

# WORD OF THE MONTH

**OXFORD AUSTRALIA: THE FUTURE OF AUSTRALIAN ENGLISH | JULY 2014**

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## kangaroo route

- **noun**: a name for an air route between Australia and the United Kingdom via a stopover in another country, originally as flown by Qantas.

### THE STORY BEHIND THE WORD OF THE MONTH

The first written evidence for **kangaroo route** reveals that the term emerged in the period of the Second World War:

The term '**Kangaroo route**' is now common parlance in aviation circles throughout the world. It came into being in 1944 when Qantas Empire Airways was operating the vital Indian Ocean service on behalf of the British Overseas Airways Corporation. ... The name 'Kangaroo Service' has now been given to the Sydney–London route to perpetuate the typical Australian identity of the important wartime route. (*West Australian*, 20 June 1946)

The 'Kangaroo Service' mentioned in this article can be found in newspapers from 1944 and, as the following extract shows, the *kangaroo* element refers to the notion of an aircraft 'hopping' between countries en route:

The Catalina service to India is now being augmented by a faster service to be known as the 'Kangaroo Service'. The long hop is part of the air route linking Australia with England, and 500lb of mail and freight is carried on each trip. (Melbourne *Argus*, 7 August 1944)

The famous 'flying kangaroo' logo that appeared on Qantas aircraft from 1944 may have influenced and reinforced the use of the term **kangaroo route**, but the early evidence clearly highlights the 'hopping' aspect as the most likely origin.

Hopping is an apt metaphor for the nature of air travel between these two distant nations. For many decades the **kangaroo route**, the world's longest air route, involved several stopovers for refuelling and provisions, and flights could take days before arriving in London:

The world-wide flight will take the winner to England along the famous Qantas '**Kangaroo' Route**—touching at Singapore, Colombo, Beirut, and Rome—and back via South Africa. (Brisbane *Courier-Mail*, 13 October 1953)

Most flights also went through Darwin and a number of other cities in South-East Asia, India, Pakistan, the Middle East, and Europe. The Sydney–Singapore–London route is most commonly associated with the **kangaroo route**, but the route was changeable and passengers were offered a variety of options: 'Qantas offers you a choice of flying the Singapore–Bangkok Way or the Hong Kong–Orient Way to London on the "**Kangaroo**" route.' (*Canberra Times*, 9 March 1966)

The **kangaroo route** has long been associated with Qantas. The reason for this is the historical role of Qantas as Australia's national carrier, and its monopoly of the air route between Australia and the United Kingdom for so many years. These days a number of airline carriers fly the **kangaroo route**, so when vice-regal appointee—and former Qantas director—Peter Cosgrove flew to London in early 2014 for an appointment with the Queen, it was not with the airline he might have expected:

... when The Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet got quotes last week for the two business-class airfares for Cosgrove and his wife on the **kangaroo route**, the cheapest fare was on Middle Eastern carrier Etihad. You can imagine Cosgrove's surprise when he received his ticket to fly via Abu Dhabi. (*Australian*, 18 February 2014)

**Kangaroo route** has been included in a number of our Oxford dictionaries and is currently being updated for the second edition of the *Australian National Dictionary*.



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