

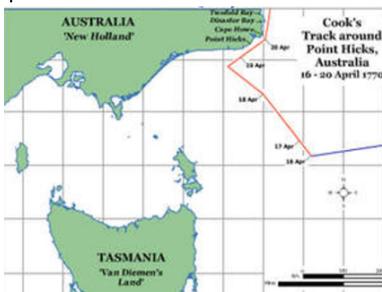
Bye Coastal A 'factitional' walk through time on Australia's edge

G. Egger,¹ J Stevens²

Context

“No-one knows for sure who was the first non-Indigenous person to sight the east coast of Australia. History suggests it may have been a sailor aboard a Portuguese ship as early as the 16th Century. It could even have been someone of Chinese or Indonesian origin centuries earlier. Either way, there's no record of their reaction to what would have been a remote, but pristine coastline.

More reliable history, albeit that with an Anglophilic bent, has Captain James Cook (or one of his officers, Lieutenant Zachary Hicks) sighting what Cook called Point Hicks, between Orbest and Mallacoota on the Victorian coast, around 6am on Thursday the 19th of April 1770, before turning north-east and sailing along the whole of the east coast of *Terra Australis* to North Queensland.



Cook's log provides the first documented observation of one of the most beautiful and unexploited (at that stage) coastlines in the world. After mooring at Botany Bay for 7 days, before sighting, naming and then passing by the

entrance to Sydney Harbour, some 500 nautical miles north of Point Hicks on his way further north, Cook and the crew of the Endeavour must have marvelled at the long sandy beaches, rocky headlands, coastal lakes, occasional inland mountains and frequent river mouths that make up the New South Wales coastline.

What they did not see was high rise developments, river banks denuded of native trees, air pollution emanating from coal-fired factories, plastic bags and tin cans littering the ocean, extravagant and unfilled resorts, and, to be fair, the most comfortable living conditions ever enjoyed by human beings, an extended average longevity, and vastly improved personal and community health.

All that came within the next 200 years. And while it may have been initiated 18 years after Cook's discovery, with the arrival of around 1500 convicts, soldiers and administrators on 11 ships from England, the coast had survived 50 - 60,000 years of Indigenous inhabitancy with little change save for that emanating from nature's contingencies.



¹ Garry Egger AM MPH PhD FASLM has qualifications in Epidemiology and Public Health. He is Vice President of ASLM and Professor of Health Sciences at SCU. He has been involved (with Professor Stevens) in developing the concept of 'eduventures' (post graduate education with an adventure) down the coast of NSW.

² John Stevens PhD FASLM is an Adjunct Professor of Health Sciences at SCU with a background in medical education and nursing. He is currently involved in health systems practices including Post Graduate CPD training, including through 'eduventures' down the coast of NSW.

Before Cook's arrival, there were estimated to have been around 17 Indigenous languages spoken along the present NSW coast by perhaps 40 – 50,000 people, in a total Australian population of around 300 tribes and between 315,000 and 750,000 Indigenous people.

Anthropologists now generally agree that Australia's first people arrived on the north-west coast of the country and (relatively) quickly spread south and east, arriving at the NSW Coastline from the opposite direction from which Cook came.....”

With all our current wealth and social mobility, modern day Australians seek dinner-party bragging rights by walking the Il Camino de Santiago in Spain, the Machu Picchu in Peru, or the Milford Track in New Zealand. But what about the Coast of NSW? On my many flights, I imagined a connecting line from the Queensland to the Victorian borders dragging adventurers from around the world to one of the few remaining, beautiful, but still accessible, yet challenging walks remaining in the civilised world.

Looking at the bigger picture, I wondered whether this could be one of the great walks of the world.....

(From: **'Bye Coastal: A 'factitional' walk through time on Australia's edge.'** ASLM. Sydney, 2017)

Current Situation

In 2015, a proposal to develop one of the great walks of the world down the NSW Coast was presented to the 24th Coastal Conference at Forster.

The proposal was based on a number of facts:

- The NSW Coast, from Tweed Heads to Sydney, offers a potentially world class, staged walk, to rival the best 'bucket list' walks in the world (the Mattu Pccu; Il Comona; Milford Track) in 9 sections from Tweed Heads to Sydney. This has provisionally been called the KOOL walk ('Keep the Ocean On your Left');
- Sections of the walk (the Yuraghir Trail in the Clarence Valley; Border to Bay at Byron; the Great Lakes region at Forster/Tuncurry) are already being used for 'Eduventures' for healthy walks and education with doctors, patients and allied health professionals, conducted under the auspices of Australasian Society for Lifestyle Medicine (ASLM) and Southern Cross University (SCU);
- The 820km total walk, divided into 1, 2 or 3 day segments or completed in one go, provides opportunities for Tourism at a national and international level, and the potential to preserve the natural beauty of the coastline;
- A link with the Australasian Society of Lifestyle Medicine (ASLM), offers the opportunity to make this a world first, 'Healthy Lifestyle' pilgrimage, with stages that can be acknowledged towards the total walk.

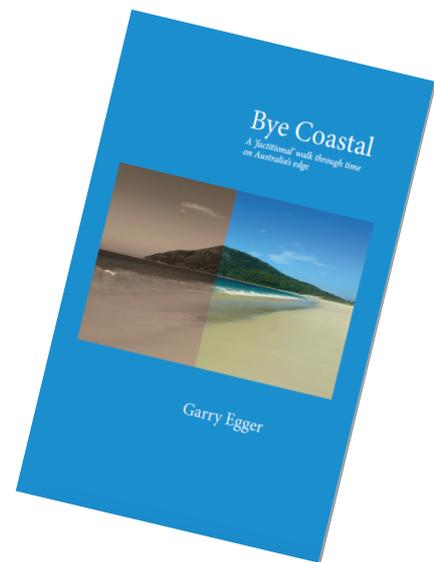


The Yuraygir Trail

The 2015 presentation was generally received with enthusiasm. Subsequently, a proposal was drawn up for one of the 16 Coastal Councils on the route to act as the lead to help develop the walk. This required no financial investment by this, or any other Council. However, following several meetings with and some changes in personnel in the potential lead Council, it slipped off the agenda.

Since 2015:

- A potential trail has been mapped out, following the example of the Yuraygir trail by the Clarence Valley Council;
- A ‘factitional’ book, combining two interwoven stories of the walk separated by chronology, but connected by geography, is currently in print, providing ‘eduventurers’ and walkers with a background, directions and potentially local business services for the walk;
- An accompanying ‘App’ and other materials are currently in development, with potential support for businesses along the walk. This can involve all levels of interactive involvement (eg. GPS notification of sites of interest, historical information etc).



The Future

It remains to be determined whether this can become a true multi-disciplinary collaborative as a beacon for public health and resource utilisation in Australia.

Co-operation is sought from Coastal Councils on the trail to help formalise the trail and provide support for marketing of this both within and outside Australia. This is a win: win: win proposition (council: tourists: local businesses).