

## INTRODUCTION

Insuperable height of loftiest shade,  
 Cedar and pine, and fir, and branching palm;  
 A sylvan scene, and as the ranks ascend,  
 Shade above shade, a woody theatre  
 Of stateliest view. Yet higher than their tops  
 The verdurous wall of Paradise up sprung.<sup>1</sup>

Thus did an early settler in the Macleay Valley, Lieut. John Henderson, draw upon Milton's elevated description of the approach to Paradise as the only fitting description for his spectacular new location. Yet this is not simply fine writing by Henderson, for the quotation contains descriptive elements which recur in many texts written in and about the region up to 1914: the profuse and varied vegetation; the preponderance and mystery of forest shadows there; and a sense of profound grandeur. This raises questions of how extensive was such an ongoing response to nature in the region or, indeed, what other shared ways of perceiving/symbolising the region were favoured, and to what extent did they rely on earlier writings to do so.

To address these questions one has to move from (passing) explorative accounts into the later field of local history, where these same records/accounts are often preserved and their analysis has been undertaken. Over the last twenty years there has been a general proliferation in Australia of local history writing,<sup>2</sup> a trend particularly evidenced for the now more closely scrutinised farther North Coast of New South Wales. While a range of pre-twentieth century works has been drawn upon in the compilation of such histories, there has been, both here and more generally, a common failure to analyse of the source texts as examples of very varied genres/styles

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<sup>1</sup> *John Milton: Paradise Lost*, ed. by Alistair Fowler (London: Longman, 1971 [1st pub. 1968]), IV. 138-143. Quoted by John Henderson, *Excursions and Adventures* I, p. 292, as description of the Upper Macleay River's forested mountains.

<sup>2</sup> The tradition has been building for a much longer period. J.W. McCarty, 'Australian Regional History', *Historical Studies*, 70 (April 1978), 88-105, (p. 89) quotes Sir Keith Hancock as stating that regional history is prominent among the things that Australian historians do well.

of writing. Hitherto, the main interest has been in their essence, rather than in their more expressive words or stylistics. Specific quotation from source/informant is rarely found, while those histories that do have them have begotten almost too promptly a large range of linked vexatious questions.<sup>3</sup>

Literary and newer methods of approaching these historical documents alike each provide ways for critical examination of such evocative pieces, thereby promising many fresh insights into the cultural make-up of this region in the crucial period of its slow settler establishment. With rare exception,<sup>4</sup> local compilations/studies have been based more closely on separate river valleys,<sup>5</sup> such accounts being supported in their turn by smaller works on the actual towns and villages of the region. Typically the writings of nineteenth century, and from even earlier, have treated the zone in broader general sweeps, and an analysis of such works should afford profitable insight into the slowly forming boundaries to the region's identity and consciousness. Local history's traditional emphasis on pastoral and economic development, on the growth of industry and on the progress of trains, roads, bridges and of later complex administrative structures could even be characterised as a 'deeds not words' approach. Through a selectivity which could be distanced from the original words, one could more readily ignore those deeds deemed inconvenient—the invasion and appropriation of the land.

This present research is inspired by a rejection of that style of simplistic chronicle, one like that which impelled Graeme Davison to describe his early work thus: 'I wrote in conscious revolt against "the kind of history that makes heroes of city

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<sup>3</sup> See, for example, Geoffrey Blomfield, *Baal Belbora: The End of the Dancing*, rev. edn (Chippendale, N.S.W: Alternate Publishing Co-operative, 1986 [1st edn 1981]). For other works treating the the local history of the North Coast, see my Bibliography pp. 320-324.

<sup>4</sup> A thematic rather than localised approach can provide a regional overview. See the study of maritime transport, Mike Richards, *North Coast Run: Men and Ships of the NSW North Coast*, 2nd edn (Wahroonga, NSW: Turton and Armstrong, 1980 [1st edn, 1977]). Also see the study of Aboriginal culture, J.S. Ryan, *The Land of Ulitarra: Early Records of the Aborigines of the Mid-North Coast of New South Wales*, rev. edn (Lismore, NSW: NSW Department of Education, 1988 [1st edn, Grafton: U.N.E., 1964]), and the overview of women's material, Baiba Berzins, *North Coast Women: A History to 1939* (Sydney: Royal Australian Historical Society, 1996).

<sup>5</sup> See Norma Townsend, *Valley of the Crooked River: European Settlement on the Nambucca* (Kensington NSW: New South Wales University Press, 1993). In this recent work insights are drawn from the late settlement and isolation of the Nambucca Valley, i.e., to descry the locality's distinctiveness. p. iix-ix. The instigation and funding of such discrete histories is also usually locally based.

councillors".<sup>6</sup> But while his work then found appropriate direction in an until then marginalised (urban) class perspective, this present exploration looks back to the philosophical construction of a country region. The situation of regional history to date has been similar, with J. D. Marshall recently declaring that (for Britain):

Sadly, the old and overworked idea of 'regional' history as economic and social history using convenient county boundaries dies very hard.<sup>7</sup>

In Australia 'region' has been taken to mean either 'states' or a slightly enlarged 'local' history (still usually based on one small city), but the approach otherwise mirrors that in Britain. The Canadian experience gives more emphasis to the regions—considering their nation more a mosaic of regions.<sup>8</sup> In the United States there has been a proliferation of studies addressing comparatively larger regions, and one such addresses a North West U.S.A. region which ignores the international boundary and includes part of Canada.<sup>9</sup> This is a bold assertion of region—here the 'Inland Empire'—that is not overly concerned with rigid boundaries. In this work the historian Katherine G. Morrissey offers further encouragement for my present study:

regions are always in the process of formation... Indeed, in most cases contestation and conflict characterise regions more than consensus does. Regions are made up of different individuals and groups who are engaged in conflicts over meanings of places, over the relations of peoples in and with places, and over their competing visions of the future. The struggles are both material and representational. And they take place not only in the world of writers and historians but also in the world of the everyday.<sup>10</sup>

The nineteenth century was a formative time for the North Coast and its many groups repeatedly contested meanings as they attempted to turn hitherto 'space' into a 'place'. The many writers of that time have left a record which, under close analysis, can reveal the complexity of the seemingly simple process of exploration and settlement.

While the overall regional perspective for the North Coast has been so largely neglected in favour of local segments, from a national viewpoint there has been

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<sup>6</sup> Graeme Davison, 'A Sense of Place', in *Boundaries of the Past*, ed. by Bain Attwood (Carlton, Vic: The History Institute, Victoria, 1990), pp. 28-35 (p. 33).

<sup>7</sup> J. D. Marshall, *The Tyranny of the Discrete: A Discussion of the Problems of Local History in England* (Aldershot, Hants: Scolar Press, 1997), p. 3.

<sup>8</sup> McDougall, Russell, 'On Location: Regionalism in Australian and Canadian Literature', *Island Magazine*, 24 (Spring 1985), 3-11.

<sup>9</sup> See Katherine G. Morrissey, *Mental Territories: Mapping the Inland Empire* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997), p. 11.

<sup>10</sup> Morrissey, p. 14.

considerably more recent attention given to a small number of the early works having this regional scope<sup>11</sup>—using them to fill out a much broader context than the 'region'. Such perspective has served very usefully to give prominence to hitherto overlooked but discrete sub-genres, including women's diaries or explorers' logs,<sup>12</sup> although this has not as yet been the particular case for the North Coast. If one looks at the seminal voyages for east coast discovery, then Cook and Banks have received much stylistic attention, particularly in Paul Carter's influential first work centred on the Botany Bay sections of their journals, yet with but sparse analysis of the North Coast sections.<sup>13</sup>

In available and relevant biography, much historical attention has been given to J.D. Lang's life, including some close reading of his actual writings, but not of his North Coast works. With fiction, Louis Becke's coastally set volumes, with their delight in many detailed descriptions, have been almost completely overlooked,<sup>14</sup> as has the 'motoring romance' of A.B. Brockway, and its style, one of much charm and underplayed humour, a manner lost after World War One. There has deservedly been a renewed Australian interest in nineteenth century prose, one concerned to revalue non-fiction as well as hitherto marginalised texts, and to treat them both in serious and scholarly fashion.<sup>15</sup> The limitation to their being more widely read has been the prevailing national focus, with modern evaluations for a largely metropolitan audience, and so 'lesser' regional works seldom rise to prominence.<sup>16</sup>

11 James Tucker, *Ralph Rashleigh* (Pymble: Angus and Robertson, 1992 [first pub. 1952]), and Lucy, Frost, *A Face in the Glass: The Journal and Life of Annie Baxter Dawbin*, [1839-1843] (Port Melbourne: William Heinemann Australia, 1992), in particular. With the coast's navigation prose from James Cook, critical attention has been so broad as to have a pan-Pacific approach.

12 See Robert Dixon, *The Course of Empire: Neo-Classical Culture in New South Wales 1788-1860* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1986), Paul Carter, *Living in a New Country: History, Travelling and Language* (London: Faber and Faber, 1992), and Simon Ryan, *The Cartographic Eye: How Explorers Saw Australia* (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 1996).

13 Paul Carter, *The Road to Botany Bay: An Essay in Spatial History* (London: Faber and Faber, 1987).

14 A. Grove Day, *Louis Becke* (Melbourne: Hill of Content Publishing, 1967). This, the only complete work devoted to the life and prose from Becke, is, paradoxically, by an Hawaiian-based critic whose interest is predominantly in the Pacific Islands writings.

15 See a collection of such works by Elizabeth Webby, ed., *Colonial Voices: Letters, Diaries, Journalism and Other Accounts of Nineteenth-century Australia* (St Lucia, Qld: University of Queensland Press, 1989). This is an approach that could well be taken in analysing many regional collections of significant texts.

16 For a type of regional work that can incorporate wider current interests, see: Maurice French, ed., *Travellers in a Landscape: Visitors' Impressions of the Darling Downs 1827-1954* (Toowoomba, Qld: USQ Press, 1994).

Despite the recently increased range of genres now scrutinised in serious study, there are still many hindrances to public savouring of these texts. While there is some valorisation of journalistic work this is not general, and serious prose—scientific, anthropological and administrative writing—has itself received very little close attention as to its style let alone for its recurring features. In close regional study, such works come more easily to the fore, since they are responses, however seemingly quiet and unpretentious, to the setting's lifestyle and settler experience of those same areas.

There are certain important aspects which make the far/further North Coast region highly distinctive if not unique because of the vast distance from the great cities, and the concomitant isolation, as well as the desperate searching for human and social solutions from one's own situation without other aid. The result of this praxis is, necessarily, often having to shrug off subsequent disparaging city criticism. And there was too—the mountain barrier to the west (but not a complete barrier), a climate that was very mild, and conducive early to pastoral work (and later yielding a wide range of agricultural products), and a vast supply of timber. In another sense the area was unique in that the same fertility and mildness supported a particularly large Aboriginal population,<sup>17</sup> one that was comparatively resilient until the rich natural and even paradisaical resources were senselessly denuded.

Because of the distance from Sydney, and largely maritime access, closer (town-like) settlement was later than other large areas—the New England, the Hunter or the zone south-west of Sydney. Because of this, so much later close contact with the Indigenous people, those who came to squat or for later anthropological work were building on the 'success', as they saw it, of the civilising endeavours in other areas. So their methodology was clearer, whether it was in getting a squatting run together, or in recording apparently distinctive social and tribal features. Long a colonial landscape, it was rapidly shaped by those who occupied the land immediately before them, so, that the first settlers' decisions are an important part of the continuing construction. For they are either added to, or undermined, redirected, or modified.

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<sup>17</sup> Arguably some of the continent's densest, from early times to the late Victorian period at least, according to Tindall and his map of tribal zones.

This is the clearer by a contrast with, say, the southern approach region of the Hunter. There the early settlers became quickly established on smaller properties, soon closely abutting on the towns. Their convict-built large substantial buildings—usually of stone—lent them part of the image of a British country squire. In that place the different social conceptions of their region impinges upon its writers - even into recent times—as in Donald Horne’s work.<sup>18</sup> In a place like the North Coast, the early settlers had their homes less architecturally substantial, and their essential tasks and thoughts dealt more with a rich, lush and fecund forest, and, of course, with the more static and close knit and still tribal groupings of local inhabitants. As food was more than ample for the Indigenous inhabitants, long distance hunting trips were not called for, apart from seasonal coastal journeys for shell-fish and the like and their survival was less problematic in food terms.

What, then, is the aim of this particular close and primary research-based study? It asks: what is the range of serious and sensitive prose written in and about the region up to the watershed year of 1914?—in the period from exploration to a still exuberant 'empire', and, secondly, from these early works, whether one can discern some of the features of a distinctive and identity-bestowing regional consciousness, perhaps the more to be clung to today as an alternative to a national stereotype?

A definition of the selected region needs to be made and the space chosen to be shown to reflect that loose concept of the sum of the 'areas' that have arisen and been reinforced in their nature by such texts as those now treated. Fortunately, for this study, this is generally accepted to run from the Manning Valley in the south to the Tweed Valley in the north, with the bounding escarpment to the west. These broad definitions for the sources of the texts reflects these long-time settler emphases. Two earlier obvious thematic approaches (focussing on Aborigines and women), and the popular one of shipping.

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<sup>18</sup> See the descriptions of class divisions, and how they are firmly located in the specific place, and how they differ from other regions, given in his *The Education of Young Donald* (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1967), pp. 15-23.

Intellectual lessons from critical theory of the last twenty years can help to inform a post-modern appreciation of any local history field. For example, on the one hand we might consider that any particular work will try to work itself towards its own integrative whole, in convincing argument. Yet it is also the case, as Deconstruction reminds us, that for every assertion which is made one should keep in mind whether the complete opposite might not be equally be true. From the viewpoint of Foucault, one must be alert to the silences as to the groups that have been left out of the history, most noticeably here for the Aborigines and for the early and real position of women. These silences can be seen as aiding the concentration of power, and hence at least as unconscious erasures. Prose written by women or those out of the moneyed class is rare in this period, yet those which do survive are especially valuable in their particular variation and consonance. From a Postmodern perspective, then, such a regional study can be merely a slice of the evolving and perceived identity which individuals in the region choose to construct for themselves. Nevertheless, one must assert that it is a wholly valid one that has had significant meaning for many within the area. They construct themselves to some degree in a regional sense of place, just as they construct themselves on other occasions or for other purposes in an educational, festal, religious or national sense, or in the international sense where the term 'region' relates to a much vaster region and identity is the more complex

The methodology for this current study was suggested by Paul Carter's approach in *The Road to Botany Bay*. That work set a benchmark for such analyses,<sup>19</sup> using critical theory to look at historical documents, thereby interrogating afresh much of our (now fading) historical consciousness. Part of the danger of such an approach is that it is oddly, even fatally, European. This scholarly analysis has a confident and deceptively simple ease to it that does not grow out of the tensions and difficulties inherent in living within the situation examined. It is speaking to Australians about a range of perceived past and present 'Australias', but what is missing is a distinctive voice for Australia itself. The sense of national experience or purpose, or even of a

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<sup>19</sup> Follow-up to his style has been in studies with a narrower scope, both spatially and temporally.

somehow manifest destiny, is not prominent. The essential point for him is to illustrate critical alternatives (particularly his 'spatial history') to accepted historiography. The like regional challenge is well posed by Adamson (in his Canadian setting):

If we lose sight of our roots by promoting solely a schema of intellectualism divorced from the body of immediate experience ... we are essentially consolidating a past in isolation from the living present.<sup>20</sup>

A more positive method for close and fruitful investigation came from the work of Graham Huggan on 'mapping', particularly as applied to colonial and later situations:

The map can be seen ... both as a visual analogue for the stabilizing procedures which seek to guarantee the 'synchronic essentialism' of colonial discourse and as an ironic reminder of the inevitable deficiencies of those procedures.<sup>21</sup>

Following this sobering approach, an interrogation of 'map-making', as it is encoded in the various texts of the North Coast, can reveal much about the ways in which writers came to know and to define the region now chosen for more probing investigation.

The task, then, in consideration of each of these significant and surviving early documents is to look at the several relationships between writer, text and reader, and to determine how these intervene/intersect in a culturally constructed situation—including the particular representation of Aborigines. A regional scope with this methodology can point a way forward for local histories to have closer engagement with such source texts. Early writer-positioning and his/her significant silences are always worthy of close investigation, as is any new grouping that may emerge. Thus, there seems a clear and very obvious difference in style between the thoughts of traversers and those of the settlers. The first group's movement and eye—the scopic regime in the setting up of prospects, and 'touching but lightly'—differs from the settlers' greater knowledge of the detail and their different relationship with issues which earlier were more easily unnoticed in the 'shadows'. While there is no strict consonance in these groupings, even those texts which exhibit a degree of variation (such as that of the squatter, E. Ogilvie) contain their own 'umbrageous' leaves.

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<sup>20</sup> Arthur Adamson, 'Identity through Metaphor: An Approach to the Question of Regionalism in Canadian Literature', *Studies in Canadian Literature*, 5 (Spring 1980), 83-99 (p. 99).

<sup>21</sup> Graham Huggan, *Territorial Disputes: Maps and Mapping Strategies in Contemporary Canadian and Australian Fiction*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994), p. 151.

## THE EARLY MARITIME PROSE

the points ... are rocky and over many of them are pretty high hills which at first rising out of the water appear like islands. <sup>1</sup>

The term 'north coast', by metonymy, takes a narrow line of land/water and uses it to define the whole region. The water side of this line—either as an entity or for its socio-cultural characteristics—is but seldom so addressed in recent serious or reflective prose. In the period to 1914 there was quite a solid body of such texts, including Cook's 'Journal', but few of the others have been readily accessible. This current work marks a comprehensive selection of texts for the period.

As one might expect in a region predominantly explored and settled from the sea, there is still a lingering historical interest in and fascination with the significant place of the nearer sea. It might be said that our true origins are in water. The background to such a residual nostalgia is to be seen more clearly in the maritime prose produced in and concerned with this region. This particular type of marine documentation can have certain distinctive emphases, arising from a point of view that is in fact 'coasting' the shoreline in both a literal and figurative sense. It is at a distance from but also part of the region, particularly in the formation of its first confident (European) cartographies—the coastal delineation and first European ordering of the land mass. Many who followed those navigators and recorders, regardless of mode of transport (surface or air) have similarly 'coasted' the region, largely being content with its physical specifics.

Such (region-initial) prose may be seen to be structured upon a special form of temporal engagement with the whole zone. First there is recorder concern with one's own journey, with its spatial beginnings, its passages and its apparent endings. No local

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<sup>1</sup> Captain James Cook, *The Voyage of the 'Endeavour': The Journals of Captain James Cook on his Voyages of Discovery*, ed. by J.C. Beaglehole (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1955), p. 316. The spelling and punctuation of the original is preserved in quotations.

part stands, justifiably, in subject-discrete isolation—all are but sequential fragments of larger structures, since the major sites, mind-sets, and values of the narrator's life lie elsewhere. Secondly, the observations then made are to some degree of the (adjacent) land as well as of the traversed sea, yet, in a strict interpretation of maritime prose, the reporter-narrator does not set foot on the land—nor need he. Thus in describing the region, the first white prose is at the same time distanced from it. Such safe and emotion-detachment leads to an almost Olympian calmness of tone, obviously arising from the safety of a further observation point and from the tranquillity of writing from a secure and familiar base, sometimes yet more aided by the final writing up of many of these texts in a comfortable land-based leisure far away. Always underlying such security, however, is the thread of an awe of the sea, and especially in the earliest texts there is the fearful uncertainty of being thrust upon an unknown shore and, possibly, of perishing there. In sum, this sort of maritime prose projects itself precariously over ocean's edges, to both shoreline and other treacherous hazards, cautiously probing these unknown spaces. With their all too dangerous possibilities usually heroically unstated, such silences remain implicit for the more imaginative and (usually) land-based readers.

This prose has—or will have when it is read today—a major engagement with issues of post-colonialism, with concepts of centre and periphery, with relevant edges, with the boundaries of the known and knowable, and with the construction of spaces both comprehensible and alluring or enigmatic. In short we will read it with attitudes and expectations far removed from those of earlier generations, be they for the merely descriptive or sensing resonance with other texts.

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Following on from Edward Said's application of spatial consciousness to geography and history,<sup>2</sup> Paul Carter has outlined a feasible model for appropriate spatial history for Australia. In his work this posited frame permits us a considerable

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<sup>2</sup> Edward W. Said, *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient*. (London: Penguin, 1978).

interrogation of our national myths of origin. Carter's first major work, *The Road to Botany Bay*,<sup>3</sup> in part specifically addresses Cook's journey and journal, opening that seemingly navigational text to wider and more ambivalent interpretations. Carter's approach is thus to broaden the spatial beyond the purely Australian, to include New Zealand for example, (elaborating on a similar approach by Bernard Smith).<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, Carter relies on a textual contrast between the recorded responses to the same places and events and features from Cook and Banks: one concerned to specify, the other to generalise; one the empirical observer, the other the Linnean and scientific classifier with a natural sciences central concern. The present regional study lies necessarily within the scope of both these interpretations.

A more specific approach, potentially rewarding for its openness to an in-depth cultural base for the study of regional writings, is the mapping one taken by Graham Huggan.<sup>5</sup> He would link depth and verifiable regionalism with feminism as similar challenges to the prevailing post-modernism, and in following a post-colonial strategy he posits selection, and its implicit philosophies of erasure and centre as the significant features to be examined.

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## COASTAL MAPPING

The earliest texts of or about the North Coast necessarily take the obvious form of more traditional open-sea navigation prose. Specifically the first prose texts concerned with the North Coast of New South Wales are those produced from the *Endeavour* journey of exploration, charting this actual coast in May 1770.<sup>6</sup> Local survey

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<sup>3</sup> Paul Carter, *The Road to Botany Bay: An Essay in Spatial History* (London: Faber and Faber, 1987).

<sup>4</sup> Bernard Smith, *European Vision and the South Pacific*, 2nd edn (Sydney: Harper and Row, 1984, 1st edn. 1959).

<sup>5</sup> Graham Huggan, *Territorial Disputes: Maps and Mapping Strategies in Contemporary Canadian and Australian Fiction*. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994).

<sup>6</sup> Robert Dixon, 'Public and Private Voices: Non-Fictional Prose' in *The Penguin New Literary History of Australia.*, ed. by Laurie Hergenhan and others (Ringwood, Vic.: Penguin Books

histories of our general zone invariably address this journey in either their very first section, or immediately after one on local geological matters and touching on Aboriginal pre-history. The major text then, and one customarily drawn upon, is James Cook's own journal, usually only relied upon for the (often single) local place or feature name then given, or for the actual date of passage past the specific modern locality, or to give some ill-defined but mandatory praise of Cook's stature.<sup>7</sup> Such regional selective use of the sea chronicle is a sincere and valid recognition of Cook's actual, albeit unconscious, role in establishing an historical and documented space for this region, despite his only recording it in its barest outlines. Yet, for all that, it seems that the eighteenth century text is mostly used as an awkward and simplistically orthodox validation of the impending European occupation. While such a claim would never be asserted in any explicit fashion, the nationalist/imperialist positioning of Cook as Enlightenment hero, skilled sailor, supreme cartographer and perhaps 'medicinal magician', actually operates to preclude the modern region's close consideration of the text of record then produced by him. It is as though the speed of his passage and his sprinkling of imperial-sourced or loosely appropriate topographic names is a kind of identity validating benediction, the lightest touch of a farther and now almost unknowable and august power. The lack of an actual North Coast landfall aids this (local history) impression of an almost saintly visitation, the mystery and cultural dimension of which may be ruined by its ever being examined too closely. Seldom does the actual chronicling and history-positioning earliest document receive more attention than the briefest quotation.

A different usage of Cook's text is seen in Geoffrey Blomfield's study of the Aborigines of the southern-most three valleys of the region. Cook is cited as sailing past these rivers, but the quotations given are his later summative comments at Cape York.<sup>8</sup>

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Australia, 1988), pp. 126-138, commences with the texts of the initial settlement at Port Jackson. However a (coastal) regional study can draw attention to the shifting and uncertain nature of the textual construction of place.

<sup>7</sup> Usually these descriptions prematurely promote the then Lieutenant Cook to Captain, and in the positioning of the hero figure ignore the awkward fact that he never returned to what became our major sites of settlement. From his second voyage, the landfall in Tasmania is so marginal to our (national) need to validate our origins on the landmass, that it is either little known or ignored.

<sup>8</sup> Geoffrey Blomfield, *Baal Belbora: The End of the Dancing*, rev. edn (Chippendale, NSW: Alternate Publishing Co-operative, 1986 [1st pub. 1981]), p. 8.

This current study pursues in part the interests shown by Blomfield—but does so through close attention to the sections of text actually written in response to this coast.

Also omitted from local histories are any specific references to the 'minor' yet perhaps more important texts of this voyage, as though the formal fact of a benign European (passing) presence—or of one of the greatest of all navigators—was all that was needed to validate subsequent (imperial) occupation. From a regional perspective, such lack of context and content probing is a significant gap, precluding any closer engagement with the early 'mapping' of the region's cultural landscape.

### **Lieut. James Cook**

Although he has been lauded as the pre-eminent national cartographer, most Australian interest in Cook has centred almost exclusively on his time at and observations about Botany Bay, the Barrier Reef, and Possession Island, thus reflecting a nationalist agenda of: the origins of our major city; the testing of the hero; and propriety of the white claim to the whole land. A related misreading is the very common popular transference of the notion of Cook's earlier search for a 'Great South Land' to Australia.<sup>9</sup> Just as Carter subverts this assertive and simplistic agenda by incorporating material from earlier in the voyage, so a similar effect from a much closer focus is gained by concentrating solely on the North Coast section. Such an approach, hitherto neglected or totally omitted, permits alternative readings of the actual landscape and of the region's history, perhaps provoking further such variant readings of the quite subtle responses to the other.

The North Coast section of Cook's text avoids the formulaic characteristics noted by Robert Dixon<sup>10</sup> and Simon Ryan<sup>11</sup> as occurring in later explorers. Coming well before the influential and concept-forming Clark and Lewis expedition across continental

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<sup>9</sup> Helen Baker Proudfoot, 'Botany Bay, Kew, and the Picturesque: Early Conceptions of the Australian Landscape', *RAHSJ*, 65.1 (1979), 30-45 (p. 35).

<sup>10</sup> Robert Dixon, *The Course of Empire: Neo-Classical Culture in New South Wales 1788-1860*. (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1986).

<sup>11</sup> Simon Ryan, *The Cartographic Eye: How Explorers Saw Australia*. (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 1996).

U.S.A. and the then considerable growth in like published journals, Cook's early work provides a more revealing view of the unknown region. To some extent his is a 'proto-Imperial' text, rather than a participation in a fully codified and somehow validated discourse of appropriation. In contrast to his treatment by later writers,<sup>12</sup> Cook's own text is restrained, however unconsciously, in the heroic positioning of the imperator-narrator. Uncertainties of voice are present, perhaps consequential on his own rapid promotion, his own social class, and from the knowledge of his science superior, Banks, being present on the voyage (and writing a companion journal). For all these *Endeavour* journals can be seen as a discourse of class and, thus, of (differing) education. In fact, it was a duty for each officer on board to maintain a journal which would be submitted for later official inspection. While this responsibility did not include the (usually illiterate) sailors, it did encompass those of limited background and expressional skills, and in this way encouraged a textual democratising of the actual experience. No officer could stray far from what would be verified by his fellows or officially disproved of for its (lesser class) speculating. Grouped together the texts thus had contemporary use as the basis of some claim to empirical objectivity, even if this might seem to exclude the unexpected, the hypothicized or the apparently quirkish.

Written, compared with others, revised and copied—all of this with a view to eventual publication—Cook's journal is a text of its time, but it is still shaped by the particular interests and phlegmatic temperament of its author. Particularly in the various observations on the coast, the surviving record shows how this land then impinged on one pair of European eyes, but certainly not in a unified imperial way, as is suggested in some of post-colonialism's more reductionist revisions. It does, in fact, record a journey along the North Coast of New South Wales as being one of relative ease, of long straight runs, even at night, in a general north by north-east direction. The only expressed concerns are the uncertainty as to a steady current, and the navigational (and cartographical) awkwardnesses of the sequence of 'pretty high hills which at first rising

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<sup>12</sup> See the fictional recreation: Godfrey Blunden, *Charco Harbour* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1968).

out of the water appear like islands'.<sup>13</sup> In the context of his post-Botany Bay experiences and expectations there is little remarkable in the landscape, only Three Brothers, Solitary Isles and Mount Warning being singled out for the notice of mariners—and perhaps all these features first seemed to appear as islands. At a safe distance of around twenty kilometres from shore there is no automatic notice of river-mouths, and—unlike at Botany Bay—no imaginative populating/colonising of the landward river valleys. There is a continuing uncertainty over the original inhabitants of the land, the nature of their culture and particularly as to the possible reasons for their avoidance of Europeans. The Enlightenment mind, wishing to deduce some further truth from new knowledge, seems disturbed by the Aboriginal deliberate avoidance of contact and thus of the withholding of almost all confirming/consolatory information.

Thus, amongst the formal terse technical prose of landmarks, distances, bearings, depths and positions, (details to ensure safety of navigation, on a passage that only had to change course at Point Danger), there are daily remarks as to the smoke from separate fires. Early in the journey, smoke from native groups was interpreted as attempts to signal the *Endeavour*,<sup>14</sup> and in the face of the avoidance practised by the New Holland natives the repeated textual references to smoke may indicate some residual hope that contact with the strangers may be desired—even suggesting a validation from the new land of a desire for a European presence. Further, at Botany Bay Cook had deduced that the six fires meant only one per person,<sup>15</sup> and as he sees only a few each day on this northward journey the dominant impression seems to be of surprise at the sparseness of human occupation, in addition to recognition of the great distance over which such limited occupation is spread. There is a (subliminal) sense of willing the unknown inhabitants into greater numbers, or a scale of human community with which an Enlightenment mind could more readily engage. While evidence of but a slight native population would have little relevance to future mariners, the text's continued interest in there seeming to be so few suggests a very real if subdued

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13 Cook, *The Voyage of the 'Endeavour'*, p. 316.

14 Richard Hough, *Captain James Cook*. (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1994), p. 72.

15 Cook, *The Voyage of the 'Endeavour'*, p. 309.

fascination with the actually observed details of their way of life. For example, on 12th May 1770 (on the Manning coast) he records:

SATURDAY 12th. Winds southerly a gentle breeze. In the PM as we run along shore we saw several smooks a little way in land from the sea and one upon the top of a hill which was the first we have seen upon elevated ground sence we have been upon the coast. At sun set we were in 23 fathom water ...

This was followed by twice as many sentences again of navigational detail, but concludes with 'Several smooks seen a little way in land', thus showing his continuing interest in the actual evidence of native habitation.

But to return to the more customary detail of the recording navigator—Sunday the 13th May brought opposing winds requiring frequent tacking in the dark of the early morning of Trial Bay. Cook's first observation of Smoky Cape would have been accompanied by relief at the wind's stability, but would have caused surprise with its volume of smoke as he looked back to the SW and saw:

...a point or headland on which were fires that caused a great quantity of smook which occasioned my giving it the name of smooky Cape, bore sw distant 4 Leagues. It is moderately high land, over the pitch of the point is a round hillock, within it two others much higher and larger and within them very low land. Latitude 30 51's, Longitude 206 54' West. Besides the smook seen upon this Cape we saw more in several other places along the Coast.

Here Cook sees evidence of a larger scale Aboriginal occupation or at least of such seeming activity<sup>16</sup> and he seems to have been excited by it. In Tahiti there had been great familiarity with the natives, the closest versions of which were denied to Cook by his position and demeanour (although, causing Cook some consternation, the same behavioural strictures were not observed by Banks and the other men of 'position').<sup>17</sup> In a sense one can see Cook's later claims to seek and record some anthropological knowledge as an attempt to reassert the dignity of objective observation, encoded in the text written of this coast. During the rest of his journey to what is now the Queensland

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16 The fires are likely to be Aboriginal pasture management, even so close to the abundant food of the estuary, and in Autumn rather than early Spring. Flinders later notes that two of the Solitary Isles had recently been burnt, indicating aboriginal pasture management very close to the sea. David Collins, *An Account of the English Colony in New South Wales*, ed. by Brian H. Fletcher, 2 vols (Sydney: A.H. and A.W. Reed, 1975), I, pp. 162-163.

17 See Neil Rennie, *Far-Fetched Facts: The Literature of Travel and the Idea of the South Seas*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), pp. 91-92.

border, the hitherto frequent mentions of smoke decline to only one.<sup>18</sup> It is probable that he saw nothing to rival the numbers of fires/persons present at Smoky Cape, and so his recording interest waned. His summative comments after negotiating Torres Strait are in praise of the Aborigines, solving for himself the seeming contrast between their 'wretched appearance' and their 'Tranquility', a passage which Manning Clark quite reasonably claims is not built on any previous hints given to the reader.<sup>19</sup> Yet it can be argued that Cook's fascination with the Aborigines emerges through the repeated references to them in the otherwise strictly formal (North Coast) navigational prose.

His general comments on the land itself are given late on the 14th May as the *Endeavour* sped northward with a strong breeze:

As we have advanced to the northward [since Botany Bay] the land hath increased in height in so much that in this latitude it may be call'd a hilly country but between this and Botany Bay it is diversified with an agreeable variety of hills ridges Vallies and large planes all cloathed with wood which to all appearance is the same as I have before mentioned. As we could discover no Visible alteration in the soil near the shore the land is in general low and sandy except the points which are rocky and over many of them are pretty high hills which at first rising out of the water appear like islands.<sup>20</sup>

This Enlightenment text constructs the perceived land within a more picturesque mode (perhaps one suggested by Banks). In forming a sylvan whole, there is a repeated pleasure from the change of landscape, the 'agreeable variety', from wooded hills and associated valleys, interspersed with plains, all neatly separated from the sea by a line of unvarying low sandy foreshore. Even the navigational (and cartographic) awkwardness—of apparent islands in this text—adds to the repeated pleasure of variety of the seen landscape. Following on in the same entry as the naming of Smoky Cape, the above sylvan interlude has an implicit peopling, while without any direct statement that such landscape is the abode of Aborigines.

For the most part it is not a self-conscious literary text. Simplicity is its style. In the matter of the Aborigines, Cook's text here can be seen as a post-Tahiti search for a

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18 This is off the Richmond coast: 'At 9 oClock being about a League from the land we saw upon it People and smook in several places.' 15th May 1770.

19 C.M.H. Clark, *A History of Australia*, 6 vols (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 1962), I, p. 51.

20 Here Cook may still have Mount Yarrahapinni in mind, the largest feature for many miles of his journey, and which probably only missed being named because of its closeness to Smoky Cape.

counter to those soft primitives, and their way of luxury, sloth and degeneration.<sup>21</sup> The North Coast section of his account shows evidence of a contested domain—Cook's attempts in fact to claim the field of the later social conceived anthropology for an objective moral science, as against the soft luxurious self-indulgence of those who should have known better. In all it is a text which posits the North Coast as knowable, its inhabitants as having dignity in their reserve, and as being widely if sparsely distributed.

### **Joseph Banks**

The North Coast section of the New South Wales journal of Joseph Banks<sup>22</sup> has already received a little more specific attention than have the corresponding sections of the other early maritime texts.<sup>23</sup> It is usually omitted completely from the region's local histories, and only in the recent critical interest of Paul Carter does one find applicable treatment, and a modern grounding for any close analysis of local sections. Carter himself deprecates Banks' text as that of a 'Linnean classifier', and as moving (too) quickly and confusingly from the particular detail to the abstract generalisation. Carter's Banks is perceived as more concerned with (exciting) 'discovery' than he is with formal and more objective 'exploration', and so the post-modern scholar suggests that, rather than opening up the spatial history, Banks works towards its premature closure. Certainly the strain of classifier is strongly there—for Banks had on board a 115 volume library and his botanical tutor, Dr Solander, the latter himself a former student of Carl Linneaus. Yet a close reading of this section of his text reveals the presence also of wider concerns, and is thus to be seen as a text which engages with or speculates on various aspects of what was an early imperial endeavour.

Banks' role on this voyage was as a representative of the powerful Royal Society of London, with its broad interest in the scientific study of all humanity and of the world

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21 Bernard Smith, *European Vision and the South Pacific*, p. 49.

22 Sir Joseph Banks, *The Endeavour Journal of Joseph Banks* (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1962).

23 Carter, *The Road to Botany Bay*.

of nature. As a young man, whose wealth could match his scientific ambition, his participation in the venture contains obvious extensions of the then approved Grand Tour, in this case a scientific, scholarly and adventurous version of the travelling finishing school for young upper class men, but here it may be seen to be going well beyond the overly predictable paths (and insights) of Europe. Cook's position as the vessel's Commander is undermined subtly by what is in effect the presence of the learned institution on the ship—moderating all observations to accord with its expectations. Similarly, in his study of later explorers, Simon Ryan<sup>24</sup> stresses the pervasive influence exerted by their prestigious scientific/scholarly bodies. With Banks in the Pacific it needs to be remembered that here is a figure who is so powerful in establishment terms that he is able to set or modify the expedition's scientific direction through his subsequent writings. Rather than being but the servant of imperial masters this shaping text is itself an important shaper of the centre's perceptions and philosophy. While wealth gave Banks the opportunity to pursue his interests, these concerns were of the sort to give him an enormous continuing input into scientific investigation. This is an early example of a restructuring to the action where the local or the individual is able to influence the thought and recording for the centre. From Banks' viewpoint a broad range of potential topics and actual interests were to be covered, from botany to the early notions of anthropology. The ship was both stable, as a base for dispassionate observation, as well as unstable, in being itself an experiment in extended maritime journeys.

Banks' actual journal for this region is a brief record—much shorter than Cook's text—and yet it is an honest attempt to give a comprehensive coverage of the relevant factual observations. Not under the formal constraints of naval service writing, and liberated through his much greater education and less constrained imagination from being but a chronicle of the physical/specific, the authorial voice of Banks' text is more personal than is Cook's account. Consider this section on the lower North Coast:

May 12. Land much as yesterday, fertile but varying its appearance a good deal, generally however well clothd with good trees. This evening we finished Drawing the

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<sup>24</sup> Simon Ryan, *The Cartographic Eye*, pp. 31-38.

plants got in the last harbour, which had kept fresh till this time by means of tin chests and wet cloths. In 14 days just, one draughtsman has made 94 sketch drawings, so quick a hand has he acquired by use.

13. Wind off shore today, it let us however come in with the land. Many porpoises were about the ship. At Noon several fires ashore, one very large which I judged to be at least a league inland. Innumerable shoals of fish about the ship in the afternoon and some birds of the Nectris kind.

14. For these three nights last much lightning has been seen to the Eastward. Early in the morn it was calm and some few fish were caught; after the weather became squally. The wind however after some time settled at South, the briskest breeze I think that the Endeavour has gone before during the voyage.

Banks is justifiably proud of their botanical work, and his personal observations add some circumstantial detail not present in Cook's text. Comparatively speaking, this journal gives the impression of being produced by a more curious and observant reporter, certainly one with a broader imagination. Of course he included the observed detail and experiences of their actual maritime journeys— 'the trouble it gave', 'lightning to the East', 'calm' and 'squally', and earlier even incorporated the seaman's phrase 'made all sneer again' (May 10). There is, however, a personal delight in their being surrounded by porpoises, and then followed by an abundance of fish and birds. Later there is an alternation between delight at the 'briskest breeze ... that the Endeavour has gone before during the voyage' (May 14) and with a landsman's unease expressed at the cross wind overnight—near the breakers of Point Danger (May 15/16). This strand appears as an attempt to respond to the fuller life of the ship's company, but it gains another element when giving the detailed process of wind observance that was a necessary part of navigation and of the ship's command. Forecasts of weather on such a sailing ship are both scientific and a source of warranted authority for the navigating action to be taken. Similarly, knowledge of the language of one's social inferiors can be a novel curiosity, but it is also a potential source of power over them, an extension now of the influence already exercised on board by Banks over the several servants from his estate. The repeated use of 'we' and 'us' firmly centres the group nature of the voyage, and, in effect, asserts a right to speak for the whole group. Of the North Coast sections in the other journals, only that of Cook uses 'we', as is appropriate for the leader, and hence Banks' journal may well be seen as having some part in a (non-articulated) contestation of leadership.

Banks' linguistic construction of a perceivable coastal zone is one where the lightning to the east is as important in this text as is the land to the west. This coast is itself a broad band of features and events. In the comment, 'Land much as yesterday', we have an early example of the Banks-felt tedium of the seemingly unvarying land which would also be felt by many who would follow them—perhaps in this case somewhat mixed with excitement at the extensiveness of a land which had already yielded a vast number of new flora and fauna species, of which the handling and classifying took up most of Banks' working day at this point. Subsequent use of Cook's text has been largely as a mapping source (often limited to the names bestowed), while Banks' largely unused script reveals a less official, more human response in this initial mapping by seawards scrutiny of the North Coast. There is no mention of the names bestowed by Cook—not officially given until recorded in the Captain's journal, but Banks' description gives no foreshadowing of any such names, or of his support for or closer relation to the Captain that might be shown by reflecting on-board agreement or even related discussion.<sup>25</sup> The text does, indeed, give evidence—much as on New Zealand—of occasional subtle disagreement over which natural features are significant. Specifically, Banks' writing gives less prominence to the sailor-cartographer's concern with Capes. The younger writer locates the very large smoke 'at least a league inland' (May 13) that is used by Cook to give the name, 'Smoky Cape'. Banks' text omits all mention of the cape later named 'Byron'. Rather, the impression is of an eye that is mentally mapping a terrain that extends well inland. He adds distances to inland features in what emerges as a concern with the actual body of the land, the terrain, and perhaps with what a later generation of scientists would call its 'biomass'. The abundant vegetation is frequently signalled to us as appearing 'fertile' and 'well wooded'—and for the Mount Warning area he adds the overall approving comment 'lookd beautifull' (May 15).

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<sup>25</sup> See the intellectual gentlemen's societies with which Banks was deeply involved and their 'enforcing canons of social or intellectual conformity'. John Gascoigne, *Joseph Banks and the English Enlightenment: Useful Knowledge and Polite Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 35-36.

As for the Aborigines, his observations on the Macleay are confined to the evidence beyond Smoky Cape, but without the note of surprise that one finds in Cook. Off present-day Coffs Harbour, Banks notes 'Several fires... one high up on a hill side 6 or 7 miles at least from the beach.' (May 14) Yet Cook retreats from mention of smoke after Smoky Cape, a seeming withdrawal from engagement in continued ethnographic speculation. However, Banks persists, giving the most detailed attention to Aborigines, and his longest entry for any day on this coast. This entry (perhaps penned one or two hours south of Cape Byron) mostly deals with his amazed observation of a group of Aborigines moving with bundles of what looked like palm leaves over the dune and away from view, but without once acknowledging the ship.<sup>26</sup> Banks, ever excitable and sensation-prone, finds it hard to believe that his curiosity at (extreme) novelty is not reciprocated by them. While there is some attempt to consider the presumably novel shape of the ship from the point of view of the Aborigines, his readiness for astonishment does not permit consideration of the disguising effect of morning glare on a ship a considerable distance from the shore. An Ockham's razor perspective would suggest the simple explanation that a culture unused to looking so far out to sea is unlikely to make the added efforts of shielding one's eyes and of interrupting necessary work to do so. Rather, here there would seem to be a model of the Enlightenment ethnographer aware of profound differences in cultures—making careful observation from a safe base, with multiple observers and sufficient time, but so distant as to draw necessarily dubious or downright wrong conclusions. Here there is support for Carter's general criticism of Banks' hasty movement from the particular to the general. The text reads as naïve in its own certainty, pride and derogatory bafflement.<sup>27</sup> This long section

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26 Much is made of this entry by Malcolm D. Prentis, 'Prelude to Dispossession?: First Contacts between Aborigines and Europeans in the Northern Rivers Region of New South Wales, 1770-1840s', *JRAHS*, 70.1 (June 1984), 3-18. Accepting Banks' description and surprise, he attempts to look through Aboriginal eyes to justify the observation, thereby claiming 'Aborigines were not equipped spiritually or socially for a *novum*, particularly one as grotesquely unlikely as a European-style ship. Something which did not exist in the Aboriginal world-view could be ignored, as it had no reality.' (p. 4).

27 Similar to the lost 'Mahogany Ship' of Warnambool (Vic.), the remains of what was believed to be a seventeenth century or earlier ship are hidden beneath the sands of what, ironically, could be the very beach which Banks was observing and claiming European primacy. See *The Northern Star*, 11 December 1993, p. 5.

of observation can be read as Banks' response to Cook's ethnographic interest at Smoky Cape on the previous day—a somewhat conceited reclaiming of dominance in this discourse of observation, and where the land and its people are merely a focus for the contesting of (European) power in the passing vessel.

Beyond the example of early closure, one can see in Banks' journal a pre-Romantic urgency to somehow encompass all experience, to include Cook's observations/insights as Commander as necessary, and also through his own, the botanist's, respect for meticulous even if competing observation. The inequality of class and education here competes with a incipient broadly human and cross-class generosity.<sup>28</sup> Perhaps the resultant tensions then are to be found later resolved in Banks' post-voyage loyalty to Cook, to the crew and for the settlement in the new land—and, even if not specifically to the North Coast, this was a force which continued to affect Banks over many years.

Still, this is a text which, for all its brevity, clearly encompasses the divisions and tensions of contested authority, in experience, in knowledge and in class. The true centre and intellectual pivot of this text is London, with its Royal Society milieu, and it is a work which ultimately positions the North Coast as part of a broad (pre-Romantic) panorama—with a threatening sea to the east, while to the west the land varies from mountains to lowlands, all richly vegetated, and inhabited by a surprising race, backward and potentially knowable. But, ultimately, its civilisation is of only minor interest.

### Lesser Texts of the *Endeavour*

Not one of the minor texts of the *Endeavour* has sufficient North Coast detail to stand alone as an adequate or even partially informative record. In these, interest is more in their aggregate, and for their relationship to those of Cook and Banks. These texts are

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<sup>28</sup> Gascoigne, *Joseph Banks*, pp. 37-38, quotes Banks at nearly thirty years after this voyage: 'I have been for many years of opinion that all mankind are really equal, notwithstanding the artificial distinctions which custom has placed amongst them, and deem us to treat them so, as far as the usages of the country I live in will permit.'

notable for their brevity (each is about half the length of Banks' entries), and for a sameness of detail that signals the writers' limited intellectual power or (possibly curbed) curiosity and the pressures for a general conformity among such subordinate recorders.<sup>29</sup> The keeping of such a journal was the standard responsibility of each officer, and these subordinates knew that their texts would be read by their superiors, those who had already constructed their own more significant texts, or were in the process of doing so, all seemingly based on the same specific experience. The pre-eminent Cook scholar, J.C. Beaglehole, suggests very plausibly that 'on board the *Endeavour* journals were common property'.<sup>30</sup> It is no wonder then that the texts of these subordinates seem and are so circumscribed, and limited to the safe recording of the potentially agreed facts: the heat, general weather, the abundance of turtles, with independent contributions usually being the putting on the record of one's work—who served 'slops', which food items were supplied short, and so on. Where all texts are freely circulated, and others' sections freely borrowed for one's own text, through their specific agreement or omissions, the minor texts are cautious and clearly lesser participants in the struggle for the (then and later) power/influence accruing to Banks or Cook as the definite recorder of a knowable coast.

Indicative of the prevailing conformity of view is the text ascribed to the astronomer Green,<sup>31</sup> one dominated by co-ordinates of position, winds, and recording the ship's routine. Yet the seemingly incidental detail reveals an approach specifically affirming his superiors' views—'three remarkable hills, called the Three Brothers'; on the 12th May 'saw a large smoke ashore', and on the 14th May 'saw several of the natives on the shore'. This meticulous detail recorded will omit nothing deemed

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<sup>29</sup> In his authoritative edition of the journals F.M. Bladen notes that the minor texts are 'practically the same as that given in Cook's logs, in some cases in the same words' but goes on to call them 'corroborative accounts', falling short of noting the power structure thereby encoded in the texts' construction. 'Introduction' to *Cook: 1762-1780*, Historical Records of New South Wales Series, Vol. I, Part 1: (Sydney: Charles Potter, Government Printer, 1893), p. xxviii.

<sup>30</sup> J.C. Beaglehole, 'Some Problems of Editing Cook's Journals', *Historical Studies*, 8.29 (1957), 20-31 (p. 24).

<sup>31</sup> Anon. in *Cook: 1762-1780*, HRNSW, pp. 272-273. Unlike other texts, its dates have been adjusted for westing. See p. 269.

significant by others, but it avoids any degree of independent judgement. Hereby the North Coast is reduced to a few non-controversial and salient physical points.

Two texts are a little less restrained than the conforming majority. Parkinson, the draughtsman whose work was praised by Banks in the vicinity of the Three Brothers mountains, as a member of Banks' company is free of the recording obligation of naval officers, and of the navigational content thereby deemed appropriate and indeed essential. His North Coast section<sup>32</sup> is coloured by his praise for an astounding rainbow seen on 9th May. The account merits quotation in full:

Having only moderate breezes from the N. and N.E. we made but little way till the 9th. In the evening of that day we saw two of the most beautiful rainbows my eyes ever beheld: the colours were strong, clear, and lively: those of the inner one were so bright as to reflect its shadow on the water. They formed a complete semicircle; and the space between them was much darker than the rest of the sky.

In latitude 32° 51', on the 10th, the land appeared considerably higher, and more broken, very sandy, and less fertile. We saw several clusters of islands; among which, it is probable, there may be some good harbours.

On the 11th, we passed high broken land, having several distinct peaks and hills, an extensive flat along the shore covered with pretty large trees, and a sandy beach. We saw also as many snakes, and three remarkable hills, which we called The Three Brothers. Latitude 32° 2'.

On the 14th, latitude 30° 22', the land appeared high, and well covered with wood; but being three or four leagues from it, we could not distinguish many particulars upon it, though we saw clouds of smoke arise from different distant parts of the country. The wind was very variable after our leaving the last bay, and we had some calms. The wind hangs mostly between the N. and E. on this coast, blows very gently, and then dies away to a stark calm; but this day we had a fresh breeze from the S.W.

On the 15th, we were in the latitude of 28° 40'. The breeze continued brisk from the S.W. the land appeared very uneven; and we saw a remarkable high peak, with three points at the top: behind it were other hills, with round tops; and the nearest land was well covered with wood. We saw six men, quite naked, walking upon a strait, white sandy beach; and, in the evening, having a low point of land a-head, we discovered several breakers, at a considerable distance from the shore. The wind freshening, we stood to the east; and, soon after dark, brought to, continued sounding every half-hour, and found thirty fathoms water.

This journal describes the land and its variety more than do the other journals of this voyage—several distinct general landscapes can be identified. There even seems a sustained delight in the contrasts to be seen between 'high broken land' and low sandy country. Yet the sea is not neglected, and one could even describe this account as being carefully balanced between water, land and air. It notes the evidence of occupation, but

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<sup>32</sup> Sydney Parkinson, *A Journal of a Voyage to the South Seas in His Majesty's Ship, 'The Endeavour'* (London: Stanfield Parkinson, 1773), facsimile edition (Adelaide: Libraries Board of South Australia, 1972), pp. 136-137.

does not linger on it. The distant and dispersed smoke reported on the 14th corroborates (or copies) the view of his employer, Banks. The Aborigines on the 15th May who so claimed Banks' interest are mentioned, but without the vainglorious conclusions of his employer. Here the only surprise with the natives is in the parenthetic 'quite naked', prefiguring the later continuing discomfort of white settlers in their contact with the Aborigines. But for the artistic Parkinson, within the same sentence his eye can be readily distracted by the 'strait white sandy beach' and the ship's movement northwards. Freed somewhat from conformity by the role of 'artistic recorder'—but with an eye to perhaps later entertaining Banks—this text is an attempt to cover the coast comprehensively, rather than to limit itself to merely the group-approved curiosities.

The journal of James Matra<sup>33</sup>—one published unofficially and to the annoyance of Banks and Cook—shows a purposeful and businesslike view of the passage along the North Coast. From leaving Botany Bay, this text gives an overview of the anticipated North Coast journey—it is to be a long run north to latitude 9 or 10 degrees South, with occasional stops for wood and water, 'and to 'establish a traffic with the natives'. No other journal gives such an overview, and whether ship's policy or not, it is the sort of navigational progress expected by Matra, and, one may assume, by others on board. None of these opportunities to re-supply or to attempt to communicate is taken on the North Coast, and the text otherwise keeps to responses to the major navigational features of the coast—the 'several small islands' [the Solitaries] and the breakers [Point Danger], specifically the most obvious hazards to shipping. Omitted is any mention of the Aborigines—the smoke from their many fires, or their work on the beach south of Cape Byron that long held the ship's company's attention. Further, the text omits the (to others) 'remarkable' Three Brothers, and ignores the names likely to be given to features. While this text would have been excluded from the commonality of the (official) journals, such total indifference to the agreed upon content of record would

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<sup>33</sup> Alan Frost, *The Precarious Life of James Mario Matra: Voyager with Cook, American Loyalist, Servant of Empire* (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 1995). The North Coast section is on p. 61.

seem to indicate an antagonism to authority.<sup>34</sup> Once viewed in this light, even the seemingly objective plentiful detail of depths, direction and so on, seems to give the impression of attempting to expose any weakness of action or decision by the commander. In total, then, this is a subverting text, where the North Coast is narrowed to the sea and (water) hazards only. Its purpose may well have been to mock, to express individuality, or to make some form of quirkish Romantic assertion.

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So, despite many similarities and their general brevity, these minor texts can be seen to posit the North Coast in different ways. There is an erasure of the land and its people; a series of physical features capable of producing (a controlled) joy; a largely undifferentiated mass—the reporting on which can be used for European inter-personal power-play. The pattern repeated up the coast is of a sequence of islands (perhaps excited reminders of their earlier island adventures), that then mostly proved to be headlands, may have brought repeated disappointment. Thus, without the attractions that would stir most junior officers' imaginations, the North Coast must be seen generally, then, as a place of service and duty, with the centre firmly elsewhere—in all these minor texts there is a sense of detachment, of being uninvolved or uninformed in the task or lacking any real curiosity as to the region.

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## LANDINGS

In contrast to the navigation texts produced in safety—such as Banks' amazed but personally safe observation of the shore-bound natives—are those texts which

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<sup>34</sup> This view would be in keeping with other references to Matra. See Cook's suspicion of Matra's role in the cutting of Orton's ears, and the post-voyage correspondence with dissembling over the anonymous journal's publication. *H.R.N.S.W. op.cit.*, p. 383-384.

record actual landings and contacts. Such closeness permits less of a comfortable, culturally-bound response, while for those who came without the security of strength, landings were occasions of physical as well as cultural vulnerability.

It is reasonable that the runaway convicts from Sydney, the Bryants (1791), in their small open craft had made one or more North Coast landings, and that they even had contact with the Indigenous people on their successful passage to Timor. But in the subsequent indirect and brief accounts of their voyage,<sup>35</sup> there is no specific North Coast detail that would distinguish it from what are now called the Hunter or Queensland coasts. Still, their journey remained, particularly for cautious authorities, as a construction of the North Coast as a conduit for escape. For a wider community there was, from their courageous venture, the added bonus of a stirring reminder of the endurance of ordinary people over long distances, and perhaps for subsequent readers, of the earliest European close contact with this coastal land and people—factors that would later lead the Port Macquarie born and reared 'Louis' Becke to attempt a full length, if fictional, account of the Bryants' journey,<sup>36</sup> and even for some local historians to claim specific landfalls in their areas.<sup>37</sup>

### Lieut. Matthew Flinders

Matthew Flinders is the next officially known mariner to visit this coast, and his journal<sup>38</sup> is the first text to describe a landing. This particular regional section has been largely ignored in published accounts of Flinders' work; until most recently the longest

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35 The clearest account is by one of the participants, James Martin, most accessible in Geoffrey Chapman Ingleton, *True Patriots All: Or News from Early Australia, as Told in a Collection of Broad-sides*. (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1952), pp. 13-15.

36 A later chapter examines this text: Louis Becke and Walter Jeffery, *A First Fleet Family: A Hitherto Unpublished Narrative of Certain Remarkable Adventures Compiled from the Papers of Sergeant William Dew of the Marines*. (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1896).

37 Jack Giblett, 'Pre-discovery', in *Port Macquarie: A History to 1850*, ed. by Frank Rogers (Port Macquarie: Hastings District Historical Society, 1982), pp. 11-18 (p. 13). [George England], *The Coffs Harbour Story* (Coffs Harbour, NSW: Central North Coast Newspaper, 1976), p. 6.

38 Flinders' account was handed over to Collins who incorporated much of it in his work, *An Account of the English Colony in New South Wales*. The North Coast section is on p. 162. For ease of access, and for its publication of the original account, my references are to George Mackaness, *The Discovery and Exploration of Moreton Bay and the Brisbane River (1799-1823)*, 2 vols. (Sydney: G. Mackaness, 1956), I, pp. 7-14.

treatment merely notes the failure to find the northern rivers.<sup>39</sup> Yet Flinders' text is quite dense in its cultural construction of the coast, drawing the region into a knowable schema. Such knowledge is not enriched through person-to-person contact with the Aborigines, but it does engage with local artefacts in a manner which reveals early racial attitudes. The general approach to the North Coast taken in this journal is one of consciously adding to the work of Cook thirty years earlier. An illuminating study in detailing Flinders' ambition and its close link with Cook is that given by David Mackay.<sup>40</sup> In brief, he posits Flinders as a young man who sees his peers in Europe gain rapid wartime promotions, and, as a navigator far away, is desperate to emulate the by then towering figure of James Cook. It is claimed that this explains the 'gusto' of manner of the *Tom Thumb* and *Norfolk* expeditions, and that, after the success of these voyages, only the finding of a great inland river or a passage to an inland sea would sufficiently enable comparison between Flinders' work and Cook's achievement. So the recent study goes on to detail many parallels between the *Endeavour* and *Investigator* arrangements (not least being the guiding hand of Banks). With the earlier North Coast recorded detail now under close scrutiny there is strong support for Mackay's approach—with Flinders prompted not least by the likely possibility of another explorer finding the major river to the continent's centre.<sup>41</sup> Yet there is also much in Flinders' text that shows a difference in emphasis from this model of unbridled ambition. This current regional study shows that it is an exaggeration to claim that:

Throughout [Flinders'] letters and journals, Cook is the silent presence, the revered model who offered the key to success. (p. 108).

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<sup>39</sup> James D. Mack, *Matthew Flinders* (Melbourne: Thomas Nelson, 1966) p. 34. A work written specifically for the bicentenary of Flinders at Yamba takes a view that is wider than the local: Stuart Lee, *Matthew Flinders and the Discovery of Shoal Bay (Yamba)* (Yamba, NSW: Port of Yamba Historical Society, 1999).

<sup>40</sup> 'In the Shadow of Cook: The Ambition of Matthew Flinders' in John Hardy and Alan Frost, *European Voyaging Towards Australia*, Occasional Paper No. 9 (Canberra: Australian Academy of the Humanities, 1990), pp. 99-111.

<sup>41</sup> Mungo Park, fresh from his successful penetration of the African continent, was nominated as suitable, willing and available for this task by Sir Joseph Banks. In this same letter, Matthew Flinders was suggested as an appropriate commander for the vessel. See *HRA*, I, Vol. II, pp. 231-232. In her fictional account, Ernestine Hill draws a closer link by describing the reason for this North Coast journey: 'Hunter gave [Flinders] the little *Norfolk* to relieve the tedium of waiting for Mungo Park'. *My Love Must Wait: The Story of Matthew Flinders* (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1978, 1st pub. 1941), p. 179. It is reasonable to read some urgency in Flinders' text.

This first northern expedition by Flinders, in the *Norfolk*, left Port Jackson on 8 July 1799, with its leader's overall purpose to:

explore *Glass-house* and *Hervey's Bays*, two large openings to the northward, of which the entrances only were known. I had some hope of finding a considerable river discharging itself at one of these openings, and of being able by its means to penetrate further into the interior of the country than had hitherto been effected.<sup>42</sup>

The hope of penetration is given fuller expression here in this late account (several years after all his voyages of discovery), while the early reports (including that paraphrased by David Collins),<sup>43</sup> perhaps with bureaucratic caution, all understate the hope. Of more immediate concern for Flinders was the checking, amplifying, completing gaps in, and adding finer detail to, Cook's chart and text. Given this set of aims it should not be surprising that there is repeated engagement with Cook's text—both validation and correction of the necessarily brief original. Yet not all of this is acknowledged by the younger mariner.

The expedition arrived in sight of the Three Brothers at noon on the day after departure, where the most southern hill was described as 'now like an island'. This unacknowledged paraphrase of Cook's text<sup>44</sup> adds a sense of commonality of impression and judgement, giving the indication of care and reliability in the younger writer. It is also preparation for the criticism of what is presented by Flinders as a direct quotation—unacknowledged but to any informed reader clearly from Cook:

They have been described 'as remarkably large and high,' but they did not appear so to me. They are sloping hills and their conspicuousness seems principally to arise from the lowness of the neighbouring lands. (p. 9).

Flinders is here clearly engaging with both the heroic stature of his predecessor and with the published version of Cook's journal in a way that works to elevate, to the status of

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<sup>42</sup> Matthew Flinders, *A Voyage to Terra Australis: Undertaken for the Purpose of Completing the Discovery of That Vast Country, and prosecuted in the years 1801, 1802, and 1803, in His Majesty's Ship the Investigator, and Subsequently in the Armed Vessel Porpoise and Cumberland Schooner*, 2 vols plus Atlas (London: G.W. Nichol, 1814), facsimile edition (Libraries Board of South Australia, Adelaide, 1966), I, p. cxci.

<sup>43</sup> Lieutenant-Colonel (David) Collins, *An Account of the English Colony in New South Wales, from its Settlement, in January 1788, to August 1801: with Remarks on the Dispositions, Customs, Manners, &c. of the Native Inhabitants of That Country*, 2 vols (London: T. Cadell Jun. and W. Davies, 1802), ed. by Brian H. Fletcher (Sydney: A.H. and A.W. Reed, 1975), II, p. 161.

<sup>44</sup> See this Chapter's epigraph.

reliable cartographer, the young and ambitious recorder of the shore. Unfortunately the first editor of Cook's work, Hawkesworth, took liberties with expression, so that Flinders' criticism is based on a slight misquotation of Cook's 'three remarkable large high hills'. Cook's original 'remarkable' is almost a synonym for 'discernible/noticeable', while Hawkesworth's eagerness for impact changes it to an intensifier for the subsequent adjectives—'large' and 'high'. This, subsequently, will prompt Flinders' own eagerness for correction. Yet consider this as preparatory before launching into a further criticism of Cook's model:

It is necessary to remark here that their form and situation in Capt. Cook's chart are erroneous; the latter differing even 20' of latitude from the account of them in the voyage. (p. 9).

Despite the perfunctory 'necessary', there is a boldness of statement here (particularly 'erroneous') that shows a more complex attitude towards the canonical Cook. Rather than simply a revered model, Cook's work is now presented as being partly impressionistic or even subtly flawed, and as something that can be made more accurate (if not surpassed) by closer attention to the subject. In all, this section of Flinders' text is aiming to position the new navigator as one whose work is intended to be taken most seriously at scholarly or official levels.

Throughout, too, there is the confident addition of considerable detail of bearings, depths, navigational dangers, and the possibilities of, lurking out of sight, small inlets. In much of this seemingly objective original observation, Cook's journal is in truth a silent, albeit generally outlining and shaping presence. Even Flinders' discovery of the southerly current, where the readiness of calculation and deduction to define a feature (one missed by Cook), echoes the approach taken by the older writer in his more sustained and substantial work of recording discovery. A generalised description of the land (near Coffs Harbour) on 11th July 1799 again paraphrases Cook:

[the land] is low near the sea and skirted by a sandy beach; but rises almost immediately to a moderate height; it is well clothed with timber and diversified by irregular and somewhat steep hills and vallies. (p. 9).

The original published source (Hawkesworth's edition of Cook) contains:

it may be called a hilly country... it exhibits a pleasing variety of ridges, hills, vallies, and plains, all clothed with wood... near the shore is in general low and sandy<sup>45</sup>

The second unacknowledged detail given by Flinders from Cook's generalised description of 14th May 1770, thus reinforces the impression of general agreement between the two accounts and the desire to quietly refine or consolidate and supersede the earlier record.

The Solitary Islands area provided another opportunity for the addition of significant detail, and an attempt to emulate Cook's approach. The given navigational detail is increased with the location of several more islands, and judicious warnings are made as to the nature of the passages, if present, between them. The lack of seals or (presumably nesting) birds is noted—a feature that might otherwise have aided later shipwrecked mariners. Further it is noted that as two islands had been recently exposed to fire, then, Flinders deduced, this 'proves that they are visited by natives'. (p. 10) While echoing Cook's sustained interest in the Aborigines, Flinders' attention to them is but slight, as shown in this isolated comment. Rather, the text merely evinces a pride in the logical deduction at this point. Such is the ambitious young explorer's confidence here that he can then assail the most enduring feature of Cook's text—the bestowed names—suggesting the islands:

might with equal propriety be called the *Miserable* as well as the *Solitary Isles*. (p. 10).

Flinders' hopes that the voyage might reveal uncharted rivers or passages are seen in his more detailed descriptions of headlands. After appearing first like islands (which Cook's chart now shows as an illusion), a closer view promises much more:

The Small projections that opened out, as we sailed along, often presented the delusive appearance of openings behind them; and we were more inclined to entertain these hopes, as Capt. Cook passed along this part of the coast in the night. (p. 10).

Every headland contains the hope of a passage inland or a river navigable for some distance—in short, the chance to open up some major part of the continent. After so many disappointments it seems almost in frustration that Flinders pauses in the

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<sup>45</sup> Hawkesworth's text is most accessible in: [James Cook], *An Account of a Voyage Round the World with a Full Account of the Voyage of the Endeavour in the Year MDCCLXX along the East Coast of Australia* (Brisbane: W.R. Smith and Paterson, 1969), p. 511.

northward journey and draws into Shoal Bay (Yamba); the text gives two pages of seemingly excessive justification, including a problem with a leak and the possibility of putting the *Norfolk* on shore for repairs—an obvious echo of Cook's similar action so much earlier at Endeavour River.

Within the account of Shoal Bay itself, the echo is, however, rather of Cook at Botany Bay, but on this occasion the whole has a much smaller scale and scope. There is detail of channels, flows, and shoals and of much awkward sand. The persistence of the mariners moving around the bay with great difficulty offers what was obviously an exasperated travesty of Cook's recorded easy access to various adjacent areas at his own first landfall. A second paragraph addresses Aboriginal issues through the examination of three huts. There is an almost casual notice of the Aboriginal shelters, and the justification for the entry and inspection is given solely by the half hour available before the sun reached its zenith for measurement—a telling conjunction of the purposes of cartography and of ethnography. The latter is furthered by the pressure upon the Port Jackson Aborigine Bongaree who then 'admitted' that the dwellings were superior to those he had seen before. This admittance also seems to justify the following sentence which describes the taking of items, although only Bongaree is noted as doing this. Yet Flinders' detailed examination of the natives' food dish in particular implies his own handling and approval of its removal. There are clear links with Botany Bay and Cook's account of his entry to Aboriginal huts and the taking of spears, but Flinders echoes none of the saving features of Cook's attempts at communication and of his leaving of objects in semblance of trade.<sup>46</sup>

After a long paragraph on botanical features—as much as the navigational sections combined (an emphasis which also evokes Botany Bay)—Flinders returns to the matter of the sea with some disappointment. The Bay 'seemed to deserve but a very

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<sup>46</sup> 'It is clear from the manner in which he was invited into the wurley and the parting gift of the water basket that cordial relations were established with the Aborigines,' claims Stuart Lee, *Matthew Flinders and the Discovery of Shoal Bay (Yamba)*, p. 30. This is somewhat generous, for the text mentions no Aboriginal people. This conflation of artefact and people may reflect early ethnographic attitudes that the (safe) study of objects reveals much about their users, but avoids the complexities of actual engagement. More likely, here we see the result of the pattern of positioning Aborigines as passive subjects of study. By ignoring their viewpoint, the early texts maintained a silence, which when repeated in subsequent texts, could be misread as Aboriginal acquiescence.

superficial examination' and 'I can give no particular mark that will point out the situation of Shoal Bay', and he then begins his final comment with 'Was ever any vessel ever likely to visit it...'. (pp. 13-14). Perhaps realising that new and helpful and potentially acclaimed discoveries do not come easily—at least not in waters already fairly closely charted—Flinders then proceeded northwards. Finally, and still in his North Coast section, there is a sympathetic clarification of Cook's journal, the later navigator almost humbly noting that his predecessor had already adjusted his magnetic bearings to the true ones.

Just as Cook and Banks relied upon or used each other's journals quite explicitly, so there is here a text which constructs Flinders' own more specific North Coast, and it does so largely through engagement with the earlier text. Such intertextuality leaves an impression of a strong desire in the follower to have his work compared to that of Cook—to not only act out the already seemingly illustrious work of his Australian predecessors, but to surpass them in his own recordings. The consequent text presents a North Coast that is not just a straight line on a map. Rather, it is inherent with intriguing possible gaps—gateways to the interior?—opening onto unknown possibilities. Yet the lack of real interest in the true inhabitants of this land reflects a text that sees the land as only a possible passageway to elsewhere. This is a text that has another possible centre—in the short term the inland of the continent—before it and its writer's returning to be well received in Europe. At the end it is after some pause and with some disillusion that the 'straight-line' model of the coast is restored, and even reinforced, beyond Cook's sparser view, to admit grudgingly of there being there no large rivers.

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There is a later brief text in which Flinders revisits this same voyage along the North Coast, but in a lighter and much more playful essay.<sup>47</sup> *Trim* is a memoir about the

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<sup>47</sup> Matthew Flinders, *A Biographical Tribute to the Memory of Trim*. [1809], (Pymble (NSW): Angus and Robertson, 1997).

life and times of Flinders' strongly individualised shipboard cat, an essay composed during the long detention in Mauritius. The cat was perhaps named after the devoted servant, Corporal Trim, from Sterne's frolicsome text 'Tristram Shandy' (1759-67), and Flinders' piece of prose in its whimsy has led one commentator to cite it as evidence that Flinders had by then exhausted all matter for his own serious writing.<sup>48</sup> Ignored or dismissed by earlier scholars,<sup>49</sup> the text has been cited more recently as evidence of the playfulness and human warmth in Flinders' character that could explain the strong loyalty of his crew and other personal contacts—aspects hinted at in the formal documents but otherwise without specific explanation.<sup>50</sup> From a regional perspective, this small text is useful for its summary of the North Coast voyage, a brief section revealing an early cultural construction of the same space, by the same author, but with different aims. Produced in conditions of both temporal and cultural distance, and certainly not representative of Flinders' other necessarily formal prose, this private essay reveals interesting attitudes to both land and Aborigines:

In an expedition made to examine the northern parts of the coast of New South Wales, Trim presented a request to be of the party, promising to take upon himself the defence of our bread bags, and his services were accepted. Bongaree, an intelligent native of Port Jackson, was also on board our little sloop; and with him Trim formed an intimate acquaintance. If he had occasion to drink, he mewed to Bongaree and leaped up to the water cask; if to eat, he called him down below and went straight to his kid, where there was generally a remnant of black swan. In short, Bongaree was his great resource, and his kindness was repaid with caresses. In times of danger, Trim never showed any signs of fear; and it may truly be said that he never distrusted or was afraid of any man. (pp. 28-29).

Following on from the essentially failed navigational attempt to emulate or surpass Cook, now the formerly promising land is finally collapsed by Flinders into merely an unimportant locus, an uninteresting bywater, with complete omission of the details of the Shoal Bay landing that held such initial promise in the earlier official report. Unlike other texts this one is almost completely inward looking. The view does not go beyond what is on the ship, its cabins, hold, hiding places—suggesting that the

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<sup>48</sup> James D. Mack, *Matthew Flinders* (Melbourne: Thomas Nelson, 1966), p. 210.

<sup>49</sup> Reflecting the critical attitudes of his own period, Mack claims 'No critic would look twice at this contrived little essay'. (p. 210) The work itself only came to public notice through publication in *Overland*, 55 (Winter 1973), 4-11.

<sup>50</sup> Mackay, p. 110, and T.M. Perry, Introduction to *A Biographical Tribute to the Memory of Trim*. (Pymble, NSW: Angus and Robertson, 1997), p. xv.

major temptation for seafarers, even for those on voyages of exploration, was to concentrate specifically on what was happening in the small self-contained world of the ship. This is a shipboard view of the journey, with its centre as the good humour and needs of the company.

On the other hand, this text, which on its surface glows with apparent good fellowship, contains more revealing and to us disturbing on-board detail of the Aboriginal adviser, Bungaree, than is found elsewhere. Similar to the general erasure from Cook and Banks' formal texts of their on-board Tahitian natives, Tupia and Taita, so Flinders' formal account gives slight attention to what must have been a quite disturbing and alien presence on the ship. The freedom permitted by this small informal text is particularly revealing of European attitude. Bungaree is described as 'intelligent', probably meaning as manifesting a degree of compliance and of his not causing disruption. But the major perception here is the portrayal of Aborigines as being either childlike or animal—an early example of this view described in more detail by one modern authority.<sup>51</sup> The co-operative Aborigine is linked with the cat and the useful goat kid, thereby presented as almost being another ship's pet. Bungaree is not given any credit or respect for his sensitive care of the animal—his 'kindness' is somehow equated with the non-human 'caresses' of the cat. Yet, as with any captivity of 'tame' large wild animals, there is a threatening undertone even with this seemingly most compliant of Aborigines. The final sentence of Flinders' paragraph, with its mentions of 'danger', 'distrusted' and of the sailors being 'afraid', reflects adversely upon Bungaree—almost as though Trim, the cat, may have reason to fear the Aborigine. In sum, then, this text perhaps inadvertently reveals the disturbing ambivalence of white attitudes then towards all Aborigines. So ultimately, the text appears somewhat fragile, despite its attempts to reinforce the Enlightenment endeavour by positioning the writer as in command of all creatures great and small within his ship-board domain.

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<sup>51</sup> Henry Reynolds, *Frontier: Aborigines, Settlers and Land*. (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1987), p. 118.

The third and final account of this same northern voyage by Flinders appears in the 'Introduction' to his major publication—that on the voyage of the *Investigator*.<sup>52</sup> The brevity of this work leads to the complete overlooking of his actual earlier interest in Aborigines at Shoal Bay. The only Aboriginal appearance now is the description of Bongaree as 'a native whose good disposition and manly conduct had attracted my esteem.'<sup>53</sup> Here the emphasis can/must be seen to be on his suitability for subordination and for instructed action—with none of the earlier recognition of his invaluable specialised knowledge of the land and of its people.

### ***Investigator and After***

In 1802, Matthew Flinders<sup>54</sup> again came to the North Coast, as part of his intended great voyage of continual circumnavigation, one partly organised by Joseph Banks. Rather than a speedy passage past a known coast, he then took the opportunity to come closer to shore in order to check gaps in Cook's and his own earlier charts. The Three Brothers now elicit no surprise or correction, but within a navigator's functional description there is a compromise between the diminutive 'hill' and its recorded outstanding significance as a landmark:

1802 July 23 ... The northernmost hill is the broadest, most elevated, and nearest to the water side; and being visible fifty miles from a ship's deck, is an excellent landmark for vessels passing along the coast<sup>55</sup>

In sum, the revision works to corroborate Cook's initial account.

Further generalised description of the land to the north is given:

1802 July 24 ... The coast from Tacking Point to Smoky Cape is generally low and sandy; but its uniformity is broken at intervals by rocky points, which first appear like islands. Behind them the land is low, but quickly rises to hills of moderate height; and these being well covered with wood, the country had a pleasant appearance. Smoky Cape

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52 Matthew Flinders, *A Voyage to Terra Australis*, I, pp. cxxiv-cxcv.

53 *op.cit.* cxciv.

54 Now with the rank of Commander.

55 Matthew Flinders, *A Voyage to Terra Australis*, II, pp. 2-5.

was found to answer the description given of it by captain Cook; its centre lies in 30 55' south, and 153 4' east. The three hummocks upon it stand on so many projecting parts; and at half a mile from the southernmost lie two rocks, and a third two miles further south, which were not before noticed. On the north side of Smoky Cape, the coast falls back four or five miles to the westward, forming a bight in the low land, where there may probably be a shallow inlet; it afterwards resumed a northern direction, and consisted as before of sandy beaches and stony points.

In this there is a revisiting of earlier observations and descriptions. Echoing Cook's journal, the image of 'rocky points, which first appear like islands' is here transferred by Flinders to his own published account, and such is the aptness of the idea that it recurs again on the following day for another North Coast place:

1802 July 25 ... Cape Byron is a small steep head, projecting about two miles from the low land, and in coming along the coast makes like an island

This close borrowing from Cook adds his standing to the present statements of verification—an agreement with Cook's observation of Smoky Cape, and then indirectly with his note of the feature 'named by its discoverer *Mount Warning*'. Even as a background presence, Cook the discoverer is always close to this much later navigational text.

While such features might be expected after close examination of Flinder's earlier log, a remarkable intrusion into this published text is the mention of an unexpected vessel:

1802 July 26 A strange vessel seen to the southward, had induced me to carry little sail all the morning; it was now perceived not to be the Lady Nelson, but probably one of the two whalers known to be fishing off the coast

Texts of discovery and exploration derive much of their (initial) valorisation, if not their *raison d'être*, from their primacy of perception and report. The inclusion here may well arise from the over-riding need to justify the slow passage on that particular morning, and the intruder's presence is then necessarily undercut by the recorder's claim of prior knowledge of two ships possibly being in his vicinity.

In Flinders' *magnum opus* there is considerable use of his own more spontaneous earlier text, and of its intertextual links with Cook's journal, the younger man drawing on the past works for the most complete expression, in order to make a most comprehensive descriptive text of the circumnavigation. There is a lively

engagement with the details of the region—even perhaps a continuing fascination with the coast that held such promise to him.<sup>56</sup>

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Another noteworthy minor journey is that of Flinders' return to Port Jackson from Wreck Reef in an open boat with sail and oars.<sup>57</sup> Without any specific mention, or indirect reference, Flinders' account is, necessarily, one reminiscent of the Bryants' illegal but successful passage to Batavia some years before. Also, the sense of order, command and achievement in the face of difficult conditions has echoes of the great open-boat voyage of Bligh. Such fame was not destined to befall this similar early traverse, which is one completely overlooked in local histories published in the (later) twentieth century.

This is predominantly a text recording struggle against winds, a struggle to continually determine position, and overall a hard-won progress to the south. The necessity of using the assisting current keeps Flinders close to the shore, but this does not yield for him any closer knowledge of river entrances that were to await their scrutiny by Oxley and Rous in much larger vessels. Matthew Flinders passes between Point Danger and the reef and is thereby able to correct his famous predecessor:

1803 31 August ...it is therefore probable, that the reef laid down by captain Cook does not join the land.

The other significant coastal features for Flinders on this journey were: Mount Warning, Cape Byron, Shoal Bay, Solitary Isles, Smoky Cape, Tacking Point and the Three Brothers—an overview of the coast that adds two features to Cook's six—in list form perhaps a measure of how slight Flinders may have felt his own ultimate achievement.

The text itself has a difference of scale from others of the colonial period. The smallness of the craft adds to the difficulty of travel, and both diminishes and dissipates any (imperial) expectations. So after a landing, at what is possibly Nambucca Heads,

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<sup>56</sup> Flinders passes this coast on three more occasions—a total of six passes.

<sup>57</sup> The North Coast section spans 31 August to 5 September, 1803.

the descriptions given of the *pandanus*, a lagoon and fine oysters are all able to evoke the more mundane experiences of earlier unofficial voyagers on this coast:

1803 2 September Smoky Cape was in sight next morning; but the wind coming round to south, and blowing fresh with thick weather, we tacked towards the shore; and at noon landed behind a small ledge of rocks, about three leagues short of the Cape. The distance run these twenty-four hours was eighty five mile, and the southwardly current had given its assistance.

This ledge of rocks lies on the north side of a point upon which there are some hummocks; and on ascending the highest, I saw a lagoon into which the tide flowed by a narrow passage on the inner side of the point. The *pandanus* grows here; and as it was a tree unknown to Bongaree, this latitude (about 30 45') is probably near its southern limit. We took in a supply of fuel and gathered some fine oysters, and the wind dying away to a calm in the afternoon, rowed out for Smoky Cape ...

Normally determined to be precise, Flinders here lapses in two apparently conflicting positionings. Three leagues north from Smoky Cape is either Nambucca or Scotts Head, while the uncharacteristically imprecise latitude given is that of Minnie Water or Sandon—well to the north of the Solitaries. Perhaps he was under considerable strain to qualify or to show punctiliousness. The modest attempt to add to geographical knowledge of plant distribution is so slight that rather it highlights the closeness of his party to the land around them, and tells us of their delight in its bounty. While there is no mention of local aborigines, this text is sufficiently unassuming to defer to the knowledge of 'Bongaree', received from him on an earlier voyage. Thus we have here a text which shows European man beginning to come to some specific accommodation with the features of this land, its people, its vegetation and its already available produce.

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It is somewhat ironic that a study of texts from those deemed the great navigators of Australian exploration ends with the strugglingly slow progress of Flinders along this same coast. The more careful combing of this regional study can thus offer an alternative to the familiar nationalist model of vast achievement, followed by (his own) sudden failure—the familiar 'tall poppy cut-down' description of both Cook's early death, and of Flinders' years of imprisonment and even earlier death. From a regional perspective, both are worthy of commemoration, but not in simply heroic terms. Their North Coast

texts reveal the more complex story of individual struggle and ambition, each trying to find home recognition in great achievement. For both this struggle is enacted against a land which did not yield to their expectations. Particularly with Flinders, it is rather the humility of his lack of success on the North Coast which offers a model of quiet encouragement to those who follow with ambition and hard-work in an enduringly enigmatic land which we can still but partially know.