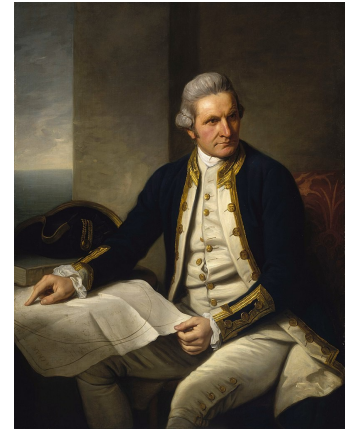


## The Great Barrier Reef

On 11<sup>th</sup> June 1770 Captain Cook was exploring the coast of Australia in his ship the *Endeavour*. He was making maps of the coast. No one had done this before. It was about 11 o'clock at night. The weather was good and the sea was calm. Captain Cook knew that there were things under the water that the ship might bump into. A sailor was testing how deep the water was all the time as they went along. Captain Cook was sailing very carefully.



Suddenly, the *Endeavour* hit something and stuck. Then the ship began to fill with water. What had happened? Captain Cook had discovered the Great Barrier Reef.



A reef is a ridge that sticks up into the water under the sea. The Great Barrier Reef is a coral reef. Coral is sharp, hard stuff like rock that is made by little sea creatures. The Great Barrier Reef is the largest coral reef in the world. Many beautiful fish and other creatures live there. There are over 1500 different kinds

of fish. Some are tiny – can you find a ruler that will show you just 7 millimetres? The smallest fish on the reef is that size. It is called a Stout Infant fish! The biggest fish on the reef is the Whale Shark. That can be 12 metres long. You would need to go out into your garden to measure that far! Look in your Atlas. You will find the Great Barrier Reef in the sea near the coast of Queensland, Australia.



But what about Captain Cook? The sharp coral tore a hole in his wooden ship. It was sinking! At first the Captain thought the ship had hit a rock. But no, this was worse than a rock. Coral can even tear a hole in a modern steel ship. What could the sailors do? All their precious maps and charts would be lost and they might drown too! Captain Cook knew they needed to make the ship lighter so that it would float up over the reef. He also knew a way that might stop up the hole. “Throw over board all the

ballast!” he ordered, “and the barrels and casks!” Splash! Over they went! Then came the jars of oil! Splash! Then the canons! Splash! Anything heavy had to go! Then the ship would float upwards.

But water was still coming in through the hole! The sailors got an old sail. They filled it up with any thing sticky or messy they could find mixed with wool and old rotten rope. Then they got some strong ropes. They used the ropes to drag the sail full of this horrible mixture right under the ship. They pulled it under the hole. The water that was rushing into the hole pulled the mixture into the hole too. It pulled the sail over the hole. It stuck in place. Now the sailors could pump the water out of the ship without more water rushing in. The hole was closed. As the water was pumped out of the ship she rose up over the reef – just. Captain Cook steered her to the shore. There they could make proper repairs.

Years later, in 1969, some divers went to look for Captain Cook's cannons that had been thrown overboard that night. They found them! They were covered over with coral. The Little creatures that make the coral had been busy. So busy that you could hardly see that they *were* cannons.



Today people go to the Great Barrier Reef for holidays. The reef has lovely islands on it where you can stay. You can dive to see the coral and the colourful fish. The Great Barrier Reef is always changing but the coral creatures are not dying, they are doing well. In some years the weather makes the coral go white. But even then it not dead. It recovers again the next year when the weather is better.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> You can find out more here: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1WEbq6BkVnU&list=PL1v9pqs4w1mwBZow\\_Io30Npjtyi1O9g9W&index=3](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1WEbq6BkVnU&list=PL1v9pqs4w1mwBZow_Io30Npjtyi1O9g9W&index=3)