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## **Early Days in Sydney Town**

Before 1788, Australia was populated by about 300,000 aborigines. Their country was the world's oldest continent for more than 10,000 years. They had encountered few visitors from other countries. Their way of life changed in the late 1770s.

### ***1. Britain needs new overseas colonies***

Three hundred years ago Australia was called New Holland by the European countries. Parts of the west coast had been visited by ships from Holland but a settlement had not been made by Europeans. Captain James Cook, from Great Britain, sailed along the east coast of New Holland in 1770 and explored and mapped it. He named this land New South Wales. He told the British government that he thought it be a good place for them to establish a settlement.

Why did the British government need new places to settle? In Britain many people were moving from the country areas to the cities. Factories and other places of work were developing. As well, there was an increase in crime. Britain's jails were overcrowded and needed to send its convicts somewhere. It couldn't send them to America. The government decided to set up a prison or penal colony in the land explored by Cook. The convicts would be taken there and never return.

### ***2. The First Fleet sets out***

On 13th May 1787, nine ships escorted by two Naval vessels left Portsmouth for New Holland. They carried 759 convicts, their Marine guards, some with families, and a few civil officers. This was the First Fleet. It was led by Captain Arthur Philip. Conditions for the convicts were poor. They were crammed into a small space below decks and were allowed on deck for short periods on some days. Surprisingly, few died over the eight month trip.

The Fleet stopped at Tenerife, Rio de Janeiro and Cape Town to stock up on food. It reached Botany Bay on the East coast of Australian between 18th and 20th January 1788.

### ***3. The newcomers arrive***

The Fleet reached Botany Bay on the East coast of Australian between 18th and 20th January 1788 and settled first at Botany Bay. This area seemed to be unsuitable for establishing a new settlement in comparison to the environment that the newcomers came from. It lacked fresh water, was open to the sea making it unsafe for the ships and the soil seemed poor for growing crops. The newcomers sailed north a few miles to Port Jackson on 26 January 1788.

### ***4. First days in the new settlement***

This new settlement had many problems from the start. Few of the convicts knew how to farm and the soil around Sydney Cove was poor. The country was hot, dry and unfertile, unsuitable for the small farming necessary to make the settlement self-sufficient. Everyone, including the Colony's first Governor, Captain Arthur Phillip,

was on rationed food.

Aborigines and the European settlers were wary of each other. They spoke different languages and had little understanding of each other's cultures. They could therefore only communicate with each other in a rudimentary way.

Unlike the newcomers, the aborigines did not find the environment harsh or difficult. They lived very well in this environment; it had been their home for a long time. They knew very well which local plants were nutritious, where they grew and when to eat them. They fished and trapped animals with ease. The settlers found the local plants hard to eat. As well, they were generally poor fishermen. As a result, most of their food had to be brought to the new colony by ship. Animals such as rats, dogs, crows, an occasional kangaroo or emu supplemented the food.

Shelter was also a problem. The new arrivals had few building materials and tools, which were of a bad quality. The local trees were large hardwoods and the tools were soon blunt or broken. As a result, building construction was slow.

### ***5. Early struggles in the new colony***

Over the next six months, the settlement was isolated from the rest of the world. All the ships except the Naval vessels "Syrius" and "Supply" had left. These two vessels were sent out to try to deal with the food shortage. In early October the "Syrius" was sent to Cape Town to buy food. Until she returned six months later, the supply of food was reduced further. This led to work on farming and building also being reduced.

During this time the "Supply" took a small group of convicts and marines to Norfolk Island to set up another penal colony. This was done to reduce the demand on the food supplies at Sydney Cove. The land there was more fertile than at Sydney Cove and the timber of better quality. The rocky cliffs around the island, however, made it difficult to load the ship for transport back to Sydney Cove. Green turtles were caught and taken back to feed the Sydney Covers.

As settlers spread out from Sydney Cove they found better land for farming. They moved along the Parramatta River and formed a settlement called Rose Hill. Crops and vegetables were grown successfully here. However, because they didn't have good transport, it was difficult to take the harvested crops back to Sydney.

In February 1790 the "Syrius" was wrecked off Norfolk Island, while again taking convicts to Norfolk Island. This left the colony with just the "Supply". In April, she was sent to Batavia to by more supplies as the colony had only three months supply of food left.

Four months later the Second Fleet arrived. These ships more convicts and much needed provisions for the colony. The supply of food improved and so did the work that was done. New buildings were completed and large areas of land near Rose Hill were cleared for cultivation.

After more than two years of isolation and near starvation, the settlement at Sydney Cove began to grow. A year long drought in late 1791 held back farming and food continue to remain a major problem until it finished.