

The story of Abel Tasman - 1

Imagine it is the 1600s. You are Abel Tasman, an experienced Dutch sea captain. In 1642, the Governor-General of the Dutch East Indies (now Indonesia), Antonie Van Diemen, says to you:



Antonie Van Diemen

Tasman, the Dutch East India Company (the VOC) and I would like you to go on a voyage of exploration. We want you to do these things:

- Find a new sea route from the East Indies to South America.
- Find out more about the south land. For example, are there precious metals? What are the people like? Are they keen to trade with us? Map, draw and describe whatever you see.

On 14 August, 1642, you sail from Batavia (now Jakarta) with two ships under your command—the *Heemskerck* and the *Zeehaen*. After landing at the island of Mauritius, you head south until strong winds force you east across the Indian Ocean. On 17 November, you sight land. You don't know it now, but this is the western coast of Tasmania. Yes—one day it will be named after you! You sail south, then east around the coast, sketching and mapping as you go, and round what will one day be named the Tasman Peninsula. Here you go ashore. One of your crew later describes what you see.

We walked into a dark, thick forest and heard odd noises that sounded a bit like trumpets and gongs. Some of the crew also thought they heard voices. We all felt as if we were being watched. Even stranger were the notches we found cut into some of the trees. They looked like steps. They were so far apart that we wondered if this land is inhabited by giants. I was glad to go back to the ship in the end.



Crew member from the *Zeehaen*

Many years later, it would be discovered that the strange sounds were probably bird calls. The notches were footholds that had been cut by Aborigines to help them climb the trees.

The next day, you try to make another landing, but the sea is too rough. So you send the ship's carpenter into the surf instead! He swims ashore and places a pole carved with the VOC's mark and a Dutch flag. You have claimed the land for the Netherlands! You call it 'Van Diemen's Land'.

Now you decide to continue sailing to the east. You soon sight New Zealand's South Island and sail up its coast to the North Island, passing the entrance to Cook Strait. Well done—you are the first European on record to see New Zealand! But you think it is the east coast of the Great South Land and that it blocks the route to South America. You head back to the East Indies via Tonga and Fiji and arrive there in June 1643. But Van Diemen is not pleased to see you ...



Antonie Van Diemen

So where are the precious metals and other goods? What about the route to South America? You didn't talk to any people, did you? What were you doing with your time, Tasman?

Um ... Do I get another chance?



Abel Tasman