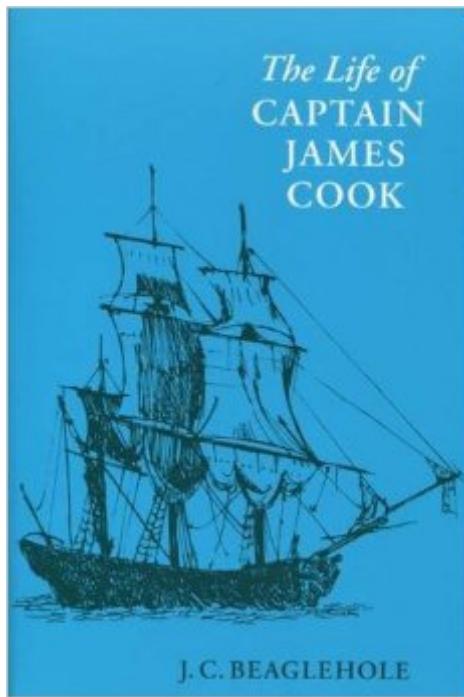


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The Life Of Captain James Cook



Synopsis

Captain Cook is the greatest explorer-seaman of all time, yet the world has had to wait almost two centuries for the first full-scale biography to do justice to the man and his achievements. Professor J.C. Beaglehole, the leading authority on Pacific exploration, devoted himself for many years to the editing of Cook's copious Journals, a monument of scholarship in four massive volumes, and the Journal of Joseph Banks who accompanied Cook in the Endeavor. The Journals completed, Beaglehole turned to writing as the crown of his life's work this biography of Cook, which was completed but for a final checking when he died. This is not merely a chronological account of events in Cook's life but a deeply revealing study of the growth of a complex character, stubborn and passionate yet patient and judicious, seen in his actions as an unrivalled navigator and explorer and as a commander of men. Those who influenced Cook from childhood up, and those who sailed with him on his voyages, are as clearly and surely drawn as the man himself. The author's first-hand knowledge of the Pacific Islands and the coasts of New Zealand and Australia give a warmth and actuality to the narrative, while his impeccable scholarship and skill in handling the mass of documentary material, his wit, and his elegant literary style, confirm the expectation that this is one of the great historical biographies.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This is a tome which occasionally tells you just a little more than you really want to know about the three great voyages to the Pacific, but anyone seriously interested in the western penetration into

the Pacific will want to read this book. It is also an articulate and formidable defense of Cook's character, seamanship, and wisdom. While Cook is not quite so venerable now in a time of great sensitivity to the degradations western invasion inflicted on indigenous people, this book presents us with an undoubtedly great man interested not in conquest but in geography, exploration, discovery, science, anthropology and peaceful relations between cultures. The aftermath was a tragedy, (see Alan Moorehead's *The Fatal Impact*) but Cook was simply too high-minded and short-sighted to foresee what would come after. Cook was for better and worse a man of his time--and it was an age of enlightenment--an exemplar of the period of science, exploration and adventure. He was of course a cold fish and hard to cosy to, but there is much to admire in this brilliant portrait of the man and his age.

The Life of Captain James Cook by Beaglehole is the book that I have been searching for a long time. For some reason, one of the greatest explorers and navigators in history never had a comprehensive biography written on. In a very short series of partial accounts, Beaglehole's book stands out as the most comprehensive biography ever written about Cook. It is apparent that Beaglehole spent several years in researching, and the result is admirable in its depth and capacity. Although the book is sometimes hard to read, because of the many details, it is still worth going through. Many unknown facts about Cook are being revealed, which throw a whole new perspective about his life. The author also did a good job in recreating the atmosphere of the life on an exploration ship, and putting Cook's explorations in the historical context. For lighter reading, I guess that Richard Hough's book is easier to read, but if you want the whole story, this is the book to read.

There is no doubt that this is the definitive biography of the renowned Captain Cook. For no other reason, persons with an interest in the greatest navigator of all time should read this work. While few details of his life outside of his three major expeditions have been retained, this book brings to life the Captain that sailed the world on his three voyages, including his personality, his foibles, his leadership, and his intellect. He was indeed a man with many admirable qualities. So why only three stars? While the book is well researched and well organized, it is not well written. Far too often, a jumble of words is presented as a substitute for a sentence. If Beaglehole could write clearly, this would certainly be a 5 star work. On the other hand, sadly enough, a clear writing style has not always been the hallmark of a professional historian.

New Zealand historian J. C. Beaglehole was perhaps the 20th century's foremost authority on European exploration in the Pacific. The main results of his long and distinguished career were "Exploration of the Pacific" and "Life of Captain James Cook". In preparation for writing the Life, he produced the definitive modern editions of the Journals of Captain Cook (4 volumes) and the Endeavour Journals of Joseph Banks (2 volumes). An understanding of Cook and the voyages must begin with Beaglehole.

I base my three star review from the point of view of a reader not a historian. I chose this book because I enjoyed "Farther Than Any Man" by Martin Dugard. "The Life of Captain James Cook" has so much minutiae, that, for me, it lost all thrill and my interest. If Beaglehole had the ability of Stephan Ambrose to condense Lewis and Clark's journals, which I tried to read, into "Undaunted Courage", which I have read twice, this would probably be a wonderful read.

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