



# **Passage to Torres Strait: Four Centuries in the Wake of Great Navigators Mutineers Castaways and Beachcombers**

*Miles Hordern*

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In his early twenties Miles Hordern first crossed the oceans from Northern to Southern Hemisphere, but one final leg of his round the world journey eluded him for twelve more years: the stretch between New Zealand and the Indian Ocean, guarded by the Torres Strait. Once thought to be mythical, so difficult was it to find and pass, the first authenticated passage took place in 1606; in 1768 it was charted by Captain Cook. In that age of sail, most sailors who attempted a passage through it still either drowned on the treacherous reefs or starved in open boats. But Hordern's 28-foot sloop took him more than 4000 nautical miles via the islands of Melanesia, the Coral Sea and the Great Barrier Reef to Australia. His cabin library included tales of individual, lingering histories that he wanted to trace for himself between the lines of the great chronicles. For it was the beachcomber -- the sailor who jumped ship, mutinied or was shipwrecked, and stayed - who had an even more enduring impact on island life.

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