

## ***The Wide Wide Sea, by Hampton Sides***

### ***Reviewed By Cindy Kennedy***

Non-fiction author Hampton Sides is renowned for writing captivating historical narratives. *The Wide Wide Sea*, his latest book, subtitled "Imperial Ambition, First Contact and the Fateful Final Voyage of Captain James Cook," is a rousing maritime adventure.

In 1776, while the American colonies were declaring their independence from Britain, Captain James Cook was celebrated as a national hero in London. Deemed the greatest navigator England had ever produced, Cook had circumnavigated the globe twice. "If I had failed in discovering a continent," he wrote, "it is because it does not exist...and not for want of trying."

One more venture required Cook's nautical skills: the search for the Northwest Passage, a navigable waterway connecting England to the markets of Asia. The elusive channel through the Canadian province had "for nearly 300 years been the grail, the phantom. Many European nations had yearned to find it, but for the British it had become an obsession."

Aboard his flagship *Resolution*, Cook set sail alongside its sister ship *Discovery* in July 1776. Veteran seamen from Cook's past excursions had signed on. Among them was Lieutenant William Bligh. A decade later, Bligh would command the *Bounty*, made infamous by its mutiny.

Although Cook's objective was finding the Northwest Passage, the Admiralty gave Cook an additional order. After sailing around the tip of Africa and proceeding to the Pacific, Cook was to transport Mai, a young Polynesian man, back to Tahiti. Mai, who was brought to London two years earlier, was a favorite of the royal court.

After their stopover in Tahiti, Cook's ships proceeded northward, not expecting to encounter land until they reached the North American coast. On January 18, 1778, however, a lookout spotted a volcanic island: Kauai, "this gem of malachite green, with undulating cliffs and razorback ridges." Cook would be credited as the first European to discover the Hawaiian chain. His expedition's initial contact with the native population was mutually beneficial.

Reluctant to leave the tropical paradise, Cook and his crew pressed northward in search of the Northwest Passage. Crossing into the Arctic Sea, the expedition sought a waterway route through interior Canada, only to encounter gargantuan walls of ice. Not one to admit defeat, Cook ordered the ships to sail south back to lush Hawaii where the seamen could winter before trying again to discover the Northwest Passage.

For generations, historians have debated just what happened during Cook's second landing in Hawaii. Through his prodigious research, Hampton Sides offers fresh

insight into that fatal encounter. Fascinating and well written, *The Wide Wide Sea* is highly recommended.