

## To Go upon Discovery

[James Cook and Canada, from 1758 to 1779]  
Victor Suthren, 2000, Dundurn Press, 210 Pages.

This book, despite the subtitle, deals with Captain Cook from his birth on 12 October 1728 in Marton-in-Cleveland, Yorkshire, England, to his death in Hawaii on or about 13 February 1779.

Of much interest is the description of the coal trade between the North East Coast of England and London on the River Thames. This challenging environment is where Cook learned his seamanship skills, the foundation upon which was built his unparalleled skill as a hydrographer. In 1755 Cook declined an offered command in the merchant navy and instead was voluntarily recruited into the Royal Navy as an able seaman and quickly rose through the ranks to become Master's Mate in HBMS *Eagle*. By 1757 he was Master in *Eagle* from which he was drafted to Master in HBMS *Pembroke* in which he arrived in Canada in 1758. It is on passage to Canada Author Suthren notes, that Cook apparently, for the first time, witnesses the effects of a long voyage on the ships' crews. From this experience Cook develops the commitment to the health of his crews that would sustain them through future long voyages, such that they no sooner completed one voyage before signing on for the next.

While in support of Vice Admiral Boscawen in the battle for Louisbourg, Cook met an engineering officer, Samuel Holland conducting a survey using a "plane table", and the rest is cartographic history. Holland went on to become Surveyor General of North America; Cook an hydrographer extraordinaire.

By 1759 Cook had completed his first survey, that of the Bay and Harbour of Gaspé in the Gulf of Saint Lawrence. This was followed by Cook's work with Simcoe and Holland compiling from existing material, the Chart of the Gulf and River of St. Lawrence in preparation for the attempt on Quebec. This major chart folio was modified by Cook and Holland on passage. The description of the survey of the "Traverse" downstream from Quebec, and the transit of the fleet through it is spellbinding. The folio was finally corrected and re-issued in 1760 after Quebec had fallen.

For the next two years Cook is confined to Halifax Harbour where he takes advantage of the opportunity to produce three "exquisite manuscripts" of the harbour before departure for Newfoundland. He also produced a "Description of the Seacoast of Novascotia", which closely resembles today's Sailing Directions. Between 1762 and 1767 when he departed Newfoundland for England, Cook completed monumental work as a surveyor and hydrographer and established an "astonishing" standard of accuracy.

By 1767 Cook's work in Canada was done, he would visit again, this time in 1778 at Nootka on the West Coast, where he refurbished and provisioned *Resolution* and *Discovery* in preparation for further explorations in the Pacific Northwest, and conducted observations as was his usual want.

The book is a little unbalanced in that it recounts in detail the adventures of Cook from his birth to his return to England from Canada in 1767. It then recounts in much less detail his three famous voyages into the Southern and the Pacific Oceans, touching again in Canada in March 1778, and on to his untimely death in February of the following year.

In twenty three pages this book describes the first two great voyages of Cook. During these voyages, the transit of Venus was observed in Tahiti (the observations later described as useless) and splendid charts of New Zealand were produced. The insularity of New Holland (later Australia), Van Diemen's Land (Tasmania), and New Guinea was established and many islands, some known others not so, were charted accurately thanks to Harrison's chronometer which lost less than three minutes after three years at sea. Unfortunately, the second "Great" voyage, one of three years duration, is dismissed in only one page.

Cook's third, final and fatal voyage takes us through the discovery of the Sandwich Islands (Hawaii), to the search for a Northwest Passage between the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans along the West Coast of Drake's New Albion (North America), and finally to his untimely death. We note the Sailing Master in Cook's *Resolution* was William Bligh while in his consort vessel *Discovery*, was berthed Midshipman George Vancouver. It was during this voyage that Cook called at Nootka in March, 1778.

This book describes the James Cook, the man. A great seaman, explorer and hydrographer with a consistent concern for the health of his crew, and possessed of an enquiring mind and a sense of responsible curiosity. To this reviewer, the subtitle of this book is a bit misleading, the book is not confined to Cook's work in Canada, but covers in differing detail, his work on a global scale. This is not a book for those completely unfamiliar with Cook's work. For a more complete biography of the man the definitive reference is Beaglehole, J.C., *The Life of Captain James Cook*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1974.

Book reviewed by A.D. (Tony) O'Connor, Dominion Hydrographer and Director General of the Canadian Hydrographic Service