

NEXT TIME YOU'RE IN ... QUEENSLAND

Sea Change. Agnes Water is a best-kept secret among sun worshippers. But for how much longer?

BY PHIL BROWN

UNTIL THE PRESENT WAVE OF backpackers began to arrive, the most notable visitor to the area of Agnes Water, an idyllic village on Australia's Queensland coast, was James Cook, who sailed by 238 years ago. During his epic journey of discovery Down Under, the then Lieutenant Cook passed the headland that locals now call "the Point" and on May 24, 1770, he anchored H.M. Bark *Endeavour* just under two miles (3.2 km) off the coast and led a small landing party ashore. They poked around what is now the burgeoning (and quaintly named) Town of 1770, at the mouth of Round Hill Creek—over three miles (5 km) north of Agnes Water. After collecting plant specimens and noticing smoke rising from Aboriginal campfires in the distance, they sailed off the following day.

The backpackers tend to linger longer, reveling in the golden beaches, the warm waters and the comparatively gentle surf that make the Discovery Coast, as Queensland's northernmost surfing spot is known, a longboarder's paradise. Tanned, blonde wahines—that's lady surfers, if you aren't up on the argot—navigate waist-high waves. The area is also a magnet for pro surfers, but they eschew the small stuff and charter boats out to the nearby southern fringes of the Great Barrier Reef, where perfect, empty barrels unload onto jagged coral. When it's flat, there's good fishing and diving to be had.

Onshore, the backpackers are in budget-accommodation heaven, but they'd better make the most of it because Agnes Water will soon be busier and a whole lot more



Surfin' safari Agnes Water's pristine environment is its great lure



exclusive. It's already being dubbed "the new Noosa"—after Noosa Heads, the ritzy beachside resort town that hugs picturesque Laguna Bay, 86 miles (139 km) from Queensland's capital Brisbane. Swiss resorts are materializing and exclusive residential enclaves are establishing themselves in the nearby hills.

But while Agnes Water is on the make, it hasn't quite made it yet, thanks to its relative isolation. It's 307 miles (490 km) north of Brisbane—a six-hour drive—and almost two hours from the nearest provincial cities, Gladstone and Bundaberg. Flying into either and hiring a car is the best way to get there, though some travelers ride the rails north and then bus in from nearby Miriam Vale.

Outside the holiday season, Agnes Water is still a sleepy hollow by the Coral Sea,



surrounded by the subtropical wonders of the Eurimbula and Deepwater national parks. From the headland, the deserted coast sweeps north in a series of yellow boomerangs of sand. To the south, little horseshoe bays offer privacy and uncrowded waves.

The backpackers and their friends cram the point break under the admiring eye of a local surf-school instructor. They hoot and holler, gliding toward the beach. At night, the bush echoes with the sounds of their revelry. But there's a feeling that this is all the calm before a storm. Agnes Water probably still looks the way it did in the late 18th century, during Cook's sail-by. But be warned: the 21st Century is closing in fast.