

Navigating the Pacific

This set of instruments includes a **sundial for telling the time, a spirit level, a compass and an astrolabe***. It was used by Cook as early as the 1750s. It is compact and provides a handy reference for a man at sea.

When the British reached the Pacific, they found knowledge systems to rival their own. Pacific navigators observed the stars, ocean currents and wave effects, air and sea interference patterns caused by islands and atolls, the flight of birds, the winds and the weather.

European navigation required charts and instruments to address the critical problem of position at sea. Aboard ship, officers and crew with specialist skills, checked and re-checked observations.



Yet, as Cook saw at first hand, navigating the Pacific could be managed using knowledge passed on by oral tradition, without the aid of instruments.

And exponents such as Tupaia, the Ra'iatean priest and navigator who joined the *Endeavour* voyage in 1769, could direct them across the ocean from island to island.

Cook's Box of Instruments c. 1750

wood, engraved brass, glass, letterpress

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*Astrolabe – taking astronomical measurements, typically of the altitudes of celestial bodies, and in navigation for calculating latitude, before the development of the sextant.