

LEX LOCI'S TRAVELS

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An ad-hoc one-pager from The Public Land Consultancy

Lex Loci and Captain Cook at Point Hicks and in the Catani Gardens



If Cook had turned left rather than right, there might be some logic in his statue now gracing the Catani Gardens at St Kilda. Well, at least the plaque on the plinth doesn't claim he 'discovered' Australia.

Lex is contemplating a difficult issue. He is at Point Hicks, in Croajingalong National Park. He is reading from the log of HMS Endeavour: an entry written by Captain Cook, and dated Thursday 19 April, 1770. The entry presents Lex with a few problems.

"The Southernmost point of land we had in sight, which bore from us West quarter South... I have named Point Hicks, because Lieutenant Hicks was the first who discovered this land."

Lex's problems: first, Captain Cook R.N. did not yet hold the rank of Captain, he was Lieutenant Cook.

Secondly, the date was wrong. A month earlier, Cook had crossed what we now call the International Date Line, so it was actually Friday 20 April 1770. Thirdly, there is speculation that what Lieutenant Hicks actually saw might have been Mount Raymond, about 10 miles east of Orbost.

But Lex's biggest problem is the word 'discovered.' In Croajingalong Lex finds himself standing alongside people of the GunaiKurnai. As they tell him, the land had not been lost, so how could it be discovered?

Lex suspects we need to rethink our use of language, and rethink exactly what it is we celebrate on Australia Day – but that's another story.

That's not the end of Lex's difficulties. He wants to know why Cook, having made landfall, then turned right. Or should we say put the helm to starboard. It was a course that took him to Botany Bay, and the Barrier Reef, and Cape York. Why didn't he turn left?

Had Cook put the helm to port, the history of Australia would have been different. He would have seen (not 'discovered') Wilsons Prom, Western Port Bay, and Port Phillip. Eighteen years later, Arthur Phillip would have brought the First Fleet to the River Yarra. Melbourne would have been Sydney. It's just too much for Lex to contemplate.

See you there! Lex Loci