

Observations of the First Fleet – 1

The First Fleet sailed from England on 13 May 1787 to establish the first European penal colony in New South Wales. The fleet was led by Captain Arthur Phillip and arrived at Port Jackson on 26 January 1788 – the date now celebrated as Australia Day.

Arthur Bowes Smyth was the surgeon who sailed on board *Lady Penrhyn*, one of the convict transport ships. During the voyage he kept a journal from 22 March 1787 until 12 August 1789.

Read some extracts from his journal, written under the name Arthur Bowes.

Friday 18 January 1788

A gentle breeze is blowing but even though we expected it, no land was sighted this evening. The wind came up during the night and the ships rolled a great deal.

Saturday 19 January 1788

At last land was sighted at 7 am about 40 miles in the distance! After the long months of the voyage everyone is overjoyed! It has been ten weeks since we left the Cape of Good Hope. This has been the longest part of the voyage at sea without entering any port.

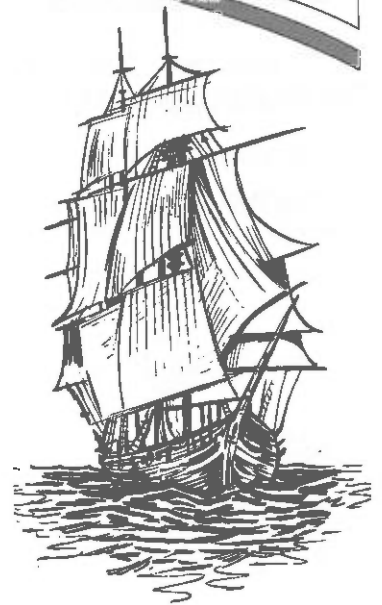
Sunday 20 January 1788

We arrived at Botany Bay and were pleased to see four of the other ships – *Sirius*, *Alexander*, *Scarborough*, *Friendship* – already there. Through a glass, we spied several natives running among the trees.

This evening we put to shore. At first the spot looked fertile with many lofty trees and lots of vegetation between. However, on closer inspection, the grass was found to be long and coarse, the trees hollow and the wood only good for burning as fuel. The soil is black sand, unsuitable for growing crops. There were also many enormous black and red ants.

Monday 21 January 1788

Several of us went ashore this morning. We were approached by seven or eight natives who presented us with long lances, which had the bone of a stingray at one end and a piece of oyster shell at the other. I persuaded one of the natives to exchange his heavy bludgeon for a looking glass.



Meanwhile Phillip and his party are exploring other more suitable bays to the north.

Saturday 26 January 1788

This evening the fleet entered Port Jackson, the new site for settlement described by Phillip as 'the finest harbour in the world'. It has been named Sydney Cove in honour of Lord Sydney, the British Home Secretary.

Tuesday 5 February 1788

As I wandered the woods in search of insects and other natural curiosities, I observed great numbers of kangaroos but it is hard to get near them as they seem to be very shy creatures. There are many cabbage trees but no visible fruit. There are some springs of fresh water but few streams as they have dried up in summer.

Sunday 20 April 1789

Today I leave Sydney Cove to return to England via Lord Howe Island. I hope to make many more drawings of rare birds.

The many animals I observed include kangaroos, large lizards, dogs, racoons, flying squirrels, very large snakes, a new species of bird as large and high as an ostrich, many species of cockatoos, parrots, lorrikeets, eagles, hawks, wild fowl, duck and many small birds with handsome plumage but none which sang. We also observed many different species of ants, flies and mosquitoes.

It pleases me to note that I again make this return voyage in *Lady Penrhyn*.