

Lesson 9

READ THIS STORY #2, Advanced

Captain James Cook

In Marco Polo's day, a notion existed that there was a huge unknown continent in the South Pacific that counterbalanced the northern continents and kept the world from turning upside-down. Marco Polo had described a new land filled with gold, and some believed his utopia must be the unknown continent. If true, the nation that discovered it would be very rich.

In 1768, an English explorer named Captain James Cook was secretly appointed by the King to search the South Pacific for this unknown continent. Captain Cook was a self-made man. He started his career as a grocer's apprentice, then worked for a coal shipper for nine years. But he had a craving for adventure, so he joined the British Navy. Captain Cook became known as an extremely good navigator.

He made three voyages between 1768 and 1780, covering thousands of miles. He took scientists and artists on all of his voyages. He kept detailed, accurate observations from which he later wrote several books. His voyages produced more reliable information about the nature of the world than those of any previous explorer.

Captain Cook also took good care of his men. He experimented with various foods and found a way to keep his crew free of scurvy during the long trips.

But he did not discover any gold, and his voyages laid to rest the myth of an imaginary continent.