Bass and Flinders: Tasmania is an island

Matthew Flinders made two important journeys. The first, in 1798-1799 with George Bass, revealed that Tasmania was separated from the mainland of Australia by a narrow passage of water now called Bass Strait. On the second journey, between 1801 and 1803, Matthew Flinders circumnavigated Australia.

Around Tasmania

In 1797, George Bass set out from Port Jackson and sailed between the islands south of Point Hicks as far as Westernport. He was sure that Van Diemen's Land, as Tasmania was known, was an island. In the waters of Westernport Bay, near the present site of Melbourne, Bass detected a strong swell coming from the west, which made him think he had found the strait separating Van Diemen's Land from the mainland. In October 1798, Bass, with Flinders, set out in the sloop Norfolk to sail around Van Diemen's Land and prove it was an island.

Bass and Flinders followed the Tamar River almost to the site now known as Launceston. They explored and mapped the north coast of the island and sailed around its north-western tip, which they named Cape Grim. Along the island's west coast, they saw chains of mountains. Flinders named two of the mountains Mt Heemskirk and Mt Zeehan after Abel Tasman's two ships. Tasman had discovered Tasmania in 1642. Bass and Flinders also named a mountain Mt Norfolk after their sloop. In December, they reached the Derwent River where Hobart is now. On 3 January 1799 they set sail for Sydney.

Significance

Bass and Flinders' journey proved the existence of a strait of water between Tasmania and the mainland, and it showed that Tasmania is an island, separate from the mainland. Ships traveling from England to Sydney could avoid sailing in the waters south of Tasmania, which made travel between England and Sydney shorter and safer. The voyage also played an important part in the future development of Tasmania.