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CHAPTER IV

COOK'S HUNDRED DAYS ON THE QUEENSLAND COAST

On 16 May 1770 Cook was off Point Danger, the commencement of the present southern boundary of Queensland, and on the 17th he was abreast Cape Moreton, which he called Cape Morton. He wrote:

"From Cape Morton the land trends away further than can be seen, for there is a small space where, at this time, no land is visible, and some on board having also observed that the sea looked paler than usual, were of opinion that the bottom of Morton Bay opened into a river; we had then 34 fathoms of water, and a fine sandy bottom; this alone would have produced the changes that had been observed in the colour of the water and it was by no means necessary to suppose a river to account for the land in the bottom of the bay not being visible, for supposing the land there to be as low as we knew it to be in 100 other parts of the coast, it would have been impossible to see it from the station of the ship. However, if any future navigator should be disposed to determine the question whether there is or is not a river in this place, which the wind would not permit us to do, the situation may always be found by three hills which lie to the northward of it, in latitude of 26° 53'. These hills lie but a little way inland and not far from each other; they are remarkable for the singular form of their elevation, which very much resembles a glasshouse, and for which reason I called them the 'Glass Houses'; the northern-most of the three is the highest and largest. There are also several other peaked hills inland, to the northward of these, but they are not nearly so remarkable."

From the time Cook left the vicinity of what is now called Moreton Bay his log reads like a gazetteer of the Queensland coast. A low bluff forming the southern point of an open sandy bay is Noosa Head with Laguna Bay and, above it, Double Island Point. Within that bay Wide Bay, separating Fraser Island, which Cook took to be a great spur, from the mainland. On its coastline of many miles he named Indian Head (where many aboriginals had gathered to peer at his strange craft!) and Sandy Cape, and, at its northern tip, ran far along until he could cross the great reef which extended north-east from it, and so gain the shelter of its lee. He called it Breaksea Spit, for it was the first place to shelter the ship from the heavy constant ocean swell from the south-east. Turning west he guessed from the flights of boobies "there was a river or inlet of shallow water to the southward of us, and that, not very far to the northward, lay some islands where they retired to at night." The bay into which the rivers Mary and Burnett empty is Hervey Bay (its northern extension is Cook's "Hervey Bay"); the islands are the Bunker group (24° S.; 152° E.).

Now, as they closed with the shore, pandanus palms were seen again for the first time since leaving the oceanic islands within the tropics; sea-snakes swam past the ship "beautifully spotted and in all respects like land-snakes except that they had broad flat tails which probably serve them instead of fins in swimming." On 25 May Cook went ashore, accompanied by Banks, Dr. Solander and some officers, under 2nd Lieutenant Gore.

They were all absorbingly interested in what they saw: a wealth of new plants: true mangroves like those of the West Indies; cockle shells close to ten small native-built fires protected by windbreaks of bark; oysters that Banks thought might justify a pearl industry in Queensland some day. There were all, or most, of the land and water fowl that had been seen at Botany Bay "besides bustards such as we have in England, which occasioned my giving the place the name of Bustard Bay": it was his second landfall in Australia, his first in Queensland.

Here, too, they saw the vicious green ant that builds its nest among the leaves of trees; the red ants and black ants that swarm in wood:

(15) After James, Earl of Morton, then President of the Royal Society.

(16) Sir Joseph Banks was obviously one of these. He wrote in his notes that day: "The sea here suddenly changed from its usual transparency to a dirty clay color as if charged with freshes, from whence I was led to conclude that the bottom of the bay might open into a large river." (The Brisbane River is the main river emptying into Moreton Bay. Cook gave the name to what is actually, Rous Channel which lies between Moreton and Stradbroke Island. He called the upper part of Moreton Bay—as we know it—"Glass House Bay.") His error was corrected by Matthew Flinders in 1799.

(17) Capt. Cook went ashore at 9 a.m. in his pinnace having with him Mr. (afterwards Sir) Joseph Banks and Dr. Solander; and Lt. Gore accompanied him in the yawl. They and their crews were the first British men ever recorded as setting foot on the soil of Queensland. Cook wrote: "We landed a little within the south point of the Bay where there is a channel leading into a large lagoon... The entrance to this channel was close to a south point... (Round Hill Head)... of this Bay, being formed on the east by the shore and on the west by a large spit of sand. It is about a quarter of a mile broad and lies in south by west. Here is room for a few ships to lay very secure and a small stream of fresh water. After this I made a little excursion in the woods while my men and hands made three or four hauls with the seine but caught not above a dozen small fish." Cook speaking of his point of anchorage says that "the north point (Bustard Head) bore NW¼W and the south point (Round Hill Head) EIS and that he was two miles from the south point and the same distance from the shore in the bottom of the Bay. (The late J. H. Maiden said that Banks here, for the first time, calls the eucalypt—the typical tree originally uniquely found in Australia—the gum tree name universally adopted in Australia and also by several other countries and languages.) (A lighthouse was built at Bustard Head in 1867 and Thomas Rockhouse was appointed to it on 1 June 1888 and remained there for over twenty years.)"

On 12 June 1926 Commodore Hyde of H.M.A.S. "Sydney" at the invitation of the authorities, unveiled a cairn erected by the Historical Society of Queensland and the Royal Geographical Society of Queensland jointly. It is situated about 100 yards inland from the point of Cook's actual landing place; is of concrete on a base six feet square; is eight feet six inches in height and is a four-sided obelisk bearing, on the seaward side, a bronze tablet inscribed:

"Under the lee of this point Lt. James Cook landed on 24 May 1770" A Recreation Reserve of approximately 1,850 acres was set apart by the Queensland Department of Lands in perpetuity (see Text Fig. 3).
Two days later, the ship lay off the eastern point of Curtis Island (Cape Capricorn) and Cook again correctly surmised that a river, lagoon, or inlet was close at hand (in fact, the Fitzroy River, on which Rockhampton now stands, empties there into Keppel Bay). The Great Barrier Reef—unknown as yet to Cook—now approaches closer and closer to the mainland, and for hundreds of miles the "Endeavour" was to limp along behind her boats as they felt their way among reefs and shallows in these dangerous seas—the "Coste Dangereuse" of the ancient French copy of the lost Portuguese chart (see Plate III).

The many hills at the northmost point in sight won it the name of Cape Manifold, and beyond it Cape Townshend, many islands of the Northumberland group, and Pier Head limited the ragged thirty-five-mile shores of Shoalwater Bay. Through a strait like a river
Monument at Bustard Bay, unveiled 12 June 1926. H.M.A.S. "Sydney" leaving after ceremony. First landing place of Cook in Queensland, 25 May 1770. Of his ten landings, nine were in Queensland, and only one (Botany Bay) in any other State of Australia.

Monument at Possession Is., Torres Straits, Queensland, where Cook took possession of the East Coast of Australia on 23 August 1770.
"— AND WE BEACHED THE SHIP."

"Endeavour" careened for repairs at site of Cooktown on Endeavour River. Cook spent seven weeks there and all who wrote journals brought them up to date during that period. They are essentially descriptions of Queensland accordingly.

PLATE IX.
Aborigines in Native Environment.

PLATE X.
mouth Cook probed his way with relief into Broad Sound, but gave
the name of Thirsty Sound to the narrow strait separating Quail
Island and Long Island from the mainland, because the search for
water there was unsuccessful. It was now 31 May and he landed—
his third time ashore—at the north-west entrance to Thirsty Sound
and the north-west extremity of Shoalwater Bay—the Pier Head. (18)
They caught no birds, no fish, nor turtle, though they saw some;
they thought the oysters were not worth picking up they were so
small; two natives were glimpsed as they fled; sharp, hooked grasses
and innumerable mosquitoes “made walking almost intolerable.”
But Banks had quite a field-day among the numerous new species
and varieties of plants and animals he saw there. One of the more
interesting things that had intrigued them all was the little fish so
common among the mangroves—the mud skipper (Periophthalmus
australis) which hops from rock to wet ground root like a frog and
actually seemed, they thought, to prefer to go by land than by water!
They did not know, of course, that the Ceratodus or “lung fish,” one
of the intermediate “links” in the story of evolving types, was to be
found in neighbouring Queensland waters, uniquely.

But their primary mission was coastal discovery and charting;
and shore observation, though important, was incidental. North-
ward again, off shore for safety, they missed (perhaps at night) the
site of Gladstone (Port Curtis) in their cautious passage through
reefs and shoals. With boats out, sounding the depth constantly,
they crept along under easy sail with gentle breezes and fair weather,
discovering a passage thirty miles long between the mainland and
the Cumberland Islands from Shaw Island to Hayman Island (now
a luxury holiday spot).

“This passage,” wrote Cook, “I have named Whit Sunday’s
Passage as it was discovered on the day the Church commemorates
that Festival,” and a small island there, among the many, was called
Pentecost Island. Here for the first time in Australia, Cook saw a
 canoe with an outrigger “large and differently built to any we have
seen upon the coast.” Natives sail and paddle scores of miles in
similar canoes in the island chains north and east of Australia.

By an endless succession of headlands and bays, picking his way

(18) Of the ten landings Cook made in Australian waters, nine were on Queens-
land soil, only Kurnell (Botany Bay) being in the present State of New
South Wales. They were 25 May: Bustard Bay; 31 May: Pier Head, on
Quail Is. (378ft. high); 11 June: Yarrabah, near Cairns; 19 June to 5 August:
Endeavour River, Cooktown; 12 August: Point Lookout, near C. Flattery; 13
August: Lizard Is.; 14 August: Eagle Is., one of the Direction Gp.; 25
August: Possession Is., Torres St.; 24 August: Booby Is., Torres Sis.

Only two (Botany Bay—one week—and Endeavour River—seven weeks)
gave opportunity for prolonged study of the country, though the party used
their eyes effectively wherever they made a landfall. Several of the landings
(as at Lizard Is., Eagle Is., Point Lookout, etc.), were to spy out anxiously
a northerly course among the shoals. Most of them were areas that have
not invited nor repaid development, though several are interesting.
among the shoals, Cook moved steadily northward past what are now the sites of Bowen (Port Denison) and of Home Hill and Ayr, a few miles inland on the Burdekin River.

He named, among others, Capes Palmerston, Hilsborough and Conway (and Repulse Bay—off which he was forced to haul the ship), Cape Gloucester and Edgecombe Bay, and on 6 and 7 June Cape Upstart and Cleveland Bay, with Magnetic ("Magnetic") Island off what is now Townsville. Halifax Bay and Palm Islands—where what were thought to be coconut palms turned out to be cabbage palms (a fruitless species)—came next; then the Hinchinbrook area, behind which lie Lucinda, Ingham and Cardwell; next Cape Sandwich, Rockingham Bay and Dunk Island; and so up what is now the richest coastal area of the opulent sugar belt (Tully, Innisfail and Gordonvale) to Cape Grafton and the site of the present-day Cairns.

Cook anchored in a bay three miles west of Cape Grafton, with Green Island (which he named) in the offing, on 11 June 1770, and went ashore about where Yarrabah Mission now stands, with Banks and Solander. The bottom of the bay was low mangrove-covered land, but the head of the cape was steep and rocky and, though there were two streams there, it was deemed unwise to attempt to water the ship because of heavy surf on the rocks.

Cook's magnificent seamanship had saved his ship and weathered every threat of disaster, but now the many menaces of this dangerous coast came to a rapid and almost fatal climax.

Standing north-west and then north, past Port Douglas and Mossman, and beyond Cape Tribulation ("there began all our troubles"), the "Endeavour," just before 11 p.m. on 12 June, in clear moonlight and with a fine breeze, drove heavily onto "Endeavour Reef," four and a half miles long, half a mile wide, with a surrounding reef of sunken coral, and in latitude 15° 47' S., longitude 145° 35' E.—eighteen to twenty miles off shore.

With a stream anchor out from the starboard quarter, Cook attempted to kedge her off, but failed, and the position became more and more perilous. To lighten the ship, iron and stone ballast, stores, water casks and guns were hove overboard, and after twenty-three hours, at the height of the tide, she slid off into deep water—but began to fill more rapidly! In this extremity Dr. Monkhouse, a midshipman surgeon (whose name is commemorated at Monkhouse Point, just below Cooktown), suggested the ship be "fothered" in a way he had once seen done for a ship subsequently brought safely from Virginia to London. He "mixed some oakum and wool, chopping it small and placing it in handfuls with sheep's dung on an old studding sail, where it was stitched down firmly ... the sail was hauled under the ship and kept extended till the suction carried the oakum and wool into the leak." Past Hope Islands, through inhospitable Weary Bay, and after a two-day anchoring against gale and two groundings on shore approaches, the "Endeavour" was warped and floated to the south bank of a river (Endeavour River), where Cooktown and a monument now stand to remind posterity of this event. The ship and her complement remained here from 19 June to 5 August 1770 for repair. This stay afforded Cook, Banks, and the others time to bring their journals up to date as well as to make almost all the local observations and enquiries that are recorded there, including the short native vocabulary which is from the dialect of the local aboriginals. It can be fairly claimed that Cook's descriptions of Australia are almost wholly descriptions of Queensland.

On 24 June one of a party out shooting pigeons saw a strange animal "something less than a greyhound ... of a mouse colour, very slender made and swift of foot" and, next day, Cook saw one himself which he would have "taken for a wild dog, but for its walking and running, in which it jumped like a hare or deer." Some time later Banks, who described this as the typical "animal of the country," saw that instead of going on all fours, these creatures bounded on their hind legs "as jerboas do" and indeed escaped by leaping nimbly over the thickets of long dense grass that stopped his dogs. Cook reports that one weighing twenty-eight pounds only when cleaned (Banks said thirty-eight pounds) was eaten and was found excellent. "It was hare-lipt and the head and ears were most like a hare's of any animal I know ... the forelegs were eight inches long and the hind twenty-two inches." Banks said: "To compare it to any European animal would be impossible as it had not the least resemblance to any I have seen." He said the natives called this animal "Kangooroo" or "Kanguru" or "Kangaru," (19) and so it has been called ever since, but, in fact, the natives do not have any word of the kind for it—some confusion in their reply to the enquiry has given a new word to our own (and many other) languages. The dingo "like a wolf" was also seen, and also flying foxes "as large and much like gallon kegs"; wild yams grew in swampy places; and there were vast termite nests—the meteorological ants' nests which stand north and south protectively to the heat and light of the sun—from six inches to eight feet high. Fish in plenty and many turtles were caught; giant clams, many cockles and an occasional crocodile were seen; flocks of whistling duck—dense mangrove swamps—evergreen bark trees or cottonwood (Hibiscus tiliaceus)—innumerable.
able mosquitoes, and on 11 July 1770 the first natives to make real contact with the visitors. They came in a small canoe with an out-rigger, and, says Cook:

“One of these men was above middle age, the other three were young: none were above five and a half feet high and all had small limbs. They were naked, their skins the colour of wood soot; their hair black, lank and cropt short, and neither woolly nor frizzled, nor did they want any of their fore teeth... (20) Some part of their bodies had been painted with red and one of them had his upper lip and breast painted with streaks of white called ‘carbanda.’ Their features were far from being disagreeable, their voices were soft and tunable, and they could easily repeat any word after us. But no one, not even Tupia (an interpreter from Tahiti), could understand a word they said.”

On 20 July about sixteen or eighteen aboriginal men and women—all stark naked—were seen and ten came on board the “Endeavour” and asked for turtle; on being refused they tried angrily to drag them away.

At 7 a.m. on 5 August 1770 Cook finally put to sea again, greatly concerned because, from high land ashore, he saw a vast series of shoals and reefs to seaward.

Making his way to Lizard Island (which he named) and climbing its highest hill (1,179 feet), he saw to his delight a passage through the Great Barrier Reef (known now as Cook’s Passage), and on taking the ship through it found no bottom at 100 fathoms and was free of reefs:

“after having been entangled among islands or shoals more or less since 26 May, in which time we have sailed above 360 leagues by the lead, without ever having a leadsman out of the chains when the ship was under sail—a circumstance that perhaps never happened to any ship before.”

But his satisfaction was shortlived: a change of wind brought them back towards the reefs as to a rockbound lee shore, and then a tide rip through the shoals and a flat calm brought them within a hair-breath of total loss. Only those who have been set towards a coral reef in such circumstances can appreciate the horror of the situation one moment hanging high above the reef as if to be dashed inevitably to pieces upon it, the next in the trough of a wave huddled far below its vicious edge, from which streams of water cascade among jagged spurs and weird sea life—all touched with equal menace. As Cook wrote:

“...all the dangers we had escaped were little in comparison... a reef such as is scarcely known in Europe... a wall of coral rock rising almost perpendicular out of the unfathomable ocean, always overflown at high water, generally seven or eight feet, and dry in places at low water; the large waves of the vast ocean meeting with so sudden a resistance, make a most terrible surf, breaking mountains high, especially as in our case, when the general trade wind blows directly upon it.”

On 18 August, at full speed upon the flood tide with a light breeze behind her and all her boats aiding, the “Endeavour” raced through “Providential Channel”—a gap in the reef—into smooth water, and in full view of the mainland at what Cook called Cape Weymouth, bounding Weymouth Bay. Portland Roads is now a seaport there.

The coastline from Lizard Island to Cape Weymouth is one of the few areas of Cook’s map of the Queensland coast that later needed correction. It was not at all remarkable that it was rather distorted!

However, his troubles were nearly over; his task was nearly accomplished.

By Forbes’ Island, Bold Head, Temple Bay, Cape Grenville, Hardy Island and Cockburn Island, he came to Bird Island and the (later named) Boydong Cays where, nineteen years afterwards, Bligh, set adrift by the mutineers of the “Bounty,” was to make his Australian landfall with his famished crew after one of the most marvellous small rowing-boat journeys of all time. (20a)

By noon on 22 August 1770 Cook found he was three or four miles north of the mainland and wrote:

“The point of the main... which is the northern promontory of this country I have named York Cape in honour of his late Royal Highness the Duke of York. It lies in the long. of 218° 14’ W., the north point in the lat. of 10° 37’ S. and the east point in 10° 41’ S.”

As early as 14 June, reaching Timor on 12 June 1778. The mutineers on 28 May (compare the dates) were at Tabusi; and reached Tahiti again on 6 June, where they separated; some remained, others left, as it turned out, for Pitcairn Is. R.M.S. ‘Pandora’ arrived at Tahiti in 1791, arrested those still there; and returning, was wrecked near Torres Strait, with the loss of thirty-one of the crew and a few mutineers. The survivors in the ship’s boats reached Timor 16 September 1791. At Timor they saw and arrested Bryant and his party of convicts (escaped from Sydney—see p. 99). On 19 June 1792 they arrived in England. Three of the mutineers, after trial, were hanged.

(20a) Bligh, with eighteen others, set adrift by the mutineers of the “Bounty” at Husine Is., on 28 April 1791, in an open boat 25 ft. long, 9 ft. 9 in. beam and 20 ft. 9 in. depth, made a phenomenal trip of 3,616 miles to Keaping, Timor, in forty-one days. They passed through the Barrier Reef and landed on C. York peninsula on 28 May, noting and naming various features in the far north until finally they passed through Torres Strait on 3 June, reaching Timor on 12 June 1798. The mutineers on 28 May (compare the dates) were at Tabusi; and reached Tahiti again on 6 June, where they separated; some remained, others left, as it turned out, for Pitcairn Is. R.M.S. ‘Pandora’ arrived at Tahiti in 1791, arrested those still there; and returning, was wrecked near Torres Strait, with the loss of thirty-one of the crew and a few mutineers. The survivors in the ship’s boats reached Timor 16 September 1791. At Timor they saw and arrested Bryant and his party of convicts (escaped from Sydney—see p. 99). On 19 June 1792 they arrived in England. Three of the mutineers, after trial, were hanged.
with my ship, and therefore may land no more on this eastern coast of New Holland; and on the West I can make no new discovery the honour of which belongs to the Dutch. . . . And notwithstanding I had in the name of His Majesty taken possession of several places upon this coast I now once more hoisted English colours and in the name of His Majesty King George the III took possession of the whole Eastern coast from the above latitude (38° S.) to this place by the name of New South Wales (originally New Wales) "together with all the bays, harbours, rivers and islands situated upon the said coast, after which we fired three volleys of small arms which were answered by the like number from the ship."(21)

Through these straits Cook followed de Prado y Tovar and Torres, and safely through, set his triumphant sails for Timor.

Cook never claimed that he accomplished a feat of new discovery when he took his ship through what he called Endeavour Strait. Torres' actual record of his voyage in 1606 and his claim regarding it had been found in the Spanish archives at Manila of the Philippines in 1762, and though Cook had not apparently seen a translation of it at that time he had his opponent, Dalrymple's, commentary on it with him and he knew that the matter of the separation of New Guinea from New Holland had been debated and disputed by many geographers for two centuries.

However, the French, just as they had secured the maps of Portugal on which Plate III is based, before 1530, had also managed to obtain copies of those of de Prado and Torres, before 1630, and include them in their published charts. They delineate the south coast of New Guinea so accurately that they can overlie a modern map of that coast without serious conflict. The "Saints' day" names given to various coastal features give a day to day record of the voyage that is more complete than even de Prado's recital.

The discovery of de Prado y Tovar's diary has given us an almost day-to-day account of the first discovery of southern New Guinea from the Louisiade Islands to and through the straits. It has, however, only been known for thirty years; the French maps go back over 300 years!

Cook cautiously wrote: "As I believe it was known before, but not publicly, I claim no other merit than the clearing up of a doubtful point."

(21) The Commonwealth Government in 1925 erected a memorial obelisk marking the position of Capt. Cook's landing on Possession Island, Torres Straits. The inscription on the bronze tablet affixed, reads:

Lieut. James Cook, R.N.
of the Endeavour
landed on this island
which he named
Possession Island
and in the name of His Majesty King George III
took possession of the whole Eastern Coast of Australia
from the latitude 38° South to this place
August 22nd 1770

the Continent—and that was a larger piece of geographical discovery, made at one time, than has ever been achieved by one navigator before or since—but he discovered its abounding possibilities as a place for the habitation of civilised mankind.

He did something more: with his French and English colleagues of 1750-1780, he finally dispelled the “mystery” of Oceania and the South Pacific. The vast series of island groups discovered, rediscovered, denied, duplicated and so on, emerged as actual entities from the mists. Up to that time they had been merely obscure geographical terms—from now on they began to be separate areas with individual political and strategic significance. This was a matter of considerable moment at a time when Great Britain was emerging triumphant from a struggle with France for dominance in Canada and in India; when she was shortly to lose the North American colonies that formed the United States of America; and when she was within twenty years to be embroiled (in the first of the world wars) with Napoleon—the first of the modern Caesars.

CHAPTER V

THE CONVICT PROBLEM IN ENGLAND

Seeking a new convict colony—and defining Australia’s coastline

Significant events in world history have unexpected consequences. It had been the capture of Constantinople by the Turks and the closing of the Middle East caravan routes that had forced Portugal and Spain to seek sea routes to the Spice Islands and that had resulted in the rounding of Africa; the astonishing discovery of the great American continent stretching almost from Pole to Pole; and piecemeal, the discovery of Cape York Peninsula, the Gulf of Carpentaria and the whole coast of Australia.

It had been the wars of the Reformation; the seizure of the vacant throne of Portugal by Spain; and the attempt of the Spaniards to annihilate the heretic Dutch physically and economically, that had led to the Dutch Empire in the Spice Islands.

It was the American War of Independence that suddenly gave “New South Wales” (including Queensland) a new importance and significance to the British Crown, and that led to its deliberate colonisation.

The revolt of the American colonies commenced (1775-6) five years after the discovery of the east coast of Australia by Captain Cook, and ended victoriously for the rebels in 1782-3. The triumphant Americans behaved most viciously towards those of their fellow countrymen who had been loyal to England—their property was confiscated; they were disallowed from any legal rights (e.g. from recovering money owed to them); and were driven ruthlessly from the land where most of them had been born. Fifty thousand of these refugees went to Canada, Nova Scotia and the West Indies: many others returned with the British troops to England, where most of them lived for years in utter destitution. (Many were in London, under the immediate eye of the Government—to its great embarrassment.) For over a hundred years before the revolt of the North American colonies legal transportation of convicts to America had been in operation. As a matter of fact, in the last fifty years there had been contractors willing to take convicted offenders off the hands of the British Government at no expense, knowing that they could sell them to American planters for as much as £20 per head—