

10. The Great Circle route and the Loch Ard story

Aim

This activity introduces students to the sailing ship history of the coast around Port Campbell. The southern Victorian coast is known as the 'shipwreck coast' because of the many ships that sunk here. Students will become familiar with the most well known of these shipwrecks - the Loch Ard. The activity involves comprehension and analysis of a selection of resources as well as imaginary writing.

Materials

- Resource sheet: The need for a lighthouse.
- Resource sheet: The Loch Ard story.
- Resource sheet: Shipwrecks and relics.

Activities

The shipwreck coast

1. Read the Resource sheet: The need for a lighthouse and Resource sheet: Shipwrecks and relics.
2. Describe clearly how sailors of the 18th century travelled from Britain and Europe to Australia. Include the latitude at which ships travelled, the meaning of "the roaring forties", and the other main hazard of the trip.
3. What was known as "Threading-the-eye-of-the-needle" and what three reasons made this very dangerous?
4. Explain why a lighthouse was needed in Bass Strait and why Cape Otway was finally chosen as the location for this lighthouse.

5. When was the Cape Otway Lighthouse finally completed? Why did it take so long to complete from its first recommendation in 1841?

6. In the next decade, why did so many people make this hazardous journey to Australia?

7. How did ship owners find even quicker ways of getting to Australia "in record times"?

The Loch Ard Story

1. Read the Resource sheet: The Loch Ard story, and the Resource sheet: Shipwrecks and relics.

2. Write your own Loch Ard story with yourself as either Eva or Tom. Explain what happened from your point of view, including how you felt, your fears, hopes and ideas for the future after such a dramatic experience.

Your story should be at least two pages long and you may wish to illustrate it.

If you are visiting Port Campbell, complete a first draft now, then revise your story after having visited the gorge, cemetery or Glenample homestead. Take photos of the caves, the gorge, graves or homestead to illustrate your story.

The need for a lighthouse

Sailors of the 18th century soon learned to respect 'the roaring forties' of the southern hemisphere and the huge seas these westerly winds whipped up. Ships could be swamped by following waves, or sunk by icebergs. For more than 80 years all ships which sailed from Britain to Australia had to sail those waters. They came via the Cape of Good Hope and returned round Cape Horn. For over 1900 kilometres of that voyage they were subject to the 'roaring forties'.

The route from the Cape of Good Hope to Sydney followed roughly 40 degrees south latitude, round the south of Tasmania and northwards along the east coast to Sydney.

Shortly after its discovery in 1798 Bass Strait was recommended as the shorter, faster route to Sydney. Entering Bass Strait from the west, or 'Threading-the-eye-of-the-needle' required great skill using the navigation equipment of the day. As well, the storms, the fog and the demands of shipping companies for faster times made the voyages very dangerous. For many ships, the first sight of land since leaving Liverpool was Cape Otway and at the same time was their last. Surprisingly, not many convict transport ships were wrecked in Bass Strait, possibly because they were cautious and travelled slowly.

In 1841, Sir John Franklin, Governor of Van Dieman's Land (Tasmania), urged the New South Wales government to erect lighthouses in Bass Strait. King Island was the first preference. Cape Otway was the site finally chosen as navigators preferred to cling to the Otway coast rather than search for the low lying King Island.

The pressure for a lighthouse was increased after the tragedy of the *Cataraqui*. It was an emigrant ship bound from Liverpool to Melbourne with 370 passengers and 38 crew on board. It was wrecked on King Island on 4 August 1845, with only nine people reaching the shore. The wreck became a scandal when bodies were washed ashore and the government called tenders to bury the victims. Pits were dug on King Island and the bodies disposed of in mass graves.

It was left to Port Phillip District Superintendent C.J. LaTrobe to organise a survey of the route from Colac, but the forests and mountains of the Otways provide a formidable barrier. Twice in 1845 he led parties into the forests and twice turned back

with men and horses exhausted by the steepness of the country and denseness of the forest. A party led by a Mr Allan marked 'a tolerable road' to within about 8 kilometres from the coast, but it was unable to complete the task. In the winter of 1846, a settler, William Roadknight, was able to push the road through to the Cape. The 'tolerable road' followed razorbacks above the Barwon River, then in the distance of approximately 25 kilometres it dropped over 1800 metres from Mt Sabine to, the now, Apollo Bay. From there it followed the shoreline, then paralleled the coast another 25 kilometres to the Cape.

Construction of the lighthouse was begun by a private contractor in 1846, taken over by the government in 1847, and completed in August 1848. The lantern was constructed by Wilkens of London and had to be landed through surf before being installed in the lighthouse. It had 21 parabolic reflectors, each with its own wick burning sperm whale oil. These were rotated by clockwork, gave a single flash lasting three seconds every 53 seconds, which threw a beam some 22 kilometres.

The Cape Wickham light on the northern tip of King Island was constructed in 1861, with a range of 24 kilometres, on a 48 metre tower 85 metres above sea level.

News of the first gold strikes reached London in 1851, and hopeful gold seekers booked passages for Australia. In 1852, 86,000 people set sail from British ports.

Ship owners needed quicker routes to Australia. An Englishman, John Towson, a watchmaker developed accurate, low cost chronometers which meant navigators could check their longitude at sea. Towson also showed that the shortest distance at sea was the arc of a great circle. Winds along this great circle were also stronger. In fact a ship that curved south on the new route could save over 1600 kilometres. With these new instruments some ventured 1000 kilometres south of the old sea lanes, dodging the icebergs and riding the mountainous seas of the 'roaring fifties'. They set record times on the run to Melbourne.

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10b. The Loch Ard story

The *Loch Ard* was a three masted square-rigged ship of 1693 tons. It was 262 feet 7 inches long (79.9 metres) and 38 feet wide (11.6 metres) with a depth of 23 feet (7.1 metres). It was built of wood with a hull of iron, and completed in Clyde (England) in 1873.

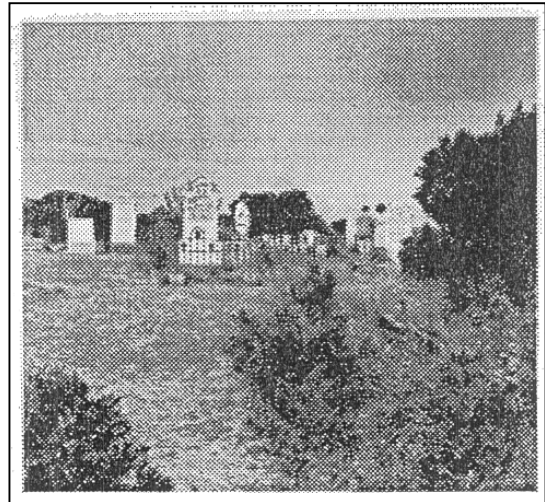
The *Loch Ard* left England under the direction of Captain George Gibb who was only 29 years old. He expected to sight Cape Otway, his first land in 15 500 km, at 3 am on 1st June 1878.

Shortly after 4.00 a.m. the *Loch Ard* struck a reef off the south-eastern tip of Muttonbird Island, approximately 1 km, south of present day Loch Ard gorge. Heavy mist had prevented the sighting of the Cape Otway lighthouse. Of the 54 people on board, only two survived -Tom Pearce and Eva Carmichael.

When the ship was wrecked, Tom Pearce, an eighteen year old ships apprentice from Melbourne, was carried out to sea under an upturned lifeboat. At dawn, with the turn of the tide, he was swept into a gorge (later known as Loch Ard Gorge). Abandoning the lifeboat, he swam ashore, badly cut and bruised. About an hour later he heard cries for help from Eva Carmichael, the eighteen year old daughter of a family of eight immigrants. Eva had been washed into the gorge clinging to a spar that had become jammed on the eastern side of the gorge. Tom swam to her through the heavy surf and floating wreckage and brought her to shore. They both then sheltered in a cave at the western end of the gorge. About noon, Tom climbed the steep cliffs and walked eastwards through the thick scrub until he came upon horse tracks. He followed the tracks until he met two

stockmen from the Glenample station, which was 5.5 km east of the gorge.

Hugh Gibson, owner of Glenample, organised Eva's rescue and at Glenample his wife nursed her for six weeks. Although several bodies were seen after the wreck, including one report of eleven in the Blowhole (700 metres west of Loch Ard Gorge), only four were recoverable. They were buried west of the gorge in a site later to become a pioneer cemetery.



Tom Pearce was awarded the Gold Medal of the Humane Society for his bravery and went on to become a ships master. Eva Carmichael returned to Ireland, never afterwards meeting her rescuer. She married C.A. Townshend of Country Cork.

10c. Shipwrecks and relics

Many shipwrecks have been recorded for southwest coastal waters. At least five wrecks, the Loch Ard, Schomberg, Newfield, Young Australia and Napier lie off the coastline of Port Campbell National Park.

The Loch Ard and Schomberg wrecks have international historic significance and have been declared 'historic' under the Commonwealth Historic Shipwrecks Act 1976. An anchor of the Loch Ard is now a display feature at the entrance to the Port Campbell Information Centre. A collection of relics from the Loch Ard shipwreck forms part of the display in the Centre.

Glenample Homestead has displays, information and relics from the Loch Ard. Additional relics are held by the Flagstaff Hill Maritime Village at Warrnambool.

The Loch Ard story is more than the story of a disastrous shipwreck claiming 52 lives.

Cape Otway has claimed its victims in greater numbers and far greater tonnage long since. What was spectacular about the wreck of the Loch Ard was not the loss of over 50 human lives but the survival of a mere two - one an apprentice, a so-called cabin boy, and the other an attractive young lady in the bloom of youth no less than seven of whose family, including her parents, were lost to the terrors of the deep.

Loch Ard Oration delivered during the centennial celebrations in 1978.

The Loch Ard disaster and the rescue and care of survivors at the nearby Glenample Homestead show the hardships and dangers of shipboard life, as well as the isolation and hardships of life in early settlements.

The Loch Ard Cemetery contains the remains of two of the victims of the disaster as well as those of early settlers. There is also a plaque listing the names of those who drowned in the sinking of the Loch Ard.