

# Why Van Diemen's Land?

Reasons (economical, political and social) for the establishment of British colonies in Australia after 1800 (ACHHK093)

AC Australian CURRICULUM

## Time line

1642	Van Diemen's Land sighted and named by Dutch navigator Abel Tasman
1772–93	Numerous French and British explorers visit Van Diemen's Land
1778	Van Diemen's Land included in British territorial proclamation
1798	Bass and Flinders prove Van Diemen's land is an island
1802	Six-week visit by Frenchman – Baudin
1803	Bowen sent to Risdon Cove to establish first colony
1803	Collins moves colony from Port Phillip to Sullivan's Cove (Hobart)
1822	First convicts transported
1824	Application to separate from NSW
1824	Van Diemen's Land Company formed
1825	Van Diemen's Land becomes a colony in its own right
1852	Gold discovered in eastern part of island
1854	Application to Queen Victoria to change name of island
1856	Van Diemen's Land is renamed Tasmania
1876	Truganini, the last Tasmanian aborigine taken to Oyster Cove, dies
1877	Port Arthur closes

## R Resources

- <[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yJ\\_1Syp9aYY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yJ_1Syp9aYY)>
- <<http://australia.gov.au/about-australia/australian-story/tasmanian-tiger>>
- <<http://www.about-australia.com/facts/tasmania-history/>>
- <<http://www.indigenoustralia.info/land/invasion.html>>

## Teacher information

### Elaboration

Investigating reasons for the establishment of Van Diemen's Land

### Key inquiry questions

How did Australian colonies develop over time and why?

### Historical skills

Identify and locate a range of relevant sources (ACHHS101) **AC**

Locate information related to inquiry questions in a range of sources (ACHHS102) **AC**

Identify points of view in the past and present (ACHHS104) **AC**

Use a range of communication forms (oral, graphic and written) and digital technologies (ACHHS106) **AC**

### Historical concepts

- Cause and effect
- Significance
- Continuity and change
- Empathy

## B

### Background information

- The British were at war with France. So, once Bass and Flinders had proved that Van Diemen's Land was an island, their fear that the French would claim this island became the motivation to establish a settlement there as soon as possible.
- The area was reasonably well known to British sailors who had been visiting for many years and it had become a popular stopover for ships travelling to Sydney.
- Lieutenant John Bowen was sent to Risdon Cove and Lieutenant Colonel David Collins to Port Phillip in Victoria on Bass Strait. Within a year both men decided these sites were unsuitable and had settled at Sullivan's Cove on the Derwent River.

## T

### Teaching notes

- Van Diemen's Land was not originally set up as a penal colony. This didn't happen until 20 years later, when some of the more hardened convicts were sent there from Sydney. It had a harsher climate than Sydney and convicts were not treated well. In 50 years, around 74 000 convicts were sent to Van Diemen's Land. These factors led to its reputation as a wretched place. Further factors included the treatment and relocation of Aborigines, resulting in their decimation and (ultimately) the eradication of the unique Tasmanian tiger—to protect sheep. When transportation ended, the name was changed to Tasmania to improve its reputation. But because of its past history and because more than half the population were still convicts or ex-convicts its reputation took a long time to improve.
- Penal settlements in Van Diemen's Land were set up to take advantage of natural landscape features that made it very difficult for convicts to escape. Bleak, isolated islands often surrounded by shark infested water were chosen for this reason. Port Arthur, located on Eagle Hawk Neck and surrounded by a natural moat, was joined to the mainland by a narrow piece of land that was easily guarded by a few men and savage dogs. It was also located closer to Hobart and in an area where natural resources such as timber and later coal were available. Prisoners were a source of labour for these industries.
- Students may need practice in writing notes and in recording references as required on Page 5. Opportunities to compare conflicting information from different sources may arise when students are sharing and discussing their research findings.

## A

### Additional activities

- Write a letter from Governor Phillip King to King George III in England telling him you are concerned about French visits to Van Diemen's Land. Suggest what you think should be done about it.
- Research illustrations of Port Arthur and use them to make a PowerPoint® presentation.

# Why Van Diemen's Land? - 1

The Dutch explorer Abel Tasman, in 1642, was the first European to discover Tasmania. By planting a flag, he claimed the land as Dutch territory and named it after the Governor of the East India Company, Anthony Van Diemen. But the Dutch never came back to claim Van Diemen's Land.

There are records of numerous British and French visits there after 1772. This explains why Van Diemen's Land was included in the proclamation the British made in 1788 when they established their colony in Sydney and claimed Australia for Britain.

Ten years later, Bass and Flinders sailed through Bass Strait and proved Van Diemen's Land was a separate island. This news caused a big problem for the British, when they learnt the French explorer Baudin had spent six weeks there. So, to stop their enemies from claiming this island, it was decided to establish Australia's second colony in Van Diemen's Land. In 1803 Lieutenant John Bowen was sent to set up a colony at Risdon Cove. He took settlers and some convicts as labourers. The soil was poor there, so he moved five kilometres to the lower Derwent River and joined a second settlement established by Lieutenant Colonel David Collins at Sullivan's Cove. Water was plentiful and this settlement did better. It became known as Hobart Town, named after Lord Hobart, the British Colonial Secretary.

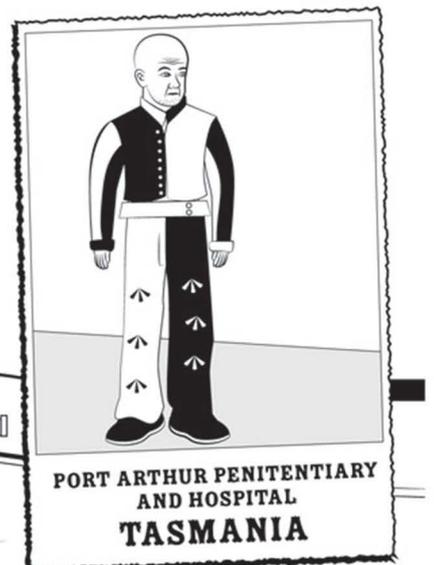
By 1806 the colony was struggling and without bread, sugar, tea, vegetables or alcohol. It was decided to provide convicts with guns so they could hunt kangaroos for meat. This made it easier for some of them to escape and become bushrangers. They terrorised the countryside. It also upset the Aborigines because their food supplies were affected.

In 1822 the first convict prison, Macquarie Harbour, was built at Sarah Island on the west coast, followed three years later by one on the east coast at Maria Island. Port Arthur, 60 km from Hobart, was established in 1830 to replace both of them. This infamous prison, surrounded by a shark-infested natural moat, closed in 1877.

By the time the last of 74 000 convicts arrived in 1853, they made up more than half the population. The island had a reputation as a cruel and brutal place. To separate it from its terrible past, they applied to Queen Victoria to have the island's name changed to Tasmania. This was granted in 1856 when Tasmania became a separate colony from NSW.

One of the tragic outcomes of British settlements in Tasmania was the plight of the Aborigines. It is calculated there were 5000–6000 in 1803, but many died of European diseases or were killed. Thirty years later there were only about 300 left. They were moved to Flinders Island but only 47 survived. They were transferred to Oyster Cove where they all died; the last woman there in 1876.

After some initial difficulties the island prospered, producing wheat and wool for export. In 1825, it separated from NSW and became an independent colony. In the same year the Van Diemen's Land Company was formed to provide cheap wool for British factories. An important shipbuilding industry was developed on the island. The economy improved and the population increased after gold was discovered in the 1870s.



# Why Van Diemen's Land? - 2

1. (a) Why did the reputation of Van Diemen's Land start to change in 1822, about 20 years after it was first settled?

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- (b) Explain why its reputation became so bad.

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- (c) When did it start to improve and why?

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2. (a) Why were Sarah and Maria Islands established?

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- (b) Where are they situated?

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- (c) When and why were they closed?

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3. Find out about the site of Port Arthur and why it was chosen as a convict prison. Record your information below in note form.



*When sheep were introduced in 1824, they were easier prey for Tasmanian tigers (Thylacines) than kangaroos. To protect the sheep, a tiger bounty was offered in 1830. As a result, these shy, secretive animals became extinct when the last one died in the Hobart Zoo in 1936.*



# Why Van Diemen's Land? - 3

1. Research the sad history of the Aboriginal people of Tasmania after white settlement. You will need to:

- think of a suitable title
- make brief notes under each of the subheadings below.
- list the references you have used.



<i>Title:</i> _____	
<i>Life before settlement</i>	
<i>First contact with Europeans</i>	<i>Land and food lost after contact</i>
<i>Conflicts</i>	<i>Flinders Island</i>
	<i>Oyster Cove</i>
<i>References</i>	

2. (a) Discuss and share what you have learnt with a small group.  
 (b) Tell what happened from either an Aboriginal or European point of view.



*Martial law was declared in 1828 leading to an event known as the 'Black Line'. Men formed a line and spent weeks trying to drive all the Aborigines south. Only a few were captured, but it persuaded the others to move and live on Flinders Island.*