An Encounter with the First People of Northern Van Diemen's Land

1642 – 1812, Tasman to the end of the First Epoch

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Abstract

Dutch, French, and British explorers set foot in Van Diemen's Land from 1642 bringing with them a range of preconceptions and prejudices about what and who they might find.

Geographically, the European expectation was for a landmass, equal to, or balancing the landmass of the Northern Hemisphere, hence the search for "The Great South Land".

Anthropologically, the European explorers anticipated finding natives like those they had encountered in Africa and the Pacific Islands. The expectation of similarity extended to colour, cultural traditions and even sexuality. They had to discover if the people were indeed black, tall in stature, woolly-haired, sexually adventurous or of a warrior disposition.

Politically, some of the explorers came for trade, some for scientific curiosity and what might develop from it, and others for acquiring land in the name of their ruler. Behind all these purposes was empire building.

The original encounters with the First People of Van Diemen's Land were full of surprises including that the people were not as black as Europeans expected them to be, nor were they to be submissive.

The Dutch, apart from one man, never landed on the shores of Van Diemen's Land but significant numbers of French and British explorers did, bringing with them European diseases, which had devastating effects upon the First People, from whose viewpoint, the British also brought unacceptable and regard for the land and its utility.

This summary of the first encounters by Dutch, French and British explorers, and eventually British settlers, is Euro-centric. It collects the prejudices and impressions of Europeans as they encountered the First People of the Dutch-named Van Diemen's Land and the British-named New South Wales.

The summary admits that none of the first European visitors to Van Diemen's Land described the island as unoccupied. It is hypothesized, therefore, that all the visiting personnel would have been taken aback by Governor Bourke's 1835 proclamation of Terra nullius – that the land "belonged" to no one prior to British claiming possession in 1770. The proclamation of Terra nullius was made almost 200 years after Abel Janszoon Tasman came to an occupied island; he called Van Diemen's Land.

An encounter with the First People of Van Diemen's Land 1642 – 1812 is in three parts:

1. 1642 – 1793, Tasman to Hayes
2. 1798 – 1804, Flinders to Paterson
3. 1804 – 1812, Paterson to Ritchie and the End of the First Epoch.

The term, First Epoch, was used by Frederick Watson, editor of the Historical Record of Australia to describe the period of British occupation to 1812 and this, in the main, is the limitation of the record of the first encounters between the European explorers and the First People of the island.

An Encounter with the First People of Northern Van Diemen's Land

Part 1: 1642-1793, Tasman to Hayes

The first European sighting of Terra australis incognito was made by Dutchman Abel Janszoon Tasman in 1642 and named New Holland. The second sighting was in 1772, by which time, Lieutenant James Cook had claimed the Great South Land for the British. From 1642, until Captain Matthew Flinders, in 1798, declared the existence of the body of water he called Bass's Strait, a succession of European visitors thought that Van Diemen's Land was part of the landmass of the Great Southland. This meant that the European explorers encountered the First People of Van Diemen's Land on the East and South-East coasts only.

The European explorers were:

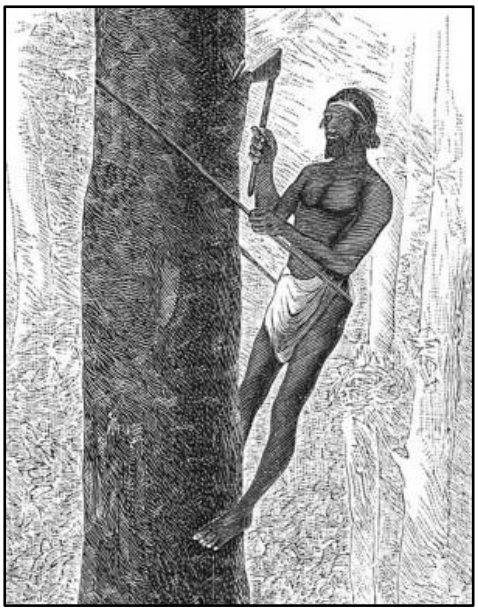
- Abel Janszoon Tasman, Dutch, 1642
- Marc-Joseph Marion Dufresne, French, 1772
- Commander Tobias Furneaux, English, 1773
- Captain James Cook, English, 1777
- Captain William Bligh, English, 1788
- Rear-Admiral Antoine Bruni d'Entrecasteaux, French, 1792 and 1793
- Captain (later Sir) John Hayes, 1793

Abel JanszoonTasman, 1642

A week after sighting the west coast of Van Diemen's Land, on 1 December 1642, Tasman anchored North of Cape Frederick Hendrick on the Forestier Peninsula. On December 2, he sent a party ashore and they found "local plants to eat",[1] also recorded as "edible greens"[2], "reported hearing human voices and seeing smoke rising from several points on shore … but not sighting people in the flesh".[3] He "saw land 'pretty generally covered with trees, standing so far apart that they allow a passage everywhere … unhindered by dense shrubbery or underwood."[4]

Tasman's navigator, Frans Visscher reported that the shore-party "would hear music, see traces of people but (not) meet a living soul."[5] He further reported that the music resembled "that of a trumpet or a small gong".[6]

Visscher also reported that the party had seen trees with steps cut in "with flint axes … to climb up and rob birds' nests. Each step measured five-feet from the other, so that they presumed that the people here must be very tall or that they must by some device, know how to climb the said trees," but Tasman noted "that there are here without any doubt men who must be of extraordinary stature."[7]



This1881engraving of the climbing technique, shows rope and hatchet and includes a loin cloth, an article of clothing not seen by early visitors to New Holland.[8]

Marc-Joseph Marion Dufresne and Julien Crozet, 1772

Dufresne (also du Fresne) anchored in Marion Bay near where Tasman anchored 130 years before and on 7 March 1772, his second in command, Julien Crozet, led a party ashore to explore the land. He met a group of First People, about 30 men, and inferred, by the number of fires that had been seen from the boat, that the land was "thickly populated".[9]

The next day Crozet and some crew returned in two boats and were met by men, women, and children and, in a ceremony that they did not understand, believed they were being invited to light a pile of "dry lighted boughs" and did so without appearing to give offence. The party had been on-shore for about an hour when Captain, Marc-Joseph Marion Dufresne landed, and was offered a similar firebrand near a small pile of wood and lit it.

> As soon as the pile was lighted, the savages retired precipitately on to a hillock, from which they threw a shower of stones, by which M. Marion, as well as an officer who was with him, was wounded. We immediately returned the fire and re-embarked."[10]

The "savages" followed the ship's boats along the shore and when the French attempted another landing they were met with a hail of spears, one man being wounded in the leg and, from his wound and recovery, the French assumed that the spears were not tipped with poison. The ship's crew returned fire and after the "savages" fled, the French discovered that they had killed one of the First People.[11]

It is not known whether Flinders, or any other of the British explorers or colonials, read Crozet's account of his voyage, but the English translation was not published until 1891, 90 years after Flinders confirmed the existence of Bass Strait.

Crozet's description of the First People of the Marion Bay area, the homeland of the Oyster Bay clan, included:[12]

- ordinary height, black, with woolly hair tied in peppercorn knots" and "powdered with red ochre,
- small bilious eyes, full mouths, very white teeth, flattened noses,
- all equally naked,
- the men having small natural parts, not circumcised, and some with cicatrices on the chest,
- in general, thin, fairly-well made, broad chests, shoulders thrown back,
- some of the women carried their children on their backs, fastened by a rush cord,
- men armed with pointed staves and stones, which appeared to have cutting-edges like iron axe heads,
- language hard and they seemed to draw their voices from the bottom of the throat.

The interaction, which became a confrontation, revealed other details of the First People's lives.

- They rejected with disdain, gifts of iron, looking glasses, handkerchiefs, and cloth.
- The offering of fowls and ducks, an inducement to trade, was rejected with the birds thrown away. It was inferred that the animals were unknown to the people.
- The throwing of spears was started after a "fearful cry" from one of the (men).
- A spear wound was easily healed, and it was inferred that the spears were not poison tipped.
- The native man who was shot was:
    - Five foot three inches high,
    - With a chest gashed like a "Mozambique Kaffir",
    - Seemed black but after washing his skin appeared reddish – only smoke and dirt made him look black,
- Bark torn from trees was used to cook shellfish,
- Multiple fires over the area but a local pine not burnt; an inference was that it was more useful in not being "maltreated",
- The burned areas were "covered with grass and brake, similar to that in Europe",
- Little game, and we presumed that the fires … had driven them inland,
- No indication of houses, only some break-winds, rudely formed of branches of trees,
- (from) "heaps of shells … we judged that the ordinary nourishment … consisted of mussels, pinna or wing shell, scallops, chama or heart cockles and other similar shellfish.

The French found plenty to eat even though they found little game. They killed or saw ravens, blackbirds, thrushes, turtle doves, a parakeet, and seabirds "especially pelicans and a black bird with red beak and feet, and which Abel Tasman mentions in his journal."[13]

Tobias Furneaux 1773 [14]

Commander Furneaux captained H.M.S. Adventure under the overall command of Captain James Cook in the H.M.S. Resolution in the 1772-1773 voyage to the South Seas. The ships became separated and before meeting up again in New Zealand, Furneaux travelled to Van

Diemen's Land "sighting South West Cape" then rested up in the refuge he named Adventure Bay on 11 March 1773."[15]

In this "region he named … Mewstone, the Friars, Fluted Cape, and Penguin Island" then sailed North naming "St Patrick's Head, St Helen's Point, Bay of Fires and Eddystone Point" then "noted 'the land trenches away to the westward, which I believe forms a deep bay".[16] This second reference to the possibility of Bass Strait was telling, for Furneaux did not investigate the "deep bay" and later, after his rendezvous with Cook, persuaded him that it was only a bay and not a strait.

Furneaux did not record that he saw any of the First People.

Captain James Cook, 1777

In 1770, when Lieutenant James Cook set foot on Terra australis he was unaware that he had landed on New Holland, the land previously claimed for the Dutch on 3 December 1642 by Tasman. Cook claimed the land for Britain.

He visited Australia again, in 1777, landing at Adventure Bay, Van Diemen's Land, with the ship's Master William Bligh, who eventually brought the ship, HMS Resolution, back to England after Cook was murdered in Hawaii.

The sister ship on the voyage, Discovery, with Charles Clerke in command, was sent a message by Cook, on 2 January 1777 saying that if the ships were separated, they were to rendezvous in Adventure Bay (VDL) and wood and water the ship and cut grass for the livestock on Cook's ship, for a maximum of 8 days.[17] By 24 January, both ships were in Adventure Bay, and on the 28th, while cutting wood and grass:

> Cook met and gave presents to **'natives, eight men and a boy'**. The following day, while on board the Resolution, Cook sighted 20 Aboriginal people on the beach. He took a group of men ashore, where they distributed gifts of iron tools, beads, medals, and fishhooks. Cook later wrote in his journal, **'I gave each of them a string of Beads and a Medal, which I thought they received with some satisfaction'**.[18]

This reaction is disputed. Another account said, "they showed no interest in the gifts of beads that Cook offered. Instead, they seemed fascinated by his striped coat." The encounter was friendly and "no violent incidents occurred".[19]

Notum bene: The event was sketched by the Resolution's artist, John Webber and "is the first to illustrate Europeans and Aborigines together."[20] The picture is held in the Admiralty Library Manuscript Collection, Royal Naval Museum, Portsmouth.[21]

A seaman aboard *Discovery,* John Henty Martin said of the natives:

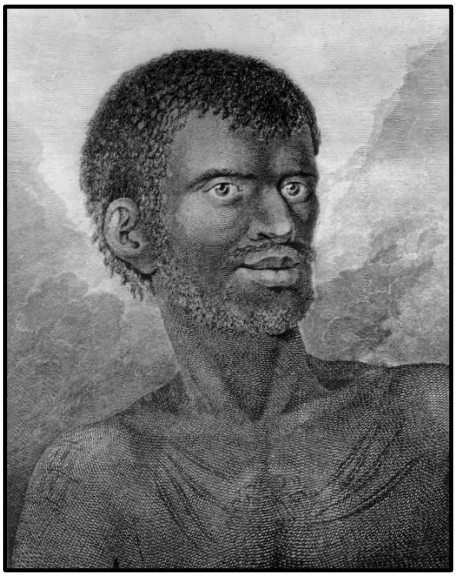
> They have few, or no wants, & seemed perfectly Happy, if one might judge from their behaviour, for they frequently wou'd burst out, into the most immoderate fits of Laughter & when one Laughed everyone followed his example Emediately."[22]

Cook's journal said:

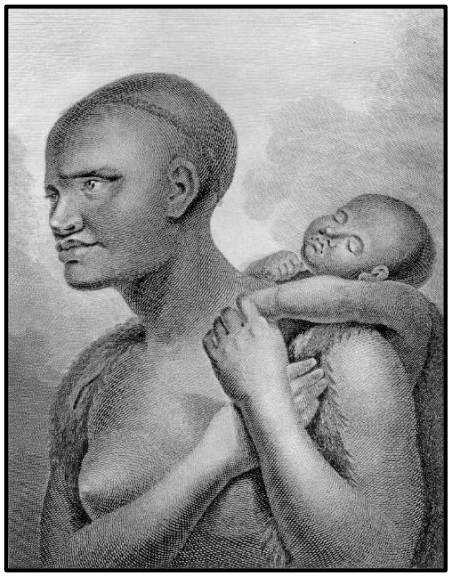
> (They are) of the common stature but rather slender; their skin was black and also their hair, which was woolly as any native of Guinea, but they were not distinguished by remarkable thick lips nor flat noses, on the contrary, their features were far from disagreeable; they had pretty good eyes and their teeth were tolerable even but very dirty; most of them had their hair and beards anointed with red ointment and some had their faces painted with the same composition."[23]

He also said that he did not think they "had 'sufficient civilization' to justify calling the land occupied since there was no evidence of religion or cultivation of the soil or of a settled law."[24]

This was an extraordinary claim to make given that Cook's exploration was in Adventure Bay for a week only and the crews did not appear to venture far inland. If they had, they would have discovered that Adventure Bay was part of an island and not part of the Van Diemen's Land mainland. He might also have discovered more of the First People's relationship with the land.



A Man of Van Diemen's Land



A Woman of Van Diemen's Land

Both pictures drawn by John Webber 1751-1793; artist on the Resolution; and engraved by James Caldwall[25] "Man", held in the National Gallery of Victoria; "Woman", held in the National Library of Australia

Captain William Bligh, 1788

Bligh first visited Adventure Bay, Van Diemen's Land, with Captain James Cook, in 1777. His second visit was on the HMS Bounty on 19 August 1788. A shore party collected botanical specimens, shot birds, obtained water and planted fruit trees, (which he acquired at the Cape of Good Hope) and corn. With the help of [botanist David Nelson] he:

> chose what we thought the safest situations, and planted three fine young Apple-Trees in a growing State, nine Vines, six Plantains, a number of Orange and Lemon seed, Cherry stones, Plum stones, Peach, Apricot & Pumpkins, also two sorts of Indian Corn, and Apple and Pear pips" in order "to do good the most in our power to the Natives or those who may come after us." [26]

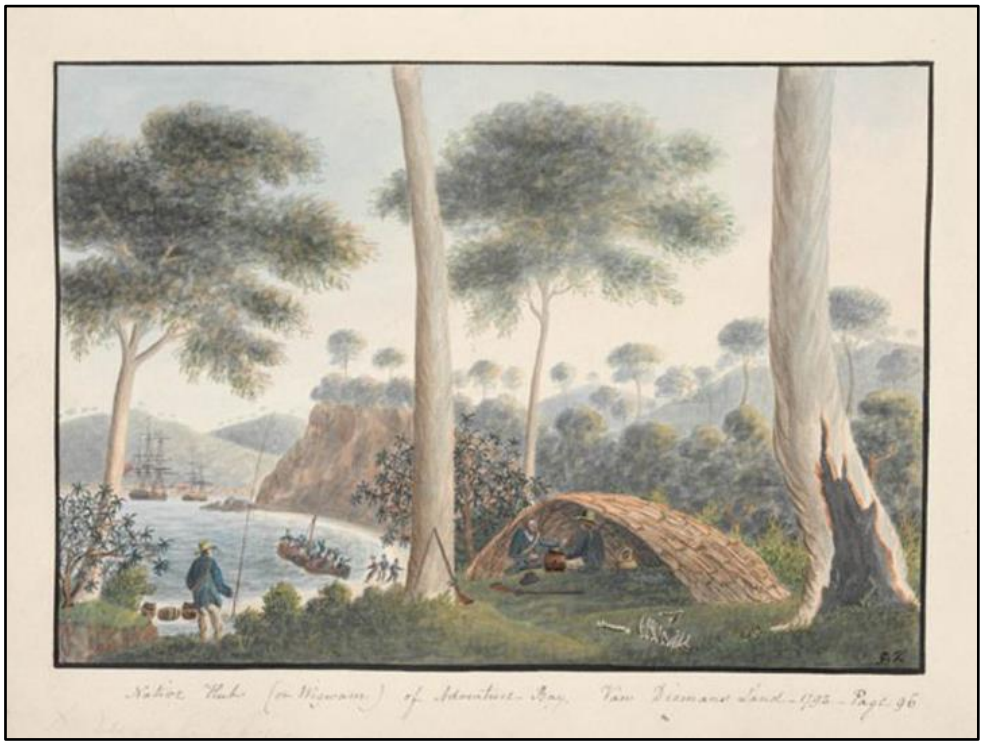
On his 1792 visit to Van Diemen's Land, he "was disappointed to find that, of the fruit trees he had planted … only one apple tree had survived (but his) lack of success did not stop him from planting nine oak trees …"[27]

Although eager to contact natives, the closest he came was to throw gifts from a longboat which was unable to land because of the rough surf. His observation from that distance was:

> They were certainly woolly headed as much as even a Negroe was. Their teeth appeared remarkably white - They run very nimble over the rocks. They talked to us sitting on their heels with their Knees close into their Arm Pits. They have a quick eye, as they caught small Nails and beads I threw at them with some cleverness. [28]

Third-Lieutenant George Tobin, an "amateur naturalist and sketcher" [29] made several pencil sketches of Adventure Bay including two which depicted domed, bark wigwams. In the picture below, two of the British crew are sitting inside the wigwam while in another sketch, two crew members are standing outside the wigwam showing the height of the dome to be between waist and chest height.

These sketches are important because, about 40 years later, George Robinson confirmed that the wigwams were similar to shelters seen in North-East Van Diemen's Land.[30]



George Tobin's Adventure Bay sketch, 1792[31]

Rear-Admiral Antoine Raymond Joseph de Bruni D'Entrecasteaux, 1792-1793 - with naturalist, Jacques-Julien Houtou de Labillardierre, 1792 and 1793

D'Entrecasteaux's expedition of 1791 was, in the main, a search for the French explorer Jean-Francois de la Perouse and his two-ship, scientific expedition which had disappeared mysteriously in the Pacific after observing the British landing at Botany Bay in 1788.[32]

He visited Van Diemen's Land twice. On the first occasion, from 23 April 1792, he arrived in, and named Recherche Bay and spent five weeks there, repairing the ship, undertaking scientific research, especially botany, and building a garden. D'Entrecasteaux also explored the area and discovered that Adventure Bay was on an island, separated from the Van Diemen's Land mainland by a beautiful waterway he named D'Entrecasteaux Channel. He named the island, Bruny Island. [33]

Among the scientific team was naturalist Jacques Labillardierre, who was awe-struck at the beauty of the area and wrote, "We were filled with admiration at the sight of these ancient forests, in which the sound of an axe had never been heard."[34]

On the second trip to Recherche Bay, in January 1793, they encountered 42 members of the Lyluequonny clan and engaged in a fascinating week of cultural exchanges which were included in his 1800, international best seller *Relation du voyage à la recherche de la Pérouse.* [35]

Labillardiere's *Relation du voyage …* "made an important contribution towards humanising the Tasmanians. Unfortunately, that information and the sympathetic attempt at cross-cultural understanding exerted no influence upon Risdon Cove's settlers in 1803," said John Mulvaney. [36]

Labillardiere and others of the D'Entrecasteaux crew that went ashore and spent the best part of a week with the Lyluequonny people, experienced an encounter that seems extraordinary given future events. Mulvaney's untangling of the *Recherche log* and the 1800 publication, *Relation du voyage …,* provides a detailed account of the encounter. [37]

The French recorded[38] that they used an Aboriginal trackway from the south coast to Southport Lagoon and initiated peaceful relations with a group of 42 Lyluequonny by sharing a biscuit with an old man but they found, in general that the Lyluequonny rejected offers of food and were 'surprised to see hot water'.

They later discovered members of the tribe had been visited their camp at night, while the men were sleeping, but took nothing.

On another occasion, some of the French were given shell necklaces in exchange for a neckcloth, handkerchief and more biscuit. The French offered more clothing as they could not understand how the people could survive in the climate while naked apart from wallaby pelts on some shoulders.

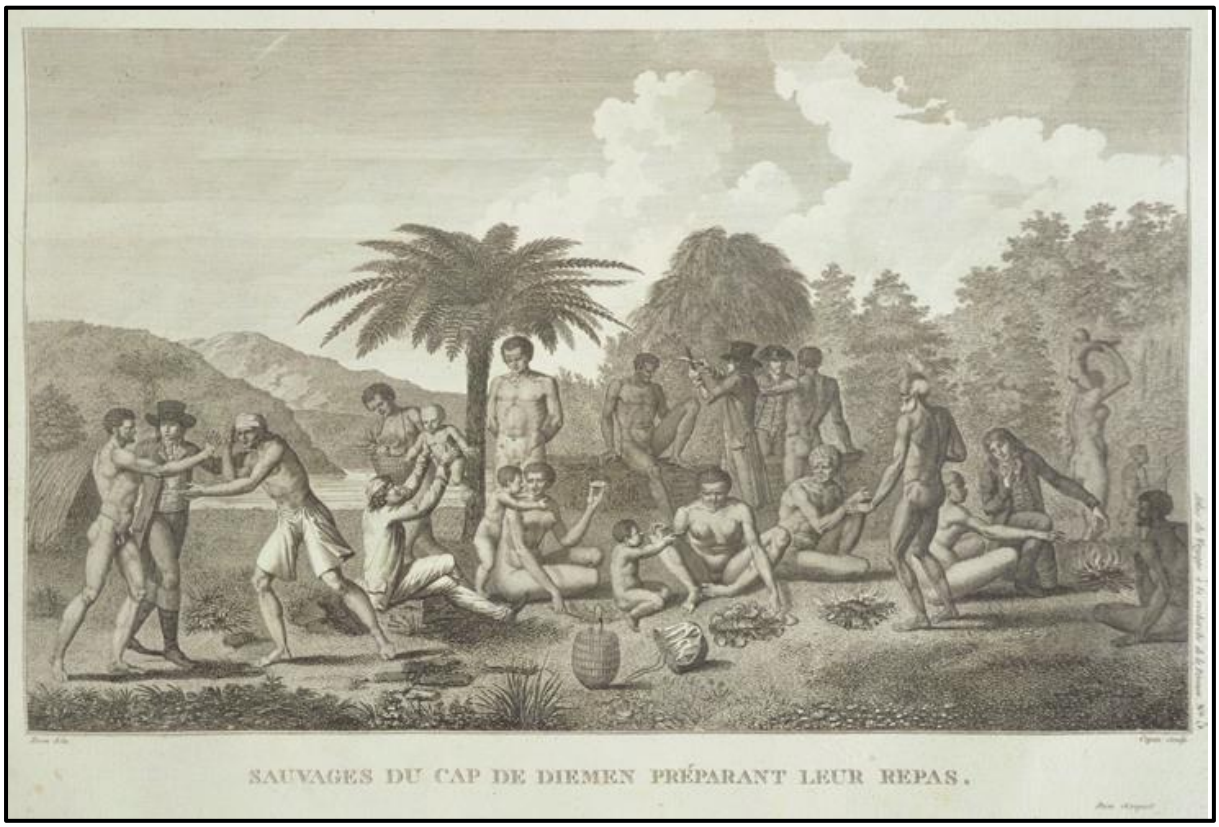
The French noted that the men were bearded, the people had woolly hair, their skin was darkened with charcoal powder. They also had 'impressive cicatrices incised with the edge of a mussel shell' and they did not follow the New Holland custom of knocking out front teeth.

For this encounter, the Lyluequonny men were unarmed, having hidden their spears, although, at one stage there was a demonstration of spear throwing over impressive distances

and accuracy, and when the time came, they escorted the French back to boat station by the shortest route. They cleared obstructions from the track, took them by the arms in slippery areas, and enjoyed an arm-in-arm singalong.

In a visit to the French garden and a mime performance about native and introduced plants, Mulvaney muses "that Labillardiere favoured an interpretation (of the incident) that stressed the intelligence and inquisitiveness of the Tasmanian, just as the spear throwing demonstration showed skill."[39]

On the following day, the French party, this time with artists, met a group of 19 people "eating shellfish beside three fires". The artist, Jean Peron, sketched the scene, below. [40]



Aborigines of Van Diemen's Land preparing their meal [Sauvages du Cap de Diemen preparant leur repas], by Jean Piron, 10 May 1793, with friendly fraternisation in action. Engraving by Jacques Louis Copia, 1764-1799, in Atlas pour servir a la relation du voyage a la recherché de la Perouse, Paris: Chez Dabo, 1817, Plate 5. National Library of Australia [nla.pic-an20973389]

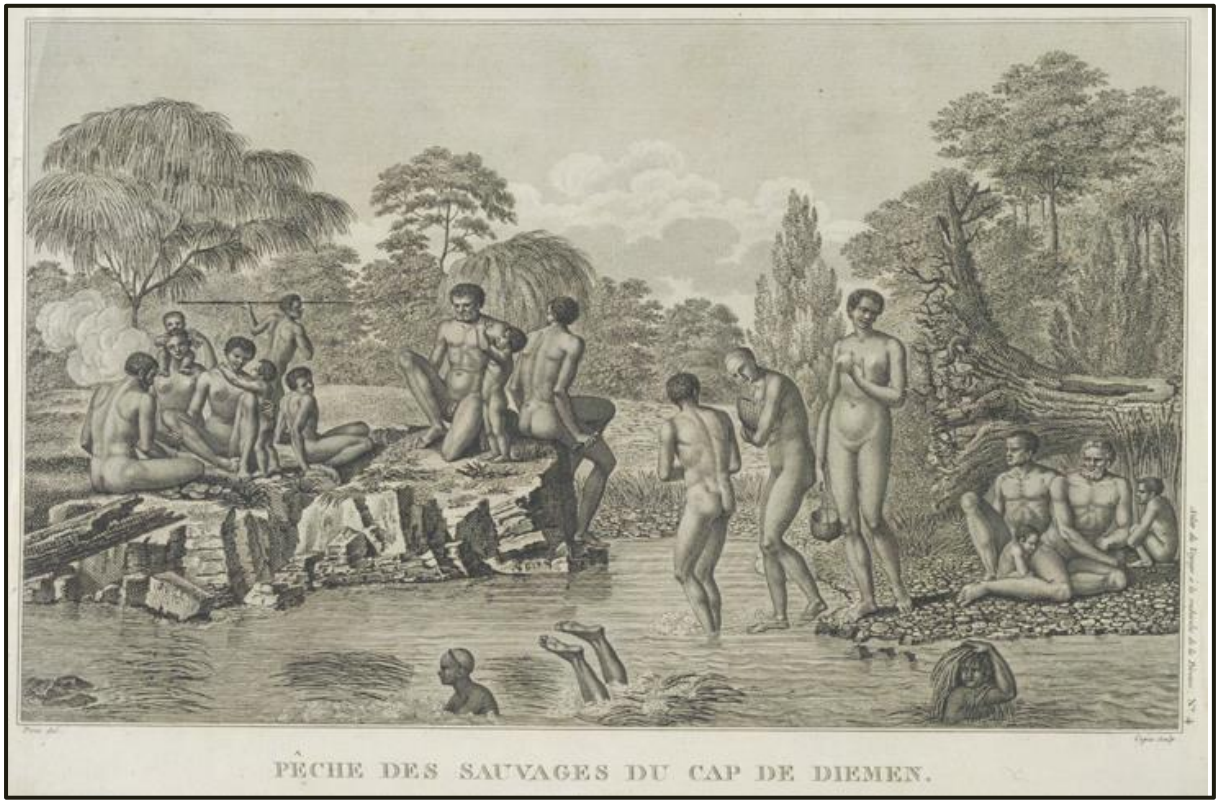
Apart from what might have been artistic licence or classic reconstruction of parts of the scene, Mulvaney noted [41] 17 First People and five Frenchmen and a "carefree fraternisation … that typified the humanising of the occasion."

He also noted that the artist, Jean Piron, had captured:

- An area clear of brush "possibly resulting from regular Aboriginal firing".
- "Three hearths with crayfish broiling" (cooking over direct heat like a barbecue).
- A basket and seaweed container.

- The artist, Piron, having his body blackened by ash.
- A Frenchman playing with a baby and holding it aloft.
- A Frenchman playing a musical instrument, possibly a violin.

He also hypothesised that one of the Frenchmen, Riche, being tubercular, condemned the Lyluequonny to the ravages of European diseases that saw the population drop from a probable 150, in 1793, to a handful, just a few years after the penal colony was established 10 years later.



Tasmanians preparing a meal from the sea [Peche des sauvages du Cap de Diemen], Jean Piron, 1793. Note the role of women in food collection.
Captain D'Auribeau commented on the accuracy of Piron's sketch. Engraving by Jacques Louis Copia, 1764-1799, in Atlas pour servir a la relation du voyage a la recherché de la Perouse, Paris: Chez Dabo, 1817, Plate 4. National Library of Australia [nla.pic-an8953914]

At a further meeting, artist Piron captured a family gathering of 48 people "preparing a meal from the sea" [42] in which:

- "Women dived for crayfish, shellfish and edible seaweed, (and) placed them on the coals".
- Women stayed underwater twice as long as the French thought possible".
- The men took no part in catching or cooking the meal and could not be induced, by French persuasion, to do so.
- The statuesque proportions of the Lyluequonny "exemplified hard primitivism as opposed to the soft, languorous, sensuous Polynesians".

The contact between the two groups also proposed that:

- "Unlike Polynesia, there were no abandoned sexual liaisons".

- Endeavouring to understand the gender of the French, the Lyluequonny "concentrating upon the young and beardless sailors … were disturbed to find that they were males also."
- Monogamy was practiced and not polygamy as was the supposed norm for 'primitive society'.
- The Lyluequonny had "an essential humanity ... (with) loving treatment of children, the sharing of food and good humour" … (and a) natural goodness."
- In the shortness of time with the People, the French were unable "to discover any religious beliefs".
- Their speech was "crisp and lively".
- "They articulate in the throat and speak very rapidly".
- Sing with a modulation like Arab music.
- At one meeting of their dance, the crew's priest, Ventenat wrote:

> Their dance consists of raising one foot behind them, touching the head with the hand, then they bend the body down and straighten up in turn, the movements being made quite violently. Their voice is sonorous, pleasant and agreeable. When they sing, they only have two tones, which are pitched between B and G. [43]

What strikes most about the encounter with the Lyluequonny is the degree of observation of the people and the empathy between the parties but the greatest curiosity, from the First People's viewpoint must have been that they were being visited by men only. Where were the women? Was it possible to have a "family" of males only?

(Sir) John Hayes, 1793 [44]

On 24 April 1793, Captain Hayes reached Adventure Bay, Bruny Island, not knowing of the exploration and discoveries of D'Entrecasteaux just 4 months previously. In fact, Hayes's private voyage, wholly for commercial reasons, left India a month after D'Entrecasteaux had arrived in van Diemen's Land for the second time and did not return to Calcutta until December 1794. It was then that he learned of D'Entrecasteaux's exploration.

D'Entrecasteaux had named the river flowing to Hobart, Riviere du Nord, since it flowed from the North but the Hayes's nomenclature, River Derwent, was the one that stuck. Although Hayes supposedly travelled as far up the river as New Norfolk and named many places downstream, he appears silent on the First People.

Conclusion

The difference between British and French visitation was important for future outcomes. The British were explorers looking to extend their influence across the world and develop empire and their sovereign empowered them to make claims of discovered lands. The French were investigators of land, people, and culture, seeking to acquire knowledge upon which they might build their empire. The difference became clear some years later when the French navigator Baudin met the British navigator Flinders in Bass Strait, and the Governor of NSW, Philip Gidley King, activated by a possible French claim of possession, discovered that Baudin had no authority to claim lands for the French. He had to return to Paris and consult with Napoleon before such a claim could be made.[45]

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An Encounter with the First People of Northern Van Diemen's Land

Part 2: 1798-1804, Flinders to Paterson

The first Europeans to settle in Van Diemen's Land (VDL) should have been aware that indigenous people had diverse and complex cultures and a significant relationship with the land – its features, flora and fauna. The British had 10 years' contact with the First People around Port Jackson, New South Wales (NSW) by the time that it was realized that VDL was an island. They should have been aware that indigenous people of the land had myths and legends and complex family arrangements to be respected. They were blind to the obvious.

At the time of the European arrival, the indigenous people of VDL existed in nine nations or clans containing family groups which occupied homelands.[1] The Southern VDL settlements intruded on the homeland of the South-East Clan in which the Melukerdee was the principal family group.[2] The Northern VDL settlement intruded on the homeland of the Northern Midlands Clan and, more specifically, the homeland of the Leterre-mairener family group. This homeland intersected with the lands of the North-East and Ben Lomond Clans. (See map next page)

The dynamic of the lives of the First People of VDL were to change dramatically with the explorations and arrival of:

- Second Lieutenant Matthew Flinders and Dr George Bass in 1798
- Sub-Lieutenant Louis-Claude de Saulces de Freycinet and cartographer Faure, 19 March to 7 May 1802
- William Collins, Thomas Clark and Robert Brown, January 1804 and
- Lieutenant-Colonel William Paterson, November 1804

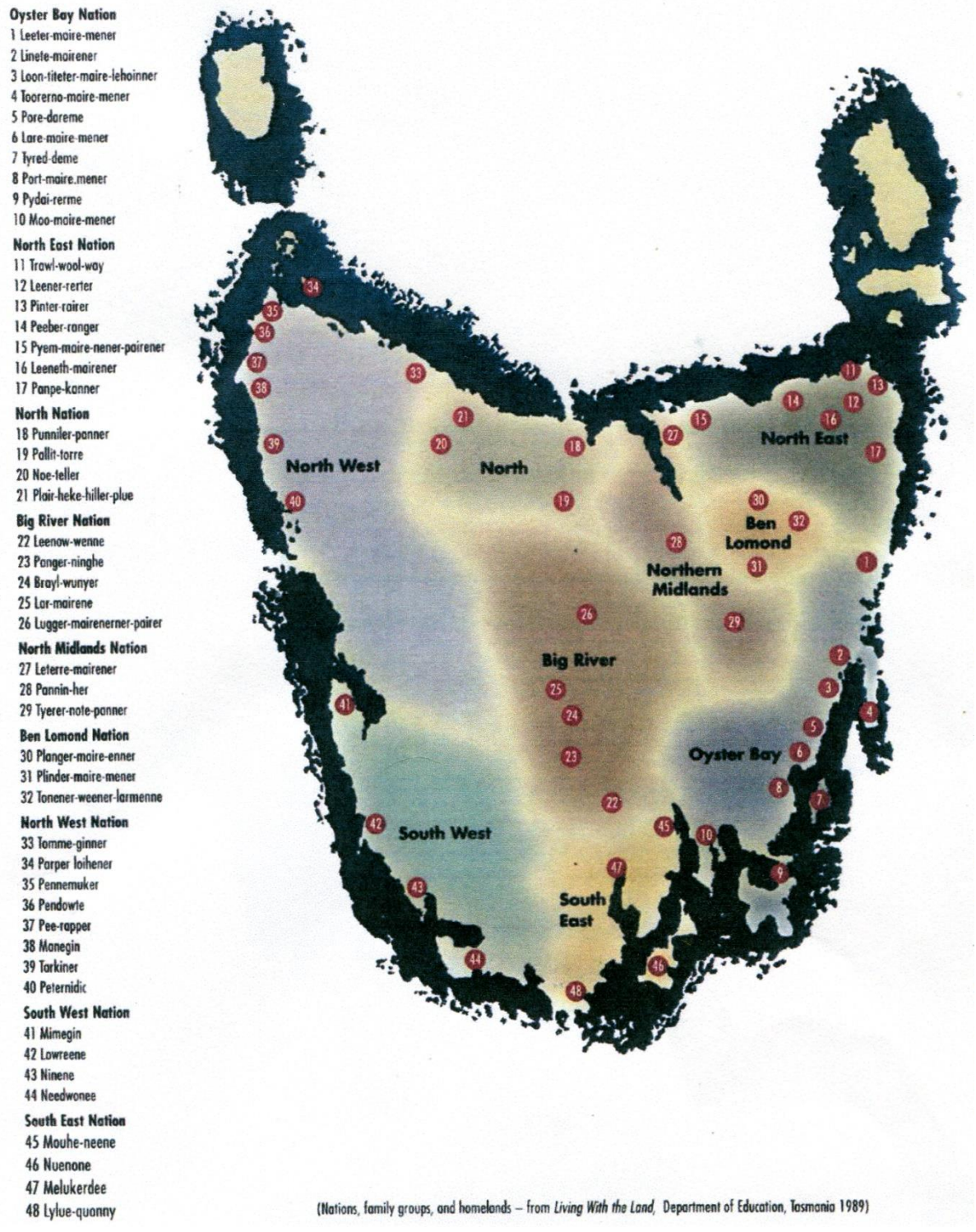
The 1798 revelation of VDL's island status, by Matthew Flinders and George Bass, created an imperative for a British settlement given that the French were still exploring VDL's coastline at a time of on-going Anglo-French conflict in Europe. The alarm at having a French settlement on the landmass that the British had claimed spurred action for settlements in Southern VDL and somewhere in Bass Strait. Although the settlements resembled military outposts, from the earliest decision to create them, the outposts were designed as settlements of possession because they included a mix of free settlers.

How Van Diemen's Land came to be a dumping ground for recalcitrant convicts is another story. Lieutenant-Governor David Collins, just two weeks after he arrived in the Derwent, wrote to the NSW Governor, Philip Gidley King, on 29 February 1804, objecting to the developing practice of NSW magistrates forwarding hardened criminals to VDL. He wrote:

> However convenient it may be to the Magistrates at Sydney to get rid of such Characters, which may be extremely troublesome to them, yet I must beg leave to observe that the Introduction of such abandoned and hardened Wretches into an Infant Colony may be attended with the most mischievous effects.[3]

Appendix 5a - Tasmania prior to European Invasion

Tasmanian Aboriginal Nations, family groups, and their homelands before European invasion



(Nations, family groups, and homelands – from *Living With the Land*, Department of Education, Tasmania 1989)

Collins was writing from a position of strength, as he was the former Judge Advocate for NSW. and, as such had advocated remote Norfolk Island "as the place for transporting offenders who had again been convicted in NSW, and that it was more dreaded than the first transportation. He thought that for this purpose it might be continued as an alternative for the gallows …"[4] Knowingly or not, Collins was predicting a mostly vicious relationship between convicts that became bushrangers and the First People.

Flinders and Bass, 2 November 1798 to 5 December 1798

Matthew Flinders, in his 1798 exploration, observed a series of islands off the Northern coast of VDL – Waterhouse Island, Swan Island and the numerical islands included – and inferred that since he saw no evidence of visits by Aborigines to the islands 'they had no canoes upon this part of the coast'.[5] This is an extraordinary claim, given the short span of time he spent in the area but became typical of the inferences made by European explorers along the Northern coast of VDL. He inferred from the attitude of seals and birds in rocky islets and Isle Waterhouse, and the lack of marks made by man on Swan Isles, that there was no native habitation.[6] He was able to say, however, that around Waterhouse Island, where smoke was rising on the VDL mainland, habitation was "most numerous between Port Dalrymple and Isle Waterhouse".[7]

Patsy Cameron, in *Grease and Ochre* noted Flinders' travels thus:

> In November of 1798, Matthew Flinders and George Bass made landfall near Waterhouse Island in their small boat while on the first leg of their circumnavigation of Van Diemen's Land. They were attracted ashore by smoke from freshly lit fires and approached a clansman burning off coastal vegetation.*"* [8]

Cameron described an encounter between Flinders and Bass and a Coastal Plains clansman in the northeast near Waterhouse Point. The clansman was firing the bush and, at first appeared not to notice the Englishmen approaching him, but his female companion concealed herself and did not reappear. Camerons states that the female "was following traditional avoidance protocols". The clansman "was civil towards the intruders, and the three men, two from different hemispheres, seemingly overcame the language barrier by using a form of sign language clearly understood by both parties."[9]

Flinders and Bass's inferences need to be examined from another viewpoint. Before 1798, before confirmation of the existence of Bass Strait, either Bass alone, or Bass and Flinders together, had previously explored South of Port Jackson and speculated on the possibility of a small scale sealing industry.[10] The existence of the sealing potential was known a year earlier when the crew of the schooner Francis, was sent to visit the scene of the wreck of the Sydney Cove on Cape Barren Island and discovered not only an array of islands but a 'lucrative seal fishery'.[11] Later, in 1798, in the Norfolk, they 'were accompanied by Charles Bishop, who harvested 5200 fur seal skins and 350 gallons of oil." [12] The sealing industry boomed to such an extent that Governor Philip Gidley King expressed his concern about over-fishing. For the North-East Clan, that wasn't their only problem.

With some sealers being escaped convicts and deserters, lawlessness was rife. The Aboriginal community was exploited, particularly on the Furneaux Group, with women seized to become 'wives' … [13]

This was an informal colonization [14] where seasonal sealers contacted Aborigines and "traded seal carcasses and dogs in exchange for Aboriginal women for sexual and economic purposes. Sporadic conflict over women took place but few records exist of the details."[15]

Although this situation related directly to the North-East of Van Diemen's Land, by inference it affected the Tamar Valley and Launceston as clans people travelled along well-known routes. Bad news could have travelled fast through the family groups, first about the hunting parties taking huge amounts of meat and then about the maltreatment of both the men and the women forced to be partners in an industry, a concept completely alien to the North-East Clan lifestyle. By the time Flinders and Bass returned to the VDL North coast, and attempted to make meaningful contact with Clan members, there was every reason for them to look warily on white intruders. This could well explain the "shyness" of the locals that the British reported after they entered the Tamar estuary.

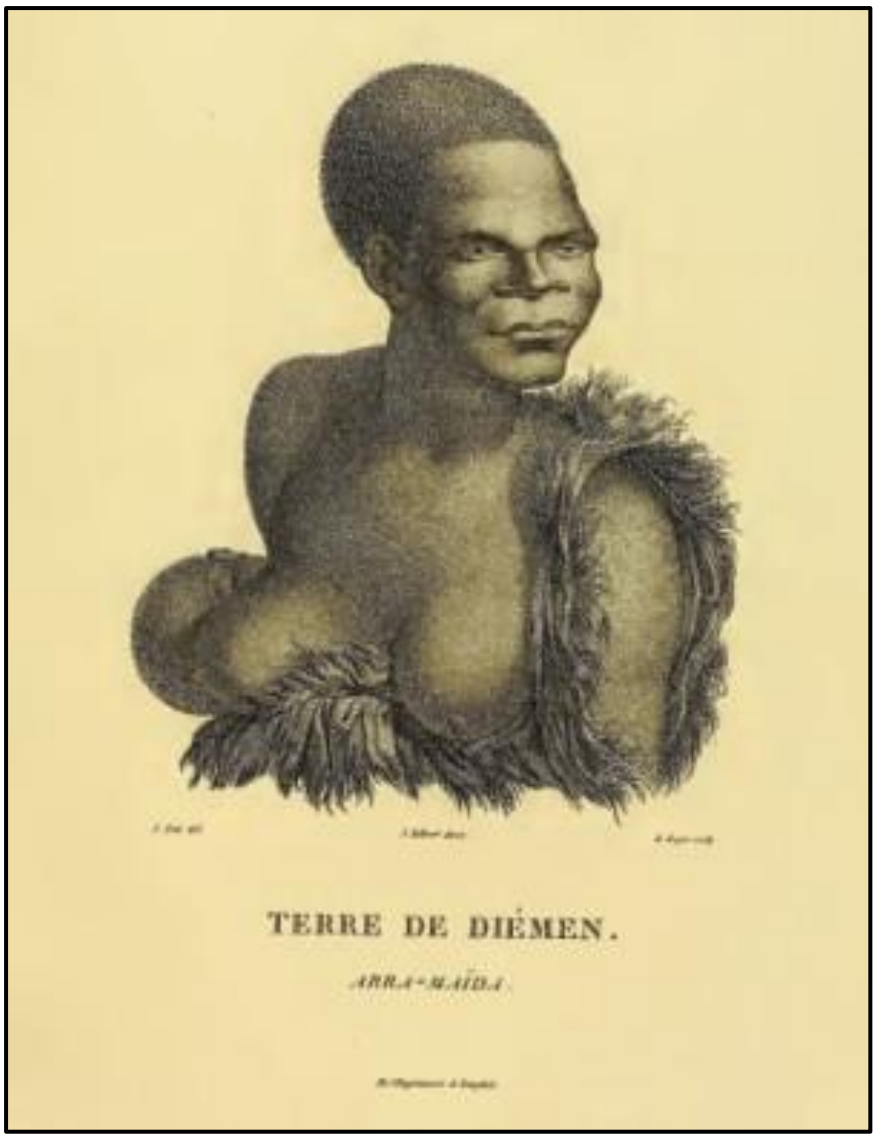
This anti-social relationship between the First People and sealers is disputed. Cameron in Grease and Ochre is adamant and writes that "… there are no reports of *trouwunnan* men or women being present with the sealers in the Bass Strait sealing operations during the early, first-stage sealing seasons of 1798-1810." [16]

The *trouwunnan* women were the seal hunters. The advantage of utilising *trouwunnan* women to hunt seals was, in fact, not recognised until their skills were witnessed in 1816 (by Captain James Kelly). [17]

In this 1798 voyage of discovery, on November 6, Flinders and Bass, anchored their ship upstream from Western Arm and the crew went ashore in search of water and found that "marks of natives having been here some little time back were numerous; and … what was of much more importance to us … several holes full of the best water, I had ever tasted …" [18]

At this point, the party saw a native lighting grass on the shore opposite to where they landed and smoke rising from Middle Island but by the time they got there, three natives, "a man a woman and a boy: the two-former seemed to have something like a small cloak of skins wrapped around them" had sped away. [19]

Flinders added that Port Dalrymple was inhabited in "the same proportion as parts of New South Wales". [20] This could have meant that the population of the Tamar region was about 1500 people – quite large. It is difficult to know what Flinders observation really means for the whole of Van Diemen's Land. John Mulvaney [21] hypothesised that a Frenchman, Riche, on the D'Entrecasteaux expedition to Recherche Bay, in 1793, had brought tuberculosis to the Lyluequonny people and the ravages of European diseases from that time saw the population drop from a probable 150, in 1793, to a handful, just a few years after the Southern VDL penal colony was established. [22] Was Flinders observing a Northern VDL population that had already been affected by European diseases which could have been introduced from the beginning of the sealing industry? In the five years between the first visits of the French, could tuberculosis have been passed from the South-East Clan of VDL to the North-East Clan?



Woman and child by a French artist from the Baudin expedition. Given that there would be a degree of artistic licence, there is a good impression of the "cloak of skins" noted by Flinders and Bass.

Nicolas Baudin explored the East Coast of Van Diemen's Land in 1801 and 1802 but not its Northern Coast. His interest in Bass Strait and his visit to Port Jackson for medical assistance alerted the British to the possibility of French settlements on the territory they had claimed.

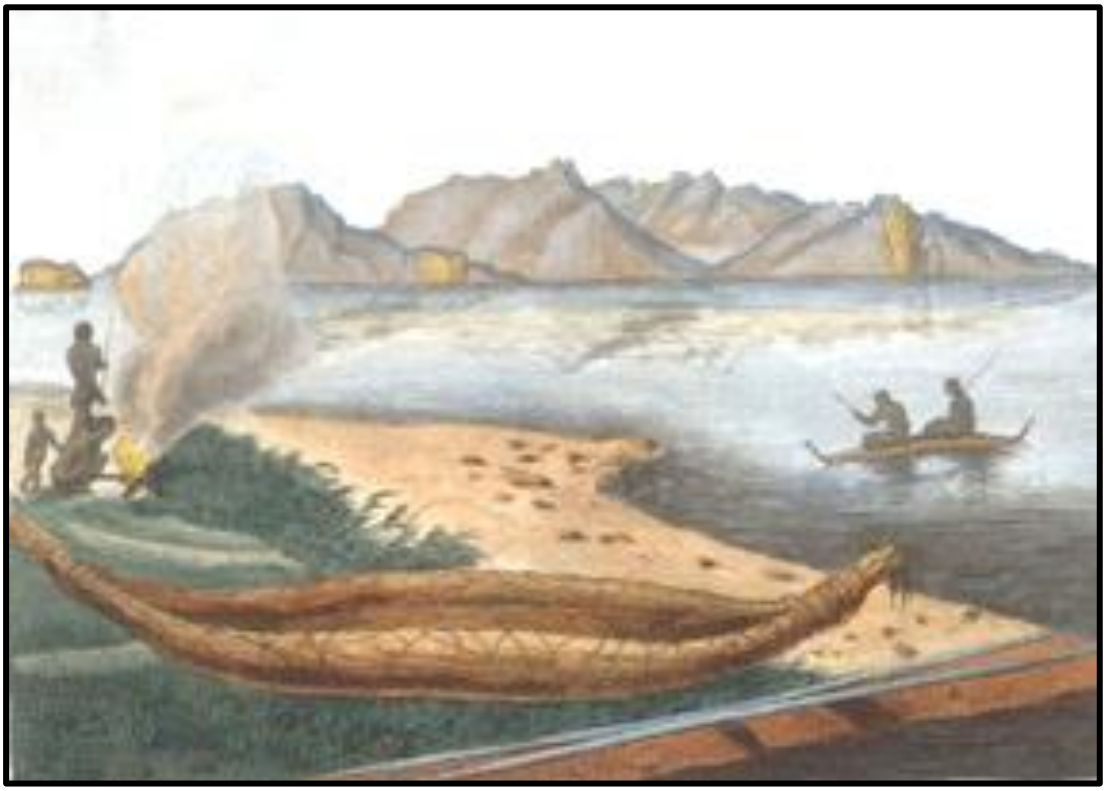
The transmission of disease would depend on the level of visitation between clans and families within clans, but it is known that European diseases devastated Aboriginal communities and the devastation appeared early in the European intrusion. In April 1789, just 15 months after the British settled in NSW, the first smallpox epidemic occurred and NSW Judge-Advocate, David Collins, soon-to-be lieutenant-governor of VDL, recorded that people who had business at the harbour each day reported many dead natives lying in rock excavations, on "the beaches and other points of the different coves which they had been in.[23]

He later described the reaction of a native who was living with him walking around the harbour shore looking for his companions and not finding one living person. “He lifted up his hands and eyes in silent agony for some time; at last he exclaimed, ‘All dead! All dead!’ and then hung his head in mournful silence. [24]

Collins’ awful observations continued but what he recorded was the effect of just one disease. Peter J. Dowling has recorded in *A Great Deal of Sickness* that: “The Aboriginal people of Southeast Australia had no herd immunity to the introduced diseases and the region was virgin-soil for many pathogens endemic among Europeans.” [25] Apart from smallpox, the diseases suggested to have been introduced by Europeans to Southeast Australia were chickenpox, dengue fever, influenza, measles, mumps, rubella, cholera, diphtheria, pneumonia, pertussis, scarlet fever, typhoid fever, anthrax, typhus, syphilis, gonorrhoea and tuberculosis. [26] It is not suggested that the whole of this dreadful list applied to Northern van Diemen’s Land.

Another of Flinders’ immediate observations of the Port Dalrymple region was seeing a group of seven or eight little huts but no people. “Some natives once made fires abreast of where the sloop [was] lying; but as soon as the boat came near the shore, they ran off into the woods; and this was the nearest communication that their shyness would permit.” [27]

Flinders returned to his canoe inference and not finding evidence to satisfy his mind – no sign of visitation by water or bark removed from trees, he concluded:



An impression of Schouten Island and Natives with a traditional Tasmanian bark canoe, as seen by the French Baudin expedition (Lesueur engraving) TMAG reference.

"The sum of our observations upon these people, and their mode of existing, was, that they have less ingenuity, and are more destitute of comforts and conveniences, than even the inhabitants of New South Wales. [28]

There is no way of knowing how far into the "woods" Flinders travelled and how much of the lifestyle of the people he observed, but the expression of impoverishment affected the way in which Europeans regarded the First People of the North-East and Northern Midlands clans.

Flinders and Bass's inference is part of the peculiarity that European assumptions are fact but the picture above, shows clearly that the Oyster Bay Clan, had a canoe-making technology? Is it possible that over more than 30 000 years of cohabitation of the island that the clans did not pass on, or copy, technologies from one another? Even more strange would be a decision by the North-East and Northern Midlands Clans to deliberately eschew this technology. Cameron hypothesised [29] that the Furneaux Island populations, instead of dying out because they were isolated by the rising waters of Bass Strait, migrated South bringing the canoe technology to the people who were already resident on the VDL mainland. They island-hopped as the waters rose. This plausible explanation leaves the question as to why Bass and Flinders found no evidence of canoe technology, not even sitting on a log for buoyancy.

The difference between the Bass and Flinders' exploration and French expeditions, such as Baudin's, was intent. Flinders, especially, was a navigator and both he and Bass were operating from the intent of colonization. The French, however, were primarily explorer-scientists. It was their intention to meet local inhabitants and record observations of the people, plants, animals, and places. It appears that colonization might have occurred but not after the expedition had returned to France and been given the authority to colonize.

George Bass elaborated on the meaning of "huts", but neither he nor Flinders expanded on the meaning of "communication" and we might surmise whether the natives' flight was shyness or fear. What would a native make of an Englishman shouting, "Ahoy there!", for example?

George Bass's more detailed account [30] is no less dismissive of the people than Flinders'. Both based on limited observations. Bass said that:

- The inhabitants' huts were in the same proportion as New South Wales.
- The huts were of bark stripped from tree, broken into convenient lengths, and leant against a branch of a gum tree and sometimes grass was thrown over the top.
- The structure did not hold out the rain and Bass added:

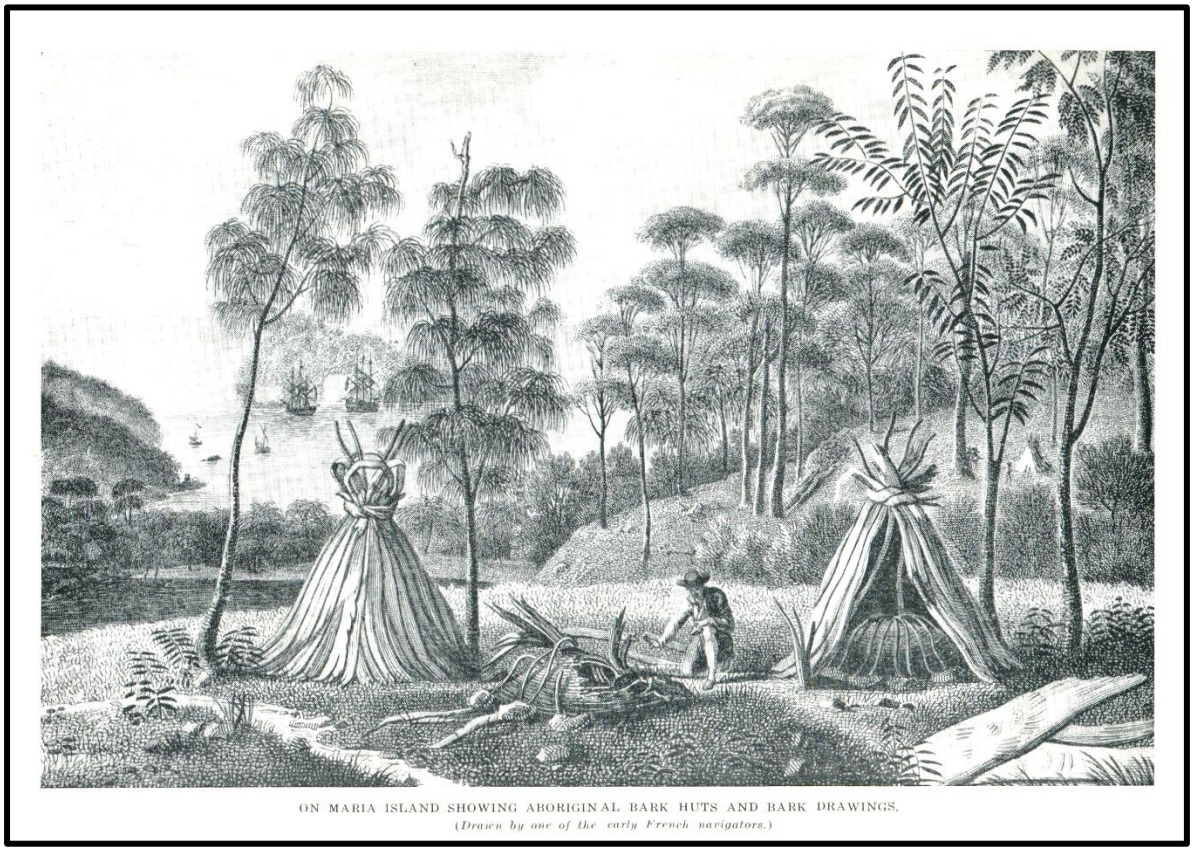
  "It is somewhat strange, that in the latitude of 41º, want should not have sharpened their ideas to the invention of some more convenient habitation, especially since they have been left by nature without the confined dwelling of a hollow tree, or the more agreeable accommodation of a hole under the rock."

- Their extreme shyness prevented communication.
- They were only sighted from a distance.
- The single utensil sighted was a basket – full description given- made of the local wiry grass and used for collecting shellfish.
- Examinations of their fireplaces found bones of marsupials but no fish bones.

- A rope found at the base of a tree suggested that this was used for climbing and taking possums.
- There was no evidence of canoes of bark or solid wood.
- Stone cutting marks in trees indicated that the tools were not as sophisticated as the hatchets on New South Wales. [31]

On completing the exploration of the Tamar estuary, Flinders and Bass had only basic observations and simple inferences of Tasmanian Aborigine lifestyle. This would not be uncommon on a first encounter in a new region where Flinders, the navigator, would be almost wholly engaged in charting the estuary, discovering anchorages, commenting on the abundance of wildlife for food and discovering fresh water. He also noted that the natives were too well provided with other food - swans, ducks, and kangaroos - to be bothered hunting for scale fish. [32]

Also, of some wonder is the fact that Flinders and Bass recorded seeing three natives only, although "huts" for more than three. Inferences that may be drawn are that the number of people was relatively small and living in a huge area or were inhabiting areas other than the near vicinity of the Tamar estuary. In either circumstance, it is odd that the local inhabitants were not a bit more curious about the visitors to their shores.



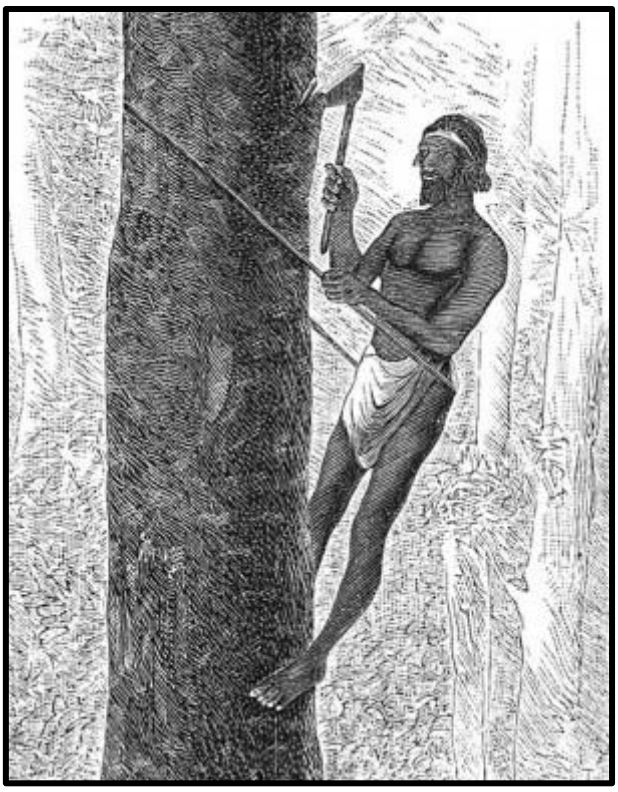
Maria Island Aboriginal bark huts and bark drawings: Drawings made by one of the early French navigators.

from The Story of Tasmanian Aboriginals (sic), Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery, Argyle St, Hobart, 1960 NB: a painting of an Adventure Bay domed hut may be found in Part 3 of this work.

Bass's inference from observing the huts is somewhat peculiar. He and Flinders arrived in November of 1798, a season likely to be much warmer than an English summer, and yet he concluded that the shelters, which he called 'huts', were year-round abodes and wouldn't keep out the rain. If he had concluded that the shelters were merely to provide shade from the sun, he might have had a different opinion of the local's ability to care for themselves.

Bass described how the bark could be removed from trees by levering it from the wood and broken into shorter lengths and leaned against a fallen limb, and, in some instances, grass would be thrown on top.[33] Again, it might be contemplated how clans, living in an island the size of VDL for 30 000 years, would not have seen each other's handiwork and copied it where effective. It is quite plausible that different types of shelters were created for seasonal and weather conditions.

The Clans of VDL must have been able to share their techniques for survival. Part 3 of this work, *The arrival of Europeans, 1642-1793, page 2,* shows that the First People of the East Coast, had an effective way to climb tall trees. It led Tasman to believe that the inhabitants of that area could have been giants as the foot notches in tree trunks were a long way apart.



This engraving from 1881 demonstrates the climbing technique with rope and hatchet that puzzled the Dutch so.[34]

Bass discovered the same tree climbing technique in Port Dalrymple. He assumed that the technique was for hunting possums and recorded, "The mode of taking the opossum seemed to be similar to that practised in New South Wales, except that it is probable they use a rope in ascending the tree; for once, at the foot of a notched tree, about eight feet of a two-inch rope made of grass was found with a knot in it, near which it appeared to have broken."[35]

If the technique for climbing trees was shared amongst the Clans, or copied, it ought to be assumed that other technologies were shared including the construction of different styles of shelters.

Freycinet and Faure, 19 March to 7 May 1802

Sub-Lieutenant Louis-Claude de Saulces de Freycinet (more commonly, Louis de Freycinet) sailed under the command of Nicolas Baudin in a scientific exploration of the Southern and South Western coasts of Australia in 1800-1803 in the ships Naturaliste and Géographe.[36] The ships became separated after they had explored the East coast of Van Diemen's Land, from January 1802, and Baudin, in Géographe sailed through Bass Strait, along its Northern coast while the crew of Naturaliste, sailed around VDL's Northern coast with Freycinet and cartographer Faure sent off to explore Port Dalrymple and the accuracy of Matthew Flinders' maps. [37] The Frenchmen discovered that Flinders' charts were remarkably accurate and made some corrections, remarked on the strength of the tidal current, as had Flinders and Bass, and the abundance of kangaroo, footprints of "cassowaries", the great quantity of wild fowl and mussels and, like Flinders and Bass, "we had no opportunity to see for ourselves whether this harbour abounded in fish." [38] If there was a sin of omission, the Frenchmen did not comment on the presence of indigenous people.

The questions to be drawn from this short exploration, two years ahead of Paterson's settlement near the mouth of the Tamar estuary, are:

- Did the members of the Northern Midlands and North-East Nations withdraw from eyesight of the French?
- Were observations of local inhabitants of no interest to the French at this time?
- Was the population severely diminished by disease?

Nicolas Baudin, Freycinet's superior, following in the wake of Bruny D'Entrecastreaux, made many observations about Van Diemen's Land natives on island's East Coast in 1802 but it is not known if the observations made were applicable to all nine Tasmanian Aboriginal Nations.

"Baudin after landfall at Bruny Island offered a description of people utterly unselfconscious about their bodies. The men held 'almost constantly the extremity of their foreskin with their thumb and forefinger whether they were walking or resting with the result it is very long; …'[39]

"Similarly, when speaking to one of the Aborigines who 'needed to pass water' the French noted he 'merely turned a quarter circle to obey the need and then returned his attention. The women were similarly unselfconscious and would simply stand up and with 'legs slightly apart while still paying attention to us' they would 'obey their natural needs facing us'. [40]

"When it came to sexuality, the women 'offered their favours … quite unambiguously showing them that which they usually hid with a piece of kangaroo skin.' [41]

These blunt observations in no way detract from naturalist Labillardière's comment from the D'Entrecasteaux expedition that the inhabitants were "amiable and peaceful" [42] or the naturalist Péron on the Baudin expedition who gave "a poetical and highly-coloured picture of the kindliness and good qualities of the aborigines". [43]

The question returns. Did these Frenchmen want to colonize Van Diemen's Land or any other part of Terra australis, which Baudin named Napoleon Land?

Governor King had heard a rumour, through Lieutenant-Colonel William Paterson "that a principal object of [the French] voyage was to fix on a place at Van Diemen's Land for a settlement" [44] and that the chosen spot was "Baie du Nord (now known as Frederick Henry Bay)". [45] Acting independently of instructions from London, King determined on settling VDL and sent a note to Baudin, who was caught up with at King's Island on the western end of Bass Strait and warned him against recommending to the French government that a colony should be established. [46] Baudin's reply to Governor King not only indicated that he had a right to hoist the French flag on the island named for King - King's Island - but added:

> "in any case, you ought to have been perfectly certain that if the French Government had given me orders to establish myself in any place, either at the north or at the south of Diemen's land – discovered by Abel Tasman – I should have done so without keeping it a secret from you." [47]

Hypothesising of whether the French would have been better colonists that the British is pointless, but it is certain that the French would have brought the same range of European diseases as the British to devastate the First People.

Bowen at Risdon Cove

Naval Lieutenant John Bowen served on the Cape of Good Hope Station and, with the same rank, sailed in the HMS Glatton, carrying convicts to NSW, arriving at Port Jackson on 11 March 1803. [48] Within three months of his arrival, he had volunteered for, and was given, the position of commandant of a new settlement at Risdon Cove in Southern VDL. Bowen's experience with indigenous inhabitants of a land was less than 12 months' service at the Cape of Good Hope Station and his experience with convicts was as an officer on a convict ship voyage and six months in Port Jackson.

Despite this, and under his command, the new colony left Port Jackson, originally, in June 1803, but because of bad weather, returned to base and set out months later not arriving in the Derwent until 12 September 1803. [49]

The colony's original complement was expected to be close to 100: soldiers, convicts, free settlers, and their families [50] but the ships, HMAT Lady Nelson and South Sea Whaler Albion finally arrived with 47, as shown in the list below:

> Lieut. John Bowen of the Royal Navy, Commandant; Mr Jacob Mountgarrett, do. Surgeon {appointed magistrates}; Mr. Wilson, Storekeeper. A Corporal and Eight Privates of the New South Wales Corps. William Birt, a free Settler from England. Wm. Clark, Do, reduced soldier of the N.S.W. Corps. Twenty-One Male Convicts. Ten Female do. Two Children. Eight Months' Provisions for the above Number of People, with an Ample assortment of Stores, Cloathing and necessaries, divided between the Two Vessels. Nine Cows. One Bull. Twenty-five Ewes and Two Rams.[51]

Governor King's detailed instructions to Bowen included the need for planting crops, reporting on the soils, keeping religious services, employing the convicts, providing land for

settlers, instructing, and if necessary, repelling the French, should the French appear. There was no mention of the First People – avoidance, accommodation, or assimilation.

Bowen's observation of the River Derwent's surrounds, however, are revealing in the context of First People's land management and confirms observations of other early European visitors. On 20 September 1803, he wrote to Governor King, saying that the banks of the Derwent, in the Herdsman's Cove area were "more like a noble man's park in England than an uncultivated country" and that he "could with ease employ one hundred men upon the land about us; and with that number, some good men among them, we should soon be a flourishing colony." [52]

In the same letter he said that he had "not seen a single Native yet, but some of the People found them on our first arrival, but they appeared very shy and have since retired entirely from us; not apprehending they would be of any use to us I have not made any search after them, thinking myself well off if I never see them again." [53]

If Bowen had had more experience and a more detailed observation of the people of Port Jackson, he might have known that the appearance of the First People in certain areas could be seasonal, and his arrival might not have coincided with the time that the First People would be in that area of the Derwent.

Collins at Sullivan Cove

David Collins' settlement at Sullivan Cove consisted of most members of the attempted settlement at Sullivan Bay, Port Phillip. That was a proposed colony for over 450 people, 300 of whom were convicts and the remainder marines and free settlers.[54] When the Port Phillip settlement was disbanded and the possibility of a Port Dalrymple settlement rejected, over 400 [55] of the original colony arrived in Sullivan Cove, on the Derwent: some of the convicts had escaped from the Port Phillip settlement.

Colonel David Collins was a much more experienced officer to be selected as an outpost commandant than naval Lieutenant John Bowen. As a marine officer, he saw action in the American Revolutionary War, surviving the action at Bunker Hill. He was promoted to First Lieutenant at the British Station at Halifax, Nova Scotia, then Adjutant in the Chatham Division and then Captain-Lieutenant in the Channel Squadron.[56] In 1788, he sailed on the Sirius with the First Fleet to NSW as Judge Advocate of the penal colony and marine detachment, being responsible for "the entire legal establishment".[57] In June of that year, he became secretary to the Governor, Arthur Phillip, with duties aligned to "crime and punishment, convict labour, health, rations and stores. … Like Phillip he had a compassionate interest in the Aboriginals (sic), and deplored each racial clash, tending always to blame the convicts for disobedience of the governor's orders.[58]

The depth of his "compassionate interest" was to be tested.

When the marines were relieved of their duty in NSW, Collins had mixed feelings as he wanted to return to England and not continue as a marine but rather with a civil appointment which he was not able to obtain. He considered NSW "a Place of Banishment for the Outcasts of Society."[59] He was persuaded to remain as Judge Advocate for NSW assisting

first, Lieutenant-Governor Grose and then Acting Governor William Paterson with whom he was later to share the responsibilities as lieutenant-governors of VDL.

On Collins return to England in 1797, a nine-year absence from his wife, he wrote *An Account of the English Colony in New South Wales* in which he appeared to have softened his opinion of the penal colony "and claimed, as the book's objective, the dissuasion of his countrymen from regarding New South Wales with 'odium and disgust'. [60]

After the 1798 realization of the existence of Bass Strait, Collins was given, in 1802, Letters Patent[61] to form a Bass Strait settlement with the rank of lieutenant-governor. He arrived in Port Phillip in January 1803 and was less than impressed with the site. He attempted to form a settlement and considered Port Dalrymple as an alternative, but eventually had Governor King agree to his moving the colony to the Derwent in Southern VDL, where Lieutenant John Bowen had established the Risdon Cove settlement.[62]

Collins' abandonment of the Port Phillip colony and decision to go to the Derwent instead of Northern VDL, was based on several factors including:

- lack of good timber and water in Port Phillip.
- bad relations with the First People of Port Phillip.
- a difficult channel to enter the best place for a settlement in Port Dalrymple; and
- possible bad relations with the First People of Port Dalrymple.[63]

Collins obviously hoped to find better settlement conditions in the Derwent where he might use his nine years' experience of legal administration in Port Jackson but his "compassionate interest in the Aboriginals (sic)" was affected by several incidents in Port Phillip. His disdain for convicts was unmoved. His disposition toward the First People of Port Phillip might well have been affected by his observations of European diseases on the people, especially the first wave of smallpox, and a horrific event in NSW during the time of Governor King's predecessor, Governor Hunter.

In an awful coincidence, in October1803, Governor King wrote to the Secretary of State for War and the Colonies, Lord Hobart, justifying his pardon of British subjects that had taken part in the 1802 killing and beheading of Pemulywe, a leader of the First People of the Parramatta and Toongabbee region, during the time of Governor Hunter. In the same month, Collins was confronted with the killing of a Port Phillip native by marines responsible for the guarding of the settlement. The killing of Pemulywe, if not in official correspondence to Collins, must have been talked about on the vessels that plied between the Port Jackson and Port Phillip settlements. Collins must have been acquainted with the event as it was too high profile not to be shipboard gossip. Governor King's despatch to Lord Hobart makes for unsettling reading, not only because it is a British soldier's account only of the incidents and therefore not good evidence but because of the language that was acceptable at the time.

> Depredations of the natives
>
> Respecting your Lordship's remarks on the causes that urged the natives to commit the acts that drew on them the resentment of four of the respites …, I beg leave to state that by a former despatch I communicated, the natives having shown a disposition to become troublesome to the settlers, who, resisting their depredations, all

> the natives left that district, and soon after plundered many of the settlers, wantonly murdered four white men, and cruelly used some of the convict women at different times. The natives about Sydney and Hawkesbury continued as domesticated as ever, and reprobated the conduct of the natives in the neighbourhood of Parramatta and Toongabbee, who were irritated by an active, daring leader named Pemulwye, and in the few intercourses we had with some of his companions they expressed their sorrow for the part they were obliged to act by the great influence Pemulwye had over them. From their extreme agility, lying in wait for them was out of the question. Decided measures therefore became necessary to prevent the out-settlers from being robbed and plundered, and to restore the natives to a friendly intercourse. With these views (founded on the opinions of the principal officers coinciding with mine), I gave orders for every person doing their utmost to bring Pemulwye in either dead or alive, and as it is a practice strictly observed among the natives that murder should be atoned by the life of the murderer or someone belonging to him, the natives were told " that when Pemulwye was given up they should be re-admitted to our friendship." Sometime after two settlers, not having the means of securing the persons of Pemulwye and another native, shot them. On this event they requested that Pemulwye's head might be carried to the Governor, and that as he (Pemulwye) was the cause of all that had happened, and all anger being dropped on their part, they hoped I would allow them to return to Parramatta. Orders were immediately given to that effect and not to molest or ill-treat any native. When I received your Lordship's opinion on this subject I caused the enclosed proclamation to be immediately published, and made the natives fully sensible of the intention and meaning thereof. They expressed much joy and are now on more friendly terms than ever. I have stated this circumstance in corroboration of the remarks made by your Lordship, and I have every hope (as it will be my care) that we shall continue on good terms with them; still the out-settlers must be on their guard against their predatory dispositions.[64]

It is ambiguous from that summary as to whether the British settlers or members of a different tribe or clan beheaded Pemulywe but in either circumstance, the event loses none of its horror.

The Port Phillip killing, although mentioned by Collins in a despatch to Governor King was recorded in detail by Lieutenant James Tuckey of HMS Calcutta in his Memoir of a Chart of Port Phillip. Under the sub-section ***Natives***, [65] Tuckey recorded that he had seen between one and two hundred natives gathering in less than an hour in an area abundant in oysters and cockles.

> … as their obviously hostile intentions made the application of force absolutely necessary, by which one of them was killed, it appears necessary to detail the circumstances with some degree of minuteness. Previous to this event, we had two interviews with separate parties of 8 and 10, during which the most friendly intercourse was maintained, and presents of blankets, beads, etc., were given them. In both these instances, they signified their knowledge and fear of the effect of fire-arms, which in order to quiet their apprehensions and, as they were totally unarmed, I ordered to be kept out of Sight.

Following the killing, Collins gave a General Order to the Port Phillip colony saying that the people should be wary of "a large body of Natives" near the settlement and that the community should not travel "along the beach in search of fish in their leisure hours.[66]

By the end of the year, Governor King had told Collins that that if the colony was to be transferred from Port Phillip, the Derwent would be a better option than Port Dalrymple, although he would like a presence to be retained at the Port Phillip site. Collins gave the free settlers a choice of staying at Port Phillip, but none stayed, possibly because of the sentiment expressed to Governor King he would need a force four times as large as he presently held, to guard against the natives and the convicts. [67]

Collins' mood would not have been tempered by a letter from Governor King about the situation at Port Dalrymple for "a schooner is just returned from Port Dalrymple after an unsuccessful attempt to procure Fresh Water, in search of which he may have been impeded by the natives, who were extremely inimical to him.[68]

King did not say in which way the "natives" were threatening, but if the search for fresh water occurred in a dry summer, the First People might not have wanted to share their water given the dry zone around Port Dalrymple. When Collins reported the dissolution of the Port Phillip settlement to Lord Hobart, in England, the comment about the "inimical natives" had become "… large bodies of hostile Natives."[69]

Collins arrived in the Derwent on 16 February 1804 and found that the Risdon site was unsuitable for a settlement and its commandant, Lieutenant John Bowen, was in Sydney and not available for discussion. He, unilaterally, established a new settlement at Sullivan Cove.

By 15 May he was reporting to Governor King that:

- an "affray" at Risdon had resulted in three of the First People being killed.
- an attempt to collect shells (presumably for cement) opposite Risdon had resulted in an attack by natives, an accident he assumed to be a reprisal for the Risdon killings; and
- he had been compelled to tell his surgeon, Mr Mountgarret that the native child he had fostered after the Risdon killings, had to be returned to the First People of the area from where the child was taken. The child had been baptized and Mountgarret intended to take him back to England.
- he hoped that the child's return would assuage the people and leave to a better relationship with them. Gov King later confirmed the position that First People should not be taken to England. [70]

Collins' sentence that closed his report of the incident is even more startling than the patronising abduction of a native boy. "We have every reason to believe them (the natives) to be Cannibals, and they may entertain the same Opinion of us." [71]

Lieutenant Moore's report of the Risdon killing, described the natives as having a hostile appearance, being armed with spears, being violent to a settler's wife and attacking a settler on his farm and were driven off with gunfire and a shot from a ship's cannon.

The incidents appear to have affected Collins to the degree that, for four months, there was no mention of the First People in correspondence with either Governor King or Lord Hobart, probably because he, and his settlement, avoided contact with the First People. His 11

September 1804 response to Governor King's decree that the "natives of NSW were to be afforded the same protections as other citizens was that he would have been happy to do it if he had "found the Natives of this part of New Holland inclined to come in our way, but at present we have not any intercourse with them, which I do not much regret; and not finding any disposition to straggle among my People, I shall wait until my Numbers are increased, when I shall deem it necessary to inform the whole, that the Aborigines of this Country are as much under the Protection of the Laws of Great Britain, as themselves."[72]

The report on the Risdon killing was disputed 26 years after the event, for a witness testified "that about 300 Aborigines appeared over the hill and were surprised to see the area occupied by "strangers" [Europeans]. They did not attack any colonist and carried waddies for hunting rather than spears for fighting" and the three-hour confrontation resulted in "a great many" Aborigines being killed.

A government official who visited the site a week later, testified that "five or six" Aborigines were killed. Another government official testified that about "four or five hundred Natives attacked … suddenly and unprovokedly, who were then fired on; no previous violence had been offered to them; [and that] 40 or 50 natives were killed." [73]

Collins, Clark and Brown, 1 January 1804

Of the reports written by these three men, on the Lieutenant-Governor David Collins investigation, expedition leader William Collins, agricultural superintendent Thomas Clark and botanist Robert Brown, who had first sailed to the area with Matthew Flinders in 1798, it is the last writer who gave information on the Aborigines of the area. [74]

Brown recorded, "Messrs. Humphrey, Collins &c who had walked along the beach towards Outer Cove were met by a party of natives who seemed disposed to be troublesome & unfriendly & obligd (sic) them to return abreast of the Ship." [75]

This comment is both interesting and unhelpful in that there is no explanation of what "disposed to be troublesome & unfriendly" means.

On the following day, landing at Outer Cove, Brown recorded that about 20 natives: "came down to the beach but on our pulling towards them in the boat they went back into the woods and we saw no more of them today." [76] This curiosity is more like the behaviour of homo sapiens, but once again, no indication is given as to what might have transpired other than bringing a boat to shore. Was it the existence of a boat with people in it that was startling, as Flinders suggested the inhabitants did not have canoes, or was it the loud behaviour of the Europeans, or something entirely different?

Robert Brown, the botanist, attempted an in-depth association with the natives and reported that: [77] (his spelling and punctuation)

> A party of natives appeard to have been watching us & followd us to the bottom of the hill where we had a friendly interview with four of them. We gave them biscuit which they did not however eat, a few trifles & shewd them the use of a hatchet w^{ch} we could not well spare them. They admired the effects of the hatchet and our skins

w^{ch} we shewed them. One of them gave me a young pigeon w^{ch} appeard to have been speard in return for the piece of biscuit.

In their persons & colour they exactly resemble the inhabitants of N S Wales in stature they do not fall short of them & and are rather better made especially in having fuller calves to the legs their hair however is wooly tho I think not so much crispd nor of so full a black as the African negro.

The hair of the head was in most of them covered (sic) with ochre by w^{ch} in some especially in the lads the wool was divided into small parcels The faces of some were blackend & in the colouring matter a considerable proportion of minute mica was contained Their arms and thighs were tatood & in many ways an archd line across the abdomen most of them had all their teeth perfect w^{ch} were in general white but not uncommonly white. The features of the boys were rather pleasing.

They speak quickly and their tones are not unpleasant I could not get them to understand that I wished to have their names for the different parts of the body.

On the top of the hill we sat down & in a few minutes 12 natives joind us at first they conducted themselves in a peaceable manner but by & bye they began to shew some symptoms of distrust as on my making some attempts to acquire a little of their language one of them smatched up a piece of wood & threatend to throw it at me at the same time raising his spear & two of them shapd their spears to throw at me I was scarce five yards from them the rest of the party being a few paces behind me.

I went cautiously back keeping my face to them they didn't throw any spears but came close up to us We then found it necessary to fire a piece in the air at the report of w^{ch} they took to their heels but did not run far & continud while we leisurely walked down the hill on our return to the ship to follow us at scarce more than 30 yards distance.

As they seemd again inclind to close with us a piece charged with buck shot was fird at one they then took once more to their heels and afterwards followed us at a greater distance We reached the beach without further molestation It did not appear that the man fird at was hurt.

About two weeks later, on 15 January 1804, Brown had another encounter with the Aborigines, in the Supply River area, and recorded: [78]

The natives to the number of 30 or upwards including women of whom there were several came down to the shore abreast of the ship & as appeard to us by their gestures wished us to land and renew our intercourse The women dancd to the song of the men who beat time very exactly with their waddies on their cloaks We were not sufficiently near to discern their movements in the dance On a red flag being displayed from the ship they frequently repeated Lappon Lilley Lappon Lilley.

The song was different from that of the Port Jackson natives Hoping to pick up some of their language & more accurately to contemplate their persons and manners a parry pushd off from the shop in the boat but before the boat could land the women were sent away & the men came down on the shore shouting and throwing stones at us, two

shots were fird over their heads upon which they ran off a little way & upon our landing they retird into the woods & did not return.

It is proposed that the attitude of the natives to the David Collins investigation of the Tamar estuary for a settlement is entirely coloured by European sealer contact as they spread out from the original sealing grounds of Bass's Strait. Brown's record suggests that he was not aggressive, even if he were ignorant of Aboriginal customs, but the Clansmen didn't seem to be eager to communicate at length or to allow their women to come into close proximity with the strangers.

An 1802/1803 confusion that VDL was not described in the latitude and longitude dimensions of NSW [79] and the disinclination of the French to declare non-interest in New Holland or Napoleon's Land made VDL settlement's a political imperative for which there was to be no consideration of the long-term welfare of the First People.

Paterson at Port Dalrymple

Two months after the killings at Risdon, in November 1804, Lieutenant-Colonel William Paterson, established a settlement in Northern Van Diemen's Land and, as Lieutenant-Governor of the Northern settlement, had equal status with Collins, the island being divided into two jurisdictions separated at the 42º South line of latitude. The Letters Patent, issued to Collins, to establish a Bass Strait settlement were used by Paterson to justify his having equal status on VDL as Collins.

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An Encounter with the First People of Northern Van Diemen's Land

Part 3: 1804 to 1812, Paterson to Ritchie, - the end of the First Epoch

For the most part, the First People of Northern Van Diemen's Land (VDL) were invisible. It wasn't that they weren't seen but their appearance in official records is meagre. The priority of establishing a military outpost-cum-settlement accounted for some of the non-information but the reality was that respect for, and co-habitation with, the First People was of official indifference.

Conflict with Aborigines began soon after the British contingent attempted a settlement at Port Dalrymple and although rarely reported, continued sporadically until 1820 and included mass killings of Aborigines, and the kidnapping of Aboriginal women and children.[1]

In the Tamar River area, from 1804 to 1806 - the establishment of the Port Dalrymple settlement to the establishment of the Launceston settlement - "an unknown number of Aborigines [were] killed by military forces" [2] and in the Northern and Southern interior of VDL, "a government official noted the 'considerable loss of life among the natives' from conflict with kangaroo hunters." [3]

The record below shows that the killing of the First People occurred despite governors' instructions to reach a conciliation with the First People and mete punishment to those who obstructed them.

Lieutenant-Colonel William Paterson at Port Dalrymple

Paterson's commission to become the lieutenant-governor of Northern VDL was contained in Lord Hobart's despatch to Governor King and included the advice that part of the Norfolk Island colony should be transferred to the Bass Strait settlement.[4] King, in conference with the NSW Corps officers, Lt-Col. Paterson and Major Johnston, decided that Lord Hobart's instructions, although ambiguous, had a political imperative and the decision was made to establish the Port Dalrymple colony immediately, without waiting for the transfer of Norfolk Islanders.

The Northern VDL colony's lieutenant-governor, Scottish-born William Paterson, was a complex man who brought to the settlement of New South Wales, in 1791, a deep interest in botany, eventually becoming a Fellow of the Royal Society, and four years of military experience in India. At the height of his military career, around 1799, as lieutenant-colonel of the NSW Corps and lieutenant-governor of NSW, the then Governor, Philip Gidley King assessed him thus: … 'whenever he acts on his own sentiments, he does what is justly right and honourable' he would not strongly oppose the officers of the regiment; …' .[5]

At the end of his career in NSW, after he had been lieutenant-governor of the Port Dalrymple settlement and administrator and acting-governor of the colony of NSW, Governor King's successor, Lachlan Macquarie said of him:

> Paterson was 'such an easy, good-natured, thoughtless man, that he latterly granted lands to almost every person who asked them, without regard to their merits or

pretensions." [6] He distributed 67 000 acres (27 114 ha) of New South Wales (to settlers and soldiers).

Depending on perception, Paterson was either a generous man or too easily manipulated but "unlike most of his colleagues Paterson neither participated in trading nor enriched himself while serving in the settlement, and he died a poor man." [7]

Whether Paterson was fit to be a lieutenant-governor is an open question but there is no doubt that he was accomplished in some fields and before he was ordered to become commandant of the Port Dalrymple settlement he had:

- Made four explorations of the interior of South Africa and published the outcome in his 'Narrative of Four Journeys into the Country of the Hottentots and Caffraria', in 1789.
- Spent two years military service in India in the 98th Regiment.
- Become a captain in the New South Wales Corps, and on his arrival at Port Jackson was almost immediately made commandant of the detachment on Norfolk Island. While there, he collected and forwarded botanical and geological specimens to Sir Joseph Banks and started preparations for a natural history of Norfolk Island.
- Returned to Sydney and unsuccessfully explored a path across the Blue Mountains.
- Become "second in command of the New South Wales Corps and … acted as administrator of NSW until Governor John Hunter arrived nine-months later."
- Been promoted to the rank of lieutenant-colonel of the NSW Corps, while on leave in England and was elected a member of the Royal Society.
- Been ordered to return to New South Wales where the new governor, Philip Ridley King, appointed him lieutenant-governor.
- Failed to stop the practice of NSW Corps officers trading in rum, disagreed with fellow officer John Macarthur, fought him in a duel with pistols and was shot in the shoulder.
- Maintained his botanical interests, especially in the Hawkesbury region, but, at the end of his career, with deteriorating health, was relieved of his command of the NSW Corps. [8]

Paterson's experience in South Africa and India would have brought him into contact with indigenes and, as a scientific observer, albeit in botany and geology, he would have observed their conduct and would have, or should have, anticipated the different ways in which people used the land and conducted ceremony. He should not have been shocked at lifestyles different from those of the British. Paterson also established a 40-hectare garden (100 acres) in Parramatta, from 1794, [9] and this would have given him the opportunity to observe the movement of the Parramatta people his activity was displacing, and the conflict that followed the interaction of soldiers, convicts and free settlers with the First People of Port Jackson and its surrounds.

Prior to Paterson's arrival in Port Dalrymple, in the six years after Flinders' declaration of Bass Strait, the British and French had further established that the land was inhabited but no one had established the pattern of life of the First People and their association with the land and with each other. That area was open to Paterson.

Governor King gave explicit instructions to Paterson about obtaining the best settlement site, keeping the colony separated from ships of other nations, including American sealers, forbidding any type of boat building and about contact with the First People.[10] He was also instructed to facilitate the British sealing industry. [11]

Of contact with the First People, Paterson's written instructions included the need to strike a good, respectful, working relationship and to treat acts of violence against them in the same way as acts of violence against the British. [12]

Paterson, because of his experience in the Hunter River area of NSW, told King that he was confident of his ability to find the best settlement site [13] and was definite that he should not have lesser status that Lieutenant-Governor Collins at the Sullivan Cove settlement. In agreeing with Paterson, Governor King divided VDL into two administrations with the line of demarcation being "The Parallel of the 42nd degree South Latitude".[14]

Despite his forthrightness regarding status, Paterson did not appear to have a confrontational nature, but confrontation occurred quickly in VDL. The day after his arrival, 12 November 1804, his military guard killed one native and wounded another. The report of the incident was not made to Governor King, until 26 November 1804 and was not acknowledged by him until 6 January 1805. [15] Reporting the killing was not the priority of Paterson's despatch for it followed details of the difficulty of finding a suitable settlement site.

The report, in full, says much about his attitude to the First People.

> On the 12th a body of Natives, consisting of about Eighty in number, made their appearance within about One Hundred Yards from the Camp; from what we could judge they were headed by a Chief, as every thing given to them was delivered up to this Person; he received a looking-glass, two Handkerchiefs and a tomahawk; the former astonished them much; like a Monkey, when any of them looked into the Glass they put their hand behind to feel if there was any person there. The first Hut they came to they wanted to carry off every thing they saw, but when they were made to understand that we could not allow them they retired peacably. From this friendly interview I was in hopes we would have been well acquainted with them ere this, but unfortunately a large party (supposed to be the same) attacked the Guard of Marines, consisting of One Serjeant and two Privates, and insisted on taking their Tent and everything they Saw; they came to close quarters, seized the Serjeant and wanted to throw him over a Rock into the Sea; at last the guard was under the unpleasant alternative of defending themselves, and fired upon them, killed one and Wounded another; this unfortunate Circumstance I am fearful will be the cause of much mischief hereafter, and will prevent our excursions inland, except when well Armed. They threw several Spears and Stones but did not hurt any of our People. [16]

The use of the word "interview" to describe the Outer Cove shooting of one native and wounding of another, is extraordinary. Was Paterson suddenly stuck for words or was he deliberately underplaying the significance of the event?

Whether the incident that resulted in the death of a local was theft is now open to conjecture in that the First People might have assumed the huge quantity of goods that the white men had brought to the land meant that it ought to be shared. There is no suggestion that Paterson

understood this despite his years in NSW where similar sharing of goods by First People would have been the standard practice.

Given Paterson's disposition to scientific enquiry, it is odd that he made no reference to the appearance of the First People – their features, adornments, or family grouping. While disappointed with the incident and wary of the consequences, Paterson's immediate concern was settlement, for two days later, 28 November, he set off on his first investigation of the Tamar and its two main tributaries. He did not return to the base camp at Outer Cove, until December 10. In his journal of his voyage upstream, 28 November to 10 December, the natives were not visible.

On 29 November he remarked on the availability of animals which could be food but saw no recent marks of the natives … ."[17]

On 1 December, he described the land he was passing through as superior to his NSW home at Parramatta NSW and recorded that there were "lofty trees… thinly dispersed … extensive plains," [18] and luxuriant pasture. [19] We know now that First People fire-stick management created much of the vista.

On 5 December, after exploring 48 reaches of the North Esk River and returning to the junction of it and the Tamar, his party "observed some fires in the woods upon the rising ground, but [did not see] any of the natives since our first interview with them at Outer Cove …" [20] From this it seems he expected the Outer Cove people and the North Esk River flood plain people to be the same tribe or family.

The tent incident at Outer Cove must have been to the forefront of Paterson's mind for when his party returned to the Lady Nelson, which they had left moored below the cataract, they found it uncompromised – at least this is what might be inferred from the fact that no mention was made of the ship being interfered with in any way. Was not this a point of wonder? Does it confirm that the First People were not users of watercraft, or does it imply that they were nowhere near the area and had not had their curiosity aroused by this seemingly unprotected vessel?

On 9 December, in the vicinity of what is now York Town Rivulet, Paterson wrote of an encounter with about forty natives, including men, women and children. The natives were shy, at first, and aggressive by throwing stones, but eventually a gift of a handkerchief and tomahawk was accepted. The receiver of the handkerchief eventually gave a soldier a necklace of small shells, which had a white metal button strung on it, but when further contact was attempted, the natives disappeared into the woods. Paterson wrote: "from the fires we have observed in that neighbourhood since, it is probable that they live chiefly in this quarter. [21]

For Paterson to conclude that the presence of fires meant some form of long-term habitation was probably a misunderstanding of the lifestyle of the people, but again, what is missing from his diary entry is a description of the people.

The white metal button threaded among the shells in the necklace presented to a soldier could have been a found object lost by a sealer, sailor or soldier or could have been an object of exchange with Europeans, either person-to-person or through a tribal exchange in a meeting between First People families. Inter-clan trading was a First People practice.

On his return to Outer Cove, Paterson proceeded to establish the settlement at Western Arm and visited Middle Island and on 23 December [22] reported that the First People had access to the island through the shoals at low tide where they collected oysters but then adds, "from not having seen any canoes or their having any method of conveyance by water, I am of the opinion the latter is unknown to them."

The abundance of shells in this district enabled Paterson to give up the idea of having to use the hard rock for building material and being able to fire the shells to produce lime for cement for brickwork. The shells were the middens of the First People and being in abundance meant that the families had gathered in that area for thousands of years. The meeting place was about to become an industry resource.

Two months after arriving at Port Dalrymple, 8 January 1805, Paterson proposed to Governor King that settlers in the region be given plots of land in size from 100 to 500 acres and "a small guard for their protection will absolutely be necessary, until we are better acquainted with the natives."[23] On the same day, however, in another despatch, he appeared to be reassessing his relationship with the natives by saying that they were "still shy but constantly in the neighbourhood both of this place and Western Arm. One man fell in with about sixteen of them yesterday. He had a kangaroo on his back which they wanted, but did not persist in taking it from him, nor were they hostile in any respect." [24] Under normal circumstances, this interaction could not have been with the same family which had a family member killed or wounded on the first day of settlement as that family, surely, would have harboured resentment for the death of a family member.

By the end of the colony's first year, as the attempted settlements at or near the mouth of the River Tamar were proving difficult to sustain, Paterson wrote to Earl Camden, Secretary of State for War, and the Colonies, saying that he intended to move the Port Dalrymple cattle to the Launceston area because of the better pastures. [25] The task of driving the cattle from the Supply River region to Launceston was aborted following a combination of inadequate water at the start of summer and an encounter with the First People who probably, and accurately, ascertained that the cattle drive was a further sign of their being driven from their land. Eventually the cattle were moved to Launceston by water.

Paterson's report to Governor King, (undated) December 1805, throws open the possibility that the men responsible for the droving, Riley and Bent, walked into a fire-stick land-management exercise or had been drawn into a fire-stick ambush. About 50 First People surrounded Riley and Bent and directed them to another course. Meanwhile, some of the locals set fire to the surrounding hills and Riley and Bent believed they were being drawn into "a thick jungle" trap. When other locals went around a hill to intercept the cattle drovers, Bent was speared as he crossed a deep gully. Paterson regarded the incident as "nothing but Treachery" and further stated that had not Riley been able to discharge his rifle and make the locals flee, both Bent, and Riley would have been killed. [26]

Paterson followed his natural history training and collected plants and animals of Port Dalrymple for Joseph Banks in London and, listed among the items was "a very perfect Native's Head, with some birds, etc., … in the box No. 1. [27] This apparent indifference in the list of biological specimens is not lessened by Paterson's report on the destructive nature of insects, the destruction of poultry by wild cats and the venomous effect of a yellow-sided black snake on a gull.[28] Later, he was able to provide an excellent description of a Tasmanian wolf,[29] but the reference to "a very perfect native's head", not only opens the question to

what is meant by that, but when and how he obtained the item. It is assumed that the head was acquired through a killing. It is less likely that the settlers or soldiers would have stumbled across a First People burial site and souvenired the head, in which case it might have been more accurately described as a skull. The souveniring of native body parts would have been done under the banner of scientific curiosity.

Was it Paterson's failing health,[30] his disinclination to develop a meaningful relationship with the First People or their belief that the British land occupiers were not to be befriended, that the lieutenant-governor's references to the First People over a four-year appointment were restricted to the above official offerings?

Paterson's despatches to Governor King and then Governor Bligh, were sparse.

The generous view is that because of his on-going illness, he wrote the least amount possible. The ungenerous view is that he was lazy. His returns to the Governor, when compared with Lieutenant-Governor Collins' returns give little insight to the development of the colony.

"Paterson was neither so precise nor so picturesque as Collins; his official communications are meagre, and his carelessness in supplying regular and full returns brought upon him the censure of Governor Bligh." [31] There is some irony in the fact that after the downfall of Governor Bligh, following the military uprising against him, Paterson's "Superior Civil and Military Rank" obliged him to return to Port Jackson and take civil command as Acting-Governor of NSW from 10 January 1809.

Paterson's indifferent phraseology about the head of a Port Dalrymple local may be compared with the phraseology of Lieutenant-Governor Collins in Southern Van Diemen's Land.

A few weeks after Paterson had the head of a native delivered to Governor King, Collins, at Sullivan Cove, recorded that a nameless native child had been vaccinated, along with other named children of the colony, presumably against smallpox, and all were recovering well.[32] Why was the native child unnamed? He would have been given a name for convenience of intercourse. This was either a level of official indifference of the First People, as demonstrated in Northern VDL, or an effort to hide an embarrassment. The official record did not bring these facts together, but the Sullivan Cove surgeon, Mr Mountgarrett had "fostered" a native child whose parents had apparently been killed at the Risdon "affray",[33] had had the child baptized and had been stopped, by Collins, from taking him back to London. The child had been named. His vaccination could only have been at the hands of his foster-parent, the surgeon. All correspondence on this matter avoided the unpleasant thought that the child had been kidnapped. It was odd that a British surgeon, in a newly founded colony, could have thought that he and his family would have been better able to care for the child than the uncles and aunts in his native family.

1807: Launceston to Hobart, overland, Lieutenant Thomas Laycock, NSW Corps

Whether Lieutenant-Governor Paterson, inspired, ordered, or acceded to a request from Lieutenant Laycock to undertake the exploration of a route between the two VDL settlements was not recorded, but Laycock's party took provisions for three weeks, in expectation of an arduous journey. His journal recorded that he left on the 3rd February 1807, arrived at the Sullivan Cove settlement on the evening of the 11th, started the return journey on the 16th and

arrived in Launceston on the 22nd. [34] Surprisingly, the journal made no mention of the First People, or their fires or evidence of their being in his vicinity of recent times or distant. Writing from Port Dalrymple on 21 April 1807, Paterson told Under Secretary Sullivan, in London, that the journey between settlements could be "performed with ease in five days"[35].

After Paterson

1. Captain John Brabyn, Commandant, 1808-1810

With Paterson's sailing for Sydney to become acting-governor, Captain Brabyn became commandant of the Port Dalrymple settlement. He had played an important part in events leading to the deposition of Governor William Bligh in January 1808,[36] and "although Paterson thought Brabyn's discipline too severe, Brabyn carefully obeyed his instructions, pressed on with government buildings, and proved to be one of the best of a poor lot of commandants at Port Dalrymple."[37]

It is not known what Paterson might have said to Brabyn about the relationship with the First People but there is no written record as to how that should be conducted[38] and Brabyn's correspondence with Paterson said next to nothing about the interaction of colonists and First People, apart from, "Fanny, the Native Girl, left Mr. Dey in January, and has not been seen since."[39] From the manner of the despatch, it is assumed that Paterson was acquainted with Mr Dey's acquiring Fanny for service.

It might also be assumed that Brabyn did not connect the fires of February 1809 with the fire-stick practice of the First People. In a hot, dry summer, Aboriginal burning of the land might not have been the practice in that area, but the possibility remains that it was. Brabyn proposed no explanation for the fires – settler neglect or burning of rubble getting out of hand, for example. He wrote that there had been "very dry weather since you left; the whole Country has been burn'd up, so that, ride which way I will, I see nothing but burnt grounds and black bushes." Later in the same letter, "Mr. Mountgarrett is obliged to feed all his Stock in his Swamp, for the fires have burnt all round for miles." [40]

Brabyn and Paterson, as members of the NSW Corps, became redundant when Lachlan Macquarie arrived in NSW with the 73rd Regiment which was ordered to go to NSW, after the governor-elect, Brigadier-General Nightingall became too ill to take command, in April 1809. After Macquarie arrived at Port Jackson, instead of sending the ailing Paterson back to Port Dalrymple to resume his station as lieutenant-governor, he appointed Major George A. Gordon as commandant.[41]

2. Commandants Major George A. Gordon & Captain John Ritchie

Governor Macquarie's instructions to Major Gordon, about conduct with the First People, were virtually the same as he gave to Captain John Murray, on his appointment to the Derwent colony and to Gordon's successor at Port Dalrymple, Captain John Ritchie. It was:

> Conciliation with the natives
>
> You are to use every means in your power to conciliate the good will of the Natives of the Country in the neighbourhood of Port Dalrymple, enjoining all persons residing within your Jurisdiction to live in amity and friendship with them; and all acts of

> violence against them, or interruption given them in the exercise of their several occupations, are to be severely punished."[42]

The repetition of this order, previously given to Lieutenant-Governor Paterson by Governor King, was meaningless unless a deliberate action was taken by the lieutenant-governors or commandants to make conciliation happen. It was more likely accepted that the instruction meant that the military, convicts-under-guard, and free settlers should take no action to contact or antagonise the First People. Later records showed that escaped convicts, when bushranging, had no regard for the First People.[43] Further, the official clause, "interruption given them in the exercise of their several occupations", could be meaningless. If, for example, a fence had been erected, across an established pathway for families travelling between hunting, gathering or ceremonial grounds, there would exist an "interruption given them in the exercise of their several occupations." There is no record of any commandant making sense of this order.

In November 1811, the ever-efficient Governor Macquarie visited Van Diemen's Land assessing the two settlements and travelling overland between them. His assessments do not mention the First People[44] or seek information from the commandants about the degree of conciliation he requested in his orders of their appointment. He did not seek a meeting any of the First People who might have been, in his words, "conciliated." It is left to the reader of the official documents to wonder about the sincerity of instructions to respect the First People of the land the British were subsuming.

Lieutenant Jonathon Oxley's Report

In 1810, Oxley was commissioned by Governor Macquarie to write a report on the VDL colonies. As well as writing some historical notes, he commented on the ports, the suitability of moorings, the look of the countryside and possibilities for future townships. Without being aware of it, he praised the First People's fire-stick land management describing the country between the North and South Esk Rivers as: "beautiful beyond description … thinly wooded being in consequence easily cleared, that in Many places the Settler would have 100 Acres fit for Cultivation in the same or even less period that it would require to Clear 20 Acres at the principal Agricultural settlement at settlement in New South Wales." [45]

Oxley also commented on the settlers, the military, and the convicts, and a little on the First People, drawing conclusions that showed nothing of an in-depth acquaintance or respect for them. He recognized that convict bushrangers degraded the First People but was otherwise dismissive of them. His report, however, stands in contrast with the scant reports made by the Northern lieutenant-governors. The following part of the report provokes many questions.

> The Native Inhabitants of this Part of Van Dieman's Land are by no means numerous; they do not appear to frequent any particular Part but wander over the Island in Tribes and families in search of Food. From the many atrocious cruelties practised on them by the Convict Bush Rangers, they avoid as much as possible the appearance of a White Man; they are however (in consequence no doubt of the treatment they receive) extremely troublesome to the Solitary Hunter, who has frequently narrow escapes and is obliged to make off as soon as he either hears or sees them. From what has been seen of them, they appear in their persons, manners, and arms, to be of the same common Origin with the Natives of New Holland; like them they have no title to the dignifyed title of Lords of the Creation. In the Cold season they cover their Bodies

> with the Skin of the Kangaroo, but neither Sex have any Idea of the propriety of a A*pron or Fig leaf.* Their habitations consist of a few Slips of Bark, placed against and supported by a Crooked limb of a Tree; this shelters their Heads from the prevailing Storms, whilst their extremities are warmed by a Strong Fire kindled before this their wretched habitation. A Party of Natives were once pursued; in their endeavours to escape, one of their Women dropped a Bundle, which on examination was found to contain the Bones of a Young Child carefully wrapped up in a Kangaroo Skin; what could be the Inducement to carry such a Burden I know not, tho' it might probably be Attributed to the natural affection of a Mother, unwilling to part even with the disgusting remains of a beloved offspring.[46]

The only other mention of the VDL First People in Oxley's report is a scant reference in the section about Hunters Island.[47]

Questions arising from Oxley's report are:

1. What does the opening sentence, "The Native inhabitants of this part of Van Diemen's Land are by no means numerous", really mean?
    a. Did the First People have a means of contraception that enabled them to hold family and clan sizes to optimal, sustainable levels?
    b. Was the population being affected by respiratory and other "white" diseases by 1810?
    c. Were unrecorded killings of the First People, by military and free settlers, significant enough to affect the population size in the first eight years of colonization?
    d. More significantly, by the end of the First Epoch, had VDL's First People had such an unfortunate relationship with the British that avoidance of the Settlement and avoidance of officials like Oxley mean that they were invisible enough not to be caught up in any form of census?

2. Does the phrase that the First People were "troublesome to the solitary hunter" have any validity apart from the probable exaggerations of white settlers away from close settlements? Oxley offers no evidence and Paterson's report of a native wanting to share a killed kangaroo offers the possibility that a local man or family, coming across a solitary hunter with killed wallabies, might want to share the meat.

3. Does his concurrence with Dr Bass's observation, that native shelters were "pieces of bark leaned against a tree limb" mean that this was the only form of native shelter? The description of "pieces of bark leaned against a tree limb" would be accurate and an acceptable shelter for the country he travelled through between Launceston and Sullivan Cove. Lieutenant Laycock, who discovered the first route between the settlements in February 1807, complained of the heat. "The Weather was so hot, and the country on fire, that on the third day I could not proceed at all."[48] Both men had passed through some of the driest areas of VDL. Oxley was in no position to compare shelters in the wetter and more heavily wooded areas of the land and the shelters would have been found to be perfectly adequate, based on thousands of years of experience.

4. Was his disgust at finding "the bones of a young child carefully wrapped in kangaroo skin" a sign that a cultural practice should be condemned? Oxley's remark reveals a Euro-centric position on burial. Cultural differences on celebrating life and death are worldwide. It is not recorded, but hoped, that Oxley's party left the relic as undisturbed as possible, having made the discovery of the parcel's contents, so that the family could return for it. Given Paterson's delivery of "a very perfect native head" to Governor and Mrs King, the reader of Oxley's report could not be assured that the relic did not become a souvenir for a member of the exploring party.

Conclusion

The close of the First Epoch for Northern VDL showed the Tamar Valley settlements increasing in size and increasing intrusion upon the First People, portending greater conflict as British settlers pushed further into the land and consumed more of the resources. The close of the chapter also revealed the opportunity lost to reach a conciliation with the First People, who would always have felt that their lands had been taken from them, but who could have been treated with respect. The British settlers also failed to leave a satisfactory record of the first eight years of close contact. Had they done so, future generations might have had a better understanding of the life of the First People and more respect for it. In this regard we might wish that the scientific, artistic, and cultural investigations of the French had been extended.

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