

Russia's Colony The English - and Captain Cook - Step In

England was Russia's other serious in the North Pacific. In the last half of the 18th century the English were the world's most formidable sea power. The British Admiralty (the Royal Navy) sent seven expeditions around the world. By far England's most accomplished navigator was Captain James Cook, who circumnavigated the globe twice. Cook found and mapped many Pacific islands, including Hawaii. He learned how to treat scurvy, even though he did not know what caused it. He tested the first clock that would keep working during a long sea voyage, thereby making it possible for mariners to compute longitude - the distance they were east and west from land.

Link:

[Captain Cook and the Scourge of Scurvy](#)

In 1776 the Admiralty called Cook out of retirement and sent him on a third voyage, this time to the Pacific Northwest Coast. He was directed to find the Northwest Passage, a water route through North America, that geographers hoped would provide an alternative to sailing around South America to get from the Atlantic to the Pacific oceans. Searches on the Atlantic side of the continent had found no such route, so Cook was sent to look along the Pacific coast.

Links:

[Captain James Cook in Alaska](#)
[Alaskan Places Named by Cook](#)
[Point Possession becomes part of Kenai refuge](#)

Ultimately, that voyage would turn tragic. Cook was killed by Hawaiian Islanders when a fight erupted during his second visit there. Earlier Cook's two ships had sailed along the North American coast from the latitude of present-day Oregon to Prince William Sound and Cook Inlet, on to Unalaska, and along the Alaskan coast through the Bering Strait and finally north to the edge of the ice pack. Cook did not find the Northwest Passage; it wasn't there.

Cook provided the first charts of the North American coastline from California to the Arctic, a remarkable achievement. At last everyone knew the shape of

North America.

During this age of exploration it was common for captains to make a formal "act of possession" when they found lands that no other country had already claimed. When Cook left England he knew the Spanish were planning another voyage to the Northwest Coast, so he made his first claim north of where he thought the Spanish might have reached. He made his claim in Cook Inlet, across the head of Turnagain Arm from present-day Anchorage. Today that point of land on the Kenai Peninsula is named Point Possession.

The Natives of Cook Inlet, the Dene Athabaskan people, traded fur pelts with Cook's crews for knives and needles. Cook sent a boat to the shore where one of his lieutenants buried an earthen bottle with parchment inside, claiming all of the land drained by the waters of Cook Inlet for England. The bottle has never been found.

Cook did not ask the Dene if he might claim their land for England. He assumed the Natives were not capable of understanding the concept of property. He also assumed the Natives would accept European sovereignty over their land, willingly, or by force if necessary. The Europeans believed that the Natives would be grateful for new European technologies and ideas, especially the idea of Christianity.