

[ ROOM 2 ]

Large  
print  
captions

we saw  
them  
coming

eight days IN  
**Katmai**

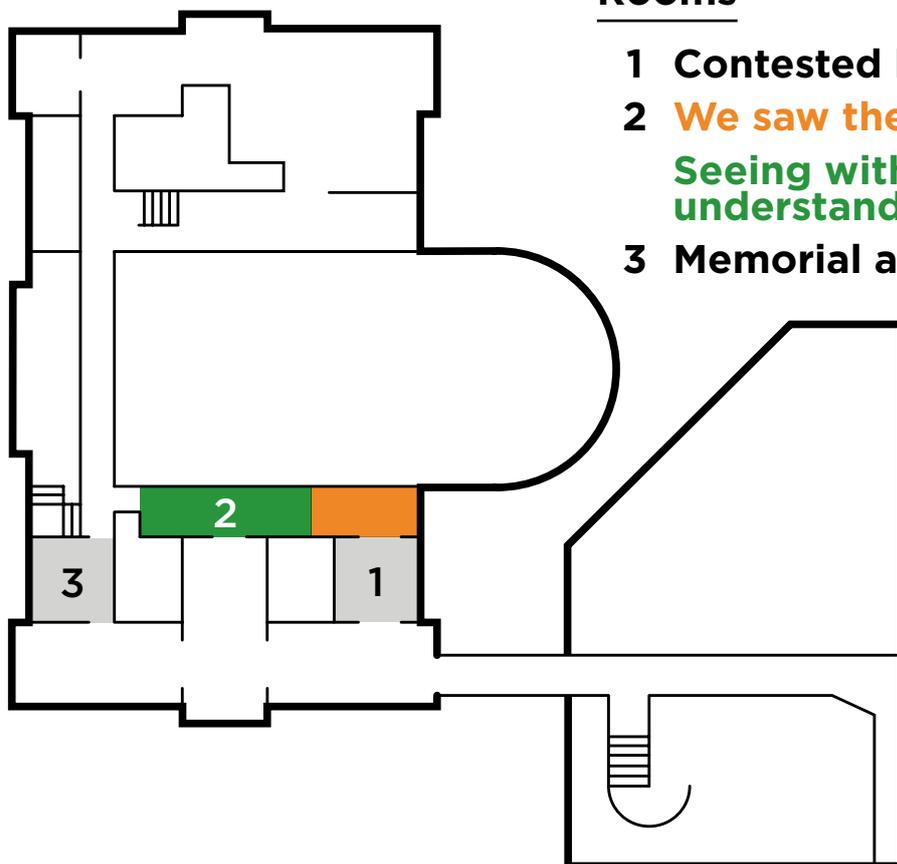
# Sensitivity notice

This exhibition explores the topic of first contact and features the names, images and voices of people who are now deceased. It refers to historical events and violence that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander visitors may find distressing, and includes historical documents that contain words and descriptions which are now considered offensive.

The State Library of NSW respectfully acknowledges the trauma of this history and its ongoing impact on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities.

## Eight Days in Kamay Rooms

- 1 Contested legacies
- 2 **We saw them coming**  
Seeing without understanding
- 3 Memorial and resistance



# We saw them coming

For thousands of generations Aboriginal people have cultivated vast trade and communication networks across the continent. Through our songlines we share knowledge, news, language and song.

Groups along the coast traded with those inland, ensuring we had access to the foods, medicines and materials needed to look after Country and kin. Special materials, including pearl shells and ochre, often travelled thousands of kilometres and became powerful cultural items and important elements of our law and ceremony.

As our tools and technology travelled so too did our stories. Through message sticks, smoke signals and corroborees, we kept in touch and maintained sophisticated lines of communication. It is hardly surprising, then, that the arrival of strangers in April 1770 was immediately noticed and news spread quickly up the coast. Signal fires were lit all along the shore, tracking the strangers as they moved towards Kamay.

## [ AUDIO LABEL ]

**LISTEN** to senior Gweagal knowledge holder Shayne Williams  
Transcripts at [www.sl.nsw.gov.au/kamay-audio](http://www.sl.nsw.gov.au/kamay-audio)

## [ SECTION THEME ]

# Protocol of Welcome

Aboriginal people have always had specific protocols that determine where people can travel and who they need to speak with before entering different parts of Country. These protocols were intended to ensure that Country was respected and that others knew who was moving, and to where.

Many older Welcome to Country protocols involved having the sweat of local Elders applied to strangers — so that the land and the ancestors would recognise and protect these outsiders while they were on another's Country. If something bad were to happen to you while you were visiting, these protocols were part of a system that ensured your spirit would be looked after and returned to your own Country and ancestors.

For most Aboriginal people it was unthinkable to simply ignore these well-established rules. For the Gweagal people in 1770, it must have been extremely frustrating to be unable to communicate these protocols in a way that the strangers on the *Endeavour* could understand. The fact that the strangers then escalated this encounter into bloodshed would have been a serious breach of protocol and law.



[ ITEM LABEL ]

## European visitors

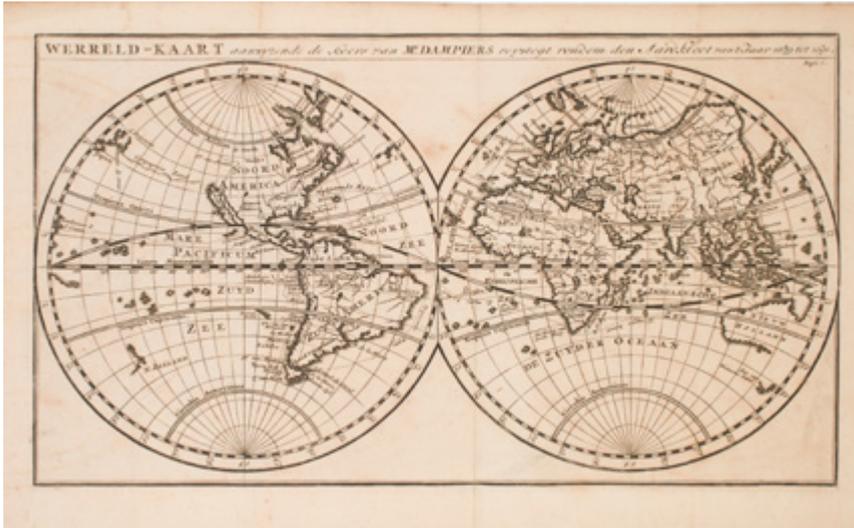
Cook and his crew were not the first European visitors to this continent. Since the early 1600s, various explorers and fortune hunters had reached the west coast. Among them was English explorer William Dampier, who spent almost two months on Bardi Jawi country in 1688.

Dampier's accounts of the Bardi people rarely revealed any kind of mutual interaction. Like other expedition accounts of First Nations peoples at the time, they painted Aboriginal people as violent, primitive and inferior. This helped reinforce the Europeans' idea that they were more capable of managing the land and more deserving of its natural wealth — an idea that formed the basis of *terra nullius* (no one's land) which claimed that the continent was uninhabited.

### **Image:**

'The natives of New Holland' (detail), from a 1698 edition of Dampier's *New Voyage round the World*.

David Scott Mitchell collection, DSM/980/D



[ ITEM LABEL ]

## A New Voyage round the World ...

published journal of  
William Dampier, 1703

When it was first  
published in 1697,

William Dampier's journal was a sensation. It fuelled the imagination of an entire generation of would-be pirates and explorers and was well known to Cook and Banks, who had a copy with them on the *Endeavour*.

Dampier's maps and descriptions of the west coast sparked great interest, but his biased and limited descriptions of Aboriginal people would have reinforced Cook's assumption that non-European peoples and cultures were savage or simple. This fifth edition features a map of Australia's west coast, charted by the Dutch and other European explorers since the early 1600s.

5th edition, corrected, London, 1703, 980/177E1



[ ITEM LABEL ]

## Journal of James Roberts

28 April 1770

Sixteen-year-old James Roberts was on board the *Endeavour* as a servant to Joseph Banks when he recorded his observations of nawi (canoes) and the local Gweagal people who were watching the *Endeavour* crew. He notes the cabbage tree palms that had been cultivated by Gweagal people for generations, and is impressed at how clear the undergrowth is.

We now recognise that Aboriginal farming and burning practices created and maintained these conditions, but the crew of the *Endeavour* — who likened the land to English parks and fields — assumed that Aboriginal people were too primitive or ignorant to be responsible for this scale of land management.

'A Journal of His Majesty's Bark Endeavour Round the World, Lieut. James Cook, Commander, 27th May 1768, with annotations 1771', Safe 1/65

**‘... the shore appearing very Pleasant with tall trees having no under wood and some fine plains in the Woods they saw some Cabbage trees a hutt and 2 small Cannews ...’**

**journal of James Roberts, 28 April 1770**