

In the hands of a fledgling historian, Captain Cook's old ship and his historic voyage are given new life

He sailed to a land down under

By MELISSA FYFE

And what a chance it was. In August 1768, when HM Bark Endeavour left England, Cook's brief was to explore the South Seas and confirm the existence of a great southern land mass. All he had to do on the way was drop into Tahiti so a group of scientists could witness an astrological event: the planet Venus passing the face of the sun.

The journey took three years and was the first of three significant exploratory trips Cook captained. Cook was 40 when he was

Zealand, becoming the first person to thoroughly chart the waters and coastline. The crew had several altercations with the natives. At one point, locals tried to kidnap Tupai's boy servant.

Having satisfied himself that New Zealand was indeed two islands and not the great southern land mass, Cook set sail for home via Tasman's Van Dieman's Land. Crossing the Tasman Sea, however, a storm blew them too far north, delivering him to Botany Bay.

Cook originally called the bay Sting Ray Bay, owing to a proliferation of the winged fish. But the crew's botanists were so excited about the unique specimens of vegetation, the name was changed. Cook stayed at Botany Bay for a week and then set sail north, charting the east coast of Australia, proving it was not an archipelago but a continuous land mass.

appointed captain of the Endeavour, not bad for someone who had been an apprentice shopkeeper as a teenager.

The Endeavour lingered in Tahiti for three months, circumnavigating the island and giving it a proper geographic identity. One of Cook's rules during the stay was that expedition members must not trade the ship's iron (including nails and hinges) for on-shore sexual favors. Two years earlier, Captain Samuel Wallis's ship, *Dolphin*, was scavenged by the sailors for any iron that could be pried from the ship, resulting in a considerably weakened vessel.

Cook and his men left Tahiti, taking a local priest Tupai and a small boy Taia as his servant. Cook was wary about taking anyone whose return

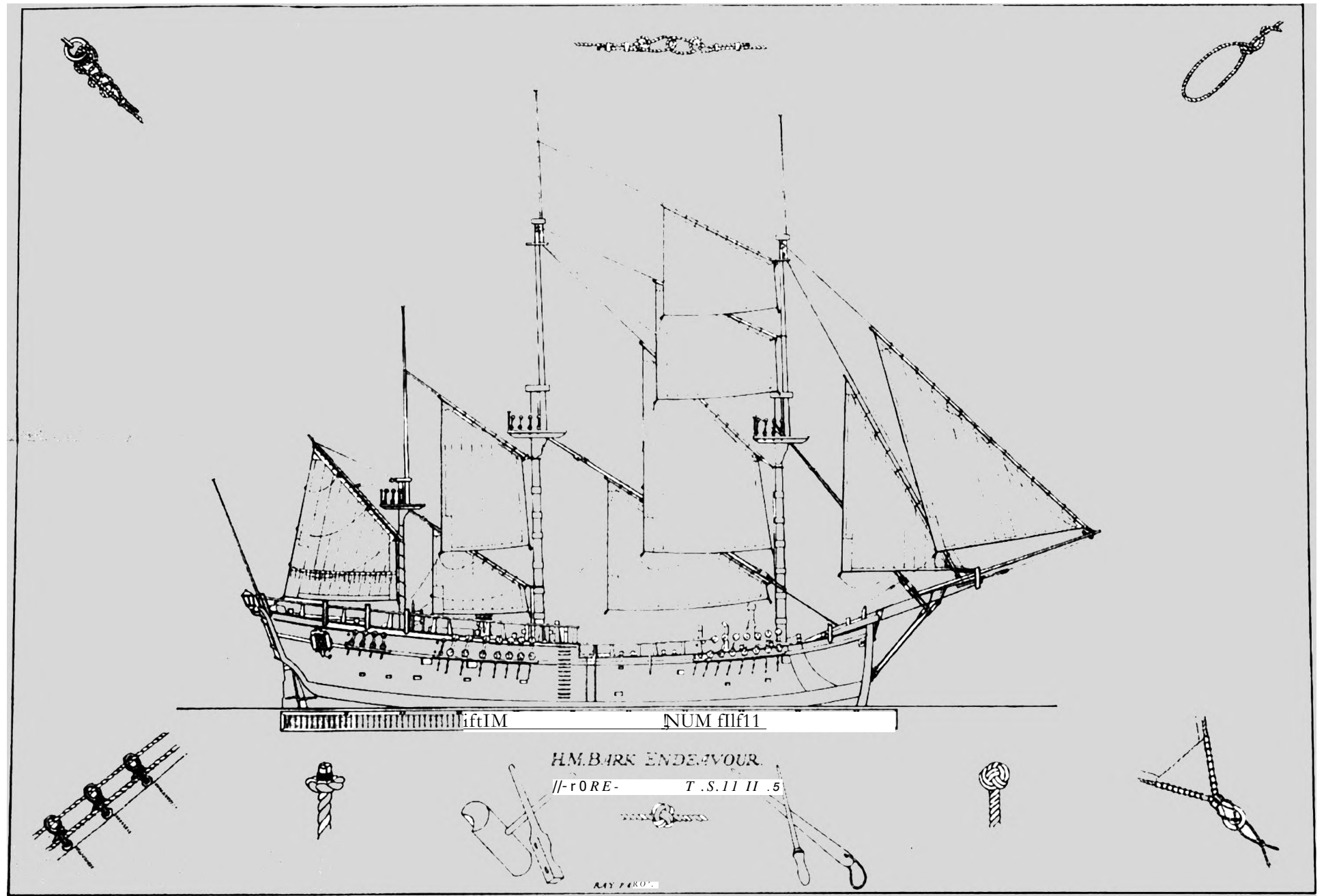
he could not foresee, but the brilliant young botanist Joseph Banks insisted. Tupai proved a great asset, navigating through local regions and praying for favorable winds. He was also used to communicating with natives in Australia and New Zealand. Sadly, the two never returned to their island home, dying of malaria on the way back to England.

Not finding any land mass south to 40 degrees latitude, Cook's path sent him west and into the eastern side of the land recorded by Abel Tasman: New Zealand. Cook spent months sailing around New

Zealand, becoming the first person to thoroughly chart the waters and coastline. The crew had several altercations with the natives. At one point, locals tried to kidnap Tupai's boy servant.

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Main mast: historian Ray Parkin's experience at sea comes to the fore as he challenges the experts in his study of Cook's Endeavour.

Cook's Endeavour is born again

H.M. Bark Endeavour: Her Place in Australian History
By Ray Parkin
Miegunyah Press, \$150

By GEOFFREY BLAINEY



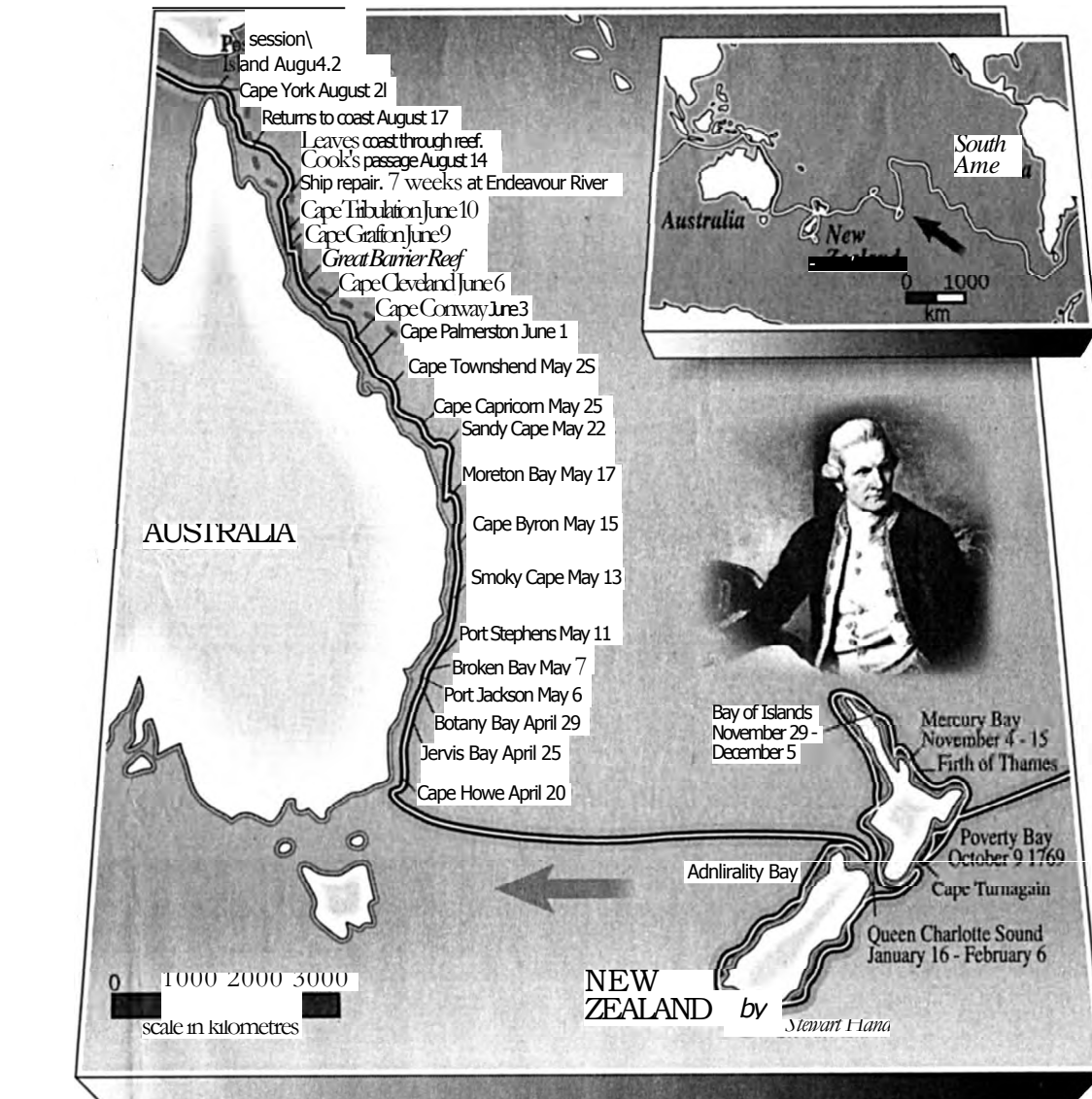
Taut prose: Ray Parkin

THIS is a remarkable book. How it came to be written is also remarkable. Ray Parkin was in the Navy throughout the '30s and, after the sinking of HMAS Perth in the Sunda Strait, was a prisoner of the Japanese. Much later, he became curious about Captain Cook's Endeavour.

Research was new to Parkin, but in Melbourne he happened to live next to that gracious and influential historian Max Crawford, who lent him Cook's journals, a crucial photocopy or two and a written testimonial that gave Parkin access to old maritime drawings in the British Library in London.

There were experts who assumed they knew everything about the Endeavour, and her masts, ropes and anchors. Parkin, being a practical seaman and tenacious investigator, began to challenge the experts. One of his conclusions was that an anchor of the Endeavour was not quite as the experts described it. This was the particular anchor or small bower lost by Cook on the Great Barrier Reef on that perilous June day in 1770 and recovered two centuries later, about a metre and a half beneath the seabed. The resurrected anchor verified some of Parkin's hypotheses.

In his mind and in his neat drawings, the cramped wooden ship,



island of Madeira, a Mr Weir's leg was entangled in a rope, while laying out an anchor, and he was dragged overboard and drowned. On the following morning, his body was conveyed in a boat, a yawl, a little way from the Endeavour, writes Parkin, "and buried with weighted feet to stand on the bottom like a silent sentinel, as do all sea-dead thus shrouded".

When meals were cooked at sea, there arose the smell of wood smoke, the scent differing according to where each load of firewood had been gathered. The cramped galley was presided over by the one-handed cook, Thompson. We think that the old Royal Navy had no place for the disabled, but Cook was told he had to find a place for Robertson, because no other ship had room for him.

Having spent 14 years at sea, Parkin respects the practical skills of Cook's crew. The ordinary seamen emerge with credit - some drunken loafers on shore, but steadfast all-rounders at sea. He quotes Charles Darwin who, spending years watching such men do daily tasks in the course of long global voyages such as Cook's, respected their "good-humoured patience, unselfishness" and contentment.

And there are the sounds: "the hearty slap and punch of a boisterous sea" and a myriad creaks, swishes, cracks and other noises, for it is well known that ships "talk", as do underground mines. There were even the cries of livestock. A footnote tells us that a goat - a source of fresh milk - occupied a tiny pen in the Endeavour. The goat had already travelled around the world with Captain Wallis and circled again with Cook, sailing past Cape Horn and Sydney Heads and finally being "honourably retired to English pastures for the rest of her life". One is reminded of Matthew Flinders' globe-trotting cat, Trim.

The book is primarily a narrative by Parkin followed by a sequence of excerpts from the journals kept by Cook, Joseph Banks and others during the five months when the Endeavour was along the east coast of Australia. To these journals Parkin adds telling comments. A second volume is a handsome red box containing 15 black-and-white plans of the ship, drawn by Parkin.

In this story, Cook quietly towers over all, with his competence, determination, humanity and outward calm. But most readers, and especially those who sail, will also come to admire Parkin, a modest and compelling guide. E11

Geoffrey Blainey's latest book is a paperback *Shorter History of Australia*.

weighing a mere 360 tons, began to take exact shape. She was the kind of ship commonly used as a cargo vessel in the Baltic and North seas. "She was built with flat floors" and, when tied up in a port with an extreme low tide, could stand up straight after the sea had run away. This proved a special advantage.

After being holed by the reef, she had to be repaired in what is now Cooktown. With no dry dock within several thousand kilometres, the Endeavour stood upright.

In this book of 467 large pages, we can walk, with a stoop, through the narrow passageways of the ship. We can glimpse her square stern occupied by the great cabin or work room with its five windows running the breadth of the stem. The stem at night must have been almost like the cosy parlor of a small pub.

We can almost smell the ship: the paint, the flax and hemp, and the Stockholm tar, which preserved the ropes and cables. The tar was made from smoked pine pitch and found its way into the fingernails and palms of the sailors, who handled the heavy rope cables.

Parkin has a gift for words. He notes of the Endeavour that "except for a minimum of iron, she was made wholly of trees and grass"; the grass being the hemp and flax from which were made her vast quantities of ropes and sails. Much of the iron was in the hull. When the Endeavour was fitted out for the long voyage in which she was to reach Australia, her bottom was studded with wrought-iron nails with broad heads. In short, she put on a suit of underwater armor.

After Parkin rebuilds the ship, he

peoples her. It is intriguing to learn of so many specialists in disguise. It was not enough to be a skilled seaman. One sailor served also as a tailor, while another was a skilled butcher. Forby Sutherland was a seaman and poulterer and prepared birds for the cook. He died when the ship was in Botany Bay in 1770 - the first person from the British Isles to be buried in eastern Australia.

So competent was Cook that we are now inclined to assume that nearly all who sailed with him on the three-year voyage must have returned safely home. The casualties, however, from mishaps and microbes were high. Of the 101 who sailed from England in 1768, more than a third died on the voyage.

Parkin's taut and vivid prose recaptures these deaths at sea. Thus, early in the voyage, at the Atlantic

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