

James Cook (1728 – 1779)

James Cook was the second child of a Yorkshire farm labourer. He grew up as a farm boy and was educated at the village school. Apprenticed at seventeen to a general storekeeper, he was later released to take up an apprenticeship with coastal ship-owners at Whitby. After serving his time, he spent a few years at sea before joining the navy in 1755 as an able seaman, progressing through the ranks to master during the Seven Years' War with France. He then spent the summer and autumn months of the next five years surveying in Newfoundland, returning to his wife and children in England each winter.



Phormium cookianum* subsp. *hookeri

Phormium (Greek *phormos* 'basket') was the name used by Aristotle for a plant used for weaving, and was adopted by the Forsters for the New Zealand "flax", the fibre preferred by Māori. The genus comprises three taxa: *P. tenax*, harakeke, native to New Zealand and Norfolk Island, and the smaller endemic *P. cookianum*, wharariki or mountain flax, with two subspecies currently recognised. The more widespread, *Phormium cookianum* subsp. *hookeri*, is common throughout New Zealand, often inland on rocky cliff faces in the northern part of its range, and the dominant coastal flax further south. It has weeping foliage and greenish or yellow flowers, sometimes flushed orange, and is commonly seen in cultivation. *Phormium cookianum* subsp. *cookianum* is restricted to damp sites in subalpine areas in the South

His outstanding surveying skills and interest in astronomy came to the notice of the Royal Society, which was planning with the Admiralty to send scientists to newly discovered Tahiti in the South Pacific to observe the transit of Venus. Cook was appointed to command the *Endeavour*, ostensibly for this purpose, but also to investigate the possible existence of a great southern continent. With a crew of 97, and eleven civilians – an astronomer, naturalists, artists and assistants – the *Endeavour* left Plymouth on 26 August 1768, and after the transit had been observed, sailed south.

The North Island of New Zealand was sighted on 6 October 1769, and the *Endeavour* remained in New Zealand waters for the next six months. During the 55 days spent at anchor, contact was made with the Māori, supplies were replenished and plant specimens collected. At Ship Cove the *Endeavour* was careened for maintenance and there, as elsewhere, large amounts of scurvy grass (*Lepidium oleracium*) and wild celery (*Apium* sp.) were gathered to supplement the crew's vitamin-deficient diet and reduce the incidence of scurvy. New Zealand spinach (*Tetragonia tetragonioides*), mānuka or kāhikatoa (*Leptospermum scoparium*) and other related species from which a "tea" was brewed, were also used when available. When the *Endeavour* left New Zealand on 31 March 1770, both the North and South/Stewart Islands had been circumnavigated and a remarkably complete and accurate chart made of the 3860 km (2400 miles) of coastline.

James Cook, now with the rank of captain, made two more exploratory voyages to the Pacific, and established that there was no southern continent, only the great ice mass of the Antarctic region. He was killed at Hawaii on 14 February 1779 during a skirmish with islanders over the theft of a boat. Captain James Cook's character and training, his navigational expertise and discerning observations, made him the foremost figure in the exploration of New Zealand and the Pacific.

The New Zealand mountain flax, wharariki, was mentioned by William Colenso as *Phormium forsterianum*, and later known by J D Hooker as *Phormium colensoi*. The first published description, in 1848, was by French merchant, judge and botanist Auguste François Le Jolis, who named it *Phormium cookianum*, in honour of the naval officer and Pacific explorer, and for many years it has been the accepted name.