

The anchor of an 1873 shipwreck  
– a reminder of the difficulties  
shipping had along this coastline

# The Town of 1770

The pace of life may be slow but the first landing place in Queensland of British explorer Captain Cook is anything but boring, writes **Vicky Gray**



So, which way to the town?" I asked enthusiastically as we checked in at the beach shack accommodation. "You're in it" came the reply.

For some reason I had just presumed that the 'Town of 1770' would have a Ye Olde town centre, with historic buildings and monuments—a-plenty. After all, we are talking about the first landing place in Queensland of British Explorer Captain Cook. I have to confess that my heart sank a little when I realised that this wasn't the case.

Not to be disheartened, we eagerly set off to explore the landscape that brought the then Lieutenant James Cook and his crew of scurvy-less men to land here on 24 May 1770.

Cook was adamant that his men were to have large portions of lemon syrup and sauerkraut in their daily

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diet and with all the vitamin C intake, he had just become the first captain to halt the horrendous scurvy disease, which had caused many sailors on long trips to either die or become incapacitated.

Cook and a party of men, including botanist Joseph Banks were coming ashore to examine the country. After finding a channel leading to a large lagoon, Cook wrote "In this place there is room for a few ships to lie in great security, and a small stream of fresh water".



**Top** A panoramic view of the peninsula, much of which is untouched

**Above** Joseph Banks Conservation Park has all kinds of flora and fauna

**Above right** Leaving only footprints – another secluded beach

**Above far right** Colourful canoes – just one of the many activities available

**Left** An inquisitive roo – one of three that came to greet Vicky Gray in 1770

**Far right** The modest marina – this is the main hub of the town!





Little did they know that they had just discovered the now known 'birthplace of Queensland.'

During the short time he spent here, Joseph Banks collected 33 plant species and made notes on "how the presence of palm trees indicated that the expedition had returned to the tropics."

## GOING ASHORE

Nowadays the 'Joseph Banks Conservation Park' remains virtually untouched, and the flora and fauna is as it would have been during their visit over 200 years ago. It is one of three national parks in the area and it sits astride the tip of the peninsula of 1770 on Round Hill Head with a panoramic view of the ocean towards Bustard Bay and Agnes Water.

While on the shore, Cook noted the large birds that he encountered. In particular, one large turkey-like bird (a species of bustard) that weighed over 17 pounds that was shot and eaten. It was the best bird they had eaten since leaving England and honoured it by naming the inlet Bustard Bay!

The pace in 1770 is slow, and for a family of five who normally race around like bustards with their >>





heads cut off, it took a few hours to get into the relaxed mood of local living. So in the meantime, we took ourselves off-roading; to discover the sub-tropical rainforest of Eurimbula National Park.

The road was not too hairy. We managed to slice through the 10 kilometres of sandy tracks without any fear of getting our four wheel drive stuck. Unless the road was wet, any conventional vehicle with high clearance could get through it, unless you are towing a caravan of course.

## At the right time of year, you can even watch turtle hatchlings emerge from their nests at night

At the end of the bush track, there is a camping ground with toilets, bore water and rain water. But the most fantastic part was found just a few feet past the camping ground. There, the Eurimbula Creek meets the ocean on a beautiful secluded beach.

Secluded and deserted, with not a soul around for miles, the children stripped off and played in the warm fresh saltwater streams, burning off all the excess energy they had from the five hour car trip from our home on the Sunshine Coast.

The beach we were on would have been the one that Cook and his crew would have walked along. I wondered if he felt the urge to strip off and frolic about too? We were really starting to unwind now and after stopping for a remarkably good bite to eat at

the quaint marina, where we talked to the owner and other locals about life in the town.

It turns out that the marina, albeit small, is the hub of the town. There are so many activities to offer the visitor; from bushwalking along the beach tracks to cruising the Great Barrier Reef over to Lady Musgrave Island, the most southerly island on the reef.

At the right time of year, between January to April, you can even watch turtle hatchlings emerge from their nests at night.

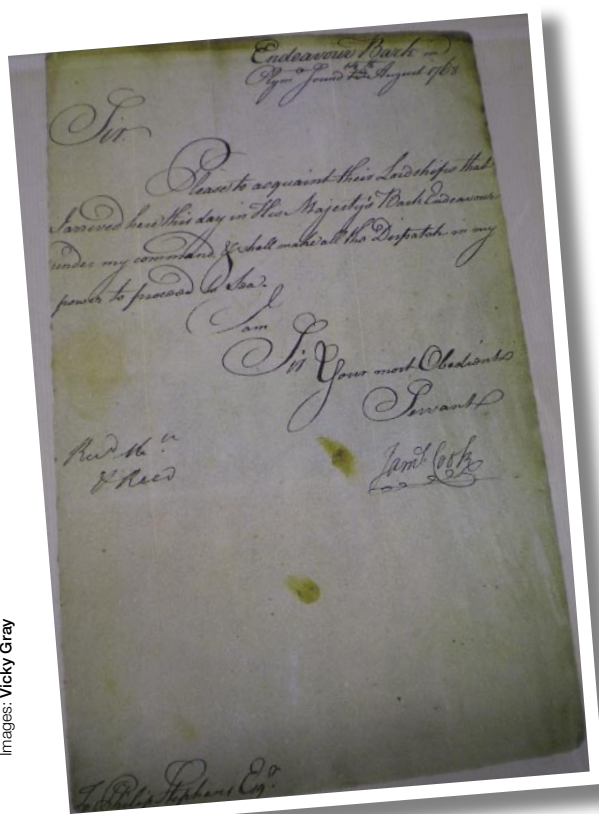
What a privilege and responsibility it would be to observe them in their plight to the ocean under the clear starry skies. I made it a date in my diary for next year, minus my two-year-old who would probably dive-bomb them in a Steve Irwin-type tackle.

We left the marina feeling a little guilty at our reaction to the first impression of the town. The townsfolk were very generous with their time and genuinely wanted us to enjoy ourselves – we had just encountered a real, honest small-town community, a rare find these days.

## A FINE ENDEAVOUR

So on to the museum we headed, in the nearby town of Agnes Water. We passed a shopping precinct on the way, with about a dozen or so shops there, which was a relief for me, who thought we would be living off sugar cane and Witchetty Grubs for the next day or so.

I discovered a great deal of information in the museum, although I had been hoping to photograph some 'parts' of The Endeavour – but then again, it wasn't as though they were shipwrecked there or anything. But I did find some actual pages from >>



Images: Vicky Gray







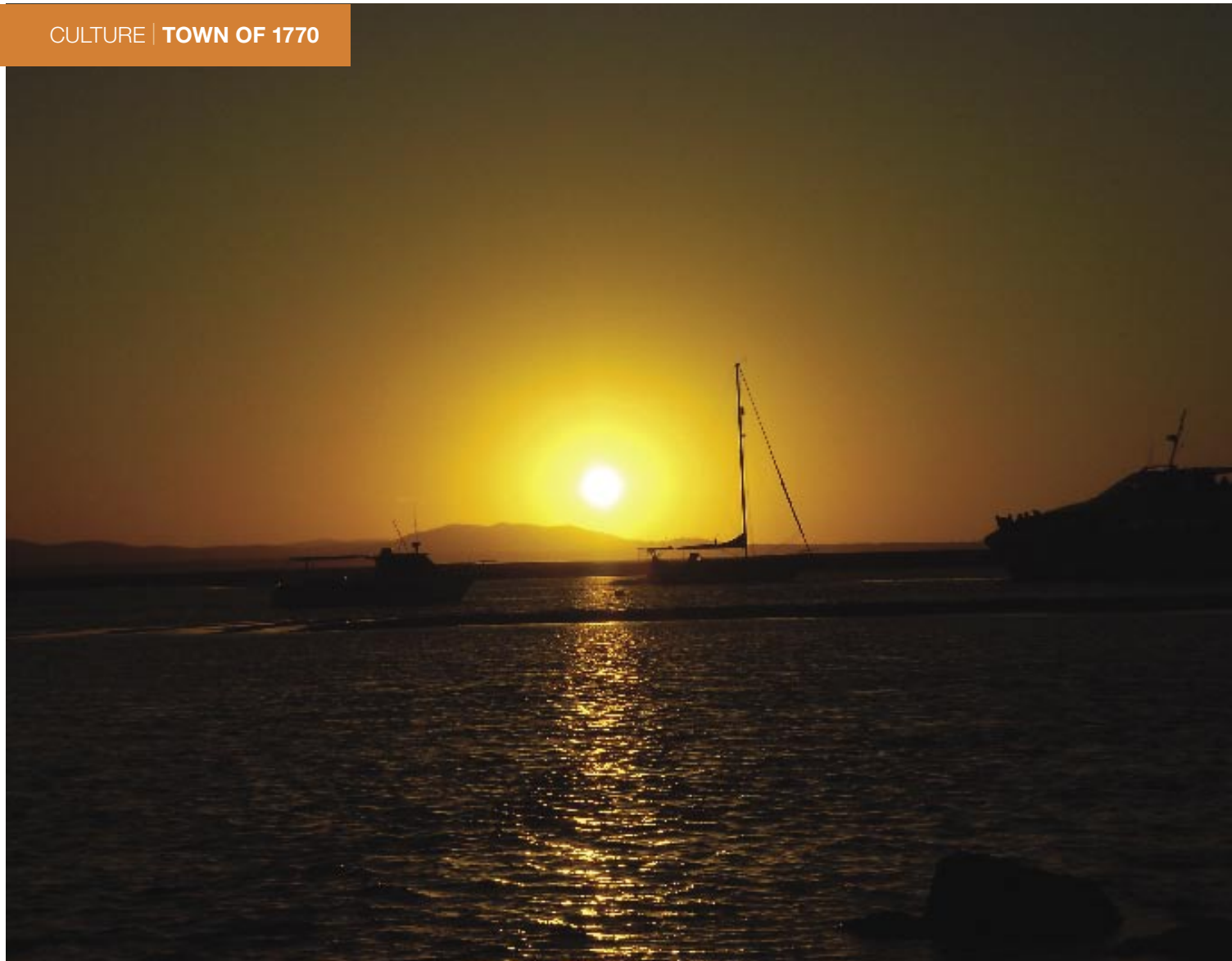
**Far left** Cook's handwritten log from The Endeavour

**Centre** Lieutenant Cook's monument commemorates the great explorer

**Left** Freshwater paperbark swamps – these trees were seemingly endless!

**Above** The marine-rich bay of 1770 is a haven for keen fishermen





Cook's original log that he had written on. It was fascinating to see the ornate style of writing, which used to be such an art form, from someone who had played such a big part in Australia's history.

After our mixed day of culture and adventure, we headed back to our beachfront accommodation for the evening. I had been told that our shack was one of the best positions to gaze at the sunset – and let me say, it did not disappoint.

Queensland is set on the eastern side of Australia, so the sun usually sets over the landscape. However, as 1770 is situated on a peninsula, with its bay of still

**1770 is one of the few places  
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water gently washing in every six hours, it is one of the few places where you will be able to watch the sun slowly set over the Coral Sea.

In contrast to the inner waters, the outer side of the peninsula, Agnes Water is home to the most northerly surf beach in Queensland. We watched as the light changed over the water; the long shadows of the slow-



paddling kayakers and the sleek cruise boats returning from their day of reef-filled activities.

The next day started early as the songbirds and laughing Kookaburras tuned up for a dawn chorus, waking our excitable children, who were chomping at the bit to have a run on the beach.

So we took a short stroll back to the marina for breakfast as we had intended on taking a trip on the 'LARC' – an amphibious vehicle which takes you over the beach and creeks to visit Queensland's first coastal lighthouse at Bustard Heads.

The tour also takes you past spectacular scenery and stops while you have a go at sandboarding. But due to an unfavourable 'king tide' the trip was postponed until the following day.

**Top** Many tourists in 1770 enjoy watching the sun set over the ocean

**Above (right to left)** Some of the plant specimens in the national park

**Right** There's plenty of time to enjoy the scenery in laidback 1770

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Nevertheless, we found countless other activities to keep us amused. We retraced the steps of Lieutenant Cook which took us to the splendid monument that had been erected. We also followed parts of the 'discovery trail', another great way of exploring the area. It would be ideal for birdwatchers as we came face to beak with cockatoos, rosellas, parrots, bush turkeys and a host of other unusual creatures.

Legend has it, that during a seven week stop further

After a few days in 1770, I found myself a little sad to be leaving this small, charming seaside town

up Queensland's coast, Joseph Banks asked the local indigenous people what they called the 'large hopping creature'. They answered by saying "Kan-ga-ru" – which actually meant 'I don't know'. The explorer simply thought that was the creatures' name!

Cook's expedition to 1770 lasted little more than 24 hours, as at 4.30am on 25 May, The Endeavour set sail once again.

Our adventure didn't last much longer than that and after a few days in the town of 1770, I found myself feeling a little sad to be leaving the small, charming seaside town. It was wonderful to step back to a life where mobile phones and laptops were a rare sight.

I think Captain Cook would marvel at the way the town had not been affected by modern society, a consciously preserved community. Although I wonder what he would think of the re-enactment of his landing, at the 1770 festival every May! 🇦🇺



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