

# 18: History

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## 18. HISTORY

Published books detailing the history of Circular Head and the greater north-west of Tasmania include:

- “It’s a Different Country Down There - A History of Droving in Western Tasmania” by Tim Jetson
- “Against the Tide. A Maritime History of Circular Head,” by Kerry Pink
- “Beyond the Ramparts. A Bicentennial History of Circular Head,” by Kerry Pink
- “Back to Circular Head, 23<sup>rd</sup> – 29<sup>th</sup> January, 1952.” Official programme and souvenir booklet, published by Circular Head Historical Society

These works and many others detailing the history of Circular Head are available for loan from the State Library of Tasmania. A selection of books is also available for purchase from the Circular Head Heritage Centre in Smith Street, Smithton.

The following abridged information has been taken from the published work “*It’s a Different Country Down There – A History of Droving in Western Tasmania*” by Tim Jetson, and has been reproduced with permission of the author:

*“Aborigines inhabited parts of Tasmania for many thousands of years. Archaeologist Rhys Jones identified a three-fold organisation of Aboriginal society consisting of the hearth group, the band, and the tribe. The North-West tribe consisted of the following bands:*

- *the Tommeginer at Table Cape*
- *the Parperloihener at Robbins Island*
- *the Pennemukeer from Cape Grim*
- *the Pendowte at Studland Bay*
- *the Peerapper at West Point*
- *the Manegin at Arthur River*
- *the Tarkiner around Sandy Cape*
- *the Petermidic, centred on the Pieman*

*Aborigines moved up and down the coast, initially restricted to narrow coastal heath plains by the dense vegetation and mountains to east. However, around 2,000 years before the present there was an expansion of activity. More extensive use of fire enabled Aborigines to encroach further inland into rainforest. Paths were cleared through to grassy upland country, the Hampshire and Surrey Hills, to the northwest of Cradle Mountain.*

*Initial European exploration began in the 17<sup>th</sup> Century when the Governor General of the Dutch East India Company, Anthony Van Diemen sent expeditions in search of a fabled south land of great wealth which was believed to exist in the Pacific Ocean. One voyage was that of Abel Jans Tasman. In 1642, the Heemskirk and Zeehaen, under the command of Tasman, departed Batavia for Mauritius and then, hopefully, the great south land. On November 24 they sighted “very high” land. The land, “not being known to any European nation” they named Van Diemen’s Landt in honour of the Governor General.*

*Unfortunately for Tasman the commercial aims of the voyage were unrealised. Spices, timber, precious minerals and other tradeable commodities were absent. In fact, Tasman did not venture ashore and there were no obvious signs of human life on the West Coast.*

*Some 130 years elapsed before Europeans appeared again in the waters around Van Diemen’s Land. The far north-western corner remained untouched with most mariners sailing the east and south coasts.*

*In 1798 George Bass and Matthew Flinders were instructed by Governor Hunter to confirm or refute previous inklings about a strait between the mainland and Van Diemen’s Land. On 6 December 1798 they sighted Circular Head, “a flat topped piece of land” known today as ‘The Nut’ in Stanley. Sailing west to Cape Grim and then south, the pair sighted a fire just inside the Pieman Heads, the first fire since Table Cape, an indication of human occupation. After completing their circumnavigation the pair returned to Sydney. The north-west corner and west coast appeared to have little to offer.*

*The north-west remained untouched until mid-December 1815 when James Kelly and his crew departed Hobart Town on their circumnavigation of the island. They sailed along the south coast and then north towards Cape Grim on New Years’ Day*



1816. After an unsuccessful attempt to enter the Retreat River, later called the Pieman, the boat survived an overnight southerly gale before nearly beaching early the next day. An encounter with six large, apparently warlike, natives was mollified by barter, with the Europeans exchanging four black swans and a wombat for spears. The voyage around Cape Grim passed without incident.

In 1823 Captain John Rolland was despatched by land and Captain Charles Browne Hardwicke by sea to explore the far north-west. Hardwicke sailed from George Town along the northern coast and forty miles down the West Coast in 1823. His reports were informative, describing the landscape. Most notable was the plain extending from West Point about 12 miles inland toward Mount Norfolk. Kangaroos abounded and the bird life differed from that in the rest of the colony. Most importantly, and perhaps for the first time, explorers met Aborigines in this quarter."

The following historical summary is abridged from the "Smithton Planning Scheme", Circular Head Council:

In 1826 the headquarters of the Van Diemen's Land Company was established at Circular Head (Stanley) under Edward Curr. Curr's surveyors, led by Henry Hellyer, commenced exploration of the area. By 1831 the settlement in Circular Head (Stanley) was well established with 45 men, 11 women, 10 boys and 15 girls. Governor Arthur visited in 1829. The settlement was known as Highfield and is managed today by the Tasmania Parks and Wildlife Service as a tourism site. In all the Van Diemen's Land Company spent about £30,000 surveying and forming roads in the north-west, all of which centred upon Circular Head. Circular Head was later named Stanley after the Secretary of State for the Colonies, Lord Stanley.

In 1845 the first post office was established

at Stanley and in the 1850s the first settlers came to Smithton which was then a shipping centre for potatoes. By 1868 the population of Stanley was around 500. A flour mill and brewery, along with bacon, cheese and butter factories, were in operation.

By 1870 the first wharf had been built at Smithton and in 1884 the first steps were taken to establish the timber milling industry. By 1904 the Duck River Butter Factory commenced operations in Smithton; in 1950 its production exceeded 1,000 tonnes.

In 1905 Smithton was proclaimed a town and the drainage of the first swamp, Mowbray, was commenced. This brought into use some of the richest dairying country in the state. The Government continued draining swamplands. Today, more than 100 years later, the municipality of Circular Head remains the largest dairying area of Tasmania with more than 30% of the State's dairy farms.

In 1908 the first meeting of the Circular Head Municipal Council was held at Stanley and in 1911 the Stanley Town Hall was built.

Railway Branch records show that in 1919 both the Stanley-Trowutta Railway and the Marrawah Tramway commenced regular services. The Smithton to Irishtown link was opened in 1921. By 1922 the railway link from Myalla to Wiltshire Junction was completed, thus joining the railways in the municipality to the State system. The Marrawah Tramway was taken over by the Government in 1929.

In 1920 the Council Chambers were moved to Smithton; by 1935 Britton's Swamp had been drained by the Government and became available for settlement. Smithton High School was opened in 1937 and in 1948 the re-aligning and sealing of the Bass Highway between Boat Harbour and Wiltshire Junction was commenced by the Department of Public Works.

In 1951 a Kindergarten and Public Hospital were opened in Smithton, and the town began to flourish.







*Balfour Track walk*