



**Nicholas Baudin
1750 – 1803**

Nicholas
Thomas Baudin
was a commoner
born at a seaport
town on the Ile-

de-Re, off the west coast of France. He was the fifth child in the family. Baudin's parents were common merchants.

He began as a lowly cabin boy in the merchant navy at the age of fifteen, and at twenty joined the French East India Company. He was a naval cadet for a year and took up the position of quartermaster on a troop transport going to India. After two years he was disillusioned and returned home.

When France entered the United States War of Independence the chance of a naval career was offered and Baudin joined up as an officer bleu (a commoner, not of noble birth). When a noble man took over Baudin's position as commanding officer on the sloop *Apollon* he was bitterly annoyed and resigned, going abroad to work in the merchant service.

A meeting with a passenger who boarded at the Cape of Good Hope gave Baudin's career a new turn. Franz Boos was the Austrian Emperor's head gardener and botanist and through this connection Baudin began botanical expeditions for the Austrians, learning a lot from Boos about botany and how to keep plants and animals alive aboard ship.

In 1792 France declared war on Austria and Baudin tried unsuccessfully to rejoin the French navy. He returned to France in 1795

and visited Antoine de Jussieu at the Museum National d'Histoire Naturelle to suggest a botanical voyage to the Caribbean. This voyage was a success, and Baudin returned to France with a large collection of plants, birds and insects.

In October 1800 following his detailed instructions from the French Ministry of Marine, Baudin led an expedition to chart the coast of New Holland and New Guinea and to collect specimens.

Baudin sailed from Le Harve in 1800, with a scientific expedition. He had two ships *Le Géographe* and *Le Naturaliste* (Captain Hamelein), and was accompanied by nine zoologists and botanists. Following resupply in Timor, the ships reached New Holland in May 1801.

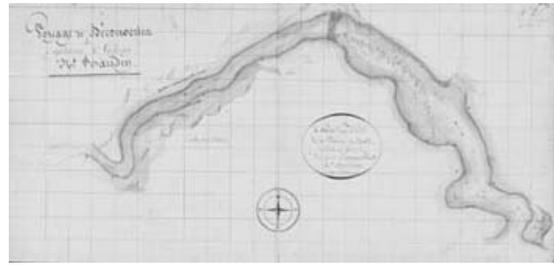


Le Géographe neared Cape Leeuwin on 27 May 1801, but then following instructions given in France, proceeded up the western coast to the north, reaching Timor in August.

A sailor called Thomas Timothee Vasse became lost from the *Géographe* off Wonnerup Beach, near Busselton, in *Géographe* Bay in June 1801. Vasse was a helmsman second class and, by all accounts, an excellent seaman. He was dumped by a wave during a storm, disappeared without trace and was presumed drowned. Baudin later revisited the area hoping to find trace

of Vasse but missed the spot and sailed on. The Vasse River behind the present town of Busselton and the Wonnerup Inlet was named 'Riviere Vasse'. In 1834 some Aborigines showed British settlers the grave of a white man who they said used to spend his days gazing out to sea waiting for his ship to return. It seems that this man was Vasse and he was waiting for the return of Baudin in the *Géographe*.

Le Naturaliste was separated from *Le Géographe* and travelled independently to Timor charting the western coast in more detail. After a sojourn in Timor the ships sailed south to Van Diemen's Land by January 1802. Baudin explored the island extensively, and after surveying D'Entrecasteaux Channel, reached the mainland southern coast, which he explored in a westward direction from Wilson's Promontory. The detailed surveys undertaken along the western coast and in Van Diemen's Land delayed Baudin's arrival on the 'unknown coast' ('Terre Napoleon') where Flinders had already arrived from the west.



*Henri-Louis de Freycinet, 1775–1840
Voyage de découvertes du Capitaine de Vaisseau Mr Baudin cours d'une partie de la Rivière du Nord, Terre de Diemen 1802 col. map on sheet 35.4 x 73.5 cm*

On the afternoon of April 8, 1802, Baudin in the *Géographe* came up with a 'foreign' vessel off the South Australian coast, which proved to be the "Investigator" — Commander, Captain Mathew Flinders RN (No 13 in series). The two Commanders greeted each other amiably, and Flinders boarded the *Géographe*, swapping news and information concerning their respective voyages. Charts also were exchanged. Flinders later named the meeting place Encounter Bay.

