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James Cook was an outstanding seaman. Coming from a poor family who lived in Yorkshire, England, he joined the navy at the age of 27 and quickly rose to the rank of Captain. In 1768 he was chosen to be in charge of an expedition to the South Seas. There were two reasons for this expedition.

The first was to study the planet Venus as it passed in front of the Sun. For this reason there were a number of scientists on board. The second was to find out what he could about the Great South Land.

The first task was completed in Tahiti in 1769. Cook then set his ship, the Endeavour, on a south-westerly course. He reached the east coast of New Zealand and followed it, sailing around the two main islands before continuing west.

At dawn on 19 April 1770 Lieutenant Zachary Hicks became the first Englishman to sight land on Australia's east coast. Cook named this place, on Victoria's south-eastern coastline, Point Hicks.

On the next day, sailing northwards, Cook sighted and named Cape Howe on the New South Wales – Victoria border (named after a Lord of the British Admiralty). Looking at the coastline from the Endeavour, Cook saw (as he wrote) that the countryside 'had a very agreeable aspect'. He decided to continue sailing northward, following the eastern coastline to discover more.