



# The Three Expeditions of Captain Cook

**DIRECTIONS:** Read each passage. Underline any necessary information. Write a brief summary.

James Cook was a British navigator and explorer best known for mapping the South Pacific. The son of a farmer, he nonetheless was drawn to a career at sea, and apprenticed himself as a merchant seaman when he was eighteen. Though he enjoyed steady career advancement in the merchant navy, he enlisted in the Royal Navy at the beginning of the Seven Years War. During this war, Cook was noticed by Royal Navy senior leadership because of his skills at surveying, navigating, and creating large, accurate maps.

The first ship he was given to command was a cat-collier used for carrying coal. It was called the Endeavour. It couldn't get up much speed, but it was solidly built and had ample cargo room. Drawing from his experience on other ships, Captain Cook required his crew to follow certain rules while they were underway, with the aim of keeping them healthy. He made them bathe every day, keep the ship clean, and regularly air out their bedding. He kept a good supply of fresh fruit on board so that no one would get scurvy, a vitamin C deficiency disease common amongst sailors of the time.

The objective of his first voyage on the Endeavor was to observe the planet Venus as it passed between the Earth and the Sun. The data he gathered would be used by astronomers to calculate the distance of the Sun from the Earth. But Cook had another objective as well: he hoped to find the supposed "southern continent." In all it was a three-year journey. He accomplished his observations of Venus in Tahiti and then travelled to the Society Islands, and New Zealand. He was able to map a great deal of the two main islands of New Zealand, until his work was interrupted by the local Maori tribe, with whom he ended up fighting. From New Zealand he continued on to Australia, where he marveled at the interesting plant and animal life (like the kangaroo!). But here the Endeavor ran up on some coral and they had to remain while the hull was repaired. A great deal of his crewmen contracted malaria, which killed over thirty of them.

A year later he commanded two ships, the Adventure and the Resolution, on yet another three-year a voyage to discover the southern continent – or prove it didn't exist. On this trip he sailed below 70° Latitude, further south than any other European explorer had ever gone. He also visited Easter Island.

His final three-year expedition lasted from 1776 to 1779, with the objective of finding a northwest passage from North America to Asia. He travelled along the entire coast of Alaska without finding a passage, though he did discover what are now called the Hawaiian Islands. He and his men spent time with the natives, but ran into trouble when one of them stole a sailboat. In retaliation, Cook tried to kidnap the native chief, but he was killed in the attempt in 1779.