

# Rachel Carson Center Perspectives

How to cite:

Cushing, Nancy. "Animal Mobilities and the Founding of New South Wales." In: "Visions of Australia: Environments in History," edited by Christof Mauch, Ruth Morgan, and Emily O’Gorman. *RCC Perspectives: Transformations in Environment and Society* 2017, no. 2, 19–25. doi.org/10.5282/rcc/7905.

*RCC Perspectives: Transformations in Environment and Society* is an open-access publication. It is available online at [www.environmentandsociety.org/perspectives](http://www.environmentandsociety.org/perspectives). Articles may be downloaded, copied, and redistributed free of charge and the text may be reprinted, provided that the author and source are attributed. Please include this cover sheet when redistributing the article.

To learn more about the Rachel Carson Center for Environment and Society, please visit [www.rachelcarsoncenter.org](http://www.rachelcarsoncenter.org).

Rachel Carson Center for Environment and Society  
Leopoldstrasse 11a, 80802 Munich, GERMANY

ISSN (print) 2190-5088  
ISSN (online) 2190-8087

© Copyright of the text is held by the Rachel Carson Center.  
Image copyright is retained by the individual artists; their permission may be required in case of reproduction.

SPONSORED BY THE



Federal Ministry  
of Education  
and Research

Deutsches Museum 



## Nancy Cushing

### Animal Mobilities and the Founding of New South Wales

We sailed from the Cape of Good Hope on the 12th of November 1787 . . . [having] provided ourselves with every Article, necessary for the forming a civilized Colony, Live Stock, consisting of Bulls, Cows, Horses Mares, Colts, Sheep, Hogs, Goats Fowls and other living Creatures by Pairs. . . . Thus Equipped, each Ship like another Noah's Ark, away we steered for Botany Bay, and after a tolerably pleasant Voyage of 10 Weeks & 2 Days Governour Phillip, had the Satisfaction to see the whole of his little Fleet safe at Anchor in the said Bay.

– George Worgan, 1788<sup>1</sup>

In these few lines from a letter to his brother, surgeon George Worgan provided an account of what had in fact been a gruelling crossing of the Southern Ocean. This was the third and final leg of the eight-month journey by what came to be known in Australia as the First Fleet: 11 ships carrying convicts and their keepers to found the British colony of New South Wales. In contrast with most historians of the venture, but reflecting the priorities of the day, Worgan foregrounded the presence of non-human animals on the ships of the First Fleet. His comparison with the biblical Noah's ark shows his awareness of the importance of these animals to the success of this colonising venture. Just as Noah's pairs of animals were to ensure that the human order could be reestablished after the great flood, the First Fleet animals were to be the progenitors of animals which would allow British life to be transplanted onto a new continent. Drawing upon the journals kept by Worgan and other ships' surgeons, officers of the marines, and seamen on this voyage, this essay will explore the implications of the long distance mobility forced on these animals, focusing on its effect on the relative status of humans and other animals.

The voyage of the First Fleet provides a valuable opportunity to study human-animal relations because ships are one of the “unfamiliar and precarious places” where “intimate and corporeal connections between humans and animals”<sup>2</sup> can change the usual hierarchies and power relations. The animals had an elevated status while in transit because of their intended role at their destination. Based on observations made during the exploration

1 George Bouchier Worgan, Letter written to his brother Richard Worgan, 12–18 June 1788, State Library of New South Wales' Mitchell Library, Safe 1/114.

2 Jonathan Peyton, “‘A Strange Enough Way’: An Embodied Natural History of Experience, Animals, and Food on the Teslin Trail,” *Geoforum* 58 (2015): 15.

of the east coast of Australia by Lieutenant James Cook in 1770,<sup>3</sup> the planners of the expedition knew that the animals of New South Wales were very different from those around which British society had developed. In order to succeed at settling this unfamiliar place, populations of non-human co-colonisers would have to be established, as had occurred as Europeans moved into the Americas and Africa. The First Fleet animals were not purchased to be eaten on board, or as live exports to be sold for consumption at the journey's end. Nor were they cargo, like the salted meat stowed in the holds of the store-ships, packed into casks to be doled out as rations in the colony. Rather than "livestock," a term which draws attention to the animal as a living embodiment of a certain monetary value, the food, fibre, fertilizer, transport, and power they would provide for the colony in the short term, and their capacity over time to form the foundation of an entire economy made them priceless. Given this central importance to the venture, the safe passage of the domestic animals on the First Fleet was a high priority, and their needs were ranked as equal to and in some cases greater than those of their human travelling companions.

The privileging of animal wellbeing over that of humans was clear in the planning and conduct of the First Fleet. Decisions made based on the welfare of the animals added both to the costs of the voyage and to the discomfort of the human travellers. Some small domestic animals, including sheep, pigs, rabbits, dogs, and cats were carried from Britain, and more were purchased at Santa Cruz and Rio de Janeiro for use on the voyage, but most of the foundational stock for New South Wales was purchased in the Dutch Cape Colony, shortening the duration of their journey to one quarter of that endured by their human shipmates. Even so, at two and a half months, this was a longer voyage than animals had had to withstand when they were drafted to assist in the European colonisation of the Americas and Africa. The decision to minimise the animals' journeying meant that the British colonists had to adapt to varieties of animals which seemed peculiar and deficient to them, including unruly Cape cattle, with their wide horns removed for the journey, and fat-tailed sheep with hair instead of wool.<sup>4</sup>

3 Cook described the kangaroo, for example, as somewhat like a very large jerboa but bearing no resemblance to any European animal he had seen. James Cook, *James Cook's Journal of Remarkable Occurrences Aboard His Majesty's Bark Endeavour, 1768–1771*, National Library of Australia, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.cs-ss-jrnl-cook-17700714>.

4 The exact numbers of animals purchased by Phillip on behalf of the government were: 4 mares, 1 stallion, and 3 colts who travelled together on *Lady Penrhyn*; 6 cows, a bull, and a calf loaded onto the *Sirius*; and 120 sheep, 4 goats, 28 hogs, and a large number of fowl shared between the *Sirius* and the *Fishbourne*, *Borrowdale*, and *Friendship* store-ships (*The Journal of Philip Gidley King, Lieutenant, R.N. 1787–1790* (Sydney: Australian Documents Library, 1980), 22). The number of goats and hogs comes from Hunter's journal. His estimate of the number of sheep as 44, also recorded by Marine Officer Watkin Tench, is taken as more reliable than that provided in Phillip's journal, which was assembled after the fact. The additional animals purchased by the officers for their own use during the voyage and for breeding in New South Wales were less closely accounted for than the government herds.

The loading of these Cape animals caused considerable disruption on the already congested ships. There was not much space to share, with the vessels ranging in size from the flagship *Sirius*, at 33 metres long and 10 metres wide, to the *Supply*, just 21 metres long and 8 metres wide, already carrying 1,500 people and assorted domestic animals, plus an unknown number of free-living animals ranging from rats to lice. On the *Sirius*, master's mate Daniel Southwell said that the new additions "lumbered the ship and crowded out the passengers, one of whose decks they now occupied."<sup>5</sup> The guns were removed from the ship's main deck to enable the carpenters to build stalls, pigsties, and other enclosures. *Sirius* then had to depart from Cape Town without observing the usual courtesy of firing a salute, a rather delicate breach of protocol.

Special provisions made for the animals affected all of the human voyagers, but especially the convicts. Once at sea, everyone on the Fleet was put on rations of just 3 pints (1.4 litres) of water per day in order to ensure there was enough for the livestock. Animals travelled on the upper decks, to which convicts were only admitted at specific times of the day, in fixed numbers and under strict supervision. In some cases, manure seeped through the decking onto the convicts below. Convicts were also moved between ships to accommodate the animals. A group of convict women was taken off the *Friendship* at the Cape to make space for 30 sheep. Thomas Kelly, whose qualifications included having been convicted of horse stealing at York, was moved from the *Alexander* to the *Lady Penrhyn* specifically to look after the horses. Meeting the needs of the animals meant impinging on the resources used by lower-ranking humans.

Even given their favoured status, animals suffered greatly on the voyage. Many of the threats to their wellbeing were linked directly with movement. While travelling the vast distance between continents, pushed along by the winds of "the roaring forties" (the band of strong westerly winds found in the Southern Ocean between 40 and 50 degrees latitude), their immediate freedom of movement was restricted by stalls and enclosures. Although these partitions were intended to protect them from the rolling and bucking of the ships, and from the sea water which periodically swept the decks, they could readily become a hazard. On New Year's Day, the chicken coops on the *Lady Penrhyn* gave way in a storm and smashed the goat house to pieces, laming its inhabitants. After two months at sea, Captain John Hunter reported that the cattle were

5 John White, *Journal of a Voyage to New South Wales*, ed. Alec Chisholm (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1962), 242, note 1.

weak and badly bruised from being knocked off their feet by the violent rolling of the *Sirius* and regretted that the ship was so poorly fitted out for them. The idea of further limiting their movement by supporting them in slings, as was often done when shipping horses over shorter distance, was rejected out of concern that this immobilisation would lead to a greater loss of strength.

Anxiety over the welfare of the animals with whom their future fortunes were entangled resulted in regular, although terse, references to them by those who kept journals on the voyage. Surgeon Arthur Bowes Smyth's account contains a catalogue of animal death caused by ill health and misfortune on the *Lady Penrhyn*: "9 fowls found dead this mornng.; last Hen Pigeon overboard & drowned; one of the Cape Sheep died of the Cold; a fine Kidd frighten'd overboard & drowned." All of the writers worried about the loss of vigour and life amongst their more-than-human shipmates, but they lacked the knowledge and resources to do anything about it. Looking for somewhere to place blame, they struck out, accusing the Dutch colonists at the Cape of being rogues who had sold them diseased stock and poor quality hay, even of poisoning the animals. They urged the ships on and prayed for fair winds to bring them to Botany Bay as quickly as possible. So eager were they to protect the lives of the animals that a risky stopover to collect fodder on the unknown coastline of Van Diemen's Land was contemplated.

One of the diarists allowed his emotional investment in the animals more free expression than most. This was Marine Second Lieutenant Ralph Clark, best known in Australian historiography for furnishing feminist historian Anne Summers with half of her memorable title, *Damned Whores and God's Police* (1975). True to form, Clark welcomed the replacement of convict women with sheep on the *Friendship*, anticipating that the sheep would make "much more Agreeable Ship mates." He expressed far more empathy for the sheep than for the women, noting on several occasions his wish that the journey would be over for the sake of the poor sheep. He wrote movingly of one ewe who was too weak to give birth to twin lambs and had to have them pulled lifeless from her body.

All were elated when they finally reached Botany Bay by 20 January 1788. The precious animals were provided with fresh grass, but kept on board for another 10 days after arrival in Botany Bay while a site for the settlement was selected and space was created for them on the land of the Gadigal people at Sydney Cove. Taking stock after



**Figure 1:** Animal imports continued with colonisation, including this breed of cattle from Bengal in India. Source: JW Lewin, Launceston, 1809, Mitchell Library, State Library of NSW, PXD 388 v. 2 no. 6.

three months in the colony, the commissariat tallied their meagre numbers: fewer than 10 horses, cattle, and rabbits; 29 sheep; and 19 goats. Pigs were the most numerous introduced mammals at 74, by then including litters of colonial-born piglets. Turkeys, geese, ducks, and chickens numbered almost 300.<sup>6</sup> Although confined behind fences and kept under watch, within a few months the cattle had decided to continue their journeying and made their way to the rich grasslands along the Nepean River near present day Camden, some 60 kilometres from Sydney Cove. Their self-directed mobility allowed them to prosper, possibly herded by the Muringong people, having built their numbers to 60 when they were rediscovered in 1795. Like many other early settlers, they were accorded naming rights to the land they had personally occupied and it became known as the Cowpastures, until their home was granted to controversial pastoral pioneer John Macarthur who renamed it Camden Park in 1806. Over the next century, goats, horses, pigs, and rabbits also established free-living populations, affecting vast areas of the continent through their unceasing mobility.

<sup>6</sup> Arthur Phillip, *The Voyage of Governor Phillip to Botany Bay* [1789] (Sydney: University of Sydney Library, 2003), Chapter 11.

The First Fleet was the first of thousands of voyages made to Australia during the colonial period. Many of those ships carried domestic livestock. The Cape of Good Hope continued as a source of animals, as did other established colonies in the region, including those in India and in the Dutch East India Company's strongholds in what is now Indonesia. By the early nineteenth century, more animals were being carried all the way from Britain to the Australian colonies, and the stocks which had been established in the first Australasian colony were themselves being shipped to new areas of settlement elsewhere on the continent, in New Zealand, and later in the French colony of New Caledonia. Setting aside some pedigree breeding stock, few of these animals had the degree of care invested in them that those on the First Fleet had enjoyed. When Australia shifted from a net importer of live animals to an exporter in the mid-nineteenth century, welfare standards plummeted, leading ultimately to the current controversies over the live animal export trade.<sup>7</sup>

This essay has explored the more-than-human entanglements of the final leg of the voyage of Australia's First Fleet through the lens of animal mobilities. Worgan described the voyage as "tolerably pleasant" but for the livestock, this was far from accurate. Even with the efforts made to preserve their life and health, all had suffered from the shock of the transition to shipboard conditions, a lack of food and water, and the physical strain of the constant movement on rough seas. Despite the losses, the priority given to the animals was significant. Their importance to the colonial project challenged what was then seen as a natural order, directing resources, attention, and even emotion preferentially to them not as livestock but as co-colonisers. Mobility temporarily blurred the familiar hierarchy between humans and other animals.

7 Nancy Cushing, "'Few Commodities are More Hazardous': Australian Live Animal Export, 1788–1880," *Environment and History*, forthcoming.

## Further Reading

- Bradley, William. *A Voyage to New South Wales: The Journal of Lieutenant William Bradley RN of HMS Sirius, 1786–1792*. Sydney: Trustees of the Public Library of New South Wales in Association with Ure Smith, 1969.
- Bull, Jacob. “Introducing Movement and Animals.”, *Animal Movements, Moving Animals, Essays on Direction, Velocity and Agency in Humanimal Encounters*. Uppsala: Centre for Gender Research, Uppsala University, 2011.
- Clark, Ralph. *The Journal and Letters of Lt. Ralph Clark 1787–1792*. Sydney: Australian Documents Library in Association with the Library of Australian History, 1981.
- Cook, James. *James Cook’s Journal of Remarkable Occurrences aboard His Majesty’s Bark Endeavour, 1768–1771*. National Library of Australia. <http://nla.gov.au/nla.cs-ss-jrnl-cook-17700714>.
- Cushing, Nancy. “‘Few Commodities are More Hazardous:’ Australian Live Animal Export, 1788–1880.” *Environment and History*, forthcoming.
- Hunter, John. *An Historical Journal of the Transactions at Port Jackson and Norfolk Island*. A digital text sponsored by University of Sydney Library. Sydney, 2003. <http://adc.library.usyd.edu.au/data-2/hunhist.pdf>.
- Karskens, Grace. *The Colony: A History of Early Sydney*. Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 2009.
- King, Philip Gidley. *The Journal of Philip Gidley King, Lieutenant, R.N. 1787–1790*. Sydney: Australian Documents Library, 1980.
- Peyton, Jonathan. “‘A Strange Enough Way’: An Embodied Natural History of Experience, Animals and Food on the Teslin Trail.” *Geoforum* 58 (2015): 14–22.
- Phillip, Arthur. *The Voyage of Governor Phillip to Botany Bay [1789]* A digital text sponsored by University of Sydney Library. Sydney, 2003. <http://adc.library.usyd.edu.au/data-2/phivoya.pdf>.
- White, John. *Journal of a Voyage to New South Wales*, ed. Alec Chisholm. Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1962.
- Worgan, George B. Letter written to his brother Richard Worgan, 12–18 June 1788. Includes journal fragment kept by George on a voyage to New South Wales with the First Fleet on board HMS *Sirius*, 20 January 1788–11 July 1788, ML Safe 1 / 114. <http://acmssearch.sl.nsw.gov.au/search/itemDetailPaged.cgi?itemID=412921>.