WOOL — A PROUD HERITAGE

England
Europe
Spain
Tenerife
Africa
South America
Rio de Janeiro
South Africa
Cape Town
Australia
Botany Bay, Sydney

Key:

1788 — sheep were brought to Australia with the First Fleet

1797 — first wool-producing sheep were shipped to Australia from South Africa (Spanish Merino)

HOW SHEEP WERE INTRODUCED INTO AUSTRALIA
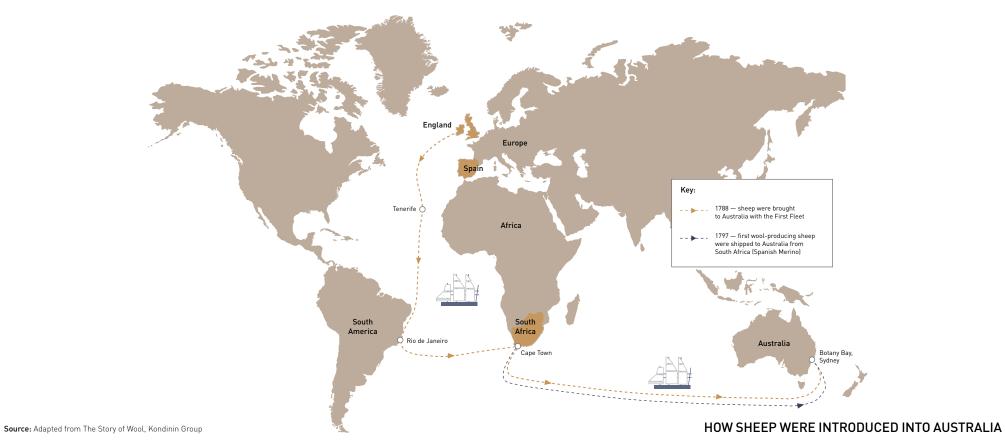
Wool — a proud heritage

During 1797, the first **Merinos** (Spanish Merinos) arrived from Cape Town, South Africa. The sheep were shared between early settlers, including Captain John Macarthur and Reverend Samuel Marsden.

As the size of the national flock grew, so did the quality of the wool, with Australian wool producers using **selective breeding** to develop a type of **Merino** suited to Australian conditions, which produced lots of white wool that felt soft to touch.

By the 1830s, Australia was challenging Spain and Germany as the main supplier of wool to England. By 1838, wool was Australia's main **export**.

The early wool industry was different from today's modern industry. Shepherds watched over sheep because there were no fences to contain them.

Shearers used hand blades (called blade shears) to harvest the wool. Horses, bullocks and camels pulled carts to transport the wool to the ships, which took it to England where it was sold and made into clothes and furnishings.

Blade shears: Shearers in the past used hand blades to shear sheep.

Did you know?

- In recognition of his contribution to Australian agriculture, wool pioneer Captain John Macarthur was honoured by a postage stamp issued on the centenary of his death in 1934 (depicting a **Merino** ram).

1934 postage stamp

- Eliza Forlonge of Scotland was a pioneer of Australia's superfine wool industry. There is a memorial in the shape of a wool bale near Eliza's grave at Euroa in Victoria and a statue of Eliza and a ram at Campbell Town in Tasmania.

Eliza Forlonge

- Hundreds of years ago Spain had the finest wool in the world. They did not allow any of their Spanish **Merinos** to leave Spain until the late 1700s.

- Reverend Samuel Marsden travelled to England during 1807 with wool packed in a barrel. The fibre was woven into a black suit that Marsden wore to meet King George III.

- The first **Merinos** in Australia produced about 1.5 kg of wool per fleece, but today's superior **Merinos** can grow a fleece of more than 8kg.

Glossary

Export — the sale of goods (like wool) or services to another country.

Merino — a breed of sheep that produces high-quality wool.

Selective breeding — wool producers choose rams and ewes to breed with that will produce lambs with better quality wool.

Shearers — people who are specially trained to harvest wool from sheep.

More information

To find out more about the history of wool in Australia, take a look at:

- learnaboutwool.com

FUN FACTS ABOUT HISTORY

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