

The early French maritime explorers of Nouvelle Hollande with Andrew Phippen

Report by James Merrington



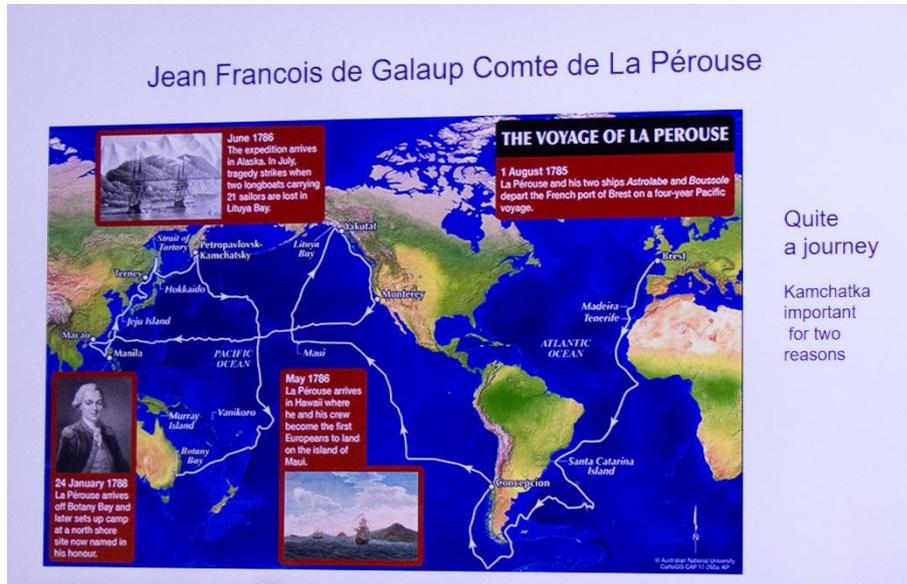
Andrew Phippen, a volunteer at the Australian National Maritime Museum, addressed the Cruising Division on 27 November. In this talk, he outlined the influence of French explorers on the history of Australia. He talked about six major explorers up to the 19th century. His initial postulation was that the first European to set foot on Australian soil was Jean Binot Paulmier de Gonneville who arrived on the north coast of Western Australia in 1504, some 266 years before Cook. He cited Aboriginal cave paintings by the Wadjina people at Prince Regent River in WA which can be interpreted as depicting Europeans in armour and also religious icons.

The French explorers mapped much of Western Australia and there are some 250 places there that the French named and are still in use today. The French also produced the first map of the entire continent of Australia. Other explorers were:

- Marc-Joseph Marion du Fresne
- Louis Francois Marie Aleno de Saint Alouam
- Jean Francois de Galaup Comte de La Perouse
- Antoine Raymond Joseph de Bruni D'Entrecasteaux
- Nicolas Thomas Baudin.

These French explorers contributed to the understanding and knowledge of Australia and its indigenous people. The focus of the French expeditions was mainly scientific. La Perouse conducted significant voyages throughout the Pacific; he was in Kamchatka, Russia, when he heard of the First Fleet settlement in Botany Bay and sailed directly here to investigate. Unfortunately, neither he nor his ship was heard of again after leaving Botany Bay. Interestingly, Napoleon applied to be crew in

his boat but La Perouse turned him down because he was too young. Imagine the different outcome in Europe if he had been allowed to sail with La Perouse.



So why are we not French? The major reason that the French did not compete with the English was the political upheaval in France in that era and also because their explorations were heavily weighted towards scientific discoveries, not conquest.

Most of the French explorers listed above didn't make it back to France: three died in Ile de France, du Fresne was eaten by Maoris and LaPerouse and crew were lost at sea.

When Matthew Flinders was mapping Australia, he met Baudin who was also circumnavigating and mapping Australia; Baudin had 22 scientists aboard, compared to Flinders' six.

Phippen's closing remark was that 'The French explorers made a hugely significant contribution to the understanding and knowledge of this continent at great cost and in a time of great uncertainty at home.'

The evening concluded with a convivial meal in the Careening Cove.

