



Ultra thin fashion pattern...

Shop Now →

ebay



JANUARY 5 2018

SAVE

PRINT

The Harbour review: Scott Bevan's ambitious exploration of Sydney's gem

Bradley Garrett

SHARE

TWEET

LESS

EXPLORATION

The Harbour

Scott Bevan

Simon & Schuster, \$49.99

Any Sydneysider worth their salt treats water as a bridge rather than a barrier. In *The Harbour*, Scott Bevan enthusiastically embraces this attitude as he traverses every bay inside the Heads in a kayak, slicing through serene channels and ferry wake on an extended oneiric drift doubling as a device for relaying a robust history of Australia's largest city through a range of voices. Bevan's variety of exploratory maritime journalism is novel, ambitious, and inspiring, but also undermined by wince-worthy foibles.

SHARE



Sydney Harbour – is it now only an ornamental lake? Photo: Peter Braig

The book begins, predictably and unfortunately, with a flourish of nationalism and reference to James Cook, setting the temporal bedrock of the historic narrative in the 18th century and largely side-stepping the presence of more than 5000 known archaeological sites

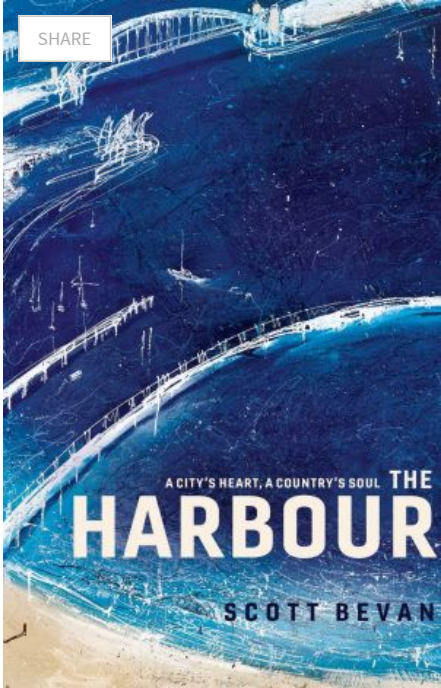
		\$319
\$319		\$319
\$599	\$4.90	\$25
\$229	\$319	\$479

Advertisement

in the area, which clearly indicate people had been cruising this harbour for thousands of years.

Aboriginal oral histories also largely elude Bevan's fastidious scholarship. He learns, for instance, that the shoreline was 30 kilometres east of the Heads 15,000 years ago and that the Cammeraygal people carry knowledge of the (currently underwater) terrain out to that point, passed down through generations. Yet Indigenous history in *The Harbour* is "shared history", a concept often deployed as a veil occluding the pre-invasion past while appearing culturally sensitive.

Even so, the hardback tome weighs in at almost 600 pages and is a beautiful mosaic of space through time, covering art, architecture, biography and history, with a sprinkling of memoir.



Harbour by Scott Bevan.

The ambitiousness of the project is staggering; it is difficult to imagine how much time Bevan spent paddling, talking to people and digging through archives to assemble this material. Not that he is one to pat himself on the back, he consistently downplays the physicality of the journey, detouring the reader from the sensual into the cerebral. This is his *modus operandi*: each point of contact in his kayak is an opportunity to drill down into the history of a place, often triggered by a conversation, artefact or monument.

Garmin Forerunner...

\$319

Garmin Edg...

\$249

Advertisement

As a result, history geeks will relish *The Harbour*. In the course of the journey, we learn, for instance, that a Parramatta river ferry called Experiment was literally horse-powered by four horses on a treadmill, that by 1908 13 million passengers a year were being carried across the harbour by five major ferry companies, and that when the

MOST POPULAR

- 1 The Cranberries lead singer O'Riordan dead at 46
- 2 Nine walks away from major NRL Footy Show shakeup
- 3 Channel Seven 'crossed a line' with neo-Nazi interview
- 4 Netflix star Aziz Ansari accused of sexual misconduct
- 5 Streaming services put Aussie drama under pressure

FOLLOW SPECTRUM

FACEBOOK TWITTER

FOLLOW SMH

NEWSLETTERS

Garmin Forerunner...

\$319

Garmin Edg...

\$249

Gladesville Bridge was built in 1964, it was the longest concrete arch bridge in the world.



ENTERTAINMENT NEWSLETTER

Get the latest news and updates emailed straight to your inbox.

Enter your email address

SIGN UP

By submitting your email you are agreeing to Fairfax Media's [terms and conditions](#) and [privacy policy](#).

We learn that the Japanese subs that snuck into the harbour during World War II and sank the HMAS Kuttabul had followed Manly ferries in, that Chowder Bay takes its name from 19th-century American whalers who made "clam" chowder from the oysters on the rocks, and that the first governors banned the building of boats to prevent escape.

Bevan is sensitive to the fact that the bays he explores are adorned with names bestowed by invaders and that most of the histories in the book are colonial histories. Yet his interview subjects are, for the most part, a parade of wealthy Australians. Scott glides up to the waterside studios of famous artists, has drinks on yachts, tells us about the cruises he has taken, and introduces us to his mates with military honours and members of his (slightly tongue and cheek) "gentleman kayakers' club".

And although the book seems, at times, blind to its celebration of a kind of "blokey" nationalism, Bevin is also clearly frustrated by how the harbour has become, in the words of his friend Ken Unsworth, an "ornamental lake". He even goes so far as to suggest that in today's Sydney Harbour "the only thing not private is the display of private wealth".

As such, as much as the book expands our historic and geographic imaginations, it also reinforces our collective sense that this is a city run by jerks in boat shoes. Bevan seems conflicted in this regard. He celebrates "regeneration" as a force for cleaning up the harbour, and champions the preservation of public land in the face of development. He is someone who has clearly benefited from wealth and connections – both of which get him access to extraordinary locations – and cannot help but be frustrated by the inequality he is cruising past.

The narrative cuts deepest toward the end of the book as Bevan traverses Circular Quay and The Rocks, decries gentrification and the clearing of social housing, and gives voice to subaltern history of the area, including one of the last occupants of the doomed Sirius building. In Darling Harbour, the book is a working-class elegy relayed in the shadow of the Barangaroo "development".

At his best Bevan challenges us, by refracting the present through the past, to imagine a more inclusive future for our "ornamental lake".

The word "harbour" means to protect and often it feels like what this harbour protects most is rich waterside investors and a wonky sense of history. But Bevan beautifully describes how Sydney's bays and coves can seem inhibiting to exploration until seen from the sea, and ultimately encourages us to use our ability to explore to reinvigorate a sense of place.

sense of place.

Just as he suggests that the best way to experience a bridge is to paddle under it, because the pace of a bridge is a matter of perspective, perhaps we can also imagine a future Sydney built more for adventure than investment. The lynch pin to such an imagination is, of course, the harbour.

Bradley Garrett is a research fellow at the University of Sydney and the author of four books, including *Explore Everything: Place-hacking the City* (Verso).

YOU MIGHT LIKE

Preparing your house for summer on a budget

RADIO RENTALS SPONSORED



RECOMMENDED

powered by plista



NEWS

You had to be nude to take part in this NGA blockbuster special event



NEWS

AFL legend Mark \"Bomber\" Thompson leaves the country days after...



NEWS

Man's fin snatched as great white takes 'test bite' off Wollongong



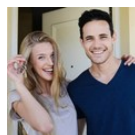
ENTERTAINMENT

The Cranberries lead singer, Dolores O'Riordan, dead at 46

FROM THE WEB

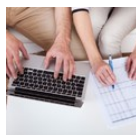
MOZO

Why Smart Aussies Are Dumping Banks for Online Loans



SMSF ASSOCIATION

Got some downtime? Your SMSF planning guide



DUCERE

There's an MBA course with no exams.



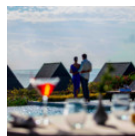
AIMET

Sharpen your skills with a Short Course.



INTERCONTINENTAL

Enjoy A Luxury Fiji Getaway



BUPA

Join families across Australia, register for the Bupa Family Challenge



	Garmin Foreru... When you trac... \$319	Garmin Foreru... When you trac... \$319	Garmin Foreru... When you trac... \$319
--	---	---	---

MOST VIEWED TODAY

ENTERTAINMENT

The Cranberries lead singer
O'Riordan dead at 46

Nine walks away from major NRL
Footy Show shakeup

Netflix star Aziz Ansari accused of
sexual misconduct

Channel Seven 'crossed a line'
with neo-Nazi interview

Actress alleges abuse on set of
True Lies when she was 12

Tomic needs help – and tennis
must be the one to provide it

The Cranberries lead singer
O'Riordan dead at 46

M1 closed in both directions after
truck crash sparks bushfire

Why dramatic house price drop
predictions could be off the mark

Wallaby in custody after bouncing
over Sydney Harbour Bridge

Tomic needs help – and tennis
must be the one to provide it

The Cranberries lead singer
O'Riordan dead at 46

'My head wouldn't stay up':
Farmer with broken neck rides for

CoinDaddy and his crypto friends
looking to change the world

This man received death threats
for taking his wife's surname

GET STARTED

Subscribe today for unlimited
access from only 50c a day

PRODUCTS AND SERVICES

- AM Edition
- PM Edition
- SMH for iPad
- Today's Paper
- Subscribe
- Manage My Subscription
- Subscriber Hub
- Corporate Subscriptions
- Digital Subscription FAQs
- Good Food Guide
- The Store by Fairfax
- Newsletters

SYDNEY MORNING HERALD

- Sitemap
- About Us
- Contact Us
- Subscribers
- Advertise With Us
- Text Version
- Site Accessibility Guide
- Privacy Policy
- Conditions of Use

CLASSIFIEDS

- Place an Ad
- Cars
- Dating
- Jobs
- Real Estate
- Commercial Real Estate
- Oneflare
- Nabo
- Tributes
- Celebrations

OUR SITES

- SMH
- The Age
- AFR.com
- Adzuna
- Domain
- Drive
- RSVP
- Essential Baby
- Home Price Guide
- Weatherzone

WEBSITE FEEDBACK

