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A New Land: European Perceptions of Australia, 1788-1850

Stephen Martin

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To many pioneering Europeans seeing Australia for the first time, the strangeness of the land they had come to colonize was overwhelming. Some who had been seduced by the exotic descriptions of Cook and Banks were disillusioned by the harsh reality of the often hostile environment they found themselves in. Others were astonished at the diversity and beauty of their new surroundings. All were faced with overcoming the despair of isolation and tempering the frustrations of establishing their lives in this surprising new land. Drawing on material - much of which is previously unpublished - Stephen Martin weaves together the impressions of and responses to their environment gathered from the written records of members of this new community. Their perceptions varied enormously from those explorers and surveyors engaged in opening up the land for pastoralists; entrepreneurs intent on the exploitation of the seemingly limitless natural resources; and scientists delighted at the profusion and curiosity of the local flora and fauna. For those for whom Australia was a prison, the bush provided opportunities for escape and life-threatening or life-saving contact with the Aborigines. The rugged terrain also provided ample refuge for those who contravened the laws of the fledgling colonial administration, nurturing a folklore of romantic and mysterious characters. "Arriving in a New Land" brings together the letters, diaries, journals, reports, maps and plans which chart the progress of the first Europeans' understanding of their new country, from bewilderment to affection. Their fresh and engaging accounts will be of interest to historians and anyone interested in learning more about the hardships and rewards of early settlement. Stephen Martin has worked at the State Library for fourteen years, specializing in the Australiana collections. This is his first book.

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