It departed from Plymouth on 26 August 1768 with 94 men, entering the Pacific around Cape Horn. After almost four months in Tahiti, from mid-April to mid-August, the Endeavour sailed south into uncharted waters. On 6 October 1769 a cabin boy sighted land.



James Cook is a key figure in the history of New Zealand. On his first voyage he mapped the outline of the country's coast so thoroughly and accurately that all the remaining voyages of discovery, including his own second and third voyages, had merely to fill in the detail and correct minor errors.

New Zealand's people, flora and fauna

Cook discovered New Zealand in more than a geographical sense. Having spent a total of 328 days on the coast, he and those with him left a vivid and comprehensive visual and written record of the country's natural history. Few lands newly discovered by Europeans have been so comprehensively documented.

The gentleman naturalist Joseph Banks travelled with Cook on the Endeavour during its 1768–71 voyage. Wealthy enough to indulge his interests, Banks paid for another botanist, Daniel Solander, and three draughtsmen or artists to join the expedition. Banks's and Solander's collections of plants and their descriptions laid the foundations for modern New Zealand botany. Although Banks declined to accompany Cook on his second voyage, he maintained his interest in New Zealand until his death in 1820.



In May 1768, another expedition to the Pacific was organised. The Royal Society had proposed to the Admiralty that the transit of Venus (the passage of Venus across the face of the sun) could be observed in the South Pacific. The observation would make it possible to accurately calculate distances from the Earth to both Venus and the sun. When Wallis returned with news of his discovery of Tahiti, the expedition was instructed to go there to make the observations.

Lieutenant James Cook was appointed to command the expedition. In his youth Cook had been a sailor in the North Sea coal trade. After enlisting in the navy he served for 10 years in North American waters, taking part in the capture of Quebec in 1759, and refining his skills and compiling charts as surveyor of Newfoundland. In 1768 he was approaching 40 and still engaged in the Newfoundland survey, when he was given the job of commanding the South Pacific expedition. Once the planetary observations had been made, the expedition was to investigate if there was land to the south of Tahiti. The voyagers were then to turn west towards Tasman's New Zealand, to establish how far it extended to the east. They were also to establish where Australia's eastern coastline lay.

The goals of the voyage were apparently scientific, inspired by a quest for knowledge typical of the Enlightenment. Because of this emphasis, Cook's voyage has often been thought of more favourably than Tasman's, yet the English, like the Dutch, also wished to expand trade and empire. The British Empire was flush with its recent success in the Seven Years' War with France, and had political, strategic and economic expansion in its sights. Cook was careful to include in his reports information about the resources of the lands he visited, and the suitability of those lands for settlement by Britain.





A favoured anchorage

On 15 January 1770 Cook brought the Endeavour to anchor at Ship Cove in Queen Charlotte Sound at the top of the South Island. From a high point on Arapawa Island he gained his first view of the narrow strait that now bears his name. Sailing through the strait, he returned to Cape Turnagain, confirming that the North Island was indeed an island. He then sailed south down the east coast of the South Island and round the southern tip of Stewart Island.



Cook's Cove



Ships Cove today

Ship Cove (Māori: Meretoto - "the big totara tree" - is a small bay in the Queen Charlotte Sound — part of the Marlborough Sounds — in New Zealand. It is on the west coast of the Sound, just west of Motuara Island and Long Island.

Māori and European contact

Cook's first landing place at Gisborne has been celebrated by one historian as the point where, 'for the first time, the two great streams of race and culture in New Zealand, Polynesian and European, came into confluence'. 1

Cook had been instructed to cultivate a friendship and alliance with the inhabitants of any new land he discovered. He is credited with showing forbearance, restraint and a depth of understanding (he had a more moderate view of cannibalism, for example, than most of his crew) that put initial relations between Māori and Europeans on a sound footing, despite episodes of bloodshed on the first and second voyages.

The Cove was named by Captain James Cook on 15 January 1770 when his ship the Endeavour anchored there to replenish supplies of food, water and wood. While his ship was overhauled at anchor, Cook made a headquarters on the shore in the Cove, ordering the planting of vegetable gardens and construction of an enclosure for pigs. Cook would return to the Cove a further four times over the course of his first and second voyages to the Pacific.

A line can be drawn from Cook's first voyage to the Treaty of Waitangi. In his instructions to Cook, the Earl of Morton, president of the Royal Society, stated that any natives he encountered were to be regarded as 'the natural, and ... legal possessors of the several Regions they inhabit', and that their voluntary consent would be needed before any of their lands were occupied by Europeans.

Monument to Captain James Cook, in Ship Cove Cook's settlement was abandoned following his second voyage. Colonel William Wakefield, one of the founders of Wellington, also anchored his ship the Tory in the Cove in 1839.

The Māori perspective

If Europeans viewed Cook's discoveries as momentous, for many Māori it must have seemed only a brief interlude in the normal course of life. Once their initial astonishment had passed, Māori dealt with the newcomers much as they dealt with Māori of other tribal groups.

Māori understanding of Cook's arrival was inevitably partial, although there was certainly some exchange of information between Māori and Cook's men. On board the Endeavour was a chief and priest, Tupaia, whom Banks had added to his retinue during the ship's stay in Tahiti. Because of the similarities of the Tahitian and Māori languages, Tupaia was able to translate spoken exchanges between European and Māori. But even with Tupaia's mediation, misunderstandings arose. Many were over the nature of trade and exchange between the two groups. Problems also arose when some crew from the Endeavour inadvertently broke sacred restrictions Māori had placed on some areas.

Approximately 1,700 acres (6.9 km2) of land at Ship Cove has been declared a Scenic Reserve administered by the Ship Cove Scenic Reserves Board.

