



# MONUMENTAL DISCOVERY NARRATIVES AND DEEP HISTORY

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## MONUMENTAL HISTORIES

IN THE EVENING OF 12 June 2020, in the midst of the Coronavirus pandemic, a contingent of mounted police and other police officers wearing protective face-masks formed a circle to guard the statue of Captain Cook in Sydney's Hyde Park (fig. 1). Weeks earlier, on 24 May 2020, the Juukan caves in the Pilbara region of Western Australia had been blasted by mining giant Rio Tinto. This destroyed a site that contained evidence of 46,000 years of Aboriginal habitation in Australia. Although Cook did not set foot in Hyde Park during his brief visit in 1770, the police protection afforded the monument, erected 109 years later, stood in stark contrast to the absence of any protection at Juukan Gorge. The former represented the lengths to which the forces of the state would go to protect a cherished coloniser heritage. One history was familiar and state-endorsed, while Juukan was unknown by the wider public until its destruction, despite being classified as a heritage site and of 'the highest archaeological significance'.<sup>1</sup>

So why this dichotomy? For one thing, ancient Indigenous pasts are either excluded from historical narratives or positioned as *outside* or *before* 'history' really began. In both academic and popular understandings of history, Australia's deep human past has not been integrated into the telling of its national history. Its vast temporal and geographical

latitudes seem incommensurable, unable to be accommodated inside history's ambit.<sup>2</sup>

In recent years, however, leading historians have called for an expansion of their discipline's time-scale beyond the modern and pre-modern.<sup>3</sup> How did it come about that a certain 'regime of historicity', in theorist Francois Hartog's formulation as 'a way of linking together past, present, and future'<sup>4</sup> was so chronologically, geographically, and racially exclusive? Historians may need to rethink their discipline not only beyond the 'pre' of prehistory, but also beyond its monumental discovery wall.<sup>5</sup>

▲ Montage using article figures.



◀ Fig 1. Statue of Captain Cook surrounded by police, Hyde Park, Sydney.

IMAGE: ELLY BAXTER

The cache of discovery narratives continues to play a key role in obscuring, if not entirely blocking off, the possibility of deep Indigenous histories. Historians of Australia have tended to start their accounts in 1770, at the time of James Cook's short sojourn at Botany Bay, or in 1788, with the convict colonisation that eventually followed. These start dates constantly reinscribed the significance of European arrivals as opposed to the exceptionally deep human history of Indigenous Australia. Is it possible to displace these 'white man' chronologies? It may be more difficult than we expect, for discovery narratives have so long delineated territory and sovereignty that Australian historians have become entrapped by their boundary markers. This is not to suggest that European discovery of other places did not mark a historical rupture, a turning point—a symbolic moment after which nothing could ever be the same. For Europe, much of the world would no longer remain unknown. For Indigenous people, colonialism presented a rupture of great magnitude. But discovery was not a closing curtain; it should not block sight of the many far earlier ruptures. Indigenous Australians lived on the continent when it was joined to New Guinea, when the seas rose, the megafauna disappeared and the climate dramatically changed. And nor did 'Discovery' mean that Indigenous sovereignty or Indigenous history ended.

In nations such as Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the United States, the timeline of European discovery clearly served imperial and colonial ends. It became cemented as a powerful device for history-telling. Although subjected to scrutiny by Indigenous activists and academic historians of various backgrounds throughout the twentieth century, the global Black Lives Matter movement has awarded critiques of Cook-style monumentalism a much higher profile.<sup>6</sup> Yet, contestations over the 'discovery' statues and stories do little to dismantle their significance as historical boundary markers; rather, they may do the opposite.

The Cook statue, situated in pride of place in Sydney's Hyde Park, evokes a widely retold

and reinterpreted story. On its high pedestal, it stands as a signifier for a complex history of sailing technology, skill, and imperial land takeovers that have been well-documented, oft written about, perpetuated and glorified. In 1810 Governor Macquarie had superimposed the name Hyde Park on the Eora lands after so many of their people had died in a devastating epidemic.<sup>7</sup> This appellation represented hopeful importations of Englishness, with its contemporary notions of civilisation, class and culture. Almost 70 years later, in Cook's memorialisation, the colonial elites of New South Wales chose their preferred imperial beginnings, one less shameful than that of the adjacent convict barracks.<sup>8</sup>

Funded by both community and government contributions, the inscriptions accompanying the Hyde Park statue read:

**CAPTAIN COOK**  
 THIS STATUE WAS ERECTED  
 BY PUBLIC SUBSCRIPTION  
 ASSISTED BY A GRANT FROM THE  
 NEW SOUTH WALES GOVERNMENT  
 1879  
 \*  
 BORN  
 AT MARTON IN YORKSHIRE  
 1728  
 \*  
 DISCOVERED THIS TERRITORY  
 1770  
 \*  
 KILLED AT OWHYHEE  
 1779<sup>9</sup>

Standing high above the general populace, the Cook figure holds a telescope in one hand, with the other upstretched as if to reach the skies. The statue speaks to the history of British mercantilism and Enlightenment science, fundamental factors in the founding of the British colony of New South Wales. Its elevation on a plinth suggests the supposedly superior notions of European or 'western' civilisation, including that of the voyage's stated purpose to measure the transit of Venus.

In the past year, many of the Juukan artefacts, a belt made of human hair and stone tools, perhaps associated with their





◀ **Fig 2.** Statue of Captain Cook, Hyde Park, Sydney.

IMAGE: FLICKR

▼ **Fig 3.** Plaque, Statue of Captain Cook, Hyde Park, Sydney.

IMAGE: FLICKR



own star stories, were removed in advance to a mining company's storage area.<sup>10</sup> In common with Cook's statue, most news coverage of its destruction mention a date—but in this instance a 46,000-year-old date. This recent chronological value, attributed by scientific dating techniques, assisted in measuring its international heritage significance. The long associations of the Puuti Kunti Karrama and Pinikura people with this region, and their long-held Indigenous stories are personal, familial and enduring. To its owners, a beginning date is not necessarily relevant.<sup>11</sup> For the non-Indigenous public, the site and its associated journey routes do not fit into a recognisable history-telling mode in the western tradition. Most of history's chronologies derive from northern hemisphere benchmarks, and regardless, such a long expanse of human time is difficult for many to imagine. Just as Cook's plaque alone does not tell that complex imperial history, adding a plaque that announces 'Juukan caves, c. 46,000-2020' would certainly not enrich the story of this site.

## DEEP NARRATIVES

The Uluru Statement from the Heart, the outcome of an Australia-wide deliberation by Aboriginal representatives, called for a full telling of the Indigenous past. It pointed to an enduring history which could be accounted for in multiple kinds of evidentiary proof: 'according to the reckoning of our culture, from the Creation, according to the common law from "time immemorial", and according to science more than 60,000 years ago'. It stated how their spiritual ties with land over deep time cemented their sovereignty:

*This link is the basis of the ownership of the soil, or better, of sovereignty. It has never been ceded or extinguished, and co-exists with the sovereignty of the Crown.*

How could it be otherwise? That peoples possessed a land for sixty millennia and this sacred link disappears from world history in merely the last two hundred years?<sup>12</sup>

Indigenous deep history presents a challenge to the constitution of the modern nation. It poses questions of what the full polity, including the Indigenous citizens of the nation, want the history and future of the nation to be. This presents a major challenge to the humanities in general and for the discipline of history in particular.

If the 'Australian nation' is taken to mean all those who belong to today's nation-state, Indigenous people rightly consider themselves as part of that polity and its history. Indeed, they have been the most defining and enduring element of it, both in their recent contributions and as custodians of the landscapes from which the modern nation benefited. Beyond this, the durée of Australia's Indigenous history is so lengthy that it makes little sense to overlook it in favour of such a relatively short history.

Indigenous Australians have repeatedly objected to the 'white lie' of Cook being lauded as discoverer of Australia.<sup>13</sup> This was an obvious denial not only of their existence, but also of their authority over their custodial land. In 2020, Wiradjuri lawyer Teela Reid got to the point: 'Let's be clear: Captain Cook did not "discover" the continent known as Australia. This must be the starting point for dialogue concerning the relationship between the Australian state and the many First Nations that have never ceded sovereignty.' She added: 'speaking truth is a hard task when you live in a country that denies the truth of its past'.<sup>14</sup>

Mythologising Cook aimed to make Australian history a British one, serving imperial agendas and a triumphalist European narrative of 'white progress' against murderous Indigenous 'savagery'. Cook's memory, however, has long been contested. At the re-enactment of his landing at Federation, in 1901, the largely white colonial crowd at Botany Bay jeered the actor playing the role of Captain Cook, drowning out his words. Instead, they cheered the Aboriginal performers, who put on such an exciting show as warriors that the onlookers demanded an encore.<sup>15</sup> In Indigenous stories and songs that stretch around the country, and in many critical artworks, Cook signifies an immoral figure. To the Gurindji, he travelled

the wrong way, and was greedy; in Australia's contemporary art, he is 'Crook', a pirate, a law-breaker, a symbol of land theft, dispossession and genocide.<sup>16</sup> Marking the 250th Anniversary of Cook's arrival in Australia, a 2019 exhibition at the National Library of Australia and one in 2020 at the National Museum of Australia presented a multi-perspectival view, including that of the Bama Aboriginal people of Cooktown, where his Endeavour crew stopped for repairs.<sup>17</sup> For many Aboriginal Australians and their allies, however, Cook became a symbol of a cruel and oppressive colonising regime, a mythologised figure who epitomised the most heinous coloniser rapaciousness and savagery.

## DISCOVERY AND LAW OF EUROPEAN NATIONS

We might well ask why discovery has been such a big deal, when people were clearly already living in Australia—a fact recorded by the so-called discoverers themselves? Put simply, discovery underpinned the British right to declare sovereignty over the continent of Australia. The 'law of nations', upon which this was based, has frequently been taken to be a universal law, as if something agreed across 'the world'. It was, in essence, an agreement amongst certain European powers, who at various points of history, used it as a basis for negotiating disputes between competing empires. The laws emanated in part from contests over papal rule, but they evolved to serve later contests of imperial conquest and expansion. In order to justify taking over the lands of other peoples, Europeans argued that they could bring a superior culture.<sup>18</sup> Under such law, the notion of 'civilisation' was awarded cultural and legal weight. It was associated with Christianity and certain economies as the superior cultural models. Hunting and gathering societies—no matter how sophisticated their technologies and techniques might be—were classed as backward and uncivilised. European nations including Portugal, Spain, Italy, Holland, France and England declared sovereignty over various 'New Worlds'.

According to the law of nations, a colony could be established in the following ways:

1. By persuading the indigenous inhabitants to submit themselves to its overlordship;
2. By purchasing from those inhabitants the right to settle part or parts of it;
3. *By unilateral possession, on the basis of first discovery and effective occupation.*<sup>19</sup>

The third, of 'first discovery', basically relied upon a European man's sighting of non-European-occupied lands. This method did not require consent, a treaty or agreement by Indigenous people. But discovery could not stand alone; it had to be followed by an 'effective occupation', a continuing colonisation. Consequently, early European colonisations such as those of the North America's Mayflower Pilgrims and Australia's First Fleet of convicts were commonly fused with discovery as dual markers to signify national beginnings.

The law of sovereignty also required certain ritual performances, with embodied and material enactments. Written inscriptions and/or visual records were required as proof that the rituals had indeed been performed. Cook's journals, therefore, attested to making certain inscriptions of dates and other details on trees at Botany Bay, and to a flag-raising ritual purportedly performed on an island off Cape York that he not-too-subtly named 'Possession Island'. To assert authority over territories, the evidence of such written records was almost as crucial as the act of locating these places in the first instance. The authoritative nature of Cook's logbooks confirmed that he had carried out his Secret Instructions of 'making Discoverys [sic] of Countries hitherto unknown'. What they did not do, however, was to demonstrate that he had 'take[n] Possession' of such territories '*with the Consent of the Natives*'.<sup>20</sup>

Reflecting the necessity of the coloniser nation's investment in continuing performances of sovereignty, discovery narratives took on a political, legal and a historical authority all their own. Later

performances of imperial and colonial sovereignty included public memorialisation, flag-raising, toasts to the King or Queen, re-enactments of 'discovery' and 'taking possession', the erection of Captain Cook statues, the naming of hotels and roads and its inclusion as a 'key fact' in school textbooks. A Brisbane bridge was named for Captain Cook in 1972. The name of the current Prime Minister's electorate near Botany Bay honours Cook. In 2020, his government was to fund a replica Endeavour to sail around Australia to mark the 250th anniversary of Cook's short visit to Australia's east coast. These moments fitted well with the wider semiotics of 'discovery', a key concept in western ontologies, including in scientific discourse, narratives of civilisation, innovation, advancement and progress.<sup>21</sup>

#### THE HISTORY DISCIPLINE'S PERFORMANCES OF SOVEREIGNTY

History writing became a performance of sovereignty in itself. As did the libraries and archives upon which it relied. Early historical societies, libraries and state archives devoted themselves to gathering explorer's, early coloniser's and government accounts as key documents of state. The Cook plaque, for example, contains a skeletal version of the kind of data upon which historians continue to rely as verifiable facts—birth and death dates, named people and named places. Details were supplied by various British parish and state archives and Cook's own logbook and journals. Discovery stories were an ideal fit for history's evidence criteria and research methodologies, providing the required framings for its chronological narratives. The epistemologies of the history discipline thus served to reinforce the discovery timeline as its beginning point.

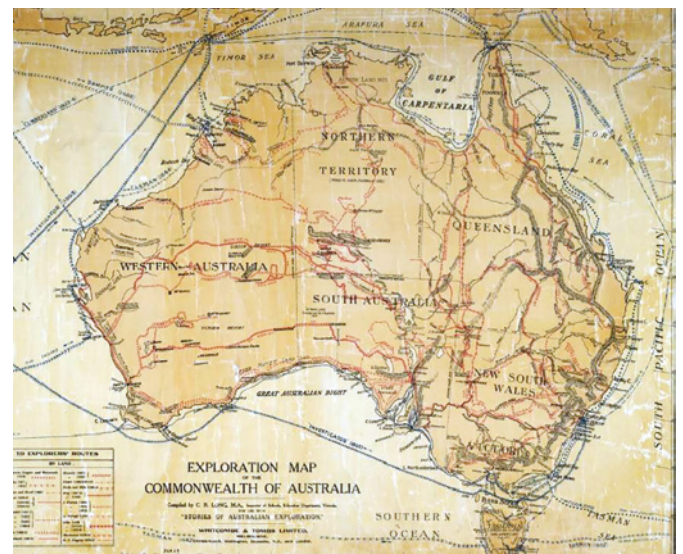
The discipline of history had its beginnings in philology or the interpretation of ancient texts, which concreted its approach as document-based. Its methodologies were refined at the major academies of Germany, England and other European centres of learning, their teachers refining critical skills to tackle the histories of people who left forms of writing.<sup>22</sup> Prior to this, it was the monastic

scholar Bede's calculations and adoptions of key dates that informed his Ecclesiastical History of the English People, including his popularisation of dating from the birth of Christ (Anno Domini [A.D.] or year of Our Lord). He is often referred to as 'The Father of English History'.<sup>23</sup> Despite today's history discipline showing increasing appreciation of and adeptness in the use of oral, visual, material objects and landscapes evidence, it still relies primarily upon text-based sources.

Although some of the earlier twentieth-century historians were sceptical about the singularity of Captain Cook in Australian history, they still gave discovery narratives pride of place. Before getting onto Cook, they usually paid attention to Englishman William Dampier's earlier voyages, then to Dutch navigators such as Dirk Hartog, Jan Carstenz and Abel Tasman. Next came the land-based explorers such as Blaxland, Lawson and Wentworth, Mitchell, Sturt and Leichardt. Maps of their one-time journey routes featured prominently in history texts, whereas the much-travelled Indigenous pathways and songlines of deeper histories did not feature at all (figs 4 and 5). Some tried alternative approaches such as foregrounding 'the land' and 'the Aborigines', but these sections read like 'background', unable to move along at the same pace as the plot-lines of the European explorers and adventurers.<sup>24</sup>

With a first chapter entitled 'The Invasion of Australia', W. K. Hancock's *Australia*, a breakthrough national history which appeared in 1930, tried to shed the popular adulation of Cook's ghost. Near the end of the book, he explains why: 'Australia has been too much glorified by simple patriots, who imagine that civilisation started with the voyages of Captain Cook'.<sup>25</sup> Regardless, Hancock fell into discovery's spectral framing: 'Many nations adventured for the discovery of Australia, but the British peoples have alone possessed her....'<sup>26</sup> The white man reigned over the land, depicted as female and as fantastically ready for the taking. With or without Cook, history writing continued in the vein of gendered conquest, where discovery delivered the 'birth of civilisation' on the continent. R. M. Crawford





commenced his history, also called *Australia* (1952) with a chapter on geography. He epitomised 'Cook's great voyage' as 'a splendid prelude to British settlement in the South Seas', marred only by the 'irksome' convict problem.<sup>27</sup> Crawford's inclusion of a chapter on 'Aborigines' reflected the strengths of the contemporary anthropological discipline, but also its weaknesses, as Aboriginal society was portrayed as an unchanging culture positioned outside of modernity and therefore outside history. Colonial onslaughts, including expropriation of lands and resources, disease, neglect, and massacres received minimal or no attention in such history books. The topic of Aboriginal Australia was considered the province of anthropologists; at the time, the historians' remit related to white Australia.

Also overlooking the horrors of colonialism, school text books usually fostered glorious discovery narratives, reinforcing the notion that Aboriginal demise was inevitable, more so given that they were a people located outside historical time. In Dunlop and Pike's school text, *Australia: Colony to Nation* (1960), they presented dynamic tales of European discoverers and colonisers, of development and progress. In an attempt to acknowledge the Aboriginal presence, they devoted a chapter to the topic, dividing their sub-section 'Prehistoric Australians' into 'Old Stone Age Tasmanians' and 'New Stone Age Australians'.<sup>28</sup> Basically, Aboriginal Australians primarily belonged in a museum exhibit, with their one chapter

REFERENCES TO EXPLORERS' ROUTES			
BY SEA		BY LAND	
Torres (1808)	o o o o o o o o o o	Lawson, Gregory, and Westworth (1818)	x x x x x x x x
Tasman (1842)	x x x x x x x x	Oxley (1817)	x x x x x x x x
" (1844)	x x x x x x x x	" (1818)	x x x x x x x x
Dampier (1688)	>>>>>>>>>>	Hume and Hovell (1824)	-----
" (1698)	>>>>>>>>>>	Sturt (1828-9)	-----
Cook (1770)	o o o o o o o o o o	" (1829-30)	-----
Bass-Whaleboat (1797-8)	-----	" (1844-5-6)	-----
Bass and Flinders	-----	Mitchell (1831-2)	-----
Flinders-"Investigator" (1801-3)	-----	" (1835)	-----
" "Cumberland" (1803-4)	-----	" (1836)	-----
		" (1845-6)	-----
		Eyre (1840-1)	>>>>>>>>
		Leichardt (1844-8)	-----
		Kennedy (1847)	>>>>>>>>
		" (1848)	>>>>>>>>
		Stuart (1880-9-10-1-2)	-----
		Barke and Wills (1860-1)	x x x x x x x x
		" (1859)	+++++
		J. Forrest (1869)	o o o o o o o o
		" (1870)	o o o o o o o o
		" (1874)	o o o o o o o o
		A. Forrest (1879)	o o o o o o o o
		Giles (1872)	x x x x x x x x
		" (1873-4)	x x x x x x x x
		" (1875-6)	x x x x x x x x
		Warburton (1873-4)	=====
		A. C. Gregory (1895-6)	=====

on Aboriginal Australians tellingly entitled 'The Days before History'. Similarly, Marjorie Barnard's popular *A History of Australia* (1962), started out with the necessary 'Background' before moving onto an action-filled chapter entitled 'Discovery'.<sup>29</sup> In most twentieth-century accounts, occupying the 'days before history', before 'discovery', was the most that Indigenous Australians could hope for. In the major histories that followed, by Douglas Pike, Gordon Greenwood, Manning Clark and others, the periodisation of discovery and/or colonisation became a convention, with Aboriginal Australians given short shrift or ignored altogether.<sup>30</sup>

Since the 1980s, Australian historians have published much on Aboriginal history, exploring how European colonisers invaded, occupied and established hegemony. They have highlighted the ongoing nature of oppressive colonial power relations, and produced studies

▲ Fig 4. (top left) A general chart exhibiting the discoveries made by Captn. James Cook in this and his two preceeding voyages, with the tracks of the ships under his command by Lieutt. Roberts of His Majesty's Royal Navy.

IMAGE: NATIONAL LIBRARY OF AUSTRALIA

▲ Figs 5 & 5a. (top & lower right) Exploration map of the Commonwealth of Australia: compiled by C.R. Long, M.A., Inspector of Schools, Education Department, Victoria, for use with "Stories of Australian exploration"; S. Yandasynde, del., Melbourne.

IMAGE: NATIONAL LIBRARY AUSTRALIA

of massacres, labour exploitation, state policies of forced migration and child removal. Yet the field of 'Aboriginal history', my own work included, still tended to commence with, and then focus upon the period after European arrival—from 1770 or 1788.<sup>31</sup> Several historians have been keen to integrate the story of the long *duree* of Indigenous Australia.<sup>32</sup> But 'prehistory' proved difficult to tackle. The first volume of the *Oxford History of Australia* was to cover the pre-1788 period, but this volume never eventuated. The *Cambridge Companion to Australian History* engaged archaeologists to write the pre-1788 chapter.<sup>33</sup> Archaeologists continue to deliver pathbreaking work which eludes historians, most of whom feel unqualified to write about this expanding field. The disciplinary divide between history and archaeology, with its rigorous techniques for researching the deep past, is clearly an issue for the future of deep history.

Some earlier archaeologists tried to dismantle the imperial discovery narrative, while at the same time falling prey to its romantic allure. In doing so, they created new archaeological discovery narratives in their wake.<sup>34</sup> John Mulvaney's 1969 book, entitled a *Prehistory of Australia*, was written in accessible prose and had a big impact upon historians and the wider public alike. Concurring with the view that the study of pre-literate societies could not be 'history', its title 'prehistory' was intended to bring this time period and these peoples into a parallel realm to other histories. The term had the unfortunate effect, however, of reinscribing the idea that the long *duree* of human experience took place outside real time—effectively before European people made real History.<sup>35</sup> In the case of Aboriginal Australians, it potentially reinforced the idea that Indigenous Australians might occupy a zone of evolutionary stages, but not the dynamic change zones associated with other history studies. Nonetheless, John Mulvaney made an astounding intervention into the dominant national narrative. In his *Prehistory* book, he allowed Aboriginal people to replace Cook, proclaiming: 'THE DISCOVERERS, explorers and colonists of the three million square miles which are Australia, were its

Aborigines.'<sup>36</sup> The capitalisation looks to have been intentional.

Ascertaining the first arrivals and routes to Australia remains an important area of research for archaeologists and associated specialists.<sup>37</sup> Nonetheless, Indigenous first arrival stories lack the prerequisites for classification as discoveries. Certainly, it is accepted that the first Australians found somewhere new and they occupied the land. However, this did not fit the mould of an imperial discovery story. There were no accessible individual names, specific places and dates. No inscriptions in ink providing a Gregorian/Bedian calendar date, an author's name or a geographical latitude and a longitude—the kinds of prerequisites that had made the white Australian arrivals 'historical' moments.

In researching the deep Indigenous past, however, certain archaeologists have relished creating a new version of the European discovery adventure. Rhys Jones, who with John Mulvaney and others researched the c. 45,000-year-old ancient cremation, Mungo 1 or Lady Mungo in western New South Wales in the late 1960s, waxed lyrical about the lost romance of earlier discovery. Referring to the wonder of 'lost lands' via *Gulliver's Travels* and Atlantis, he lamented how it was no longer possible to make such new discoveries on the high seas. With mischievous flourish, he recalled the adventures of the French navigator Baudin, whom he described as the 'thick skinned matelot from Le Havre', who had rounded the coast of 'the half unknown Terra Australis'.<sup>38</sup> It was, of course, not 'half unknown' to local Indigenous nations, only 'half unknown' until the European discoverers entered measurable time.

## REDISCOVERED HISTORIES

We have discussed how discovery-based narratives offer specific, dated beginning points that became a standard periodisation for Australian history which reinforced coloniser hegemony. In her book *Periodization and Sovereignty*, mediaeval historian Kathleen Davis considered the way historians organise their analysis in themed chronological



chunks, arguing its efficacy in reinforcing and naturalising the social orderings of both past and present.<sup>39</sup> For Europe, 'The Age of Discovery' was an epoch in itself, forming a prelude to 'modern history'. This so-called Age spanned the ocean journeys of the Spanish, Dutch, Portuguese and more—generally from the fifteenth century to the seventeenth century—an epoch which omitted Cook's era, perhaps because Europe had already 'discovered' and mapped most of the rest of the world. Certainly, maritime journeys expanded Europe's known worlds, enabling them to broaden their knowledge, their imaginations, their cultural influence and wealth, and above all, their dominions. Despite the horrors of kidnappings, slavery, theft, and disease that followed discovery, in the making of western and world history, discovery was told as an appealing tale that heralded the arrival and beginning of a dynamic age.<sup>40</sup> The prior histories of the northern hemisphere were known as early modern and mediaeval, and the earlier periods beyond those were classed as Ancient History and classical studies (fig. 6). For Australianists, Cook's visit to Botany

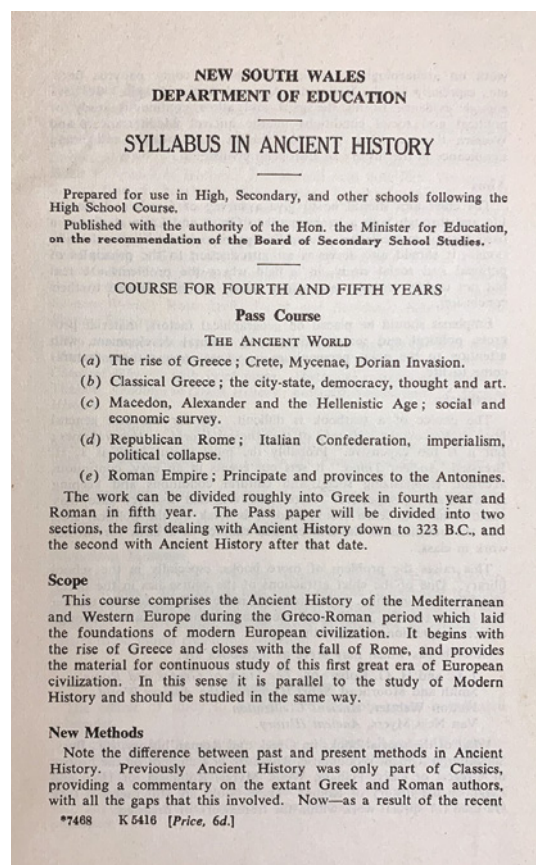
Bay threw their continent into a story that potentially could find a place in both European history and modernity.

As the doctrine of discovery was the legal basis of British sovereignty, it became the conventional doctrine for writing the nation. Revered or mocked, because discovery became a set periodisation, histories that centred around the idea of heroic 'firsts' by white men have been difficult to budge. Their ubiquity also entrapped historians focused upon critiques of colonialism, for they too fell into discovery's dated certainties.

As long as discovery narratives remain the focus of history contestations, their significance will be reinforced and significant sites like Juukan Gorge, with its incommensurable history, will remain unprotected. Such places may have much to teach people of the present, and arguably the lessons of deep time may be more relevant to the future than the monument to honour Captain Cook. While historians need to be cautious that they do not appropriate Indigenous history simply to deepen coloniser identities, unless they grapple with the exceptionally deep human history of Australia, the nation—and the wider world—will be the poorer for it.

So what is preventing this from happening? For one thing, historians do not yet have the appropriate skills to research and decipher deep history. While archaeologists have well-developed fieldwork strategies, disciplinary boundaries appear difficult to cross. Historians and archaeologists both need to engage in transdisciplinary collaborations. Beyond that, they need to work in true partnership with Indigenous knowledge holders, and in doing so, to seriously consider Indigenous regimes of historicity and Indigenous modes of historical practice.

In order to proceed with the study of deep time, history itself requires reconceptualisation. New kinds of human-centred periodisation will be required—not simply ones to do with stone tools or climate. Historians will need to develop new methodologies for using different kinds of evidence. Japanese historian of the Gurindji, Minoru Hokari, urged scholars to



◀ Fig 6. Ancient History Syllabus.

IMAGE: VCN BLIGHT, GOVERNMENT PRINTER, 1961

include Indigenous accounts not only as myths or legends, but as interpretative capital 'h' Histories. In order to understand Indigenous histories, Hokari explained, one needed to pay attention—to geography, to the breeze touching one's skin, and to the earth, which lives and speaks.<sup>41</sup> Indigenous knowledge approaches and cross-cultural ways of knowing offer the prospect of innovative directions for the history discipline.

“ The Indigenous archive resides  
not in text but in discrete  
physical landscapes...

The Indigenous archive resides not in text but in discrete physical landscapes—in material evidence, rock art, language and in the epic narratives kept alive in aural and visual performative traditions that in turn rejuvenate the spirits embodied in the land. As explained by the Gay'wu group of women, Indigenous history-telling practices follow a sacred or spiritual logic, with the principles of song cycles propelling the past into the present, and along journey routes across vast landscapes.<sup>42</sup> Indigenous approaches to temporality are non-linear,<sup>43</sup> and place-based. Plants and animals are historical actors, animated and storied. Great journey stories travel along prescribed routes that follow where the sun sets and rises; these are narratives rich in ecological knowledge with an Indigenous law and a moral trajectory associated with an enduring sovereignty. These people saw the oceans around the ancient continent of Sahul inundate the land; they witnessed islands being formed, rivers changing course, bays forming, ecologies changing from savannah to rainforest, lands covered in ice becoming grasslands, and glaciers leaving behind huge granite boulders. They knew of volcanoes erupting. Over 65,000 years or more, Aboriginal Australians responded to many ruptures, many challenges.

It is important to note, however, that Indigenous Australians do not necessarily wish to be incorporated in western discovery narratives, for the discovery concept does not concur with their ontologies of human/land relationships.<sup>44</sup> The transient moment of discovery and the ephemeral journey routes of explorers stand in contrast to the continuity of Indigenous journey routes—the enduring thread of human travel by generations of women, men and children across vast landscapes, layered with Indigenous names bearing complex, connected and richly storied meanings. These were sustaining routes, where people shared deep stories of place, and knowledge of food, water and medicines that sustained whole communities. Indigenous Australians knew these tracks for their creation and origin stories, as marriage routes, as connecting roads that united distant clans and language groups. They contained shelters, art sites, their ecologies sustained gatherings, feasts, rituals, history stories and dances; they were dotted with sites of birth and death.

Deep history should become a creative challenge to current thinking of what constitutes history, how it can be researched, its role in the present, its role in moving the narratives beyond imperial narratives of discovery. Indigenous narratives recount their journey routes through time with contrasting ontologies of temporality—dubbed an 'everywhen.'<sup>45</sup> If a truly collaborative enterprise with Indigenous knowledge holders, 'deep history' may serve as a potential decolonising move. The nation might thereby gain more knowledge of the long era of Indigenous occupation not as a static 65,000 years of 'continuing culture' but as one encompassing both continuity and change. To prevent discovery's monumental features continuing to block the view of deep time, historians need to appreciate indigenous interpretations of the deep past, and work with Indigenous leaders to ensure future histories of nation align with Indigenous sovereignty and inform reparative justice. To do so, the discipline's parameters must be open to radical change. ¶



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