



Australia's Unique History

The first human habitation of Australia is estimated to have occurred between 42,000 and 48,000 years ago. These first Australians were the ancestors of the current Indigenous Australians; they arrived via land bridges and short sea-crossings from present-day South-East Asia.



Most of these people were hunter-gatherers, with a complex oral culture and spiritual values based on reverence for the land and a belief in the Dreamtime.



A 19th century engraving of an Indigenous Australian encampment, showing the indigenous mode of life in the cooler parts of Australia at the time of European settlement.





Lieutenant
James Cook
charted the east
coast of Australia
on HM Bark
Endeavour,
claiming the land
for Great Britain
in 1770.

This replica was built in
Fremantle in 1988;
photographed in
Cooktown Harbour
where
Cook spent
seven weeks.

The first undisputed recorded European sighting of the Australian mainland was made by **the Dutch navigator Willem Janszoon**, who sighted the coast of Cape York Peninsula in **1606**. During **the 17th century**, the Dutch charted the whole of the western and northern coastlines of what they called **New Holland**, but made no attempt at settlement. In **1770**, **James Cook** sailed along and mapped the east coast of Australia, which he named **New South Wales** and claimed for Great Britain. The expedition's discoveries provided impetus for the establishment of **a penal colony** there.

The British Crown Colony of New South Wales started with the establishment of a settlement at **Port Jackson** by **Captain Arthur Phillip** on **26 January 1788**. This date was later to become **Australia's national day, Australia Day**. **Van Diemen's Land**, now known as **Tasmania**, was settled in **1803** and became a separate colony in **1825**. The United Kingdom formally claimed the western part of Australia in **1829**. Separate colonies were created from parts of New South Wales: **South Australia** in **1836**, **Victoria** in **1851**, and **Queensland** in **1859**.

The Foundation of Perth 1829 by George Pitt Morison is a historically accurate reconstruction of the official ceremony by which Perth was founded.



Blundells' Cottage, built around 1860 is one of the few remaining buildings built by the first European settlers of Canberra



The Northern Territory was founded in 1911 when it was excised from the Province of South Australia. **South Australia was founded as a "free province"** — that is, it was never a penal colony. **Victoria and Western Australia** were also founded "free", but later accepted transported convicts. **The transportation of convicts to the colony of New South Wales ceased in 1848 after a campaign by the settlers.**

**The Round House built in 1830 is the
oldest remaining building in Western
Australia**





***Port Arthur, Tasmania
was Australia's largest penal colony.***

The Indigenous Australian population, estimated at 350,000 at the time of European settlement, declined steeply for 150 years following settlement, mainly because of infectious disease combined with forced re-settlement and cultural disintegration. The removal of children from their families, which some historians and Indigenous Australians have argued could be considered to constitute genocide by some definitions, may have contributed to the decline in the indigenous population

Such interpretations of Aboriginal history are disputed by some as being exaggerated or fabricated for political or ideological reasons. This debate is known within Australia as **the History Wars**. Following **the 1967 referendum**, the Federal government gained the power to implement policies and make laws with respect to Aborigines. Traditional ownership of land — **native title** — was not recognised until 1992, when **the High Court case *Mabo v Queensland (No 2)*** overturned the notion of Australia as ***terra nullius*** ("empty land") at the time of European occupation.

A gold rush began in Australia in the early 1850s, and the Eureka Stockade rebellion against mining licence fees in 1854 was an early expression of civil disobedience. **Between 1855 and 1890**, the six colonies individually gained responsible government, managing most of their own affairs while remaining part of the British Empire. **The Colonial Office** in London retained control of some matters, notably foreign affairs, defence and international shipping

On 1 January 1901, federation of the colonies was achieved after a decade of planning, consultation and voting, and **the Commonwealth of Australia** was born as a Dominion of the British Empire. The **Australian Capital Territory (ACT)** was formed from a part of New South Wales in 1911 to provide a location for the proposed new federal capital of Canberra (**Melbourne was the capital from 1901 to 1927**).

The Northern Territory was transferred from the control of the South Australian government to the Commonwealth in 1911. Australia willingly participated in World War I. Many Australians regard the defeat of the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps (ANZACs) at Gallipoli as the birth of the nation — its first major military action. The Kokoda Track Campaign is regarded by many as an analogous nation-defining event during World War II.

The Last Post is played at an ANZAC Day ceremony in Port Melbourne, Victoria, 25 April 2005. Such ceremonies are held in virtually every suburb and town in Australia.



The Statute of Westminster 1931 formally ended most of the constitutional links between Australia and the United Kingdom when Australia adopted it in 1942. **The shock of the United Kingdom's defeat in Asia in 1942 and the threat of Japanese invasion caused Australia to turn to the United States as a new ally and protector.** Since 1951, Australia has been a formal military ally of the US under the auspices of **the ANZUS treaty**

After World War II, Australia encouraged mass immigration from Europe; since the 1970s and the abolition of the White Australia policy, immigration from Asia and other non-European parts of the world was also encouraged. As a result, Australia's demography, culture and self-image have been radically transformed.

The final constitutional ties between Australia and the UK were severed in 1986 with the passing of the Australia Act 1986, ending any British role in the government of the Australian States, and ending judicial appeals to the UK Privy Council. In 1999, Australian voters rejected by a 55% majority a move to become a republic with a president appointed by Parliament. Since the election of the Whitlam Government in 1972, there has been an increasing focus on the nation's future as a part of the Asia-Pacific region.

Two of Canberra's best-known landmarks, Parliament House and Old Parliament House (foreground).

