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# The First Footers - Bass and Flinders in Illawarra

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*Illawarra Historical Society*

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## The First Footers - Bass and Flinders in Illawarra

### **Description**

W.G. McDonald, (1975), *The First Footers - Bass and Flinders in Illawarra*, Illawarra Historical Society, Wollongong, 52p. The bicentenary of the birth on 16 March 1774 of Matthew Flinders was commemorated by the Illawarra Historical Society at its March 1974 meeting, when a paper, of which this booklet is a revision, was read by the author. It dealt specifically with the explorations of Bass and Flinders in Illawarra and its vicinity, a subject which has received little attention from their biographers. (Even the one exception, Professor Ernest Scott, was writing a life of Flinders, so quite reasonably had little to say of Bass without Flinders). This booklet is an attempt to fill the gap. It does not set out to cover their earlier and later careers, which are comparatively well documented, in any detail; nor does it seek to cover fully the story of the Sydney Cove, which would repay more detailed investigation, particularly to clarify the many inconsistencies in the existing accounts.

### **Publisher**

Illawarra Historical Society, Wollongong, 52p



# THE FIRST- FOOTERS

BASS AND FLINDERS  
IN ILLAWARRA

*W.G. McDonald*



Geographical Miles



Track from Port Jackson



## THE ILLAWARRA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

The Society's objects are the advancement and study of the history of Australia in general and of the Illawarra district in particular, by the holding of regular and special meetings; the collection of documentary material and artefacts; excursions to places of historic interest; publication of a monthly Bulletin and local historical booklets; and maintenance of an Illawarra folk museum.

Regular monthly meetings are held at the small Meeting Room, Town Hall, Crown Street, Wollongong at 7.45 p.m. on the first Thursday of each month except January.

The Society's Museum at 11 Market Street, Wollongong, is open from 2 to 5 p.m. on Wednesday, Saturday, Sundays and public holidays (except Christmas Day and Good Friday) and daily during school holidays.

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Visitors are welcome at all Society functions.

Enquiries regarding membership are invited to Box 1030 P.O. Wollongong N.S.W. 2500.



The **TOM THUMB** battling the storm off Providential Cove (from an illustration by Julian Ashton to **THE PICTURESQUE ATLAS OF AUSTRALIA**)

# THE FIRST- FOOTERS

**BASS AND FLINDERS  
IN ILLAWARRA**

1796 - 1797

*W.G. McDonald*



**ILLAWARRA HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
WOLLONGONG**

1975

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## Author's Note

The bicentenary of the birth on 16 March 1774 of Matthew Flinders was commemorated by the Illawarra Historical Society at its March 1974 meeting, when a paper, of which this booklet is a revision, was read by the author. It dealt specifically with the explorations of Bass and Flinders in Illawarra and its vicinity, a subject which has received little attention from their biographers. (Even the one exception, Professor Ernest Scott, was writing a life of Flinders, so quite reasonably had little to say of Bass without Flinders). This booklet is an attempt to fill the gap. It does not set out to cover their earlier and later careers, which are comparatively well documented, in any detail; nor does it seek to cover fully the story of the **Sydney Cove**, which would repay more detailed investigation, particularly to clarify the many inconsistencies in the existing accounts.

The Illawarra Historical Society, and I myself, thank Miss Ann Flinders Petrie for permission to quote from Flinders's manuscript Journal of the Tom Thumb voyage; the Principal Librarian, Australian Reference, and staff of the Australian National Library, Canberra, for locating and providing a copy of T. F. Palmer's letter to "one of his friends in Scotland", and for permission to quote; and the Trustees of the Mitchell Library, Sydney, for permission to quote from Hunter's letter to Sir Joseph Banks (in the Banks Papers) and to reproduce part of Grimes and Flinders's "Topographical Plan".

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I am also, not for the first time, indebted to my sister Miss Margaret McDonald for assistance in research, and to Mr. A. W. R. Macdonald for maps and for the cover design; and, not least, my thanks are due to Miss Deborah Shaw for much patient typing and retyping of the manuscript.



# THE FIRST FOOTERS

On the morning of 26 March 1796, just south of Towradgi Point, a small boat ran in and cast anchor just outside the breakers. Then a tall, powerful young man threw a keg over the side and plunged in after it, watched by a smaller, dark young man and a boy in the boat. The big man picked up the keg and made his way up the beach to a creek, filled the keg and swam back through the breakers with it. Hauling him and the keg aboard, his companions began to heave on the anchor line to pull the boat further out to sea. But the anchor came up too soon, and just at that moment the inevitable outside wave came sweeping in, picked up the boat and flung it, nearly full of water, on the beach.

In this undignified way occurred the first authenticated landing of white men in Illawarra; and they had not even meant to come to Illawarra at all.

Leaving Hargrave's Spaniards<sup>1</sup> out of the reckoning, the first discoverer to sight Illawarra was Captain Cook; but his attempted landing near Woonona was frustrated by "the great surff which beat everywhere upon the shore"

Between 1788 and 1796 various ships passed along the coast on the way to and from Sydney, but apparently well out - no one landed, or even made a detailed examination from the sea. Then came the two men and the boy.

George Bass, the big man who swam ashore, was then 25. He was a Lincolnshire farmer's son, who had in his boyhood developed a passion for the sea. His family made a doctor of him, but he circumvented them by going into the navy as a surgeon, though his qualifications - he was a Member of the Company of Surgeons, forerunner of the present Royal College of Surgeons - were superior to those of the common run of naval surgeons, usually reputed to be either half-qualified butchers or shaky-handed candidates for delirium tremens.

He spent three years with the Channel Fleet and on a voyage to Newfoundland, and, his medical studies not being exacting, filled in time learning seamanship and navigation. Then he was appointed to H.M.S. *Reliance*, bound for far-off New South Wales, settled only six years before. She was a large enough ship for him to have a surgeon's mate. Bass's surgical duties seem to have been as accommodating as Dr. Watson's practice - no doubt the surgeon's mate had to stop on the job, take sick parades, and hand out the mist. tuss. and Number

Nines, or their naval equivalents, during his superior's frequent absences exploring. Bass had also a subordinate of still lower rank, a servant and general dogsbody - "loblolly boy" in the naval language of the day - named William Martin. And another officer was the man whose name was to be inseparably linked with that of Bass.

Matthew Flinders was also a Lincolnshire man, born at Donington on March 16. 1774. His father, a local doctor, wanted Matthew to follow him into medicine, but could not get him even as far as Bass. At fifteen the boy entered the navy, receiving his warrant as a midshipman through the interest of a family friend, Captain Pasley.

Pasley was also the friend of Captain William Bligh, who was about to sail for the South Seas in H.M.S. **Providence** on a second attempt to transport breadfruit trees from Tahiti to Jamaica - his first attempt in H.M.S. **Bounty** having miscarried spectacularly. Bligh had extricated himself no less spectacularly from a desperate predicament by a voyage of 3600 miles in an open boat from mid-Pacific to Timor, which established for all time his reputation as a navigator and seaman of the first order; and he had been exonerated by the Admiralty, if not by MGM, from all culpability in the events leading up to the mutiny.

Captain Pasley recommended his protegee to Bligh, and young Flinders sailed in the **Providence** to the South Seas, and thence to the West Indies. Bligh must have thought well of him, for he deputed to the seventeen-year-old midshipman some of the chartwork and the care of the all-important chronometers, vital for determining longitude. The experience must have been invaluable, but Bligh was an exacting taskmaster, and Flinders later expressed the hope that he would never again be placed under Bligh's orders.

When Flinders returned to England the war with France, which lasted with two short intermissions for 22 years, had broken out. He served in Captain Pasley's ship, the **Bellerophon**, in the first great naval action of the war, the Glorious First of June, under Lord Howe.

In this battle Flinders's patron Captain Pasley received a wound which put him permanently on the beach. "Interest" was important in the Navy of those days. There was probably not much future for Flinders in the **Bellerophon**, and he may have been glad, when Lieutenant Waterhouse of the **Bellerophon** was appointed to command H.M.S. **Reliance**, to transfer with him as master's mate and sail again for the South Seas. He and Surgeon Bass discovered a common interest in exploration. "In Mr. George Bass, surgeon of the **Reliance**" wrote Flinders later, "I had the happiness to find a man whose ardour for discovery was not to be repressed by any obstacle, nor deterred by danger", and they found that in New South Wales there was still plenty of room for discovery.



**2. MATTHEW FLINDERS**

(Drawn in 1808 during his captivity in Mauritius)



1. GEORGE BASS  
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In the seven years since the foundation of the colony, little had been done to fill in the details even along the coast. Port Jackson, Botany Bay and Broken Bay had been surveyed by Hunter; Lieutenant Bowen had put in at Jervis Bay, and Surveyor Grimes and Captain Broughton at Port Stephens. But that was practically all, and even the coast between Botany Bay and Jervis Bay was known only by what Captain Cook had seen from the *Endeavour*.

Less than two months after reaching Sydney Bass and Flinders began, in a modest way, their exploring careers. Taking young Martin with them, in a small boat named the **Tom Thumb**, which Bass had brought out from England, they sailed round to Botany Bay, and explored Georges River for about twenty miles beyond the limit of Hunter's survey. <sup>2</sup> Their report led to the establishment of a new settlement called Bankstown.

Five months later they were off again to investigate a large river reported by Henry Hacking, quartermaster of the *Sirius*, as falling into the sea a few miles south of Botany Bay. Their craft was again called the **Tom Thumb**, but this time it was a different boat, built in the colony. Many of us were told in our schooldays that the **Tom Thumb** was eight feet long with a beam of five feet, which would have made it not only very small, but "a craft of most unhandy proportions". But, as K.M. Bowden pointed out, Flinders in his journal said, not that the length of the boat was eight feet, but that the keel was eight feet long; and Bowden surmised that her overall length was ten to twelve feet. This was **Tom Thumb** the first; and Bowden, going on to consider all the available evidence on **Tom Thumb** the second - the craft in which the Illawarra voyage was made - came to the conclusion that it was probably about sixteen feet long by six feet in the beam. He added "Whatever the actual size of the second **Tom Thumb** it still must have remained an extremely small craft for so hazardous an expedition". <sup>3</sup>

Loading the second **Tom Thumb** with ten days' provisions and two muskets, they set out to explore Hacking's river. They first stood well out to sea, then, when a sea breeze sprang up, stood in towards the shore, concerned because their water supply, which had been by mistake put into a wine cask, had gone bad, and till they could find water ashore they would have to depend on five watermelons which they had in the boat. Presently "an eminence in the high land...presented itself under the semblance of Hat Hill". They could not imagine how they could have come so far, but coming nearer they found that it was indeed Hat Hill, and recognised the land to the northward as part of the coast which they had seen from the *Reliance*.

A southward-setting current - no doubt that which had carried the *Endeavour* back from near Botany Bay to the neighbourhood of

Woonona - had carried them many miles south of their destination. As the wind died away at sunset, they pulled in for "a bending in the coast" and anchored. The surf was too high to land, so "after making a miserable supper and drinking a melon" they slept as best they could in the boat. "The great similitude" says Flinders, "which the south head of this bending in the coast had to the roof of a barn, as well as we could distinguish by moonlight, induced us to call it Barn Cove". This "bending in the coast" was probably Bulli Beach - certainly it was in the neighbourhood of Bulli.

Next morning the explorers found they still could not land in Barn Cove; but it was essential to land somewhere for fresh water. The low coast to the south seemed to offer better chances of landing, and with the breeze blowing from the NNE they ran before the wind till ten o'clock, when they "passed a reef which projected farther than usual, and to leeward of which was less surf". So they decided to make the attempt, with the results previously described. This first landing of white men in Illawarra appears to have been made on the southern side of Towradgi Point. Just behind the beach is a reedy channel, a creek in wet weather, and probably more permanent before so much of the locality was cleared and filled. This would be all that remains of the creek where Bass filled the water cask.

Having baled the **Tom Thumb** out, the adventurers decided she must be launched again at once; for they could see smoke within three miles, and the natives thereabouts "were generally believed to be cannibals". So, says Flinders, "having placed the boat stern on for the water, and put the most spoilable provisions on board, by watching a favourable opportunity, we launched her; and the boy and myself getting upon our oars, were safe without the verge of the surfs before any of the larger ones came, not having shipped above eight or ten buckets of water."

Bass, the strongest swimmer, had been left ashore; now he swam out with the lead line, and they began getting the rest of the load on board again. "The musquets were near being lost from the breaking of the lead line; ...but by lashing the heaviest articles to the oars and masts, everything else came on board safe"; and about half-past three they were under way again.

They were safe for the moment from the cannibals of Towradgi; but, as Flinders says, they were in a "miserable plight". They had "three days bread, entirely spoiled; - five days flour, not in the least wet: - tea and coffee, spoiled: - sugar, half wet: - a few cakes of portable soup, not much worse: - one piece and a half of salt beef and three of pork: - six pounds of rice and a little sago, good: - the guns, rusty and full of sand and salt water: the rods incapable of being drawn: - a barica of water, brackish: - our clothes completely soaked: - a

watch and two pocket compasses, wet: - one horn of powder dry; and two, wet: - and a small bundle of wet sticks."

They passed two islets, "small rocky barren spots" on which they could see no prospect of landing. Their view to the south was bounded by "a projecting point, upon which is four eminences forming a kind of double saddle", with what appeared to be a much larger island lying a short distance off the point. Night was now falling, and they hoped to camp on the large island; but again they could find no safe landing place. So they pulled round to the lee of Saddle Point, anchored, and spent another thoroughly uncomfortable night in the boat - particularly uncomfortable for Bass, "for in rafting off the things in the afternoon, he had been exposed near five hours naked to the sun in the heat of the day, and was now almost one continued blister."

There can be no doubt about Saddle Point. Flinders himself surmised that "the outer part of the island" was Captain Cook's Red Point, and that name appeared in the chart in his "Voyage to Terra Australis". The discrepancy in the number of islands is partly explained by a footnote Flinders added in his Journal, to the effect that they had since learnt from Rogers, a fisherman, that what they had taken for one large island was "divided into two parts by a narrow channel but of tolerable depth." The "two parts" are now Martin's Islet and Big Island, and the two islets passed earlier are Flinders Islet and Bass Islet, the two northernmost of the Five Islands. That still leaves one island too few, but Big Island from some angles looks like two; and to make up the five the rock shelf in the channel between Big Island and the mainland has had to be counted as an island, and christened Rocky Islet for the purpose.

At dawn, to the adventurers' surprise, a voice from the shore called to them in the language of the Port Jackson aborigines offering fresh water and fish. The guns were still useless, but as there were only two blacks with fish spears they rowed over to them, and exchanged some potatoes and two handkerchiefs for water and two fish. The two blacks offered to take them to a freshwater river a short distance to the southward, and in the hope of finding a sheltered anchorage and getting enough water for the return journey, they agreed. Taking the blacks aboard, they steered about four miles southwest to the entrance of the alleged river.

"About noon, we came off the entrance...It appeared to be a small stream which had made a passage through the beach; but we could not tell how it would be possible, even for our small boat, to enter it, as the surf was breaking nearly across, however, by following their directions, in going sometimes close to the surf, sometimes to one side, and sometimes to the other, we got in with difficulty; and rowed about a mile up a little more water than the boat drew, against a very strong tide.



“Our conductors had gone on shore and were now walking, with eight or ten strange natives, on the sand abreast of us.

“The boat having touched the ground once or twice, and the rivulet still continuing shoal, we began to relinquish the hope of getting up it; and to consider, that there might not be water enough for the boat to go out again till the flood tide should make, which would leave us in the power of the natives, and even as it was, we were in their powers, for the water was scarcely higher than the knees, and our guns were still full of sand and rusty.

“Having agreed upon a plan of action, we went on shore to get more water, dry our powder, get the guns in order, and mend one of the oars, which had been broken when the boat was thrown upon the beach. On asking the two natives for water, they told us we must go up to the lake for it, pointing to a large piece of water from which the rivulet seemed to take its rise, but on being told that we could not now go, they found some within a few yards. This circumstance made us suspect, that they had a wish, if not an intention, of detaining us: and on reflection, their previous conversation in the boat evidently tended to the same purpose.

“The number having increased to near twenty, and others still coming, we began to repair our deficiencies with as much expedition as possible - But an employment more than we expected, now arose upon our hands. - the two friendly natives had gotten their hair cut, and beards clipped off, by us,<sup>5</sup> when in the little cove at Saddle Point, and were now showing themselves to the others, and persuading them to follow their example. Whilst Mr. Bass, assisted by some of the natives, was mending the oar, and the powder was drying in the sun, I began, with a pair of scissors, to execute my new office upon the eldest of four or five chins presented up to me; and as great nicety was not required, got on with them to the number of eleven or twelve; which were the greatest part of our bearded company. Some of the more timid, were alarmed at a double-jawed instrument coming so near to their noses, and could scarcely be persuaded by their shaven friends to allow the operation to be finished but when their chins were held up a second time, their fear of the instrument, the wild stare of their eyes, - the smile which they forced: - formed a compound upon the rough, savage countenance, not unworthy the pencil of a Hogarth. I was almost tempted to try the effect of a snip on the nose; but our situation was too critical to admit of such experiments.

“We got our things into the boat, and prepared to go out again. But to get away peaceably, we were obliged to use deceit; for they kept continually pointing to the lagoon, and desiring, or indeed almost insisting, that we should go up into it, and the two Port-Jackson



natives seemed more violent than any others. We appeared to coincide with them, but deferred it till tomorrow; and pointed to a green bank near the entrance of the river, where we would sleep; then putting on a resolute face, we shoved off the boat. Most of them, followed us, the river being very shallow, and four jumped in. The rest took hold of the boat and dragged her along, down the stream, shouting and singing. We shouted and sung too, though our situation was far from being pleasant.

“On coming on to the green bank, they brought us to the shore, and those in the boat leaped out; one of them with a hat on, but which he returned on being asked. Some of them still kept hold to prevent us from going further; but...with a menacing countenance, we resolutely pushed away from them: one observing to the rest that we were angry, let go his hold; and the others immediately followed his example.

“Whilst we got down to the entrance, they stood looking at each other, as if doubtful whether to detain us by force; and there is much reason to think, that they suffered us to get away, only because they had not agreed upon any plan of action: assisted, perhaps, by the extreme fear they seemed to be under of our harmless fire-arms.

“The sea breeze blew so strong, and the surf ran so high, that we could not possibly get out of the rivulet; and therefore came to an anchor just within the surf which broke upon the bar, and not fifteen yards from the shore on either side. The water was tolerably deep in this place, the stream from the lagoon ran very rapid, so that the natives would not venture in, to come to the boat, but three or four of them kept hovering upon the point to the southwards of us, amongst whom was Dilba, one of the Port-Jackson men. This fellow was constantly importuning us to return and go up to the lagoon. He was as constantly answered that ‘When the sun went down, if the wind and surf did not abate, we would’. As the sun disappeared, five or six natives were coming towards us from the other side. We had gotten the guns in order; and having a little powder in one of them, I fired it off, on which the party stopped short, and soon walked away; those on the point too were all retired but Dilba, and he soon followed.

“We slept by turns till ten o’clock and the moon being then risen, the weather calm, - and water smooth, we pulled out towards Saddle Point; not a little pleased to have escaped so well.”

This incident most people remember from their primary-school days, but just where the shearing took place has been much disputed. Flinders calls the river “Canoe River”, and says it “descended from a lagoon under Hat Hill”, which he calls “Tom Thumb’s Lagoon”. All these names appear on his map.

In a moment of aberration Meehan in 1816 identified Tom Thumb's Lagoon with the lagoon between Throsby's stockman's hut (near Brighton Beach at Wollongong) and Red Point, and the name stuck until "the Thumb" was converted into Port Kembla Inner Harbour. Then, to conform with this, Allan Cunningham identified Hat Hill with Mount Keira, and labelled Mount Kembla Cap Hill or Molle Hill, making a molehill out of a mountain, and confusion worse confounded.

These identifications are quite untenable: so are the theories which identify Tom Thumb's Lagoon with Coomaditchy and with Little Lake at Warilla. Tom Thumb's Lagoon can only be Lake Illawarra, and Canoe River its entrance; and there is a scintilla of evidence that the blacks were shorn on the southern rather than on the northern side.<sup>6</sup>

Oddly Flinders makes no mention of Windang Island, which is such a striking feature of the entrance - the one piece of solid land in miles of sand. The map shows a hammer-headed peninsula on the south side to the entrance, which presumably represents Windang Island joined to the mainland by a sandspit, as it often is. Whether the channel is to the north or south of the island, or both, depends on the vagaries of wind and tide.

Hat Hill is said by Flinders to be five miles W.N.W. from Red Point. He was over a mile short in his estimate of the distance, but the bearing is dead right for Mount Kembla. For Mount Keira the bearing is wrong, and the discrepancy in distance even greater.

The adventurers spent a third uncomfortable night in the boat, under the lee of the inner of the two northern islands, which they called Martin's Isles.<sup>7</sup>

Next morning (28 March), says Flinders, was fine "with a light air off the land. We got under weigh, and stood to the northward pulling and sailing, but the light air freshening to a breeze, and soon after blowing strong, we had a long and very laborious row to get in with the shore, which about noon we effected: and soon after, a light breeze set in from the sea.

"Rowing close along the shore, at one in the afternoon, we came abreast of a small beach fronted by a reef of rocks. There was a narrow passage through these rocks, and the sea breeze having as yet made no impression on the water, it was without surf, and permitted us to get to the beach, and haul the boat up.

"Till evening, we were employed in getting fresh water, which there was a good deal of trouble to find, and in cooking provisions.



“For the first time, we slept on shore; and, perhaps the softest bed of down was never more enjoyed. The liberty of lying in any posture and stretching out our limbs, was an indulgence, which our little bark could not afford: but I ought to have had a back covered with one continued blister, to describe the sensations of my companion.

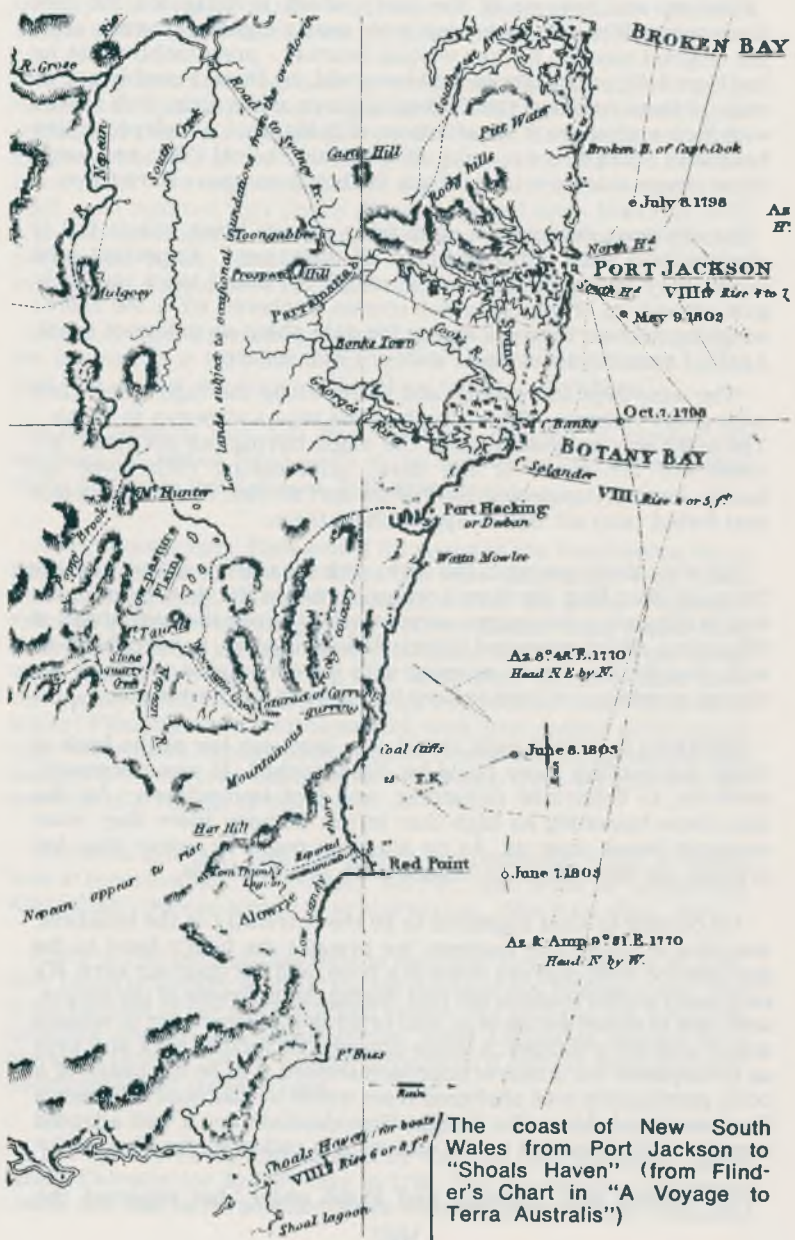
“In the morning, we prepared to depart, having made a comfortable breakfast, and talked over our happiness in finding so friendly a little place, which had enabled us to lay in a stock of rest against a day of labour, as well as cook provisions for some time to come. At 7, we pulled to the northward, the weather being calm; and passed Barn Cove; but the sea breeze again set in from the northward, and at noon freshed so much, that we could not make head against it. Being then near a high projecting head with a small reef running off it, we pulled in and anchored.

“The intermediate coast is high, with some small beaches here and there, but they afforded no shelter. About seven miles from Barn Cove, there are two beaches which falling back a little within the coast line, served as a point of separation to our distances, under the name of Double Cove.

“Towards evening, the sea breeze died away, and an air arose from the southward. We weighed immediately and proceeded to the northward along a high cliffy coast.”

There is a problem in identifying these places. The map shows the northbound track coming in almost at right angles to the coast a little south of Bellambi Point. This must be where they rowed in about noon on 28 March. An hour or so later they found the “friendly little spot” where they camped that afternoon and night. Between Bellambi Point and the site of the old Bellambi Jetty is a small beach fronted with rocks, with a channel through them distinguished by navigation markers. Fishing boats still find it a friendly little spot, and quite recently a boat launching ramp has been constructed at one end. Nothing could fit Flinders’s description better, but for a footnote which he himself added to the journal; “The small place of shelter...is among the cliffy heads in which a stratum of coal was afterwards discovered.”

This obviously points to Coal Cliff, or at least somewhere north of Austinmer. But it still seems more likely that they camped for the night at Bellambi. The description fits, and it is hard to rebut the evidence of the map. They came in to the coast between Towradgi and Bellambi, and an hour later, rowing against the wind, found their camping place; so it could not have been far to the north. Again, the camping place was south of Barn Cove, which the map shows well south of the spot marked “Coals discovered”.



The coast of New South Wales from Port Jackson to "Shoals Haven" (from Flinders's Chart in "A Voyage to Terra Australis")

Flinders was not one of the party which investigated the coal discoveries. When he added his note, nearly eighteen months after the original voyage, he was writing hearsay - presumably what he had been told, or thought he had been told, by Bass. Possibly one or other of them confused their camping place of the night of 28 March with their anchorage of the afternoon of 29 March. "A high projecting head with a small reef running off it" would fit Coal Cliff; and would allow reasonable time to sail from Bellambi and pass Barn Cove.

The sky grew overcast as night fell - "heavy black clouds full of electric fluid were flying about in all directions." Expecting land winds, they anchored close to the cliffs; but about ten a southerly gale sprang up. They could not remain anchored off a lee shore; weighing anchor, they ran before the gale along an unknown coast. Again, I cannot improve on Flinders's own account:

"The wind kept increasing, and swept along the high steep cliffs with great violence. The waves became seas and began to break... The night was extremely dark, the moon having not yet risen. We could see the shade of the dark, grim-looking cliffs over our heads; and the thundering noise of the surf at their feet told us a tale that forbid (sic) all idea of approaching them.

"We were thus running in the dark, with the sail flying away before the mast like a flag, Mr. Bass keeping the end of the sheet in his hand, and hauling aft a few inches occasionally, to keep the boat ahead of those seas, which appeared eagerly following after, to overwhelm us with destruction. I was steering with an oar, and it required the utmost exertion and care to keep her directly before the sea.

"Breakers appeared right ahead. The land was low at the back of them, but nothing more could be distinguished. It was necessary, however, to determine something, and that immediately; for the seas were becoming so high that in ten minutes more they must certainly break over us. As no situation could be worse than the present, we determined to make a push at all hazards.

"On coming to what appeared to be the extremity of the breakers, watching a favourable moment, we brought the boat's head to the sea, had the mast and sail down in a trice, and got upon our oars. We cautiously pulled towards the reef during the intervals of the surges, and...got in under the lee of it; and in three minutes, were in smooth water, and out of danger. A white appearance farther back still kept us in suspense, but a nearer approach shewed it to be the beach of a cove, particularly well sheltered from winds in that quarter whence the present gale blew. We thought Providential Cove a well-adapted name for this place, but by the natives it is called Watta Mowlee." <sup>8</sup>

They landed next morning and found water, but reported the



country "in general sandy and barren." They stood to the north again, and at last entered Port Hacking, their original destination.

Camping by a small cove on the north side, they went fishing, but were put off by sharks which were "sufficiently daring to come to the surface of the water, eyeing us at the same time with voracious keenness. The size of our vessel did not place us at a great distance from them." So they went ashore again. "Two natives...paid us a visit...and behaved very civilly. We understood them tolerably well, and were not under the least apprehension, considering ourselves as almost at home; and had it not been for the numberless mosquitos...should have passed a comfortable night."

Next day they explored Port Hacking, reporting it "very shoal, and but few places in it fit for shipping...We slept some distance up the port, but did not see ducks or anything to shoot anywhere."

In the morning they left Port Hacking, noticing in passing the bombora off Jibbon Head south of the entrance. That evening they came alongside the **Reliance** in Sydney Cove.

A few months later Bass added his name to the lengthening list of those who had attempted to cross the Blue Mountains. With hooks and climbing irons, he scaled the north wall of the Grose Valley and reached a high mountain, probably Mount Banks (alias Mount King George) but could see only more mountains and more gorges ahead when hunger and thirst forced him back. Bass seems to have been completely amphibious, always on for exploration either by land or water; Flinders was a marine animal, with little urge to go far above high-water mark, though when it came to exploration by sea, he said himself that he verily believed he would leap from his grave at the mention of a voyage of discovery.

One feels also that they differed in temperament - that Flinders was a conscientious, meticulous worrier, and Bass an archetypal Australian - one can almost hear him saying, "She'll be right, Matt!"

Early in 1797 the **Reliance** went to the Cape. Returning late in June, they found in Sydney some of the survivors of the **Sydney Cove**. The main outlines of her story are well known, but in detail the available accounts are full of inconsistencies. What follows is offered as a tentative reconstruction, subject to revision if certain contemporary documents ever come to light.

The **Sydney Cove**, commanded by Captain Guy Hamilton, sailed from Calcutta for Sydney late in 1796. She developed a dangerous leak, and had to be beached on or near an island in the Furneaux

Group, off the north-eastern corner of Van Diemen's Land. All hands got ashore on the island, which they named Preservation Island. Then, leaving Captain Hamilton (who according to one account was over eighty) and most of the crew on the island, the first mate Hugh Thompson, the supercargo William Clark, and fifteen others set out in the longboat for Port Jackson, only to be wrecked again on the coast of the mainland - Hunter says between Cape Howe and Point Hicks, which is usually identified with Cape Everard in eastern Victoria. The longboat being beyond repair, they set out to walk to Sydney.

"Their journey", wrote Hunter to Sir Joseph Banks, "was attended with so many fatiguing difficultys, that they were not capable for want of an equal share of strength of keeping together. Many of the Number perished thro fatigue and want of Food, whilst others struggled hard to preserve life and to get Northward, but were so often Annoyd by the Savage Barbarity of the Natives that their Number decreased to five, and latterly to three, who get so near us that a small Boat being out Catching fish a little to the Southw(ard) of Botany Bay & close in shore, saw these 3 people Crawling along the Rocky shore and frequently waving to the Boat; they went on shore & picked up these three Men, in most Wretched & Worn out Condition. One was ye Supercargo, one White Seaman, & a Lascar". (According to Flinders, this was at Watta-Mowlee - Preservation Cove for Clark and his companions too).

"They were immediately brought hither", Hunter continued, "and properly taken care of; they gave an account of having parted Company with the first Mate & the Carpenter the day before, & at no great distance from where they had found the fishing Boat...I ordered my own Whale Boat to be immediately dispatched with a good Crew & to take this fisher Man with them; Blankets Cloathing & such kind of Nourishing food as might be Necessary for people in their Weakly state, were put into the Boat; but when they arrivd at the place Nothing could be discovered of those helpless People except a few trifling things they had with them, part of which being covered with Blood, gave us reason to suppose they had been destroyed by the Natives; the boat was 3 days in Search but in Vain."

Hunter also sent the schooner **Francis** and the **Eliza** (which he describes as a decked longboat) to Preservation Island, where they picked up the ancient mariner Captain Hamilton and most of the other survivors. Leaving a few men to guard the cargo, they sailed for Sydney, but disaster was compounded when the ships became separated and the **Eliza** vanished.

The **Reliance** was in need of extensive repair, and Flinders, now the second lieutenant, had his nose kept to the grindstone. But Bass

was at a loose end, Hunter was not satisfied with the first search party's report, and there was something else to be investigated. "The Supercargo", said Hunter, "informed me that...a few nights before they were taken off, when they had occasion for a fire to lay by, they found a very Considerable quantity of Coal, so much upon the Surface of the Earth that they found no difficulty in getting enough for a large fire the whole time they Stay on that Spot".

So, when "Mr. Bass the surgeon of the *Reliance* an ingenious Young Man, offered himself to make the Search", Hunter was happy to accept. "The Super Cargo of the Wreckd Ship *Mr. Clark* being thoroughly recovered offered to accompany Mr. Bass - I gave them my Whale Boat well Mann'd & armd..." According to his friend Thomas Fyshe Palmer, one of the so-called Scottish Martyrs, there was no one more scientific in the native language than Bass, and he was able to open communications with the local blacks. He was "led by a Native," says Hunter, "to the place where lay the remains of the two Men, one had his skull much fractured - No doubt Murdered by the Natives". According to Palmer, Bass was told by the blacks that "the carpenter, churlish and avaricious, and without sense or foresight, seized the natives' fish, would give them nothing in return, and offended them so much, that the first mate, whom they were very fond of, fell victim to his folly, and they both perished." "To add to the probability of this having been their end", adds Collins, "Mr. Clarke mentioned the morose, unfeeling disposition of the carpenter, who often, when some friendly natives had presented him with a few fish, growled that they had not given him all, and insisted that because they were black fellows, it would be right to take it by force." It transpired also that "the principal person concerned in spearing the chief mate and carpenter" was that same Dilba who, at Canoe River, "had been most strenuous for Tom Thumb to go up into the lagoon which lies under the hill." Perhaps in refusing him Bass and Flinders had been even wiser than they realised.

Flinders says tersely, "Dilba was sought after to be shot by Mr. Bass and others"; but apparently they were unsuccessful - which was hardly surprising.<sup>9</sup>

An account of this expedition (with, it seems, a sketch or sketch map or both) was sent by Bass to Major (afterwards Colonel) Paterson, who apparently circulated copies of the latter part, describing the coal seams - the same extract turns up in Governor King's letter book and in the Banks Papers, and thence in the Historical Records; but the first part of the letter, the map and Bass's report to Hunter have not yet come to light. So it is not clear where the murder of the mate and the carpenter occurred. Flinders says "near Hat Hill"; Bass himself seems to suggest that it was south of the coal seams; both Hunter and Collins imply that it was north of the spot where the Sydney Cove men found the coal.<sup>10</sup> Nor is it

clear where Bass went on his unsuccessful search for Dilba. He may well have been the first to go farther into Illawarra than a few yards above high-water mark. But, until Bass's missing papers give first-hand answers, much about the first part of this voyage remains obscure.

However, Bass's investigation of the coal is fully documented. "This vein of coal", he told Paterson, "...commences about 20 miles to the southward of Botany Bay. The land there is nearly twice the height of the north head of Port Jackson, not a steep cliff like it, but has here and there small slopes and lodgments on which trees and shrubs grow. The sea washes up so close to the foot of it that it is no more than barely passable with some danger in blowing weather. About twenty feet above the surface of the sea, and within reach of your hand as you pass along, is a vein of coal of about six or seven feet in thickness; the rock below it is slaty, but above it is of the common rock stone of the country. The vein does not lay perfectly horizontal, but goes on declining as it advances to the southward, until at the end of about two miles it becomes level with the surface of the sea, and there the lowest rock you can see when the surf retires is all coal. Here the bold high land gradually retreats back, and leaves in its front a lower sloping land, which, keeping the line of the coast, meets the sea with sandy beaches and small bluff heads alternately. In the land at the back of the beaches and in the small bluff heads we traced for about six miles along the coast four strata of coal from fifteen inches to three feet in thickness, with intermediate spaces of slaty rock of a few inches in thickness...

In pursuing the track home of our little boat, you will find it run upon the beach near two rocky heads about half way between Saddle Point and Providential Cove. That place is in about the middle of the two. You will perceive also in the sketch that the high mountainous land...falls back as I have already described. Of the nature of the coal you will best judge by the specimen, which was unavoidably taken from the outside, consequently is rather injured by the weather. Access to the veins is rather difficult; there is no landing within several miles of them, except upon the little beach between the two rocky heads, and even there no boat ought to lay except one that can be beached. In summer, however, when the sea and land breezes are regular, and gales of wind uncommon, a boat might lay there for several days together, and of course in that time load a large craft, which might stand off and on in the meantime. You will be surprized to see how different the vegetation is to that about Sydney, or any other place we have ever before seen. Upon the sloping land in front of the high bold land I observed there several cabbage-trees nearly in resemblance of plantain but yet a true cabbage, and the fern which I can no otherwise describe than by calling it a cabbage tree fern, for it is to distant appearance a cabbage, but upon a close inspection the



leaves are found to be fern, and beautiful fern. There were many trees that I am certain have never before been known in this country; one, the most remarkably new, was about twelve feet in height, its leaves large, broad and hairy, or rather woolly...and the smaller branches of it covered most thickly with long sharp prickles. Well I remember them, for in the blindness of my eyes I seized one of the branches and was handsomely repaid for my hasty curiosity by a handful of thorns".<sup>11</sup>

Bass, according to one of his biographers, was, more than anything else, a naturalist at heart, and "the first man who brought a trained scientific intelligence to bear upon natural phenomena in this country"; and this, the first report of some of Illawarra's most characteristic vegetation, is typical of his reports on the places he visited. Shortly afterwards he was reporting on the dissection of the first wombat brought to Sydney - oddly enough from Furneaux Islands by the Sydney Cove men - and describing it as "very economically made".

Almost before the nettle-tree prickles were out of his hands, Bass was off again, with a party which went to make a further investigation of the Cowpastures and the wild cattle. Then, from Mount Taurus (Spaniard's Hill, between Menangle and Douglas Park)<sup>12</sup> "two gentlemen proposed to walk in as direct a line as the country would admit to the sea-coast". One, of course, was Bass. "A whaleboat was ordered to wait for them about five leagues to the southward of Botany Bay". "Making their course a little to the southward of east, they fell in with the boat very conveniently" says Collins, but "Mr. Bass described their route to have lain, the greatest part of the way, over nothing but high and steep ridges of hills, the land becoming more rocky and barren as they drew near the sea-coast. In each of the vallies (sic)...they found a run of fresh water, in some places of considerable depth and rapidity. The direction of these streams being to the northward, they were supposed to fall into a harbour which...had obtained the name of Port Hacking". There, of course, Bass was only partly right - right about Hacking or Port Hacking River (whichever it is), wrong about George's River and its tributaries.<sup>13</sup>

Hunter's map of New South Wales in 1798 showed the track of Bass and his companion Williamson, with comments from descriptions given by Bass. First the Nepean, then "tolerable good level ground" and "grassy hills of gentle ascent" - which would be Appin - then a major stream - George's River - followed by "good pasturage" in the region of Wedderburn. Then "mountainous brushy land stony and barren" and similar comments; various streams; "rocky sandy and brushy mountains" followed by the last big stream - Port Hacking River; then "saw the sea" and "barren sandy sea coast". By the

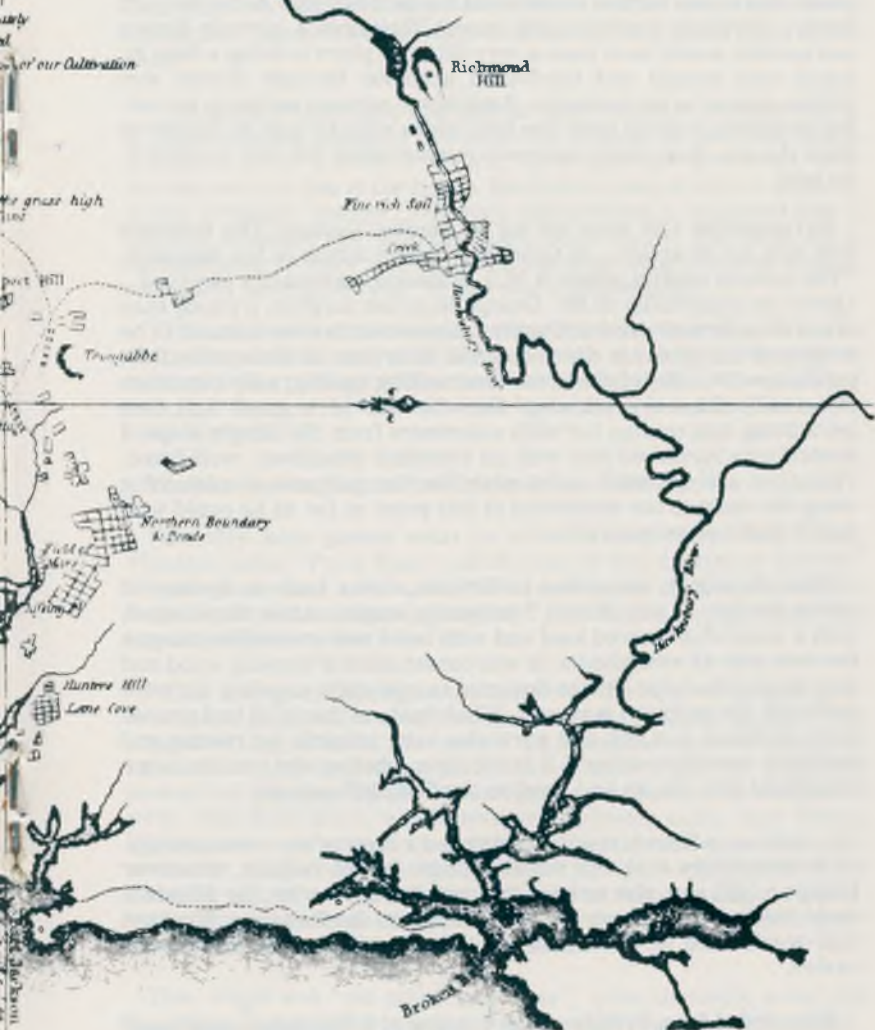








Hunter's map, showing Bass and Williamson's march to the sea, September 1797 (from Collins, "An Account of the English Colony in New South Wales".)



scale on Hunter's map they reached the coast south of Burning Palms; but a "barren sandy coast" suggests somewhere further north; Werrong, Burning Palms and Era, except for the beaches themselves, are far from sandy, and in their natural state must have been anything but barren. If the "five leagues to the southward of Botany Bay" are reckoned as fifteen statute miles, the rendezvous would have been at or near Garie; and this seems a more likely place. Anywhere further south could not be described as barren and sandy; anywhere further north, except Wattamolla, already known and named, would have been a very difficult place to bring a boat in. Again only second and third-hand accounts through Hunter and Collins appear to be available; Bass's own account seems to be lost. But probably, having been the first white man to land in Illawarra from the sea, Bass fairly narrowly missed being the first to enter it by land.

In December 1797 Bass set out on another voyage. The **Reliance** was still out of action - as Governor Hunter wrote in his despatch, "The tedious repairs which H.M.S. **Reliance** necessarily required... (gave) an opportunity to Mr. George Bass her surgeon, a young man of a well-informed mind and active disposition to offer himself to be employed in any way in which he could contribute to the benefit of the public service...He informed me that nothing could gratify him more effectually than my allowing him the use of a good boat and permitting him to man her with volunteers from the King's ships. I accordingly furnished him with an excellent whaleboat, well fitted, victualled and manned to his wish, for the purpose of examining along the coast to the southward of this point as far as he could with safety and convenience go".

This whaleboat, according to Bowden, "was built in Sydney of native timber. It was 28 feet 7 inches in length, rather flat-floored, with a somewhat curved keel and with head and stern alike, as was the case with all whaleboats. It was constructed of banksia wood and was lined with cedar. It was designed to row eight oars but six were sufficient for ordinary purposes. Whaleboats of this kind had proved to be excellent in a sea and were also very suitable for rowing and sailing in smoother water." It is not clear whether she was the same whaleboat that Banks had used on the Coalcliff voyage.

In addition to Bass himself, she carried a crew of six - not convicts as is sometimes said, but naval ratings. In one respect, whatever Hunter might say, she was not manned to Bass's wish, for Flinders could not be spared from the repair work on the **Reliance**. The boat was provisioned for six weeks - in the event they were to be away twelve.

They sailed from Sydney on the evening of 2 December,<sup>14</sup> and spent

the first night in Little Bay. Next day they had nearly reached Wattamolla, when the wind veered round and became adverse, so that they bore up and ran into Port Hacking. The winds were still unfavourable on the following day, and they put in to Wattamolla; but at last the wind went round to the north-east and they were able to make good speed southward, passing the Five Islands at sunset and coming to territory previously unexplored except for what Captain Cook had seen from the *Endeavour*. About 1 o'clock next afternoon (5 December) adverse winds led them to anchor in a small bight in the coast.

“The shore in this bight, and also for some distance on each side of it, bears evident marks of volcanic fire. Several of the little heads and points are of a basaltic nature; Upon landing, I perceived, near the extremity of one of the heads, the rocks laying scattered about in a very irregular manner, and upon examination it appeared that a volcanic eruption had formerly taken place there. The earth for a considerable distance round, in a form approaching to that of a circle seemed to have given way; it was now a green slope.

“Towards the centre was a deep ragged hole of about 25 or 30 feet in diameter, and on one side of it the sea washed in through a subterraneous passage with a most tremendous noise. The pieces of rock that lay scattered about had all been burnt, but some were in a state of scoria.”<sup>15</sup>

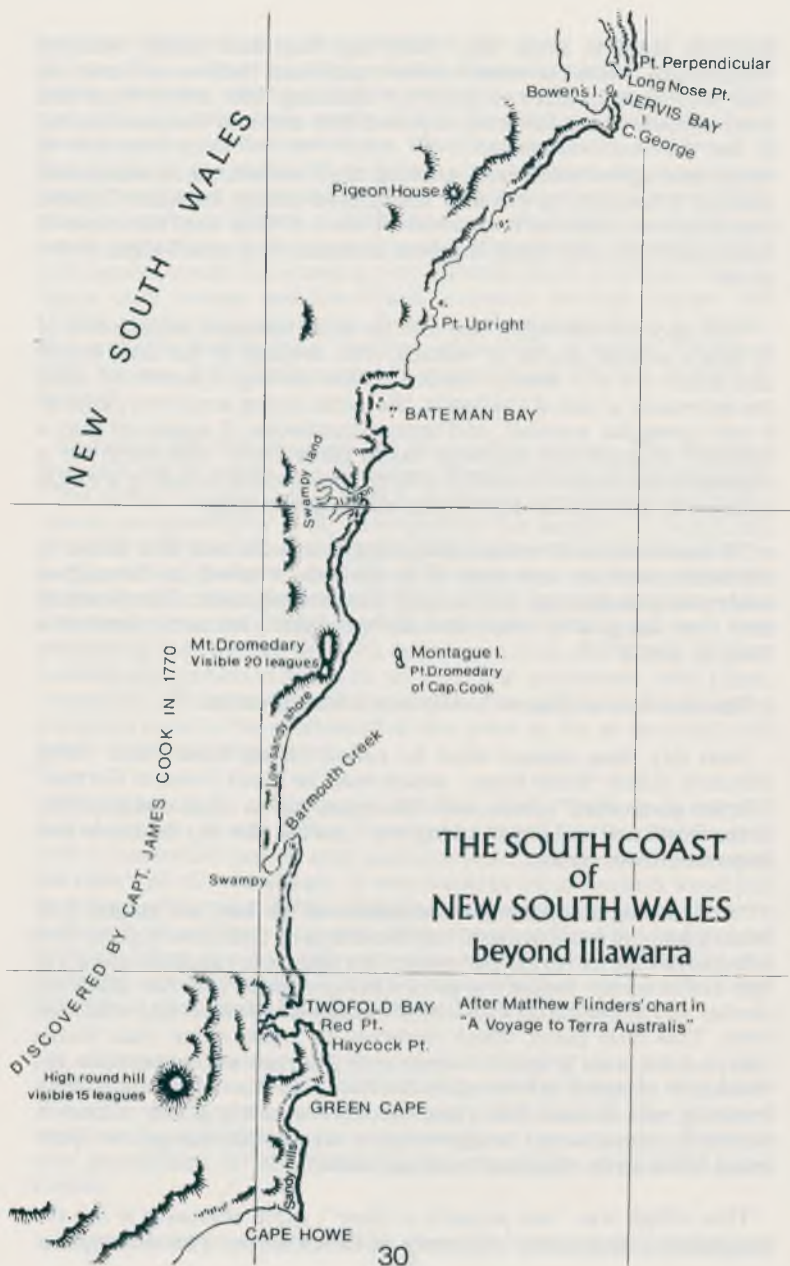
The blowhole at Kiama hardly needs identification.<sup>16</sup>

Next day Bass passed what he called “Long Nose Point” and Flinders called “Point Bass”, which must be Black Point at Gerroa.<sup>17</sup> “To the southward”, Bass said “the coast bights back considerably to the westward and forms a long bay”, and in this bay he made two important discoveries.

“At 5, seeing an opening in the bottom of the bay, we judged it to be an inlet, and ran down to it, but found it to be a shallow lagoon, with a bar breaking all across the mouth; we therefore rowed on along the bay for a rocky projecting point that promised fair for affording shelter and at 6 came up with it, and found a small river, into which we went. This little place, which deserves no better name than Shoals Haven, for it is not properly a river is very narrow at the entrance, the south side of which is formed by the rocky point, and the north by a breaking spit of sand that runs out from a sandy point; within it widens but the channel though deep, is very small, the greater part being filled up by shoals of mud and sand.”

This, which was “not properly a river”, quite obviously is not the Shoalhaven, and pretty obviously is Crookhaven. The description





fits, and the inlet to which the name of Shoals Haven is attached on Flinders's chart is clearly Crookhaven; and though for anything larger than a fishing boat Crookhaven may be indeed a crook haven, the Shoalhaven mouth is no sort of haven at all.

This is confirmed by what Bass found when he went for a walk ashore. "The country round it is in general low and swampy, and the soil for the most part is rich and good, but seemingly much subject to extensive inundations.

"There are, however, at 6 or 8 miles back from the head of the west branch, many thousands of acres of open ground which never can be overflowed, whose soil is a rich vegetable mould.

"During my examination of the country back of Shoals Haven I fell in with an arm of water that, on tracing down to the sea, I found to be the main stream of the barred lagoon that we had in vain attempted to enter. It runs about 9 or 10 miles westward until it strikes upon the mountains laying S.W., and then enters them with high rocky banks. The south bank of this arm is a slip of soil exactly resembling the banks of the Hawkesbury. At its back lie the extensive plains already spoken of.

"However capable the soil of this country might upon a more accurate investigation be found to be of agricultural improvement, the difficulty of shipping off the produce must ever remain a bar to its colonization. A nursery of cattle might perhaps be carried on here with advantage, and that sort of produce ships off itself."<sup>18</sup>

In later years, however, Alexander Berry confuted Bass by cutting a canal (still in existence, separating Comerong Island from the mainland) from Crookhaven to the Shoalhaven, which gave a reasonably safe entrance and enabled a thriving coasting trade to be carried on until the railway came to Bomaderry.

The whole length of the Illawarra coastline had now been examined, though, except for Bass's excursion inland, there is no record of anyone having been more than a few yards above high water mark. (And even Bass's excursion was not, strictly speaking, in Illawarra; he does not mention having been on the northern side of the Shoalhaven). Bass probably went some distance inland when he was hunting Dilba; but where we do not know.

From "Shoals Haven" Bass went on down the coast. He examined Jervis Bay in some detail, gave it only qualified approval, and had some hard things to say about Lieutenant Bowen's inaccuracies. He sighted on an island (probably Brush Island) a pole which, he thought, must have been erected by "some shipwrecked persons",

but the sea was too heavy to land. (On his way back he did so, and found the pole was only an exceptionally tall and straight tree-stump). He reported adversely on Bateman (sic) Bay, - it "falls far short of that respectable figure it makes in the charts"<sup>19</sup> and on "a branching lagoon" where "the form of the ground in general is either low and swampy or at once inclining to the mountains...The tops of some of the lower hills are well grassed, but the soil is too poor and sandy for cultivation."<sup>20</sup> He was moved to modified rapture by "one of the prettiest little harbours as to form that was ever seen. One would take it to have been intended as the model of some large deep harbour"; but even for small craft its usefulness was marred by the extreme shallowness of the bar; whence he gave it the name of Barmouth Creek.<sup>21</sup>

His most important discovery on the far South Coast was "a bay which seemed capable of affording security for shipping". (This too he left for more detailed examination on the way back, when he found that "the nautical advantage of this bay, notwithstanding the anchorage is but small, seem to be superior to any we have been in", but he was disappointed to find the land still sterile.)<sup>22</sup>

Rounding Cape Howe, Bass went on to discover Wilson's Promontory and "Western Port" before taking the whaleboat back to Sydney, where it was preserved as a historic relic - probably the first such preservation in Australia.<sup>23</sup> Meanwhile the Francis, which had already made a second voyage to the Furneaux Islands, made a third; this time Flinders was given a leave pass and allowed to go.<sup>24</sup>

Bass's observations of the tides and currents in the region of Wilson's Promontory and Westernport had substantiated practically beyond reasonable doubt the surmises of Cook, Vancouver and Hunter himself that a strait existed between New South Wales and Van Diemen's Land. To establish this beyond all question, Hunter gave Flinders the command of a little 25-ton sloop, the *Norfolk*, and directed him to pass through the strait, if it existed, and to circumnavigate Van Diemen's Land. Accompanied by Bass, Flinders did so, in the process discovering Port Dalrymple and the Tamar and making a careful examination of the Derwent. This voyage not only solved one of Australia's major geographical problems, but had the immediate practical result of providing a much shorter and safer route between the Cape and Sydney, while a few years later the reports on the Derwent and Tamar largely influenced the decision to colonise Van Diemen's Land.

So far Bass and Flinders had been not only bold and enterprising, but lucky. But after the Tasmanian voyage luck deserted them; they were dogged by ill-fortune throughout the comparatively few years that remained to them.



Bass, given long leave from the Navy because of ill-health, went on a trading - and perhaps smuggling - voyage in the **Venus** to the Spanish settlements in South America, Neither Bass nor the good ship **Venus** was ever heard of again - at any rate, not authentically.<sup>23a</sup>

Flinders, through the massive influence of Sir Joseph Banks, was given the chance to solve the last great problem in Australian marine geography - whether New South Wales and New Holland were one continent or two large islands. The Gulf of Carpentaria was very imperfectly known from old Dutch records; the south coast, from the head of the Bight to Westernport, totally unknown save for the veracious account of Captain Lemuel Gulliver, who in 1699, northwest of Van Diemen's Land in latitude 30 deg 2 min south, was cast upon the shores of Lilliput;<sup>25</sup> and the more prosaic but hardly more reliable account of an American skipper named Williamson, who had taken advantage of an unusually wet season to sail through from west of Van Diemen's Land to the Arafura Sea, neither grounding on the MacDonnell Ranges nor striking Ayers Rock.

The Admiralty provided "the best ship that was available"; but at that crisis of the naval war it was not surprising that the old **Xenophon**, rechristened **Investigator**, was no better than she should have been. Flinders's plans to smuggle his bride out to Sydney with him misfired. Someone from the Admiralty caught her in the captain's cabin with her bonnet off, which was apparently as damning as if he had caught her with everything off. So, under a cloud of official disapproval, Flinders sailed without her, not to see her again for nine years.

He circumnavigated Australia in his leaky and rotten old ship, proving beyond doubt that it was a single land mass. When the **Investigator** staggered back to Port Jackson, a naval board reported her "not worth repairing in any country, and it is impossible in this country to put her in a fit state for going to sea."

Flinders sailed for England as a passenger in the **Porpoise**, which ran on Wreck Reef off the Queensland coast. He sailed her cutter back to Sydney, got help, and started again for England in the 29-ton schooner **Cumberland**. With so small a craft he had to pick up food and water wherever possible, which ruled out the Horn, and also a direct course to the Cape of Good Hope. He sailed to Timor, and thence to Mauritius, then a French possession.

The last European news when he left Port Jackson had been of the Peace of Amiens; but war had broken out again, and unwittingly he sailed into an enemy port. The governor, Decaen, interned him, and held him for seven years. He had been run down and suffering from scorbutic ulcers when arrested, his health deteriorated in captivity,

and he returned to England a broken man, worn out and old at thirty-six. He devoted the four years left to him to completing his maps and charts and to his great work, "A Voyage to Terra Australis". The first copies were delivered the day before he died.

Whether or not he invented the name "Australia", it was his advocacy in this book, taken up and pressed by Macquarie, which led to its official adoption for the continent whose existence Flinders had proved.

Flinders's fame, said Dr. T. M. Perry "lies in his explorations, his skill as a navigator, his innovations in hydrographic cartography, his experiments on magnetism in ships...and, depicted in sepia-toned steel engravings on the margarine-and-mustard-coloured walls of countless primary-school rooms, his self-appointment as chief barber to the aborigines on the shores of Lake Illawarra". If I have, perhaps, concentrated too much on the last item, it is not only because this, and the other Illawarra explorations of Bass and Flinders, are of particular local interest, but also because the published biographies (except Scott's life of Flinders) treat them cursorily and none too accurately - too cursorily; for, though admittedly both Bass and Flinders went on to do bigger things, their work in Illawarra was not insignificant. They were the first to land here, and the first to draw attention to the district's potentialities. Nor, considering the small craft and the primitive equipment available, were the **Tom Thumb** and whaleboat voyages inferior as feats of courage and seamanship to any of their longer voyages. Bowden calls the **Tom Thumb** voyage "a great feat of navigation, skill and endurance;" on the whaleboat voyage one may quote the verdict of Flinders, making all allowances for the friendship which let him make for Bass the sort of claim he would never have made for himself: "A voyage expressly undertaken for discovery in an open boat, and in which six hundred miles of coast, mostly in a boisterous climate, was explored, has not, perhaps, its equal in the annals of maritime history."

There is room, perhaps, for a detail which, while totally irrelevant to Illawarra, may be of some interest for the light it sheds on Flinders as a man. Manning Clark saw him as "a clean-living, upright, almost priggish young man with a passion and a talent for discovery"; and that is indeed the impression one would get from the works published in his lifetime, which are stiff and formal in their style and, to a landsman, overloaded with nautical technicalities. "Authorship sits awkwardly upon me", he said. Bass was more enterprising - even in a journal intended for official perusal he could say that the entrance to Twofold Bay could be distinguished "by a red point on the south side of the peculiar bluish hue of a drunkard's nose." But some of Flinders's writings which have since come to light - his Journal of the **Tom Thumb** cruise, for instance - show he was human; and none

more so than a little - known essay he wrote during his captivity. "A Biographical Tribute to the Memory of Trim," the black tomcat who was born at sea in the **Reliance**, transferred with Flinders to the **Investigator**, and sailed with him in the ill-fated **Cumberland**. Anyone who has had his house, if not his ship, taken over by a cat will recognize the portrait.

The human figures in Flinder's more formal writings may seldom, if ever, come to life; but Trim does, and so do some of those humans whose paths he crossed. The "Biographical Tribute", says Dr. Perry, who was responsible for its publication in **Overland** last year, "is of interest for two reasons: for the light it throws on early nineteenth century shipboard life, and especially for its revelation of its author. It shows the same keen observation of cats and men that is seen in the careful description of places in the Voyage of Terra Australis; his sense of fun and boyish humour, and above all the warmth of his affection, not only for Trim, but for men, that is to be seen in his treatment of his crew...and the closeness of his friendships with former shipmates...It is sure proof that, while Deacaen and Mauritius held the body, the mind and the spirit were unconfined."

# Appendix I

## THE TRACKS OF THE "TOM THUMB"

Flinders's MS Journal concludes with the following table of distances:

"From the entrance of Port Jackson to Point Solander -	11 miles.
"Thence to entrance of Port Hacking -	7 ½
to Watta Mowlee -	3
to Double Cove	5 ¾
to Barn Cove -	7
to where the boat was thrown ashore -	4
to Saddle Point -	5 ¾
"True bearing of the coast line is about SSW -	44 40.6 lat.
Latitude of Port Jackson	33.49.5
of Saddle Pt.	34.30.1
From Saddle Pt. to Canoe River is about S.W. 4' 2.8	
Latitude of Canoe River	34.33

"Now the latitude of Hat Hill made in the ship was 34 28' and it bears from Saddle Point west-north-west about some five miles, which shews the above calculation to be near the truth."

The precise distances given should make it easy to identify the various places mentioned; but they cannot be reconciled with modern maps. Measuring from one known place to another (ignoring for the moment the unascertained Double Cove, Barn Cove and "where the boat was thrown ashore"), one finds not only discrepancies, sometimes relatively very large, in individual distances, but too small a total, even assuming that Flinders was reckoning in nautical miles. +

Flinders being "one of the great cartographers and discoverers of the world" (Aust. Encyc.), this may at first seem surprising. But this was almost his first venture; and he had on this expedition "no other means of ascertaining the situations of places than by pocket-compass bearings and computed distances" (Voyage to Terra Australis p. ciii).

Mr. C. W. Gardiner-Garden and I, after various unsuccessful attempts to reconcile Flinders's distances with the Admiralty chart, found that the chart distance from Sydney Heads to Red Point (Saddle Point) was just 44 nautical miles in a straight line; and that marking the stated distances along this line, and drawing lines at right angles to it to intersect the coast, gave reasonable approximations to "Point Solander" (Cape Solander) and "Watta Mowlee" (Wattamolla),

+ Geographical, geometrical, maritime, nautical miles: One minute of a great circle of the earth. The British Admiralty fixes it at 6080 feet. (Shorter Oxford English Dictionary, s.v. "mile").



though Port Hacking remained several miles out. Marking the unascertained places in the same way, and applying the same process to the Grimes & Flinders map (on which the scale is in "geographical miles" +), gave the following results (confirming, if any confirmation were needed, that the northbound and southbound tracks on the map are those of the Tom Thumb):

Distance from Port Jackson (nautical mls.)	Places named by Flinders	Place where coast intersected	
		(1) on Admiralty Chart	(2) on G. & F. Map
11	Point Solander	Between Inscription Pt. and Cape Solander	Slightly south of Botany Bay entrance
18 ½	Port Hacking entrance	About 2½m. south of entrance, and about ¼m. north of Marley Beach.	Port Hacking entrance
21 ½	Watta Mowlee	About 1m. south of Wattamolla	Providential Cove
27 ¼	Double Cove	½ mile north of "Stanfield B." (Stanwell Park)	About 1 mile south of point marked "Coals discovered"
34 ¼	Barn Cove	About 1m. north of Sandon Point (i.e. towards north end of Thirroul Bch.)	Where south- bound track first comes close to coast
38 ¼	"Where boat was thrown ashore"	Towradgi Point	Reef, with track running inshore on its southern side
44	Saddle Point	Red Point	"Sandy Point"
<b>Distance from Saddle Point</b>		Entrance Lake Illawarra	
4 miles S.W.	Canoe River		Canoe River

+ See last footnote

5 mls W.N.W.	Hat Hill	About 1.4m. E.S.E. of Mount Kembla (Summit of Mount Kembla is almost exactly W.N.W. & distant 6.4 nautical miles from Red Point)	Hat Hill
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(The latitudes and longitudes given in "Voyage to Terra Australis" are of little or no help, except for Red Point and Canoe River, the other Illawarra references being to places not recognisably referred to in the MS. Journal.)

By map scale **Barn Cove** is between one and two miles north of the northernmost and farthest-projecting of several reefs or groups of rocks marked on this part of the coast. This appears to represent Bellambi Point. If so, Barn Cove is in the region of Bulli. Of the beaches thereabouts, Bulli Beach and the next beach southward (between Waniora Point and Collins Rock) are "bendings in the coast" which, though they "scarcely deserve the name of a cove", might pass as such. The natural shape of the latter's southern head has been obliterated by bulldozing. From Sandon Point, Waniora Point might be thought to look somewhat like the roof of a barn. The resemblance is not striking, but might be more apparent from a small boat at sea.

In the third paragraph of the text Flinders distinguishes between "coast" and "shore". The former appears to mean the land generally, and the description "high and stony but regular" to apply to its dominant feature, the Illawarra Range, which on the map is drawn parallel and close to the shoreline to a projection rather over two miles further south than Barn Cove; after which it makes an exaggerated bend inland. The projection seems to be Broker's Nose, which is in fact roughly two nautical miles further south than Bulli Beach.

Barn Cove, I think, is almost certainly either Bulli Beach or the next beach southward, with a slight balance of probability in favour of the former.

The place, "where the boat was thrown ashore" was identified by the late Mr. T. D. Mutch as about the mouth of the Towradgi Lagoon. But Mr. Mutch probably made this suggestion, as Mr. Gardiner-Garden adopted it in the first edition of his Observations, without having had the advantage of reading the MS. Journal. It is submitted, with respect, that, while the boat was thrown ashore at Towradgi, it was south rather than north of Towradgi Point. If the northernmost reef marked is Bellambi Point, the next but one southward should be Towradgi Point. The Tom Thumb went in on the lee side (i.e. the wind being N.N.E. the southern side) of the reef; and the map shows the track running in just south of the third reef.

**Saddle Point** is Red Point. This self-evident from the description of point and islands; Flinders in the text tentatively identifies an island with Captain Cook's Red Point, and in the Flinders Chart actually used the name.

**Hat Hill** must then be Mount Kembla. The bearing from Red Point (W.N.W.) rules out Mount Keira.

**Canoe River** and **Tom Thumb's Lagoon** can only be the entrance to Lake Illawarra and Lake Illawarra itself. Neither distance nor bearing from Red Point is consistent with either Coomaditchy or Little Lake, and the map clearly indicates a far larger body of water than either.

In "A Voyage to Terra Australis" Flinders gives latitudes and longitudes for Red Point (34 degrees 29.5 mins. S. 151 degrees 1 min. E.) and the entrance to Tom Thumb's Lagoon (34 degrees 33.0 mins S. 150 degrees 56.7 mins E.) in each case by the Admiralty chart the latitude is almost precisely correct, the longitude slightly overstated. There is still no other conclusion possible than that Tom Thumb's Lagoon is Lake Illawarra, and its entrance was in its present position, probably always determined by Windang Island's breaking the force of the waves. The channel is so drawn on the map as to suggest that it left the lake further north and west than at present. The dunes and sand banks may well have shifted; but obviously Flinders was in no position to observe the channel very precisely.

It is odd that he does not mention Windang Island, which contrasts so sharply with the miles of sand to north and south. Nevertheless, the hammer-headed peninsula shown on the G. & F. map just south of "Canoe River" may represent Windang Island, joined (as it sometimes is) to the mainland by a sandbank.

The map shows the northbank track coming in almost at right angles to the coast a little south of Bellambi Point. This must be where they rowed in about noon on March 28. An hour or so later they found the spot where they camped that afternoon and night. Between the point and the old colliery jetty site is a small beach (which fishing boats still find a friendly little spot) fronted with rocks, with a channel through them distinguished by navigation markers. Nothing could fit Flinders's description better, but for his footnote, which points to Coal Cliff. (Coal seams are visible as far south as Austinmer, but the headlands there could not be called high.) But the Tom Thumb could hardly have sailed with a beam wind, and been pulled against a head wind, from Flinders Islet to Coal Cliff in a morning; and it could not possibly have been rowed against the wind from south of Bellambi Point to Coal Cliff in an hour. In any case, the camping place was south of Barn Cove (see entry for 29 March).

The solution may be that, when Flinders came to write his footnote (well over a year after the voyage, and not having himself taken part in the investigation of the Coal Cliffs), lapse of memory, misunderstanding of what Bass told him, or both, led him to confuse

the camping-place of 28 March with the anchorage of the following afternoon. The latter may have been one of the partly-sheltered channels between the rock shelves projecting from the base of the great promontory between Coal Cliff and Clifton.

Measurement on the G. & F. map places Double Cove south of "Coals discovered", measurement on the Admiralty chart places it north of Stanwell Park, and the text, which here seems to depart from chronological sequence, is inconclusive. Stanwell Park Beach, backed by two lagoons with a small headland between them, would from a small boat a little way out appear as a double cove, and seems to answer the description better than anywhere else thereabouts.

For the more important of these identifications I do not claim any particular originality. Others have worked on this voyage before, especially Mr. J. S. G. Worland, Mr. Gardiner-Garden and other members of the Illawarra Historical Society who in its early years devoted much attention to these questions. In the main these findings merely confirm and elaborate theirs. They had far less to work on, and the extent to which each piece of additional evidence as it has come to light has confirmed their deductions is a tribute to the soundness of their work.

(The above Appendix, previously published in "Earliest Illawarra" (Illawarra Historical Society, 1966) is reprinted here for the sake of completeness).



## Appendix II

Extract from a letter dated 14 August 1797 from Rev. Thomas Fyshe Palmer to "one of his friends in Scotland"<sup>26</sup>

Of this wonderful country we have little or no knowledge, except a small portion of the sea coast of a corner of it. With two armed ships and a schooner, on purpose for the use of the colony, no discovery has been attempted. Such things are never thought of; and if a private adventurer undertakes them; he is discouraged. Chance however has done something. The Sydney-cove, a large ship from Bengal to this place, was wrecked on this coast in lat. 41.47. The mate and others left the wreck in the long boat unfortunately in the tempestuous winter season, and this was again wrecked on the coast. But the super-cargo and two others, after innumerable hardships, arrived safe. By this means we learn, that where the Sydney-cove was wrecked, there is an archipelago of islands, with a strong tide and current from east to west, and vice versa, from which a rational conjecture may be formed that there is a passage quite through the island. Should this conjecture be true, and this passage should be navigable, the passage to India would be very considerably shortened. The country is described as totally different from this, very rich and fertile, abounding in pines and firs, of which there is no one here. In all the intercourse of whites with the uncorrupted natives of this country, they have found them, most kind humane and generous. Where the mate and supercargo were wrecked, no civilized Europeans could exceed them in kindness. They supplied them in abundance, and successive parties of fresh natives, equally kind, shewed them the way. The mate, represented to be an amiable man, walked till he could walk no longer. Unfortunately, the carpenter staid to keep him company, and the rest proceeded and arrived safe. The carpenter, churlish and avaricious, and without sense or foresight, seized their fish, would give them nothing in return, and offended them so much, that the first mate, whom they were fond of, fell a victim of his folly, and they both perished. My most worthy friend Mr. Bass, surgeon of the Reliance, went out on purpose to find these two. He found only their bones. He was accompanied by the most scientific people in the language, though by none more than himself; and the natives of his acquaintance told him the above. He returned only yesterday. He confirms the above account of the country. He says there are several species of trees not found here. But, what is more important, he has discovered a seam of coal, seven miles long, great part of which, by the inequality of the ground, is above ground. He has brought home three bags, it burns capitally, some of which the governor sends by this ship (the Britannia, Capt. Dennet) to Sir Joseph Banks. The coal is not distant twenty yards from the sea, and about 45 miles distant, by sea, from hence.



Encounter between the SYDNEY COVE survivors and aborigines.  
(from an engraving by John Buckland Wright in MATTHEW  
FLINDERS' NARRATIVE OF HIS VOYAGE IN THE SCHOONER  
"FRANCIS")

## NOTES AND REFERENCES

The following abbreviations have been used in references:

Journal: Matthew Flinders, MS. journal of voyage in the **Tom Thumb**, March-April 1796. This journal, the property of Miss Ann Flinders Petrie, is in the National Maritime Museum, Greenwich. The portion dealing with the exploration of the Illawarra coast is reprinted in "Earliest Illawarra" (Illawarra Historical Society, 1966).

V.T.A.: Flinders, "A Voyage to Terra Australis"; London, 1814; facsimile edition published by Libraries Board of South Australia, 1966.

Narrative: Geottrey Rawson (ed.) "Matthew Flinders' Narrative of his Voyage in the Schooner **Francis**", etc.; Golden Cockerel Press, 1946.

Collins: David Collins, "An Account of the English Colony in New South Wales"; London, 1802; facsimile edition published by Libraries Board of South Australia, 1971.

Bowden: Keith Macrae Bowden, "George Bass, 1771-1803"; Oxford University Press, 1952.

Garden, Observations: C.W. Gardiner-Garden, "Observations on some of the Historical Aspects of the Prominent Geographical Features of Illawarra" (1959; second edition 1965. References are to second edition).

Scott: Ernest Scott. "The Life of Captain Matthew Flinders, R.N."; Angus & Robertson, Sydney, 1914.

H.R.N.S.W.III: Historical Records of New South Wales, Volume III; N.S.W. Government Printer, Sydney, 1895.

<sup>1</sup> Lawrence Hargrave, the famous aviation pioneer, propounded, in addresses to the Royal Society of N.S.W. and in his pamphlet "Lope de Vega", a theory that Spaniards from Peru had discovered the east coast of Australia about 1595, had entered Sydney Harbour, and had won gold from the Shoalhaven.

<sup>2</sup> This is the distance given by Flinders in V.T.A. p. xcvi. If, however, they had reached a point above the big northward loop of George's River, and had found the river flowing from the south, it seems strange that Bass should later have assumed that the headwaters of George's River and its tributaries drained into Port Hacking (see p. 23).

It is stranger still that the revised version of the "Topographical Plan of the Settlements of New South Wales" by Grimes and Flinders, which purports to incorporate additions to 1815, and includes the names of Appin, Airds and Minto, shows a river east of Appin, in the position of upper George's River, but continuing as a dotted line on a conjectural course to Port Hacking and having no connection with the George's River shown as running into Botany Bay. The middle section of George's River could hardly have remained unknown as late as 1815.

<sup>3</sup> Bowden, Appendix, pp. 153-157.

<sup>4</sup> Quotations in the account of this voyage are, unless otherwise indicated, from the Journal. The grounds for the identification of Barn Cove and other places mentioned in the account of this voyage are set out at length in "Earliest Illawarra" p.p.59-62, reprinted as Appendix 1 ante, based on and substantially adopting the conclusions of Garden, Observations, pp 6 - 10 and 16 -18. All later writers must acknowledge their debt to Mr. Gardiner-Garden for his thorough research on and careful study of the geographical problems of this voyage.

<sup>5</sup> Flinders does not explain why the idea of clipping the blacks' hair and beards should ever have occurred to him; possibly Clark in his account of the march of the survivors of the *Sydney Cove*. (see p.20) provides a clue, though he is speaking of tribes further south: "The natives of this part of the coast appear strong and muscular... Their hair long and straight, but they are wholly inattentive to it, either as to cleanliness or in any other respect. It serves them in lieu of a towel to wipe their hands as often as they are daubed with blubber or shark oil, which is their principal article of food. This frequent application of rancid grease to their heads and bodies renders their approach exceedingly offensive". (H.R.N.S.W. III p. 762).

<sup>6</sup> While the *Tom Thumb* was waiting just inside the bar, three or four blacks, including Dilba, "kept hovering on the point to the southward of us", but it was not until sunset that "five or six natives were coming towards us from the other side". (ante, p. 14).

<sup>7</sup> Although Martin is still commemorated, the name of Martin's Islet has now been given to the outermost southern island, and the outer and inner northern islands are Bass and Flinders Islets respectively.

<sup>8</sup> The locality is now Wattamolla. The name of Providential Cove for the inlet, after falling into disuse, was officially restored by the Lands Department in the 1930's, soon after the naming of Boy Martin Point (the south point of the inlet) and Bass Heights and Flinders Heights to the westward. (Dowd and Havard, "Historic Watta-



<sup>9</sup>Hunter to Banks, 15 August 1797 (in **Banks Papers**, Mitchell Library) Palmer to "one of his friends in Scotland", 14 August 1797 (see Appendix); Collins Vol 1. pp 36-37; Flinders, V.T.A. pp civ-cv; Flinders, Narrative.

<sup>10</sup>Flinders, V.T.A., Introduction p. civ: Bass says that Paterson would find the location of the coal seems "in pursuing the track home of our little boat" (italics mine) Hunter says (ante p. 20) that the survivors parted company with the mate and the carpenter the day before their rescue at Wattamolla, but that the coal had been found "a few night before". Collins says that the mate and the carpenter "from excessive fatigue, had been unable to proceed any further, and had stopped the day before their companions in this miserable voyage had been taken up by the fishing boat" (Vol 2 p. 36); but according to him Clark mentioned that "two days before he had been met by the people in the fishing boat, he had fallen in with a great quantity of coal, with which he and his companions made a large fire, and had slept by it during the night" (p. 45).

Collins further says Bass "proceeded about seven leagues to the southward of Point Solander, where he found, in the face of a steep cliff, washed by the sea a stratum of coal, in breadth about six feet, and extending eight or nine miles to the southward. Upon the summit of the high land, and lying on the surface, he observed many patches of coal". If "seven leagues to the southward of Point Solander" is reckoned in statute miles, it gives a position between Stanwell Park and Coal Cliff Beach; if in nautical miles, a position between Scarborough and Wombarra.

<sup>11</sup>Bass to Paterson, 20 August 1797 (H.R.N.S.W. III p. 289) The "sketch" referred to has apparently been lost.

<sup>12</sup> See contemporary maps reproduced as illustrations, and notes to Macquarie "Journal of his Tours" (Public Library of N.S.W. 1956) at p. 260.

<sup>13</sup> Collins Vol. 2 p. 30. See also note 2 above. For the conflicting authorities on the name of Hacking or Port Hacking River, see Illawarra Historical Society Bulletin, June 1971.

<sup>14</sup>Bass's own journal says "Sunday December 3rd". It appears, however, that the journal is dated according to "ship's time". This method of dating was also used by Captain Cook in his journal of the voyage of the *Endeavour*. It is thus explained by Dr. J.C. Beaglehole in his edition of Cook's journals: "The dating of the Journal is according to 'ship's time', by which the twenty-four hour day begins twelve hours before the day of civil time, and runs from noon to noon. Cood's p.m. therefore precedes his a.m. and his a.m. alone is

identical with civil a.m. Thus his Friday, May 27 (with which the Journal opens) corresponds with civil Thursday, May 26 p.m. and civil Friday, May 27 a.m., his Saturday begins on civil Friday afternoon; and so on". (The Journals of Captain James Cook (Cambridge University Press 1955) Vol I. p. cclxxxvi). Bass's "Sunday December 3rd" therefore began at 12 noon on Saturday 2 December civil time, and so on. The dates given in his journal have in this account been adjusted so as to show the date by civil time.

<sup>15</sup> Quotations in the account of this voyage are from Bass's journal, reprinted in H.R.N.S.W. Vol 3 p. 312 et seq.

<sup>16</sup> Or so one would have thought; but by an inexplicable aberration the editor of H.R.N.S.W. said in a footnote that the bight was "evidently the bight of which Point Bass forms the southern extremity". If he was referring to Flinders's Point Bass (*infra*) there is no such bight; if he is referring to the modern Bass Point, between Shellharbour and the Minnamurra mouth, there is at least one small blowhole thereabouts (but on the south side of the peninsula); but it does not remotely approach the size of the hole described by Bass. Moreover, Bass goes on to say, "The easternmost part of the Blue Mountains comesto the sea here". One can understand that he might have thought so however misguidedly, at Kiama, where the spurs of Saddleback close in to the ocean; but never at Shellharbour. (The editor of H.R.N.S.W. piled aberration on aberration by another footnote to the effect that "this range of mountains...is now known as the Illawarra Range, and runs in a N.E. direction from Kangaloon to the coast-line near Coal Cliff" - over twenty miles as the crow flies from Shellharbour.)

<sup>17</sup> Bass, Journal (H.R.N.S.W. III p. 314); Flinders V.T.A. p. cvi; et Flinders's chart. The modern Bass Point is several miles further north (see note 16 above)

<sup>18</sup> Bass, Journal (H.R.N.S.W. III pp. 314-315). In "Shipping on the Shoalhaven", an article by Mr. W.S. Frost in the *Shoalhaven Chronograph*, May 1974, it was stated that Bass dragged the whaleboat across the narrow strip of land about where the canal is to-day, and rowed up to where the gorge begins. From correspondence with Mr. Frost and with the editor of the *Chronograph*, it appears that there is a local tradition to this effect, said to be derived from Alexander Berry, who probably had his information from James Meehan. As he first visited Sydney in 1808, Berry could have had no direct contact with Bass in Australia.

Meehan, is quite likely to have obtained information from Bass. He arrived in Sydney in February 1800, and two months later was assigned to Surveyor-General Grimes whom he accompanied on exploring trips between 1801 and 1803. Bass was intermittently in Sydney between August 1801 and February 1803. His friendship with

Palmer shows that he was not an "exclusive", and that he would have had no objection to associating with an educated convict who shared his tastes and interests. It seems quite probable, therefore, that Bass discussed his explorations with Meehan, and that Meehan passed on the information he had received from Bass, and the results of his own examination of the area with Lieut. Kent in 1805, to Berry.

However, Meehan's Field Book (F.B. 38 in N.S.W. State Archives) does not support the theory that either Bass or Meehan dragged a boat along the line of the canal. As pointed out by Mr. A.K. Weatherburn ("Exploration of the the Jervis Bay, Shoalhaven and Illawarra Districts, 1797-1812"; R.A.H.S. *Journal*, Vol 46 at pp 86-87) the entries in the Field Book, though somewhat obscure, suggest that Kent and Meehan's party made the passage from Crookhaven to the Shoalhaven by sea; while the vague and inaccurate delineation of the north-west arm of Crookhaven on Meehan's plan (N.L.D. S120, Mitchell Library) suggests that it was "not inspected at close quarters".

If Meehan had learned from Bass that there was a safe and comparatively easy "inside" route for a small boat from Crookhaven to the Shoalhaven, he and Kent might have been expected to use it. On the information now available, therefore, the balance of probability seems to be against the tradition.

<sup>19</sup>H.R.N.S.W. III p. 317. Bowden (p. 60) does not query the correctness of Bass's identification of Bateman's Bay. R.H. Cambage in "Captain Cook's Pigeon House and Early South Coast Exploration" (Sydney, S.E. Lees, 1916) contends (pp 6-7) that Bass "did not visit Bateman Bay at all, but by some means confused it with an inlet some six or seven miles to the northward known as Durras." Cambage's arguments are not without plausibility, and his view has been accepted by W.A. Bayley in "Behind Broulee". I do not know the district well enough to express an opinion.

<sup>20</sup>H.R.N.S.W. III p. 317. A marginal note identifies the "branching lagoon" as Tuross Lake. Bowden concurs.

<sup>21</sup>H.R.N.S.W. III p. 318. Bowden (p. 60) identifies "Barmouth Creek" as "probably the mouth of Bega River".

<sup>22</sup>H.R.N.S.W. III pp 319,329-330; Bowden p. 60. It seems clear that the bay was Twofold Bay.

<sup>23</sup>The preservation, however, was not such as would meet the approval of the National Trust. Peron, Baudin's zoologist on the *Geographe*, in describing the French expedition's visit to Sydney in 1802 wrote, "Consecrated, as I may say, by this grand discovery, this bold navigation, Mr. Bass's boat is preserved in this port with a kind of religious respect. Snuff-boxes made of its keel are relics, of which the possessors are as proud as they are careful, and the Governor himself imagined he could not make a more respectful present to our

chief than a piece of wood from the boat, set in a large silver etui, round which were engraven the particulars of the discovery of Bass's Strait." (*Voyage de Decouverte aux Terres Australes*; Paris, 1824; translation from G.A. Wood, "The Discovery of Australia," (Macmillan of Australia, 1969, p. 346). Whether because of too many such gifts, later official indifference, or merely the ravages of time, the boat seems to have disappeared.

<sup>23a</sup> There were persistent rumours that the *Venus* had been captured by the Spaniards and her crew sent to the silver mines. This was not inherently improbable. The Spanish Government enforced, as strictly as distance and its own inefficiency allowed, a rigid monopoly of trade with its colonies. As well as possible plans for smuggling in goods, Bass had a plan for smuggling out alpacas, whose export was prohibited. (In later years, incidentally, someone contrived to smuggle alpacas out of Peru to New South Wales, and some of them came down Bong Bong Pass to Henry Hill Osborne's property at Avondale near Dapto). So Bass's enterprise was at any time doubly hazardous, but, had he known it, at that particular time triply hazardous, for Spain was France's ally in the war which broke out again soon after Bass sailed from Sydney in February 1803.

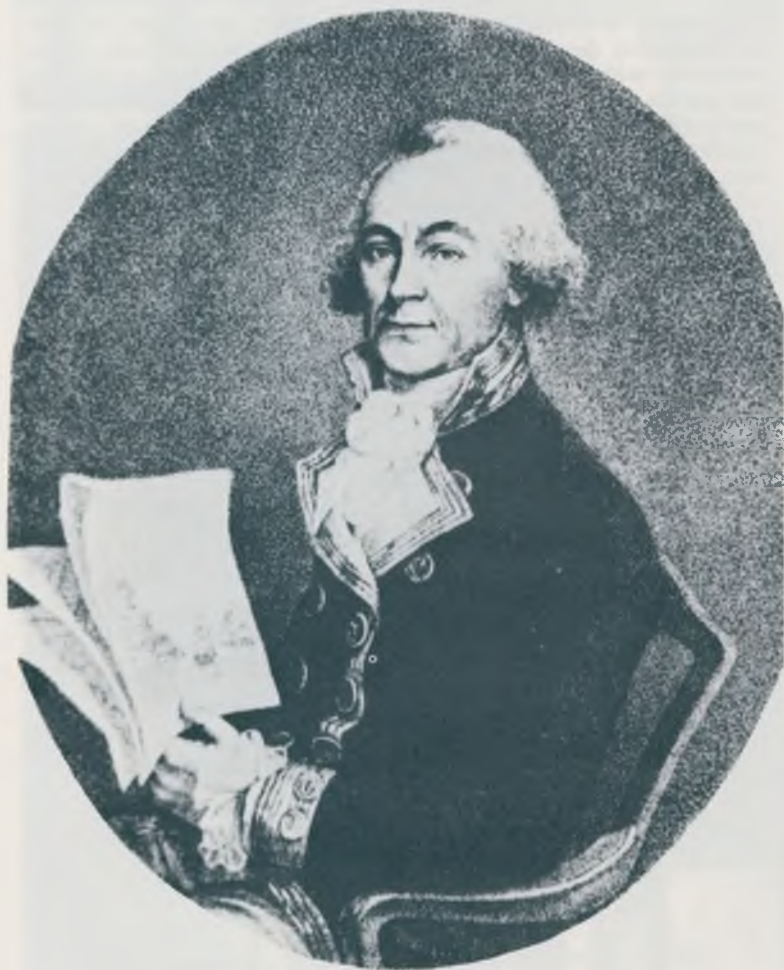
But in 1808 Spain changed sides, or had a change of sides forced upon her by Napoleon. (Students of the career of Horatio Hornblower will recall that it was because of this Spanish volte-face that Hornblower, having captured the *Natividad* from the Spaniards and turned her over to El Supremo, had to attempt to recapture her; and that among the British prisoners and internees released by the Spaniards was Lady Barbara Wellesley). None of the British prisoners released had been on the *Venus*. Some had heard of an English doctor who was a prisoner in the mines, but none were found who had actually met him. None could give any first-hand or other reliable information of any of the *Venus's* crew; and it seems now to be generally accepted that she was lost with all hands somewhere in the Pacific.

The problem of Bass's fate is discussed at length in Bowden, pp. 129-141.

<sup>24</sup> Following Scott, p. 124, I stated in a note in "Earliest Illawarra" p. 19 that Flinders went on the first voyage of the *Francis* to the Furneaux Islands; but it now seems clear that he went, not on the first, but on the third voyage.

Though Flinders himself in his Narrative says, "In the beginning of February 1798 the schooner went a second time", Collins mentions three voyages, in May-July 1797 (Vol. II pp 35-37, 43), in December 1797-January 1798, (pp 72,80), and in February 1798 (pp. 85, 94). Referring to the third voyage, he says, "In the *Francis*, which was at that time (towards the end of February 1798) on her passage to the island where the *Sydney-cove* was wrecked, the governor had sent Lieutenant Flinders of the *Reliance*, a young gentleman well





**CAPTAIN JOHN HUNTER, R.N.**

(from an engraving in his Historical Journal of the transactions at Port Jackson and Norfolk Island, 1793)

qualified for the purpose, who was instructed to make what observations he was able relative to the anchorage and situation of those islands”.

<sup>25</sup>Gulliver's Travels, Part I Ch. I. Swift, a master of the corroborative detail which lends an air of verisimilitude to an otherwise bald and unconvincing narrative, gave an exact latitude, but **not** an exact longitude, which could not, with the navigational equipment available in his day, have been ascertained in the conditions Gulliver describes. However, it would appear that Lilliput was somewhere in South Australia - a location of which good use was made by James McAuley in his satirical poem, “The True Discovery of Australia”.

<sup>26</sup>The “friend in Scotland” is believed to have been the Rev. John Disney. The letter was published in London in 1798 as a broadsheet (Ferguson, **Bibliography of Australia**, Vol I, item 277). This is now extremely rare, the copy in the National Library, Canberra, being the only one known to exist in Australia.



A contemporary impression of the Rev. Thomas Fyshe Palmer in prison (Reproduced by permission of the Mitchell Library).

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