



Kurnell Peninsula: Captain Cook's Landing Place

NEW SOUTH WALES

When Lieutenant (later Captain) James Cook first set foot on Australian soil at Kurnell Peninsula Headland in Botany Bay, New South Wales, he made history.

This moment led to the British settlement of the Australian continent. It altered forever the way of life for Indigenous Australians, dramatically expanded the world's scientific understanding of the continent's unique flora and fauna and ultimately led to the creation of a new nation—Australia.

Originally sent by the British Admiralty to the southseas to observe the transit of the planet Venus across the face of the sun, Cook spent several months circling and surveying New Zealand's North and South Islands. Later the *Endeavour* set sail for Van Diemen's Land, which Cook believed to be the south-eastern tip of New Holland. Southerly gales propelled the ship north and, on 19 April 1770, Lieutenant Zachary Hicks, Cook's second in command, sighted land. This was the 'East Coast of New Holland', first named Point Hicks and now Cape Everard, on the east coast of Victoria.

The *Endeavour* sailed north, close to land in the Illawarra region (near Wollongong), but the surf was too rough for them to get ashore.

Sailing northwards along the coast, Cook found the first safe harbour to drop anchor on 29 April 1770. In addition to observing the land, Cook was searching for fresh water to sustain the crew on its voyage.

Approaching the shore by longboat, the crew noted, on what is now known as Kurnell Peninsula, the presence of a 'small village consisting of about six or eight houses'. With no means of understanding each other's language, confusion marked the initial contact between the landing party and the local people.

"I thought that they beckoned us to come ashore, but in this we were mistaken, for as soon as we put the boat in they again came to oppose us... I fired a musket between the two which had no effect... one of them took up a stone and threw at us..."

— (Cook's journal, 29 April 1770)



Cook's party explored the area over the next eight days, gathering food, collecting scientific samples and observing this new land. Despite several encounters, Cook was not able to establish effective communication with the local people, who maintained a wary distance. The crew noted local activities such as camping, fishing, using trees for bark and food, collecting shells and cooking fish.

The Europeans were not the only ones recording first impressions. 'Captain Cook stories' exist in parts of Aboriginal Australia the explorer never visited. In some Aboriginal stories, Kurnell Peninsula is called 'The Foot', the place where Cook's foot, first connected with Australian land.

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