

Countdown – Why did the Endeavour Sail into Botany Bay?

article by Sue Murray

On 29 April this year it will be 250 years since the first Europeans reached the east coast of Australia. Why did HMB *Endeavour* stop for eight days in Kamay (Botany Bay)?

A voyage of discovery

In August 1768 the *Endeavour* set sail from England on a voyage of discovery. The first goal was to reach Tahiti in the Pacific Ocean. The scientists on board gathered important scientific data while they observed a rare sight: the transit of Venus.

From there, Captain James Cook and his crew were instructed to sail south to search for ‘The Great Southern Continent’. Scientists believed there must be a continent south of Tahiti that balanced out the land masses in the northern hemisphere. Of course, Cook didn’t find a large land mass—it didn’t exist. The *Endeavour* then sailed west and spent six months mapping the coasts of New Zealand.

Homeward bound

When this was done, their mission in the south seas was complete. Cook’s orders were to sail home by the best route possible. If it had been a different time of year, with different winds and weather, Cook might have sailed east around the tip of South America or west around the tip of Africa. The *Endeavour* had been at sea for nineteen months and the ship needed repairs so Cook chose the safest route. He didn’t want to risk the winter gales of the southern oceans.

Cook decided to sail from New Zealand to Van Dieman’s Land, then sail north. He wanted to map the east coast of the land known then as New Holland—to explore and discover new places on the way home.

In search of supplies

The *Endeavour*’s crew sighted land well north of Van Dieman’s Land, on the south-east coast of Australia. They then sailed north for several days. Having been at sea for a month, the crew needed fresh supplies of water.

They also needed wood for fuel and feed for the animals on board. Cook couldn’t find anywhere on the rugged coast to land until sighting the opening of a bay. This place was called Kamay by the inhabitants, but Cook named it Botany Bay.

The *Endeavour* spent eight days in Kamay, Botany Bay. The crew collected fresh water, gathered firewood, harvested grass and caught a great number of fish. Cook mapped the bay. The scientists collected many specimens of plants and animals. The European visitors didn’t understand the language or customs of the people they encountered, so they didn’t find effective ways to form connections. They did observe some aspects of the lives of the inhabitants.

Once the visitors had collected enough fresh supplies, they sailed out of the bay, and on to other discoveries and adventures.

Blast Off – Tupaia and the Endeavour

article by Sue Murray

Did you know that when the Endeavour reached the east coast of Australia, there was a Polynesian priest on board?

As you may know, HMB *Endeavour* sailed from England to Tahiti on a scientific mission to observe the transit of Venus. The *Endeavour* spent some weeks in Tahiti and the surrounding group of islands that Captain James Cook named the Society Islands. During that time, the Europeans met Tupaia, a man of noble birth from the island of Ra'iatea.

Expert navigator

Tupaia was a high priest who was educated in many fields, including navigation guided by the stars. Joseph Banks, the noted botanist on the *Endeavour*, befriended Tupaia, then persuaded Captain Cook to allow Tupaia to sail with them when they left Tahiti.

Cook's orders were to sail south from Tahiti on a mission of exploration. It was hoped that they would find fabled *Terra Australis Incognita*, or Unknown Southern Land, that scientists believed lay in the South Pacific. Tupaia was able to chart 130 islands in the region and to advise Cook about reefs, the people of the islands and the resources to be found on many of the islands.

During these visits, Tupaia acted as an interpreter and assisted Cook to understand the local customs and protocols. When Cook finally decided that *Terra Australis Incognita* did not exist, the *Endeavour* sailed on to New Zealand.

Interpreter and diplomat

During the six months that the *Endeavour* spent charting the coastlines of New Zealand, Tupaia continued to interpret for Cook, and to provide diplomatic services. Tupaia was able to understand the local languages. In fact, it seems that the Maori people recognised that Tupaia was of high birth and a priest, so treated him with great respect. Some assumed it was *his* voyage, that he was in charge.

When the *Endeavour* left New Zealand, Cook chose to sail west to New Holland, then to explore the east coast by sailing north. The first landfall was in Kamay, as the local inhabitants called the sheltered bay. Cook later named it Botany Bay.

Cook ensured that Tupaia was in the landing party for this first contact between Europeans and the people of Kamay. As you can imagine, Cook hoped that Tupaia would be able to communicate with the inhabitants of this place, as he had everywhere else. Unfortunately, this was not the case. Tupaia was no more able to understand the Dharawal people's words and actions than the Europeans were. Imagine if there had been a way for effective connections to be made.

Tupaia was also an artist, and he drew images of the local people fishing in Kamay Botany Bay. His chart of the islands of the South Pacific and the artwork he created while sailing on the *Endeavour* are held today by the British Library, historic links to a remarkable man.

Find out more about Tupaia and see more of his art at the [British Library website](#).

Orbit –The First Words of the First Contact

article by Sue Murray

What was it like for the people of Kamay, as they called Botany Bay, when the *Endeavour* arrived 250 years ago?

The inhabitants of Kamay were going about their everyday lives when they saw an extraordinary, otherworldly sight coming up the coast, then into the bay. Apparently, some people thought it was an enormous bird, while others decided it might be a floating island, with possums scurrying up and down the strange trees. When we encounter something new, we often try to understand it in terms of what we already know, don't we?

For the Gweagal people of the Dharawal nation, the *Endeavour* probably seemed as strange and mysterious as an alien spaceship would if it landed outside your classroom right now. So how did the local people react to the arrival of these people from a world away? The only records we have access to are the accounts and artwork of the people on the *Endeavour*.

Warra warra wai!

Two local men came to the beach as the landing party from the *Endeavour* neared the shore. Joseph Banks wrote in his diary that day (and the spelling is his) what he saw, as best as he could understand it:

They calld to us very loud in a harsh sounding Language of which [we did not] understood a word, shaking their lances and menacing, in all appearance resolvd to dispute our landing to the utmost tho they were but two and we 30 or 40 at least.

What did the two men call out? What were the first words of the first contact between the two cultures? The artist Sydney Parkinson recorded that the men said, 'warra warra wai', which means 'Go away'.

Do you think that the two local men had been planning to engage in a conflict with the strangers? The odds were against them—fifteen or twenty to one. Could there be another reason for their actions?

Ceremonial communication

According to Dharawal elder Dr Shayne T Williams, the men were more than likely carrying out their ceremonial duty. An article Dr Williams wrote for the British Library contains this information:

In our cultures it is not permissible to enter another culture's Country without due consent. Consent was always negotiated. Negotiation was not necessarily a matter of immediate dialogue, it often involved spiritual communication through ceremony.

If the Europeans had known the local customs and protocols, perhaps the first contact between the two cultures might have ended differently. As it was, the inhabitants kept their distance for the entire time the *Endeavour* stayed in Kamay, Botany Bay. After eight days, the *Endeavour* sailed out of the bay and on up the coast.

Did the people of Kamay wonder if those strangers would return? Did life return to normal after that brief encounter, at least for the next eighteen years, before more of those vessels arrived, and life as the people of Kamay knew it changed forever?

Touchdown – Captain Cook's Secret Instructions - What If?

article by Sue Murray

When HMB *Endeavour* sailed from England in 1769 it was on a scientific mission, taking a team of scientists to Tahiti to observe the transit of Venus. Once this was completed, Captain Cook opened secret orders from the British Admiralty that instructed him to search for the fabled *Terra Australis Incognita*—Unknown South Land. European scientists of the day believed there must be a huge land mass in the South Pacific, to the south of Tahiti and west of New Zealand. They knew about New Holland, as Australia was then called. The Dutch had discovered the coast of Western Australia long before the *Endeavour* set sail. Cook was searching for a land that didn't exist, *not* the continent now known as Australia.

If Cook found this fabled land, his secret orders included these instructions:

... employ yourself diligently in exploring as great an extent of the coast as you can ... You are also to observe the nature of the soil and the products thereof ... You are likewise to observe the genius, temper, disposition and number of the natives [the inhabitants], if there be any, and endeavour, by all proper means, to cultivate a friendship and alliance with them ...

Of course, there was no Great South Land to be found where Cook was ordered to search but the secret orders set the tone for Cook's actions as he sailed up the east coast of New Holland on his way home to England. The people aboard the *Endeavour* explored and charted the coastline diligently. Cook was a superb cartographer—a mapmaker. And when the *Endeavour* spent time in a bay he named Botany Bay, there were plenty of observations made of the land, the flora, the fauna and the people who lived there.

Endeavouring contact

During most of Cook's exploration of the South Pacific and New Zealand he was aided by Tupaia, a Polynesian man of noble birth. Tupaia was able to understand enough of the languages and customs of the people the *Endeavour* encountered—until they reached Botany Bay.

The customs, protocols and languages of the inhabitants were completely unknown to anyone on the *Endeavour*. Any attempts to interact with the locals were rebuffed. The Europeans couldn't find the means to communicate with the inhabitants.

Cook and his crew didn't appreciate that his landing party didn't follow accepted local practice—that they hadn't been given permission to be on the country of the Gweagal people of the Dharawal nation.

The crew of the *Endeavour* did make many observations of what they saw of the way people lived but, as Cook wrote himself:

... we could know but very little of their customs as we were never able to form any connections with them ...

If only ...

Imagine if the Europeans had been able to form some connections. They would have discovered a culture with religious beliefs, mythologies, rules of law, kinship systems, sustainable resource management practices, scientific knowledge and much more.

As it was, when the *Endeavour* sailed away after their eight day stay in Botany Bay, the crew left with very little knowledge or understanding of the local people, and without managing to 'cultivate a friendship and alliance with them'. If only that had been possible ...