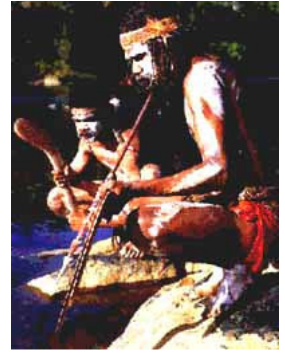


# Australia – A Brief History



## **Before 1770**

The first human inhabitants of Australia were the Aborigines. They are a people belonging to the Australoid group who probably came from Asia. Nobody is quite sure how they came to Australia around 60,000 years ago. Anthropologists believe they may have walked and sailed to the continent from Asia.

The Aborigines were nomadic hunter-gathers. They roamed from place to place taking advantage of the resources of the land during varying seasons. They hunted animals using spears and boomerangs. They also gathered fruits, nuts and yams which they ate.

The Aborigines had a thriving culture for many thousand years. There were around 300,000 Aborigines in about 250 tribal groups before the first white settlers came. Each group had its own territory, traditions, beliefs and language. They all believed in the Dreamtime which is the center piece of aboriginal culture.

## **The First Encounter With Settlers**

The Aborigine people had never seen white people until Captain James Cook landed in Botany Bay in 1770. They were shocked to see these white people in their strange clothes. When the Aborigines first saw the ships of the first fleet enter Botany Bay in 1778 with so many white skinned people they thought they were the spirits of their dead ancestors (after all they were so white). In actual fact these were the first European settlers led by Captain Arthur Phillip.



At first the Aborigines were friendly towards the visitors but were very confused at the way white foreigners behaved:

- Why did the foreigners walk on Aborigine sacred sites and dig up Aborigine graves?
- Why did they boss each other around and beat and hang people?
- Why did they chop down trees and take food without asking?
- Why were they mean and selfish towards each other and not sharing?

## **The First Misunderstanding**

While exploring around the new settlement Captain Arthur Phillip befriended an old Aborigine man. When he returned to camp he met the old man again and gave him some beads and a hatchet. Later that night Captain Phillip discovered the old man taking one of his shovels and slapped the man on his shoulder and pushed him away while pointing to the spade. The old man was very upset and could not understand why his *friend* was acting this way. Aborigines share what they have with their friends. From that point on Captain Phillip was very careful not to offend the Aborigines but Aborigine and the Settlers cultures were so different! They didn't understand each other.

## **Conflict**

When the Aborigines realized that the white men were not the spirits of their dead ancestors and that the settlers were taking more and more of their land and destroying the trees and wild life they began to fight back. The Aborigines killed a number of the settlers and even wounded Captain Phillip in an attack. The settlers reacted by slaughtering and poisoning the Aborigines and systematically destroying the land and wild animals they lived on.



## **Disease**

White settlers brought diseases the Aborigines had never had before (diseases which were quite common in Europe at the time). Aborigines caught smallpox and even the common cold and died in great numbers. Within two years smallpox had killed almost half the Aborigine population around Sydney.

## **Depravation**

The arrival of and settlement by British colonists corrupted the Aboriginal way of life. Those who wanted to encourage settlement of Australia declared that before their arrival, the entire continent was *terra nullius* (uninhabited by humans). They used this as justification for taking whatever they wanted. As more and more white settlers moved in and occupied the fertile lands the Aborigines were pushed further and further away from their traditional lands and into the harsh arid interior. Their families were broken up, their children taken away from them and sent to be "civilized," their sacred sites destroyed and their wild animals hunted.

The killing and exploitation of Aborigines by whites continued well into the twentieth century. The aboriginal population declined from the original 300,000 when the first white settlers arrived to only about 60,000 people. It was the policy for 100 years to remove mixed race Aborigines (Aboriginal and white parents) from their Aboriginal mothers to be raised in the Anglo culture, further destroying their culture. Aborigines were second class citizens in their own land. They were finally given the right to vote in 1967.

## **Reconciliation**

Much progress has been made over recent years to try to right the wrongs of the past. Where possible the government has been returning land to its traditional owners and encouraging Aborigines to rebuild their culture and lives. Despite these efforts, they are the single most disadvantaged group of people in Australia.



# Australia – Immigration

## **Aborigines – The First Inhabitants of Australia**

The first human inhabitants of Australia were the Aborigines. They came here about 60,000 years ago. Nobody is quite sure how they came to Australia. They may have walked (during the ice ages) and sailed here from Asia. It is estimated that there were about 300,000 Aborigines living in Australia before Europeans arrived. Except for the Aborigines who have been here for over 60,000 years, all other Australians came here within the last 220 years.

## **The First Fleet – The Convicts**

In 1779 the British government decided it needed a new penal colony (place to send convicts) as far away as possible from Britain. The British had shipped convicts to the American colonies, primarily Georgia, prior to American independence in 1776. John Banks who had been with Captain Cook when he visited Australia suggested just the place: Australia, then known as New South Wales. On May 13, 1787 a fleet of eleven ships left Britain with two years provision and a cargo of 759 unwilling convicts, their guards, and ship's crew numbering 1,530 people in all. They were to colonize the new land.



After an eight month journey they sailed into Botany Bay in New South Wales on the 18th of January 1788. The captain of the fleet Arthur Phillip decided Botany Bay wasn't a very good place to start a settlement and moved to Port Jackson further up the coast. This is the site of the city of Sydney today.

Life in the new settlement was very hard and most of the people didn't have the skills (such as farming, carpentry, etc.) to tame the new land. Starvation was always a major problem. About 160,000 prisoners were shipped to Australia until 1868. Stealing a buckle or a loaf of bread was enough to be shipped off to Australia.

## **The Free Settlers**

Not too many people wanted to come to Australia in the early days because life was very hard. The sort of people who were needed (farmers, carpenters, builders, etc) didn't want to leave the comforts of home for the hardships of this new land.

During the early 1800's as poverty and unemployment increased in Britain, the British government tried to encourage people to come to Australia by agreeing to pay for their passage (this was called "assisted passage"). These settlers were called "*Free Settlers*". Life on board these ships was squalid. Disease in these cramped surroundings was always a problem. Some of these new settlers laid claim to vast tracts of land on which they started grazing cattle and sheep. They came to be called the "*Squatters*". Over time some of these families became very wealthy and respectable. Their land holdings called "stations" in some cases are bigger than some countries.



## **The Fortune Hunters – The Diggers**

The discovery of gold in 1850 changed Australia radically. In the space of a few years the population increased astronomically. People came from England, Ireland, Scotland, China and even the USA in search of gold. Cities emptied as people rushed off to the gold fields. New shops, factories and farms were opened up to cater for the new people.

These people digging for gold came to be called the "*Diggers*".

Only a few miners ever became rich. It was the merchants and shopkeepers who really became rich.



## **The Displaced**

During the mid-1800's and the 1900's, many people fled to Australia to escape poor conditions in their home countries. The potato famine in Ireland in the 1850s brought an influx of Irish immigrants. After the end of World War 2 many displaced people from Europe found their way to Australia. They came mainly from Britain, Holland, Germany, and Italy. More than 500,000 refugees have settled in Australia since 1945. The latest groups being from war ravaged Bosnia.



## **Factories**

Rapid industrialization in the early 1960's meant that there was a great demand for unskilled labor for the new factories, industries and civil engineering projects opening up in Australia. A large number of new immigrants arrived from Britain, Ireland, Italy, Greece and Turkey. The new immigrants also brought with them their cultures, customs and cuisines. Australia started to become cosmopolitan; a truly multicultural society.