

## Australian Histories Podcast: Episode 74. Bass & Flinders part 5.

*\*Note: citations included in this transcript are used more as memory prompts for me in writing the episode than for strict academic purposes.*

### INTRODUCTION Episode 74: ö 'Grand Canyon' by David Löhstana [CCFM Music]

Today, we'll continue on in our series on the explorers Bass & Flinders. In the previous episode we heard of the disappearance at sea of poor George Bass. His exploring days were over and he seems to have lost his life on a voyage intended to ensure a late return for the investors in his business venture.

But on a brighter note, Flinders had just completed the first leg of *his* much anticipated circumnavigation of the Australian mainland. He'd bumped into the part of the French expedition on his way, but on the whole was delighted by the surveying of new coasts he had so far undertaken, and he had made it back to Port Jackson in good health, mentally & physically. He would refit his ship, resupply and head off shortly on the second leg of his mission. Everything seemed to be rosy while they readied to depart.

The French were recovering from their shipboard ailments and had acknowledged and agreed that the charts Flinders had produced were true and fair, and Flinders sent copies back to England with a good conscience.

We will take up the story again here, as Flinders readies to depart on July 22nd, 1802 on the second leg of his circumnavigation voyage, and make his name, in the completion of this mammoth task.

But before I begin I wanted to mention a podcast that might be of interest to those of you who enjoyed *Episode 66, Australian Dogs*. In that episode I spoke of a hardy dog that was specifically bred here in the new colony in the early days, to help them hunt kangaroo and provide meat in the years the colony was struggling with food supplies. Known as the *kangaroo dog*, I mentioned that some believed the breed no longer survives, but I happened across a podcast from the ABC's History Listen program, called *Kangaroo-Dog*, indicating such dogs *are* still with us, and some of you may find it interesting listening. I will put the link in the show notes on this episode webpage. <https://www.abc.net.au/listen/programs/the-history-listen/kangaroo-dog-mongrel-greyhound-scottish-deerhound-roodog-/104156394>

In Port Jackson the refit of the *Investigator* was progressing well, but the spares and provisions that were supposed to have been sent out from England, to allow the continuation of the mission, had still not arrived in Sydney, and the colony itself had little to spare to supply such a vessel, still suffering from the food shortages throughout that winter, such that Bass had sent out to source salt pork etc. at that time.

Even finding suitable fresh food to feed his crew in port was a problem for Flinders in Port Jackson. Indeed Bastian reminds us he would have been worrying that his men might have to *leave* on the second leg of their journey in a worse condition than he had managed to *bring them into* port! (Bastian, Josephine 2016, p. 128)

Being mid-winter, even wild game & fish was harder to come by, but he was eventually able to order the "30,000 pounds of bread & biscuits, 8000 pounds of flour and 156 pounds of kiln dried wheat, ... from two American ships [that afterwards arrived], [and] sufficient rum and tobacco for the journey". (Estensen, Miriam. 2002 p217)

Fortunately, the convict ship from England, which had been charged with bringing out his required supplies also arrived later in June, with his spare parts and materials, and they carried some livestock, which

he was able to purchase too. The firewood and water of course could be obtained locally, and was gathered over the many weeks they were in port.

News came too, that a peace treaty had been signed with the French, (Bastian, Josephine 2016, p. 129) so there was plenty to celebrate, though these agreements had never lasted long in the past. Still, optimism was expressed all round.

Flinders, on completion of his interim charts, and with the added discoveries made by Grant & Murray around the same time, was able to show them to Baudin. He agreed that the majority of the discoveries and landmark names along the southern coast of the mainland must be accredited to the English, the French only responsible for initially charting a small portion first. This was no doubt a blow for the French, having so little to claim, after such a great deal of effort expended. Louis Freycinet lamented to Flinders "Ah Captain, if we had not been kept so long picking up shells and catching butterflies at Van Diemens Land, you would not have discovered the South Coast before us." (Morgan, Kenneth 2016, p. 100)

But Freycinet took charge of publishing the official French expedition accounts after Baudin died, and afterwards Peron in 1810, and in those works he was less than truthful about French/English achievements, despite what he had agreed directly with Flinders in Port Jackson at the time. As it turned out Freycinet was able to publish first, albeit with rather poor quality maps, in 1811, without acknowledging Flinders prior accomplishments, or his assistance to the French, at all. (Morgan, Kenneth 2016, p. 184)

Freycinet would later make claims that he knew to be false about the French achievements, particularly along that southern coast, and he proved to be quite the cad once he and Peron took over the writing up of the French expedition journals and charts. Peron & Freycinet also took advantage of the hospitality shown by the English at Port Jackson to surreptitiously spy on behalf of the French.

All the while the English were feeding and entertaining their French 'brothers in exploration', Peron was quietly inspecting and recording every detail about Sydney that might be of interest in the future. He wrote a detailed report on the opportunities there, and made assessments of the settlement's condition and social structure, population size, it's resources, and defences. He would gather a great deal of intelligence for his country, to help assess future prospects for the French in the south. They even made charts of Sydney harbour and the wider Port Jackson, marking potential landing sites should an invasion be required, so it was a pretty thorough and focussed covert operation. Peron's report included his opinion that "the English colony in Sydney should be destroyed as soon as possible". (Bastian, Josephine 2016, p. 130) (Estensen, Miriam. 2002, p. 221)

Peron's reports and belligerent attitude would have far reaching consequences for Flinders, in time. Peron gave the Governor of Mauritius a copy of this aggressive report, the contents of which would not have helped make *him* any more disposed to friendly relations towards Flinders, when he would arrive in Mauritius a couple of years later. Estensen wrote "the extent to which the efforts of Peron and Freycinet were dictated by personal inclination or by orders from any of their superiors is difficult to gauge. Clandestine reconnaissance of the territories of rival nations was a frequent part of exploration at the time, nor can the patriotic motivation and underlining hostility of individuals be discounted. Peron's report seems not to have had any immediate effect on France's plans or policies, but in the hands of the governor of Ile de France [*that's Mauritius*] it would contribute to the crushing fate of Matthew Flinders." (Estensen, Miriam. 2002, p. 221) More on that later then.

So it's not known if Peron was acting under Baudin's orders, but Baudin himself at least *appeared* to operate much more in the spirit of shared scientific discovery, and he was extremely appreciative of the good will shown them in Sydney, leaving a %50 donation for Mrs King's orphanage, and the boys school on the Hawkesbury.

He also wrote a letter stating his gratitude to the British government and the people of Port Jackson, and indeed all who assisted in getting their crews back to good health and in sharing hospitality and warmth.

He noted that it behoved the French to do the same, should any distressed British vessel seek their assistance. So genuine and keen was Baudin to reciprocate the extraordinary help and goodwill they had been the beneficiary of, he wrote 12 copies of this testimonial letter, with spaces for King to fill in the name of Captain & Ship for anyone sailing into French waters, so as any French they met there would know just how much good will was owed them. (Estensen, Miriam. 2002, p. 224)

Interestingly, when Baudin finally did depart Port Jackson, a Mary Beckworth, who had been his mistress during his stay apparently, was allowed to sail with him. (Estensen, Miriam. 2002, p. 224) Flinders would have been green with envy.

King sent a copy of Baudin's appreciative letter back to Banks, so he would know just what level of good will they had been able to leverage off his scientific venture, but unfortunately, he popped the rest of the copies on his desk with his other papers. And truly, his desk must have been a giant mess, because he failed to furnish a copy to Flinders when he finally set out again. This might have been his biggest blunder of all, given the situation Flinders would find later himself in, in the not too distant future. It might have been of great help. Once again, we'll touch on this situation later on.

Flinders and Baudin socialised often during their time together in Port Jackson, as he and his crew recovered, and one member of the French Expedition recorded "Captain Flinders often had us to dinner on board his ship. He seemed to be a most distinguished officer and to be very well educated. He already made several voyages along this coast, and we were grateful to him for some very useful information for the next stage of our trip." (Morgan, Kenneth 2016, p. 102)

Departing on July 22<sup>nd</sup>, Flinders left Port Jackson before the French. (Morgan, Kenneth 2016, p. 102) Before leaving the settlement in New South Wales Flinders did record his assessment of the colony, probably in particular for Banks, to allow people to measure the success of his project. "In 1803 [the colony] was progressively advancing towards a state of independence [from] the mother country for food and clothing; both the wild and tame cattle had augmented in a proportion to make it probable that they would, before many years, be very abundant; and manufactures of woollen, linen, cordage and leather, with breweries and a pottery, were commenced. (*and we know just how successful the wool trade in particular would become in a very short time*) The number of inhabitants was increasing rapidly, and that energetic spirit of enterprise which characterises Britain's children, seemed to be throwing out vigorous shoots in this new world. The seal fishery in Bass Strait was carried on with ardour, many boats were employed in catching and preparing fish along the coast – sloops and schooners were upon the stocks, various detached settlements were in a course of establishment, and more in project. And all this, with the commerce carried on from Sydney to Parramatta, and the villages at the head of the port, and to those on the rivers falling into Broken and Botany Bays made the fine harbour of Port Jackson a lively scene of business, highly interesting to the contemplator of the rise of nations." (Flinders, Matthew. 2012)

This assessment was very impressive, and a positive lens for those participating in the new society, including the convicts rising out of their servitude into self-sufficiency, but of course we do need to pause and acknowledge just how devastating all this expansion continued to be for the indigenous inhabitants, and the frontier wars, which would rage on and off for the following century across the country, were beginning to kick off in earnest, as the land grabs increased.

Flinders continued; "In Sydney and Parramatta, houses of stone or brick were taking the place of wood and plaster ... a stone bridge over the stream which runs through the town of Sydney was nearly finished, and the whiskey, chariot and heavy laden wagon were seen moving on commodious roads to different parts of the colony. In the interior the forests were giving way before the axe, and their places becoming every year more extensively occupied by wheat, barley, oats, maize and the vegetables and fruits of southern Europe. .." (Flinders, Matthew. 2012, pp. 232–3)

And he goes on to list acreage, stock numbers, agricultural yields and population statistics to support his optimistic impressions. But he also notes the obstacles still being experienced and slowing the stellar advancement of the colony, including “the vicious propensities of a large portion of the convicts, a want of more frequent communication with England (*probably particularly frustrating since the European wars had been raging and complicating sea travel*), and the prohibition of trading with India and the western coasts of South America, in consequence of the East-India-Company’s charter.” (Flinders, Matthew. 2012, p. 234) The East India Company held a charter that gave it a monopoly on trade in the region, (Morgan, Kenneth 2016, p. 54) not that these prohibitions seemed to have stopped many people undertaking such trade. It was this that Bass intended to ignore when he was planning to trade with South America directly on his last voyage if you remember.

But any advances in the charts available to captains for travel around the Pacific and Indian oceans and associated straits, would become very valuable, where faster, safer sailing routes might be possible. And further discoveries of things that might be bought or sold or otherwise exploited for business, would be considered good for everybody. Indeed so keen was the East India Company for better information that they helped sponsor Flinders voyage, via Joseph Banks, covering some costs for provisions and some other supplies. Banks advised Flinders “The reason for the allowance is to encourage the men of science to discover such things as will be useful to the Commerce of India and you to find new passages.” (Morgan, Kenneth 2016, p. 54)

So in setting off on the next leg of his expedition Flinders would head north out of Port Jackson, sailing in what were now reasonably familiar waters early on. They would fill in the blanks still remaining from Cooks charts along the east coast, before making their way westward along the northern coast of the Australian land mass, and finally completing his circumnavigation by charting down the west coast before returning to Sydney via the south.

The Governor sent the *Lady Nelson* to travel in company with the *Investigator*, with Lieutenant Murray, the discoverer of Port Phillip Bay, in command. On board with him was Henry Hacking, the long-time game keeper for the NSW colony, and a man quite familiar with trekking inland, around NSW at least.

Flinders also included in his crew two aboriginal men to act as go-betweens in any communications they might have during their explorations on land, noting “The worthy and brave Bongaree, who had sailed with me in the *Norfolk*, was to volunteer again, and was bringing a friend with him, a good natured lad called Nanbaree.” (Flinders, Matthew. 2012, p. 123) (Bastian, Josephine 2016, p. 133)

But both the *Investigator* and the *Lady Nelson* were short of sailing crew, and they recruited 9 convicts having “respectable recommendations”, who were promised their freedom on Flinders’ commendation, if they performed their duties well during the voyage. (Bastian, Josephine 2016, p. 132) “Several of these men were seamen, and all were able and healthy; so that I considered them a great acquisition to our strength. With respect to themselves, the situation to which they were admitted was most desirable; since they had thereby a prospect of returning to their country, and the society from which they had been banished.” (Flinders, Matthew. 2012, p. 122)

Of the nine convicts Flinders took on, one died during the journey, another failed to meet the behavioural standards expected of him, and would return to his sentence when Flinders arrived back in Port Jackson. The remaining seven did serve Flinders well, and as per their agreement, were all completely emancipated on their return, some opting afterwards to return to England. (Flinders, Matthew. 2012, p. 232)

Now underway and in need of reaching the north and undertaking much survey work before the wet season set in, they hastened to Hervey Bay, north of Brisbane, where they had left off exploring last time, while in the *Norfolk* in 1799. In this region they had an encounter with a large number of aboriginal men, and despite the language barrier, Bungoree was able to facilitate a peaceful exchange, the crew recording of

the 50 or so people they encountered, “[they] did not permit their women and children to come near the Europeans, but some were seen at a distance and it was reported the women had long hair tied behind. The men were of a middle stature ... well made, mild and sociable, having no weapons... Bongaree amused them by throwing his spear, which seemed to surprise them and it appears they are unacquainted with the Woomera”. (Morgan, Kenneth 2016, p. 104)

The Woomera is a device used to extend the reach on the spear throw and increase the power of projection. I’ll provide an image of the tool on the episode page. (Wikipedia: Woomera 2024) ... Bungaree demonstrated it’s use and they were impressed by the great advantage it gave in throwing distance, but one man who tried to use it, as Bungaree had showed him, ended up throwing both the spear and throwing stick, so it’s a tool that requires practice and skill to master. (Estensen, Miriam. 2002, p. 226) All new technology comes with a learning curve doesn’t it!

Indeed they reported seeing many aboriginals during their journey northwards, noting “they were the strongest made natives we had seen in New Holland, painted with a great variety of figures and colours, wore necklaces of reed and shells, and had a great variety of features, some were thought upward of 6 feet [tall].” (Bastian, Josephine 2016, p. 135)

Despite regularly meeting clearly differing language groups in all their travels, Flinders continued to express constant surprise about the unique cultural practices and languages he observed across the vast country!! It seems he was struggling to comprehend the complexities and distinctiveness of the cultures of these separate First Nations peoples.

At the encounter near Hervey Bay a number of the local men appeared to follow them back to their ships, and Flinders made them gifts of red caps and tomahawks, which they enjoyed, and they reciprocated by giving the white men some buckets and nets they had crafted. (Morgan, Kenneth 2016, p. 105) A very friendly exchange by all accounts.

They spent 2 months charting northward of Hervey Bay, but they were again unnecessarily stalled for several days when young Samuel once again allowed the ships clocks to run down, just south of Mackay, necessitating the tedious resetting procedures over many days, and delaying their advance. (Morgan, Kenneth 2016, p. 108) (Estensen, Miriam. 2002, p. 231) It happened again in December too. Why Flinders persisted in giving that crucial job to the unreliable Samuel is a mystery, except that it must have been his *designated job* as the Midshipman, but surely by now you might have thought assigning seconder to confirm the task had been done might be a valuable failsafe?

They approached the Whitsundays toward the end of September, where they worked to find a passage through the maze of the reefs, to the open water of the coral sea. They must continue further north, if they were to have time for investigating the Torres Strait before the wet season set in. Flinders noted “the reefs, ... form so extraordinary a barrier .... amongst which we sought fourteen days, and sailed more than 500 miles, before a passage could be found through them, out to sea.” (Flinders, Matthew. 2012, p. 149)

He appreciated the beauty and magnificence of the coral reefs and their accompanying sea life, recording “Each species had a different shade of colour between green, purple, brown and white, equalling in beauty and excelling in grandeur the most favourite parterre of the most curious florist: but in contemplating this rich scene, we could not forget that we were probably admiring what might, even very soon, be the destruction of our poor ship, of ourselves, and all our hopes.” (Morgan, Kenneth 2016, p. 111)

“In these narrow passages the tide runs with extraordinary violence, and the bottom is coral rock, and whether with or without wind, no situation can be more dangerous.” (Bastian, Josephine 2016) They spent nearly two weeks trying to make safe passage through the Barrier Reef labyrinth and were fortunate to have had excellent weather that whole time. Flinders did manage to safely navigate a passage through the outer reefs, north of the Whitsundays and into the open sea, the route later labelled ‘*Flinders Passage*’.

(See image. *Portion of Flinders' chart of Australia, showing his meandering track through the Reef and his futile attempts to cross the outer barrier. Cook's track can be seen through Whitsunday Passage.* (Foley, John C. H. 1988, p. 174))

The maze of coral reefs extends over 2000 kilometres, or 1250 miles, along that northerly eastern edge of the seaboard, from Hervey Bay right up to Papua New Guinea really. (Estensen, Miriam. 2002, p. 233) Some can be clearly seen on the surface of the water as the waves break across them, others remain hidden just under the surface even at low tide, but can still cause a problem for those sailing or traversing the area. Extreme caution is required even today. It would have been a terrifying and arduous feat to find a navigable passage deep enough to get to open water, in a ship that had no navigation equipment, radar to aid in directing it, or motors to navigate around obstructions. To be at the mercy of wind and tide amongst such an obstacle course must be anxiety inducing to say the least! Take a look at the Great Barrier Reef on Google Earth, and then imagine trying to parse your way through, on a lumbering wooden sailing ship, with the highest point for vision atop a measly mast, if you were lucky enough to have daylight and clear skies! Quite the navigational achievement.

Of their anxious passage through, Flinders wrote, "We were successful. At four the depth was 43 fathoms and no reef in sight; at six a heavy swell from the eastward and a depth of 66 fathoms were strong assurances that we had, at length, gained the open sea." His advice to future sailors attempting passage in the region was "if he do not feel his nerves strong enough to thread the needle, ... amongst the reefs, while he directs steerage from the masthead, I would strongly recommend him not to approach this part of New South Wales." (Estensen, Miriam. 2002, p. 240) And we see from his journals that we can credit Flinders with coining the term 'Great Barrier Reef'; and so it is.

The *Lady Nelson*, which had accompanied them all his way, was intended to provide extra men to undertake the charting and other observations, carry additional supplies and provide some small measure of safety just being in company with another ship. It had a sliding keel and could both sail in shallow water, and beach at low tide where necessary, so it was expected to be a useful vessel to accompany the *Investigator*, but instead she proved to be more of a liability. By the time they had made open water again the *Lady Nelson* had lost one of her keels, and some of the copper sheathing from the hull. Apparently the vessel did not sail all that well anyway, and after the challenges of making their way through the reefs, under sail with a ship that was quite unresponsive, Flinders felt it best to send the vessel back to Sydney as soon as they reached open water, and to continue on alone in the *Investigator*. (Bastian, Josephine 2016, p. 144) Nanbaree was ready to return home too, and so with a little rearrangement of crew members and provisions, the *Lady Nelson* made for Port Jackson, while the *Investigator* proceeded north on their mission.

Flinders sent a note to Governor King explaining the reasons for the *Lady Nelson's* return, (Morgan, Kenneth 2016, p. 112) and providing a report on the places discovered so far, that might be of interest as new British settlement sites. He included instructions about travelling through the reef too, to be of assistance to any others sailing north before his official charts would become available. He also reminded King that the *Investigator* was unlikely to arrive back at Port Jackson any time before June of 1803 on his *intended* sailing plan, and asked King to pass this information on to Joseph Banks.

And of course he enclosed a bundle of mail for England, including a touching letter to Ann, in which he wrote "we are all well, and the accomplishment of the objects of the voyage is advancing . . . . Amidst my various and constant occupations, thou art not one day forgotten". (Retter, Catherine, Sinclair, Shirley 1999)

The further north they travelled and the closer they got to the wet season, the more oppressive the travel conditions became. The heat and humidity, the mosquitoes, and the stinking mangrove swamps, made exploration a difficult job for all aboard, and this journey was proving not to be as cheery as the earlier exploration of the southern coasts. The surveying undertaken was necessarily limited, due to the difficulties

of access and their time constraints, and Flinders continued to be frustrated by the failure to find any navigable rivers inland, but all their work added value to the existing knowledge, all the same.

His instructions required him to chart all the way to Cooktown, but knowing the difficulties of navigating through and around the Great Barrier Reef, and the time they had left to do so before the necessity of taking shelter from the cyclone season after November, he knew much of that far north eastern coast would need to be skipped, or surveyed in only a very limited fashion in the time left. He deemed their attention would be more productively spent charting the Torres Strait, and around into the NW, which would be of greater importance for charting reliable shipping routes, and probably doable in the time allocated, and so that modified plan was enacted.

“Finding and clearly charting a safe passage through Torres Strait would be of enormous value to traders and all needing to pass through the area quickly” because long periods in boats led to crew deaths and greater risks for ship owners. Flinders noted the value gained “if a passage through the Strait, moderately free from danger, could be discovered, since five of six weeks of the usual route, by the north of New Guinea, or the more eastern islands, would thereby be saved.” (Morgan, Kenneth 2016, p. 114) And King’s opinion was already known, that a well marked and tried route would be “a matter of great universal benefit”. (Morgan, Kenneth 2016, p. 116)

Between their departure date in July, to the time they got clear of the reefs on October 20<sup>th</sup>, they had travelled many hundreds of miles inside and outside the Great Barrier Reef, often following Cooks original tracks before they reached Cape York. Soon afterwards they prepared to round the tip of the Australian mainland into the Torres Strait, and head westward along the northern coast, Flinders having studied the accounts of earlier trips through the strait that he had access to. (Morgan, Kenneth 2016, p. 103)

On approaching the Torres Strait Flinders wrote “Our latitude at noon was exactly that of the opening by which Captain Edwards of the *Pandora* had entered the strait in 1791; and which I call the Pandora’ Entrance. This opening appeared to be preferable to that further northward, by which Captain Bligh and Mr Bampton had got within the reefs; more especially as it led directly for [the] Murray Islands, where if possible, I intended to anchor.” (Flinders, Matthew. 2012, p. 151) And they did shelter on the north side of the Murray Islands. The locals paddled out to meet them, looking fierce, but helpfully, they were only wanting to trade for metal goods, and this exchange allowed them to add to their fresh food stores on board.

It was a productive time. Flinders had been able to correct much information on Cook’s early charts, and they continued making their way through the maze of islands surveying as they travelled. Flinders identified and named the Prince of Wales Channel, which would become the main thoroughfare for years to come for trading ships between India and Sydney. He was very pleased. “I now considered all the difficulties of Torres Strait to be surmounted, since we had got a fair entry into the Gulf of Carpentaria; and to have accomplished this, before the north-west monsoon had made any strong indications. ....” (Flinders, Matthew. 2012, p. 159)

On entering the Gulf of Carpentaria, Flinders checked his mapping against old Dutch charts from the 1600s and updated all the information, noting numerous stagnant lagoons inland, not realising in the wet season, these would swell and expand and empty pouring directly into the Gulf. And let me just comment here that I recently had the chance to visit the Western Australian Shipwreck Museum in Fremantle, where I saw the preserved remnants of the Dutch ship the *Batavia*, wrecked off the coast of WA (and that’s an enthralling and surprising story, which I recommended in a much earlier episode. The History of NL podcast did an excellent deep dive into the *Batavia* wreck story.

<https://www.republicofamsterdamradio.com/episodes/stuff-what-you-tell-me/batavia/1> I’ll place a link to that again from the AHP website fyi, but where I was going was, the Museum had on display several of the

early Dutch maps, from the 15 & 1600s, and it really is astounding just how much of the Australian coast they had already charted, east coast aside, a century before Cook.

Flinders gets a lot of credit, as I suppose his focus was actually on exploring, charting and naming all he saw, where as the Dutch recorded it all as they passed, largely on a mission to make the sea route to the spice islands safer, as they generally did not find much of consequence on their forays onto our land, that screamed '*I can be converted to cash for the VOC*', and therefore not of great interest! I will post a copy of one of their maps so you can get an idea of the extent of their prior knowledge. Flinders really saw much less *unseen by European eyes* coast than we imagine, though of course, by his time they had the chronometers which allowed them much more precise maps, particularly the longitude issue being solved by then, and so better quality and more reliable charts. Anyway, back to the narrative with Flinders then.

They did some exploring on land around November 7<sup>th</sup> and met with some aboriginal men there who "clearly discouraged them from venturing any further inland"! So mutually understood language is not always necessary for some messages then!

In January, sailing around Groote Eylandt off the western side of the Gulf of Carpentaria, while exploring on land, they recorded seeing some exceptional aboriginal art there in caverns, including depictions of "porpoises, turtle, kangaroos and a human hand", along with other daubing's, stencils, and charcoal drawings. (Estensen, Miriam. 2002, p. 258) The ship's artist painted & drew depictions of what they were looking at, aware that these must have been important works for the local people, denoting great symbolic meaning.

During this journey Flinders' Journals record him referring to the Aboriginals as "Australians" rather than the more common terms 'Indians' or 'Natives'. So again, we can credit Flinders with the term Australia and Australian, and acknowledge the indigenous inhabitants recognised as our First Australians.

Around this time one of Flinders' men was gravely injured by a spearing during a confrontation with Aboriginals there, and his crew pursued and killed some of the men in response. Though this type of reprisal was absolutely against the rules Flinders had set, it seems no punishment was meted out afterwards. (Flinders, Matthew. 2012, p. xxii) The crew member that was speared seems to have recovered, but another died from what was described as 'coup-de-soleil' - heat stroke. After all their positive interactions, this was very unfortunate altercation, and more highly charged exchanges followed across the north.

They found evidence along the north of visits by Asian sailors, including broken earthen ware jugs and tree stumps felled by iron axes, neither of which were items the indigenous people used. (Flinders, Matthew. 2012, p. xx) These 'visitors' would have been members of the Maccassan fleet, Malay sailors who visited annually to harvest sea cucumber or 'Trepang', in the Gulf, for sale to the Chinese. And indeed, they later met with a group around the Melville Island area, and were able to communicate and gather a great deal of information from these men. (Flinders, Matthew. 2012, p. 205)

One crewman wrote, we were "not a little astonished to see 6 small vessels at anchor under a small neighbouring island." (Morgan, Kenneth 2016, p. 128) The vessels were Malay praus, from Makassar on the Indonesian island of Sulawesi, then under Dutch Rule, and they were able to communicate through Flinders' Malay Cook, Abraham Williams. They discovered they were 6 of sixty in a fleet that had come to harvest Sea Cucumber, and were told that sometimes the local indigenous people also helped in the harvest, in return for tobacco, alcohol, cloth and various other trade items they would bring.

Apparently after being brought up from the sea floor the Sea Cucumber would be opened and eviscerated, boiled with the bark of a Mangrove used as a preservative, then opened and pressed with stones as they dried in the sun, or they might be smoked for preservation. The finished trepan product, would then be sold on their return, to Chinese export, as a medicine and an aphrodisiac. (And aren't they all? Nothing like a smoky, salty dry and unappetising blob of chewy sea creature to turn you on....!)

(Estensen, Miriam. 2002, p. 265) (Morgan, Kenneth 2016, p. 129) It was a huge venture, with each prau carrying 100,000 sea cucumbers, and all of this industry was most amazing to the crew of the *Investigator*.

This kind of abundance and the easy passage to the Asian trade centres north, lead Flinders to conclude that the north side of Arnhem land might prove to be a useful place for a settlement. (Morgan, Kenneth 2016, p. 130) He would later write to Banks "If the East India Company have any intention of making a settlement on New Holland, the harbours of Cape Arnhem, the wild nutmegs, and perhaps the trepan which seems to bring the Malays a good many thousand dollars annually from the Chinese, might be additional incitements." (Morgan, Kenneth 2016, p. 155) And indeed in the decades to come, the British would make several attempts at establishing settlements in the region; at Fort Dundas on Melville Island in 1824, Raffles Bay around the Cobourg Peninsula in 1827 and Port Essington in 1838, but with no lasting success early on. (McKenna, Mark 2016, p. 65)

Flinders noted just how hot & humid the conditions had been, and that "On board the ship, the average standard of the thermometer was nearly 85 degrees (*that would have been Fahrenheit of course, so around 30 Celsius*). On shore it was hotter, yet the mosquitoes were not very troublesome; but the common black flies, from their extraordinary numbers and their impudence, were scarcely less annoying than mosquitoes; they get into the mouth and nose, and settle upon the face or any other part of the body ... nor are they driven away easily." (Flinders, Matthew. 2012, p. 181) This is an exasperating experience many of us have had, especially in the outback areas, and why the famous cork hat was invented, to keep them from landing on the face!

Having sheltered successfully through the monsoon season along that northern coast, by March the condition of the *Investigator* was causing concern. The carpenters on board were regularly caulking the hull but were reporting on the many rotten and weakened parts of the ship they observed, and were questioning it's seaworthiness. Pumps were by then being operated at all times, and there was a concern that in rough weather the hull may even break apart. One crewman wrote, "we despaired of ever arriving safe into any port, especially if we met with boisterous weather," (Morgan, Kenneth 2016, p. 121) and it was suggested the *Investigator* might have less than six months of sailing left in her.

With the humid conditions, excessive flies, oppressive heat and tropical conditions, the health of crew was deteriorating too. Scurvy and malnutrition was also taking hold, Flinders himself writing that he was "disabled by scorbutic sores", and even Trim was losing his toenails and was "almost grey [having] lost much weight and seemed threatened with premature old age", (Morgan, Kenneth 2016, p. 133). The crewmen failed to see or identify the abundant health giving food that was all around them on the land they were travelling through. Clearly the indigenous people were tall and fit and healthy, and living entirely from the environment all around. Yet Flinders and his men continued to deteriorate, and they considered that they might have to largely abandon much more exploration and make an early run back to Port Jackson, more than half a continent away. But now the state of the ship was making even that option impossible.

Flinders recorded "I cannot express the surprise and sorrow which this statement gave me. From this dreadful state of the ship I find the complete examination of this extensive country, which is one of the nearest objects to my heart, to be greatly impeded, if not wholly frustrated . . . With the blessing of God nothing of importance should have *been left for future discovery* upon any of the shores of this great, and in many points, interesting country. .... But ....with such a ship I know not how to accomplish so great an undertaking." (Bastian, Josephine 2016, p. 162) (Flinders, Matthew. 2012, p. xx)

The north western and western coasts ahead might prove to be *the* most important regions to chart, if suitable ports and land might be found there, due to it's easy access to China and the rest of Asia. (Bastian, Josephine 2016, p. 131) But the ship would require much timber replacement and more substantial repairs than they could affect themselves out of port. Flinders wrote, "March 26<sup>th</sup> – [the winds had driven us] near to the Island of Timor, [so] I judged it advisable to obtain refreshments there for my ships company ... the bad state of the ship might cause more labour at the pumps than our present strength

was capable of exerting.” (Flinders, Matthew. 2012, p. 212) So they retreated to Kupang in Timor, to repair, recover and restock, before resuming the charting along to the north western and western reaches of New Holland.

The stop in port would also give Flinders the opportunity to get a letter away to Banks and the Admiralty, advising of the necessity for his change of plans, to report on the dire state of the ship, and to describe the good work they had undertaken up to that point. He would keep an eye on the possibility of hiring or buying another ship while in Timor, in which they might be able to safely complete the great charting project, rather than rushing to Port Jackson as the current ship demanded, (Morgan, Kenneth 2016, p. 133) but he was not to be in luck.

Arriving in Timor on March 31<sup>st</sup> 1803, (Estensen, Miriam. 2002, p. 270) they found no alternative ship available. They would need to do as good a job patching it all up as they could manage, with the men and supplies available there, reprovision with whatever was available, and make haste to Port Jackson in the poor old *Investigator* after all. Flinders departed Kupang on April 8<sup>th</sup>, two crew members short, having lost his cook and another young man to desertion; an unusual situation for Flinders. (Flinders, Matthew. 2012, p. 214). Sadly, that necessary stop at Kupang would bring even more discomfort and trouble to the expedition though.

Their return to Port Jackson, even in haste, would see him *technically* complete his circumnavigation, but it would not allow time for the *thorough investigation and charting* that was crucial to the original mission. And there were some investigations, along that western coast in particular, that were extremely important. A quick look for the Tryal Rocks, (sometimes spelled Trial Rocks) out to the west was a necessity, for example. The English ship the *Tryall* had been wrecked there back in 1622, before it’s survivors made their way to Timor, but the wreck position had been incorrectly charted on future maps and therefore the Tryal Rocks remained a great unknown risk to future sailors, until they were found and correctly charted. (Estensen, Miriam. 2002, p. 273) (Wikipedia: Tryal Rocks 2024) And by the way, the story about the Tryall wreck is worth looking up too.

And so despite the need to hasten in their travels to Port Jackson, Flinders insisted on undertaking *some* investigations and charting on the way, even with the dangerous state of the ship and the increasingly ailing crew, *and* against the ship’s doctor’s advice. This time, despite his usual care of his crew, Flinders was clearly risking a great deal in travelling as he did on this leg returning to Port Jackson, and many of the crew paid the ultimate price as their health deteriorated further. Even the limited exploring that Flinders attempted as they travelled was too much for the ship’s doctor, who felt a speedy and direct route home was the only hope for the men aboard, and here the two fell out, “their relationship becoming bitterly acrimonious”. (Estensen, Miriam. 2002, p. 275)

Within days of leaving Timor men began sickening. Flinders at first would attribute the crew’s ill health to the tropical conditions they had been labouring under for so long, but as the number suffering increased over the weeks, it seemed more likely they had contracted dysentery in Timor. The water from Kupang was probably contaminated. (Morgan, Kenneth 2016, p. 135) They worked hard to keep the ship clean and well-aired, but the illness continued to get worse and spread throughout the crew.

Indeed it was very likely that the developing dysentery *was* a direct result of their stay in Timor. All these busy ports were overcrowded and highly unsanitary at the time. Even as they finally rounded the south west cape and began their eastward return journey, more of his men died or were incapacitated one way or another, Flinders himself by then, affected by scurvy, was hardly able to walk. (Morgan, Kenneth 2016, p. 136) May 13<sup>th</sup> they reached Cape Leeuwin, and proceeded along the southern coast again.

The *Investigator* barely held it together, and they can attribute its survival to good luck, in that the worst of the weather largely held off during their travels. Within weeks, rounding the south east and

heading directly for the colonial settlement at Sydney Harbour, those that survived illness were very fortunate to make it into port, on their less than seaworthy remnant of a ship.

Limping into Port Jackson on June 9<sup>th</sup>, 1803, 12 of the crew were immediately hospitalised. Four more were too sick, even be moved from the ship, and they subsequently died on board, their loss added to the sorrowful tally of five poor crewmen who had previously died at sea. (Bastian, Josephine 2016, p. 190)

At least this time on his arrival in Sydney they had plenty of fresh food available, and Flinders was treated as the returning hero with many tales to tell, despite the awful state of his men. I guess this outcome was a regular risk with sea travel, and so not as shocking as we might find it today. But it was a heavy toll, and a very sorry end to what had started out as a happy and constructive venture.

Everyone was very pleased with the charts made from the voyage though, including the confirmation that they were living on an island continent larger than Europe, with no strait separating NSW to the east from New Holland, marked to the west. It was all one gigantic landmass.

Though several men had lost their lives on this journey, (Morgan, Kenneth 2016, p. 138) it might have been much, much worse. When Flinders wrote to Ann soon after their arrival, he said "It was the unanimous opinion of the surveying officers that, had we met with a severe gale of wind .... [the *Investigator*] must have crushed like an egg and gone down. I was partly aware of her bad state, and returned sooner to Port Jackson on that account before the worst weather came. For me, whom this obstruction in the voyage and the melancholy state of my poor people have much distressed, I have been lame about four months, and much debilitated in health and I fear in constitution, but am now recovering, and shall soon be altogether well." (Morgan, Kenneth 2016, p. 138)

So an almost cheery optimistic note to finish off there, despite all the recent trials and losses, to reassure his lonely wife, but a very sorry outcome, particularly considering just how spectacularly well he had done in keeping his crew healthy on the first long leg of the expedition earlier.

At least with Port Jackson's food supply in relative abundance at last, his surviving crew were soon able to build strength and recuperate. Flinders was pleased to see his cat recovering too. "Trim, like his master, is becoming grey; he is at present fat and frisky, and takes meat from our forks with his former dexterity...." (Flinders, Matthew. 2012, p. 225)

His mission was not completed as expected by Banks. The *Investigator* was immediately condemned, unfit for any further work, and there were no other suitable ships at Port Jackson which Flinders could take to more thoroughly complete the task once his crew were recovered. After much discussion with the Governor, always keen to support the project "for the benefit of Science and navigation", (Bastian, Josephine 2016, p. 192) they both felt the best option was for Flinders to sail for England at the earliest, and lobby to be refitted from there. With a sturdy, seaworthy vessel he could return and complete the valuable exploration mission, examining in detail the coast and inland he was forced to rush past. With his existing charts and journals he would make his case directly to the Admiralty, and present Joseph Banks with the collection of specimens they had collected so far, hoping to win *his* continued support for another ship and a continuation of the official expedition.

Knowing that the delay in charting the circumnavigation would be very unwelcome news to the Admiralty, and possibly give the French the advantage in publishing *their* resulting charts first, Flinders wrote "....notwithstanding the reluctance I felt at returning to England without having accomplished the objects for which the *Investigator* was fitted out. My election was therefore made to embark as a passenger in the *Porpoise*; in order to lay my charts and journals before the Lord Commissioners of the Admiralty, and obtain, if such should be their pleasure, another ship to complete the examination of Terra Australis..." (Flinders, Matthew. 2012, p. 232) If his plan should come to fruition poor Ann would necessarily be set aside again.

During this last journey Flinders had been affected by scurvy, and had a recurrence of his old kidney complaint, arriving in Port Jackson quite unwell. While in Sydney he rested up with the governor, and later convalesced further out, on the *Hawkesbury*. Flinders used that time to write more thorough reports back to Joseph Banks, and tell him he would resume and complete the task as soon as a new ship could be found. But meanwhile, one of the other expedition men that Banks had recruited to accompany Flinders, Robert Brown, was also sending his thoughts and reports back to Banks. Brown had advised “our expectations of getting inside the country by means of navigable rivers or inlets have been completely frustrated . .... Our excursions have nowhere extended to more than a few miles from the shore. The interior of New Holland therefore is as completely unknown as ever.” Indeed Brown wrote a great many disappointed and disparaging comments about what they had to date seen and recorded, and suggested that *he thought* there was very little point in continuing the expedition. While Flinders had also been likewise disappointed and frustrated, *he* still felt there was lots of important work to do, and begged to be supplied with a ship to accomplish it. But it seemed support in England was beginning to wane anyway. He would need to get there fast and make a compelling argument.

While recuperating on the *Hawkesbury*, Flinders at last received a number of letters from Ann, and they seemed warm and loving, pleasing him a great deal, and prompting him to write back in the most gushing and romantic manner, just as we might expect from him.

And he was disappointed not to have had the chance to catch Bass in port, (he being at that time embarked on trading across the Pacific). Flinders wrote a letter to George Bass, offering good wishes for his successful venture, and telling him he was sorry they hadn't had the opportunity to meet in Port Jackson. He didn't know at the time, but Bass would never receive that letter, indeed Bass was probably already lost to the sea at that point. (Morgan, Kenneth 2016)

On July 22<sup>nd</sup> the *Investigator* had been formally decommissioned and Flinders made his last entry in that log book, recording the transfer of his ships company to the *Porpoise*. In October of 1803 Flinders would set sail for England, as a passenger on the *Porpoise*, to make his case to the Admiralty for a new exploration vessel.

So we'll finish up there today, and in the next episode, the last in this series, we'll find Flinders experiencing some of the most heroic, exasperating and frustrating experiences of his life, before returning to his long suffering wife in England. And of course we will need to reflect on Trims adventures too, to complete the story.

### Podcast Recommendation

This episode I have another podcast recommendation for you to try. Called “I was only doing my job”, Ross Manuel researches the careers and experiences of interesting men & women in the services. I particularly liked his episodes giving us a great deal of interesting and uplifting information about Honorary Brigadier General Meredith, the man I & others have taunted about his role in the ill-fated Emu Wars, which we recounted in Episode 34 in the Great Emu War. But there was so much more to him than that unfortunate foray. Another episode I particularly liked was a sensitive look at the experiences of Lt Colonel Sister Vivian Bullwinkel, the sole survivor of the Bangka Island Massacre. Anyway, you can check it out for yourself to see if it's for you. <https://thedocnetwork.net/>

Thanks so much for listening

(Smith, Samuel [no date])

(Flinders, Matthew, Sandall, Philippa, Dooley, Gillain 2019)

(Retter, Catherine, Sinclair, Shirley 1999)

(Richard 2018)

(Wikipedia: Trim 2024)

(GBR Biology, [no date])

(Wikipedia: Laperouse 2024)

(Wikipedia: Longitude 2024)

(Wikipedia: Tryal Rocks 2024)

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### Music, IMAGES & other links:

- Intro/Exit music modified from: *'Grand Canyon' by David Löhstana [CCFM Music – 2018]*
- Sound snippets: Sailing Ship noises – <https://freesound.org/people/Supertyv2/sounds/166753/>
- History Listen (ABC): Kangaroo Dog <https://www.abc.net.au/listen/programs/the-history-listen/kangaroo-dog-mongrel-greyhound-scottish-deerhound-roodog-/104156394>
- Batavia story by History of Netherlands Podcast: <https://www.republicofamsterdamradio.com/episodes/stuff-what-you-tell-me/batavia/1>
- Image: Woomeras (<https://www.aboriginal-bark-paintings.com/aboriginal-woomera/>)
- Image: Flinders Passage - *Portion of Flinders' chart of Australia, showing his meandering track through the Reef and his futile attempts to cross the outer barrier. Cook's track can be seen through Whitsunday Passage.* (Foley, John C. H. 1988, p. 174)
- Image Flinders: National Museum of Australia. <https://www.nma.gov.au/defining-moments/resources/flinders-circumnavigates-australia>
- Flinders Miniture SLNSW: Matthew Flinders, ca. 1800 - watercolour miniature portrait. <https://www.sl.nsw.gov.au/stories/terra-australis-australia/matthew-flinders-journeys>
- Naval coat or sash badge, belonging to Matthew Flinders: <https://www.sl.nsw.gov.au/stories/terra-australis-australia/matthew-flinders-journeys>
- Flinders' chronometer: Powerhouse Museum <https://collection.powerhouse.com.au/object/237881>