

Australia



Australia is a huge island found between the Pacific and Indian Oceans. In 1770 James Cook, the captain of the *Endeavour*, took possession of the land for the King of Great Britain, thus *The Great South Land* became part of the British Empire. Today, Australia is one of many nations linked to Great Britain as an independent member of the Commonwealth of Nations.

Justice in England was very severe. In the days of William Shakespeare some crimes resulted in the offender being boiled alive for all to see. People who stole property valued at more than 5/- (five shillings) were hanged. Crowds of people would bring their meal with them when they set out to watch the latest criminal being plunged into eternity on the gallows. Many criminals were sentenced to lengthy prison terms in one of the colonies. In 1776 the USA became an independent nation, with the result that they refused to accept any more British criminals. Consequently the decision was made to transport thousands to Australia.

On 13 May, 1787 Governor Phillip, with a fleet of twelve ships, set out to establish a settlement in Australia. The fleet

that sailed from England carried five hundred and sixty four male convicts, one hundred and ninety two women and thirteen infants belonging to the convicts. In all, counting soldiers, guards, doctors and others, one thousand and seventeen people left Great Britain to establish a convict settlement in the “Land Down Under.” The fleet arrived in Australia in 1788. Today in Australia there is a degree of pride at being able to trace one’s ancestry to a convict who was transported on the first fleet.

Before the settlement took place, the huge island was occupied by many aboriginal tribes, who were given no say in what happened in 1770 and 1788.

The land was soon divided into six states named New South Wales, Queensland, Victoria, South Australia, Western Australia and later what was called Northern Territory. To the south is the island state of Tasmania. On 1 January, 1901 the states united to form the Commonwealth of Australia. For a time there was a dispute between the governments of New South Wales and Victoria concerning the state where the Commonwealth Government would meet. This was solved when New South Wales set aside a portion of land which is known as the Australian Capital Territory (A.C.T.) with Canberra as the seat of government.

Australia is 7,686,848 square kilometres in size. From east to west it measures 3,983 kilometres, and from north to south 3,138 kilometres. The coastline measures 27,948 kilometres which includes Tasmania and the 821 small islands dotted along Australia’s coastline. Our highest mountain is Mount

Kosciusko which rises to 2,228 metres above sea level, while Lake Eyre in parts is sixteen metres below sea level. Australia has a national Coat of Arms - a shield decorated with the state badges which is supported by an emu and a kangaroo. Both of these animals cannot walk backwards, which symbolises a nation that is ever moving forward. In 2002 the population was estimated to be close to 20,000,000.

Christians should be people who walk forward, following God's ways. Christians shouldn't retreat and in God's strength they should keep following in his ways. God's Word the Bible teaches his people how to live and Jesus himself has told them not to give up. 'No one who puts his hand to the plough and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.' Luke 9:62.

In Australia most people live along the coastal plains where the rainfall is sufficient to support the population and provide adequate water to grow the crops needed to support both animal and human life. Once we cross the Great Dividing Range the land becomes drier. The interior desert regions are of no real value for agriculture. The land far beyond the Great Dividing Range is *The Australian Outback*.

The convict settlers worked in the coastal areas but, with the arrival of free settlers and with released convicts, the move inland commenced. The outback was settled by courageous men and women who claimed their piece of land. Many established cattle and sheep stations, while others concentrated on wheat production.

It was the inland that provided the best land for sheep because of the low rainfall. Wet weather along the coast had

caused the crippling foot rot amongst the sheep.

The wheat that was first grown along the coastal areas suffered from a disease called rust, causing the wheat farmers to move over the Great Dividing Range to the western plains where there was good weather for both cattle, sheep and wheat.

However the inland area had great tracts of land with a low rainfall. In many places the land selected as a station for sheep or cattle was little better than desert. This meant that many hectares of land were needed to feed just one animal. The sheep and beef cattle had to compete with thousands of kangaroos for the small amount of pastures available. However, the settlers discovered that when the rain did fall, the deserts bloomed with a multitude of coloured flowers and pastures grew for the animals to eat.

Those early settlers found life very difficult. They travelled in carts which carried everything needed to clear the land, build houses, till the soil, as well as seed to grow vegetables for themselves, and crops to feed the cattle and sheep. In addition they had herds of cattle to drive before them to the land they were to claim as their own. Imagine, if you can, Dad and his family, workmen, herds of cattle or sheep facing thick bushland and a range of mountains. To reach the outback regions it meant cutting a pathway through the timber. The newcomers had to be on guard against attack from the Aboriginal tribes that were being displaced from their traditional land. It was very hard work moving forward with all their possessions and cattle! And when they arrived there

were no houses waiting to be inhabited; just trees!

The early houses were known as 'slab huts,' because the roughly cut timber was placed in the ground in a vertical position. The roof was usually made of timber and corrugated iron - tin. Inside paper was often glued to the wooden slab walls in an effort to prevent the winds blowing into the home through the cracks. I have read of the people living in those homes, lying in bed and being able to see the stars through the cracks in the wall. Sometimes mice made their nests in the paper, and could be heard moving about between the slab wall and the paper.

Often the floors were paved with a mixture of sand and cattle manure, which set like cement for many months. When the floor began to break up it was everyone and everything outside while a new floor was mixed and laid.

In those days there were no churches, schools, doctors, telephone or cars. Usually the family, travelling by a horse drawn cart, visited a large town to buy supplies. They used bullock teams to convey their wool and wheat to the markets for sale. Others drove their stock to far away sale yards to be



auctioned to butchers. After a time in the town where the family bought supplies that would last for the next year, they set out on the long journey home.

Everyone in the family worked hard to build their homes, grow crops and take care of the sheep and cattle. In many places children grew up not being able to read or write because there were no schools. Their parents couldn't teach them as they had never attended school either!

How different this was from what we read in the Scriptures concerning God's people Israel, who were rescued from slavery in Egypt. The Lord raised up Moses to lead them to the Promised Land. God provided them with all they needed for the journey.

After Moses' death Joshua became their leader. God used the Israelites to overthrow the ungodly people who had settled on the land promised to Abraham and his descendants (Genesis 17: 8). Houses were ready to be occupied, crops were growing in the fields and cattle were waiting to be milked or killed for food. We can trust the words of our God when he said: 'A good man leaves an inheritance to his children's children, but the wealth of the sinner is stored up for the righteous' (Proverbs 13:22).

How different this was to the conditions faced by the men and women who settled in the outback regions of Australia - out beyond the *black stump*, and where the crows fly backwards to keep the dust out of their eyes.

What an adventure it would be to spend some time in the Australian outback.