

The First Fleet

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The goals in England were overcrowded, filthy and disease ridden resulting in many prisoners being removed to the hulks, which were old battleships that had outlived their usefulness. These ships were anchored in some of the harbours off the southern coast; the main places being Portsmouth, Plymouth and Woolwich. Soon this type of accommodation became as bad as the prisons on shore and the hulks had deteriorated to the point of becoming useless. The American War of Independence meant that prisoners could no longer be sent to those shores. Three unsuccessful attempts to establish colonies in South Africa failed and so it was settled by the English Lords of the Admiralty to send a fleet to Australia.

The First Fleet consisted of eleven ships; five transport (to carry convicts), three store ships and two British naval ships – His Majesty’s Ship Sirius and His Majesty’s Armed Tender Supply. The Sirius was the flagship, captained by John Hunter and carried the newly appointed Governor of New South Wales, Arthur Phillip. The Supply’s duties were to keep the ships of the Fleet together, take messages between the ships and any other duties that the small ship could perform.

162,000 convicts were sent to Australia between 1788 and 1850 by the English courts Australia in 806 ships. Acknowledged as The Founders of Australia the convicts and crews of these first eleven ships have become known as The First Fleeters. Convicts and marines embarked on the ships at Portsmouth on the 16th March 1787 and left English shores on the 17th May 1787 provisioned to supply 790 convicts plus marines and crew. The First Fleet arrived in Australia between 18 -20 January 1788.

THE VOYAGE

Departed PORTSMOUTH	May 13th 1787
Arrived TENERIFFE	June 3rd 1787
Departed TENERIFFE	June 10th 1787
Arrived RIO de JANIERO	Aug 7th 1787
Departed RIO de JANIERO	Sept 4th 1787
Arrived CAPETOWN	Oct 13th 1787
Departed CAPETOWN	Nov 12th 1787
Arrived BOTANY BAY	Jan 18th 1788

Before the arrival of The First Fleet the land was inhabited by approximately 300,000 aboriginals, a nomadic people who had inhabited the land for about 50,000 years. In the Kimberleys (Northern Territory), indications show aboriginals may have inhabited Australia for more than 116,000 to 176,000 years and they had arrived by watercraft. However, conventional belief is that they arrived between 40,000 and 50,000 years ago. Australia has always been separated by at least 60 kilometres of water since the glacial maximum of 140,000 years ago.