

GREAT SOUTHERN LAND

THE MARITIME EXPLORATION OF TERRA AUSTRALIS

Great Southern Land: The maritime exploration of Terra Australis looks at the European definition and understanding of Australia as a continent through the exploration, study and charting of its coasts. The story includes the separation of an Australian continent from 'Terra Australis Incognita'; the unfolding of the geography of the continental edge and the conceptual change from 'the Great Southland' to 'Australia'.

The maritime investigation and mapping of the coastline of Australia fits into the broader story of the growth of European understanding of the geography of the southern hemisphere. From its representation as an ill-defined land mass in Renaissance charts, Australia was gradually given form by Spanish and Dutch voyagers in the late 16th and early 17th centuries. French and English navigators defined greater stretches of the Australian coastline, and the later marine surveyors, such as King and Stokes, refined the overall surveys into accurate charts of the continent's coasts. Finally, the coast of the Australian Antarctic Territory was given reliable form in the middle part of the 20th century.

The story of the maritime exploration of the Australian coastline therefore extends across 400 years, from the 16th century to the present day.

Dr Michael Pearson

Michael Pearson has a PhD in historical archaeology and has worked for over 30 years in the heritage field, with the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service, as head of the historical environment activities of the then Australian Heritage Commission and subsequently as Deputy Executive Director of the Commission, and since 1993 as director of Heritage Management Consultants Pty Ltd which specialises in heritage research, management and planning.

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