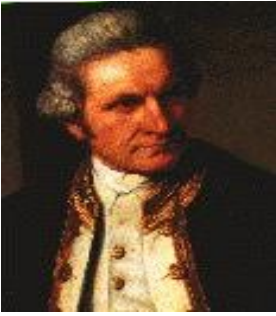


James Cook, Explorer of Alaska

known as *Captain Cook*, (British sailor and explorer)
Encyclopedia Britannica, Explore North



Born: Oct. 27, 1728, Marton-in-Cleveland, Yorkshire, England

Died: Feb 14, 1779, Kealahou Bay, Hawaii

He joined the Royal Navy (1755) when he was 27 years old. He served in several battles against the French. His mapping abilities (he was a self-taught mathematician) earned him a posting as surveyor of Newfoundland. In 1763–67 he surveyed the St. Lawrence River and the coast of Newfoundland.

He received his promotions the hard way through sheer determination and ability, with no powerful connections to help him. In 1768 he was appointed commander of the first scientific expedition to the Pacific. Sailing on the *HMS Endeavour*, he found and charted all of New Zealand and explored the eastern coast of Australia. That voyage (1768–71) produced a wealth of scientifically collected material and was also notable for Cook's successful prevention of scurvy among crew members.

As a commander, he was sent with two ships to make the first circumnavigation and penetration into the Antarctic. On that expedition (1772–75), which ranks as one of the greatest of all sailing-ship voyages, he successfully completed the first west-east circumnavigation in high latitudes.

On a third voyage (1776–79) he was sent in search of a Northwest Passage around Canada and Alaska. The fabled Northwest Passage (a trading route across the top of North America) from Europe to the Orient had been searched for, in vain, over the previous 280 years. Dozens of unsuccessful expeditions had been launched. The discovery of this route was so important that a £20,000 prize had been offered by Britain.

Cook had been given an honorary shore posting in gratitude for his previous service, and was not initially considered to lead this new expedition, the prize money must surely have been a consideration in his offer on January 9, 1776 to lead the expedition.

The 462-ton *Resolution* left England on July 12, 1776, eight days after the Declaration of Independence had been signed on the opposite side of the Atlantic. On July 30th, Cook encountered 3 warships and 62 troop transports heading for the revolution on the east coast of North America.

The vessel *Discovery*, commanded by Charles Clerke joined the *Resolution* at Cape Town, South Africa. Following months exploring the South Pacific, the coast of New Albion was sighted on March 6, 1778, south of present-day Newport, Oregon. Three weeks later, after fighting violent weather, Cook arrived at Nootka Sound (he named it St. George's Sound) on March 29, making the *Resolution* the first British Ship on the Northwest Coast.

The Alaska section of Cook's third voyage has received comparatively little study. The following chronology has largely been adapted from a work by the late Paul Capper:

Alaska 1778

- May 1** Sitka Sound, "perfectly serene weather"
- May 6** Sights Mt. St. Elias, first reported by Vitus Bering.
- May 11** Expedition's first landing in Alaska, at Kayak Island.
- May 21** Passes the south end of the Kenai Peninsula.
- May 24** Sights Afognak and Kodiak Islands.
- May 25** Spend 2 weeks exploring Cook Inlet before giving up.
- June 14** The first Aleuts paddling kayaks are seen.
- July 23** Heads northwest into the open Bering Sea.

Alaska 1778, cont...

- Aug 3** William Anderson, expedition's surgeon, dies
- Aug 5** Lands on Sledge Island west of current Nome
- Aug 14** Crosses the Arctic Circle
- Aug 19** Tasted walrus meat, which the men termed "disgustful"
- Oct 2** Enters Unalaska Bay.
- Oct 14** Cook meets Russian fur traders
- Oct 27** A gale began, Captain Clerke's servant is killed, falling
- Oct 30** The last view of Alaska for Cook

November 26 - sights Maui.

Cook's men are the first Europeans to sight Hawaii. Cook was killed by Polynesian natives on Hawaii.