

Abel Janszoon Tasman (?1602 – 1659)

Little is known of the early life of Abel Tasman, the Dutch voyager acknowledged as the first European to discover New Zealand. He was born, probably in 1602 or 1603, in the village of Lutegast in today's province of Groningen in the Netherlands. His first wife was Claesgie Heyndrix, with whom he had a daughter Claesjen, and he described himself as a widower and a sailor when he married Jannetje Tjaerts in Amsterdam in 1632. For three years 1634–37 he served the Dutch East India Company as first mate and later as skipper, patrolling in the Dutch East Indies (Indonesia), and in 1638, accompanied by his wife, he returned to the company's base at Batavia (Djakarta), in command of the *Engel*.

The company prospered, and Tasman's task was to seek further trade and booty in the north-west Pacific and along the coast of Asia. The dangers were considerable however – a very high death rate due to disease, and general unseaworthiness of ships – and on one voyage two of the three ships under his command were lost in a storm. Tasman's voyage of 1642 was instigated by interest in profits rather than knowledge, and was sent by the governor general, Antony van Diemen, to ascertain whether exploitable southern lands or a sea passage across the Pacific to Staten Landt (Chile) existed. With experienced Franz Jacobszoon Visscher as chief pilot, Tasman commanded two small ships, his flagship *Heemskerck*, and an armed transport ship, *Zeehaen*.

Tasman's course took the ships west and south of the known coast of Australia and then eastwards following the 45th parallel until mountains were sighted on 24 November 1642. He had made the first official discovery of what he called Van Diemen's Land and was later renamed Tasmania in his honour. After taking on water and planting a flag, they continued east. On 13 December a "large land, uplifted high" (the Southern Alps of New Zealand) came into view, and was named Staten Landt, in the belief that it could be the western part of the South Atlantic land earlier discovered by fellow countrymen. The ships sailed north and anchored in Golden Bay, where four sailors were killed in an unfortunate encounter with Māori, and continued up the west coast of the North Island to Cape Maria van Diemen, named by Tasman after the governor's wife. On 4 January 1643 a group of small islands was sighted and the next day investigated in the hope of obtaining vegetables and water, but the rocky shore, heavy surf and threatening inhabitants on the cliff tops discouraged landing. It was the eve of the Epiphany, and Tasman named the islands *Drie Coningen*, Three Kings. Apparently without setting foot ashore in New Zealand, he returned to Batavia.

After several more exploratory and trading missions, Tasman retired with 288 acres of land in Batavia, and part-ownership of a small cargo vessel. He died in 1659, leaving 25 guilders to the poor, and his property to his wife, daughter and grandchildren. Many geographic features in New Zealand commemorate the Dutch navigator, and a fern, *Davallia tasmanii*, found on the Three Kings, was also named after him. The orchid *Pterostylis tasmanica* was for many years confused with similar Australian plants, but in 1994 was recognised as a distinct species, occurring in Victoria, Tasmania and New Zealand.



Pterostylis tasmanica

Pterostylis tasmanica (recently known as *Plumatichilos tasmanicum*) is one the bearded group of *Pterostylis* greenhood orchids. The specific name means 'of or from Tasmania', and thus honours 17th century Dutch navigator Abel Janszoon Tasman. The plant grows 10–20 cm high from a basal rosette of leaves. The flower is about 2.5 cm long, the lateral sepals deflexed and the upper hooded part translucent with a netted pattern of dark green lines. The labellum is covered with long yellow hairs and has a dark brown callous at the tip. It flowers in October and occurs in a few localities in northern and central New Zealand, often under gorse or mānuka on clay hillsides, and in south-eastern Australia.

