

Extracts from the Diary of Joseph Banks, April 1770

Description



1770 April 28. Botany Bay reached

The land this morn appeared Clifly and barren without wood. An opening appearing like a harbour was seen and we stood directly in for it. A small smoke arising from a very barren place directed our glasses that way and we soon saw about 10 people, who on our approach left the fire and retired to a little eminence where they could conveniently see the ship; soon after this two Canoes carrying 2 men each landed on the beach under them, the men hauled up their boats and went to their fellows upon the hill. Our boat which had been sent ahead to sound now approached the place and they all retired

higher up on the hill; we saw however that at the beach or landing place one man at least was hid among some rocks who never that we could see left that place. Our boat proceeded along shore and the Indians followed her at a distance. When she came back the officer who was in her told me that in a cove a little within the harbour they came down to the beach and invited our people to land by many signs and word[s] which he did not at all understand; all however were armed with long pikes and a wooden weapon made something like a short scimitar. During this time a few of the Indians who had not followed the boat remained on the rocks opposite the ship, threatening and menacing with their pikes and swords—two in particular who were painted with white, their faces seemingly only dusted over with it, their bodies painted with broad strokes drawn over their breasts and backs resembling much a soldiers cross belts, and their legs and thighs also with such like broad strokes drawn round them which imitated broad garters or bracelets. Each of these held in his hand a wooden weapon about 2½ feet long, in shape much resembling a scimitar; the blades of these looked whitish and some though[t] shining insomuch that they were almost of opinion that they were made of some kind of metal, but myself thought they were no more than wood smeared over with the same white pigment with which they paint their bodies. These two seemed to talk earnestly together, at times brandishing their crooked weapons at us as in token of defiance. By noon we were within the mouth of the inlet which appeared to be very good. Under the South head of it were four small canoes; in each of these was one man who held in his hand a long pole with which he struck fish, venturing with his little imbarcation almost into the surf. These people seemed to be totally engaged in what they were about: the ship passed within a quarter of a mile of them and yet they scarce lifted their eyes from their employment; I was almost inclined to think that attentive to their business and deafened by the noise of the surf they neither saw nor heard her go past them. At 1 we came to an anchor abreast of a small village consisting of about 6 or 8 houses. Soon after this an old woman followed by three children came out of the wood; she carried several piece[s] of stick and the children also had their little burthens; when she came to the houses 3 more younger children came out of one of them to meet her. She often looked at the ship but expressed neither surprise nor concern. Soon after this she lighted a fire and the four Canoes came in from fishing; the people landed, hauled up their boats and began to dress their dinner to all appearance totally unmoved at us, tho we were within a little more than ½ a mile of them. Of all these people we had seen so distinctly through our glasses we had not been able to observe the least signs of Clothing: myself to the best of my judgement plainly discerned that the woman did not copy our mother Eve even in the fig leaf.

After dinner the boats were manned and we set out from the ship intending to land at the place where we saw these people, hoping that as they regarded the ships coming in to the bay so little they would as little regard our landing. We were in this however mistaken, for as soon as we approached the rocks two of the men came down upon them, each armed with a lance of about 10 feet long and a short stick which he seemed to handle as if it was a machine to throw the lance. They called to us very loud in a harsh sounding Language of which neither us or Tupia understood a word, shaking their lances and menacing, in all appearance resolved to dispute our landing to the utmost tho they were but two and we 30 or 40 at least. In this manner we parleyed with them for about a quarter of an hour, they waving to us to be gone, we again signing that we wanted water and that we meant them no harm. They remained resolute so a musket was fired over them, the Effect of which was that the Youngest of the two dropped a bundle of lances on the rock at the instant in which he heard the report; he however snatched them up again and both renewed their threats and opposition. A musket loaded with small shot was now fired at the Eldest of the two who was about 40 yards from the boat; it struck him on the legs but he minded it very little so another was immediately fired at him; on this he ran up to the house

about 100 yards distant and soon returned with a shield. In the mean time we had landed on the rock. He immediately threw a lance at us and the young man another which fell among the thickest of us but hurt nobody; 2 more muskets with small shot were then fired at them on which the Eldest threw one more lance and then ran away as did the other. We went up to the houses, in one of which we found the children hid behind the shield and a piece of bark in one of the houses. We were conscious from the distance the people had been from us when we fired that the shot could have done them no material harm; we therefore resolved to leave the children on the spot without even opening their shelter. We therefore threw into the house to them some beads, ribbons, cloths etc. as presents and went away. We however thought it no improper measure to take away with us all the lances which we could find about the houses, amounting in number to forty or fifty. They were of various lengths, from 15 to 6 feet in length; both those which were thrown at us and all we found except one had 4 prongs headed with very sharp fish bones, which were besmeared with a greenish coloured gum that at first gave me some suspicions of Poison. The people were blacker than any we have seen in the Voyage tho by no means negroes; their beards were thick and bushy and they seemed to have a redundancy of hair upon those parts of the body where it commonly grows; the hair of their heads was bushy and thick but by no means woolly like that of a Negro; they were of a common size, lean and seemed active and nimble; their voices were coarse and strong. Upon examining the lances we had taken from them we found that the very most of them had been used in striking fish, at least we concluded so from sea weed which was found stuck in among the four prongs.—Having taken the resolution before mentioned we returned to the ship in order to get rid of our load of lances, and having done that went to that place at the mouth of the harbour where we had seen the people in the morn; here however we found nobody.—At night many moving lights were seen in different parts of the bay such as we had been used to see at the Islands; from hence we supposed that the people here strike fish in the same manner.

1770 April 29.

The fires (fishing fires as we supposed) were seen during the greatest part of the night. In the morn we went ashore at the houses, but found not the least good effect from our present yesterday: No signs of people were to be seen; in the house in which the children were yesterday was left every individual thing which we had thrown to them; Dr Solander and myself went a little way into the woods and found many plants, but saw nothing like people. At noon all hands came on board to dinner. The Indians, about 12 in number, as soon as they saw our boat put off Came down to the houses. Close by these was our watering place at which stood our cask: they looked at them but did not touch them, their business was merely to take away two of four boats which they had left at the houses; this they did, and hauled the other two above high water mark, and then went away as they came. In the Evening 15 of them armed came towards our waterers; they sent two before the rest, our people did the same; they however did not wait for a meeting but gently retired. Our boat was about this time loaded so every body went off in her, and at the same time the Indians went away. Myself with the Captain etc. were in a sandy cove on the Northern side of the harbour, where we hauled the seine and caught many very fine fish, more than all hands could Eat.

1770 April 30.

Before day break this morn the Indians were at the houses abreast of the Ship: they were heard to shout much. At sunrise they were seen walking away along the beach; we saw them go into the woods where they lighted fires about a mile from us. Our people went ashore as usual, Dr Solander

and myself into the woods. The grass cutters were farthest from the body of the people: towards them came 14 or 15 Indians having in their hands sticks that shone (said the Sergeant of marines) like a musket. The officer on seeing them gathered his people together: the hay cutters coming to the main body appeared like a flight so the Indians pursued them, however but a very short way, for they never came nearer than just to shout to each other, maybe a furlong. At night they came again in the same manner and acted over again the same half pursuit. Myself in the Even landed on a small Island on the Northern side of the bay to search for shells; in going I saw six Indians on the main who shouted to us but ran away into the woods before the boat was within half a mile of them, although she did not even go towards them.

May 1770

1770 May 1.

The Captn Dr Solander, myself and some of the people, making in all 10 muskets, resolved to make an excursion into the country. We accordingly did so and walked till we completely tired ourselves, which was in the evening, seeing by the way only one Indian who ran from us as soon as he saw us. The Soil wherever we saw it consisted of either swamps or light sandy soil on which grew very few species of trees, one which was large yielding a gum much like sanguis draconis, but every place was covered with vast quantities of grass. We saw many Indian houses and places where they had slept upon the grass without the least shelter; in these we left beads ribbons etc. We saw one quadruped about the size of a Rabbit, My Greyhound just got sight of him and instantly land himself against a stump which lay concealed in the long grass; we saw also the dung of a large animal that had fed on grass which much resembled that of a Stag; also the footsteps of an animal clawed like a dog or wolf and as large as the latter; and of a small animal whose feet were like those of a polecat or weasel. The trees over our heads abounded very much with Loryquets and Cockatoos of which we shot several; both these sorts flew in flocks of several scores together.

Our second Lieutenant went in a boat drudging: after he had done he landed and sent the boat away, keeping with him a midshipman with whom he set out in order to walk to the Waterers. In his Way he was overtaken by 22 Indians who followed him often within 20 yards, parleying but never daring to attack him tho they were all armed with Lances. After they had joined our people 3 or 4 more curious perhaps than prudent, went again towards these Indians who remained about ½ a mile from our watering place. When they came pretty near them they pretended to be afraid and ran from them; four of the Indians on this immediately threw their lances which went beyond our people, and by their account were thrown about 40 yards; on this they stopped and began to collect the lances, on which the Indians retired slowly. At this time the Captain Dr Solander and myself came to the waterers; we went immediately towards the Indians; they went fast away, the Captain Dr Solander and Tupia went towards them and every one else stayed behind; this however did not stop the Indians who walked leisurely away till our people were tired of following them. The accounts of every one who saw the Indians near today was exactly Consonant with what had been observed on the first day of our landing: they were black but not negroes, hairy, naked etc. just as we had seen them.

Sources:

<https://www.sl.nsw.gov.au/joseph-banks-endeavour-journal>

<http://gutenberg.net.au/ebooks05/0501141h.html>

The above text has been updated to reflect modern spelling.

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