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DISASTERS THAT CHANGED AUSTRALIA

By Richard Evans

Australian history is full of disasters. Some are natural but many more are man-made, results of individual or collective stupidity, reckless decisions, or greed.

- Mismanagement and poor planning made Cyclone Tracy and the Black Friday bushfires far more destructive and deadly than they should have been.
- Vital natural resources were carelessly destroyed, from thousands of years ago to today.
- The Snowy Mountains Scheme and the Australian Institute of Sport bought national pride at ruinous expense.
- British General Douglas Haig, through sheer arrogance and determination, sent thousands of Australian soldiers to their deaths for no strategic gain.
- A feral legion of rabbits let loose on the environment turned furry friends into an uncontrollable plague.

In *Disasters that Changed Australia*, Richard Evans nominates the worst disasters in an engrossing, insightful account of what happened and why.

Writer and historian **Richard Evans** is the author of *The Pyjama Girl Mystery: A True Story of Murder, Obsession and Lies*, and co-author of *Constructing Australia*. He has a PhD in history from Monash University, and works as a Research Fellow at Swinburne University of Technology.

DISASTER FACTOIDS:

- The 1939 Black Friday bushfires burnt 10% of the surface area of Victoria. Ash from the fires fell in New Zealand.
- More Australians died in the pointless Flanders offensive of 1917 than in any other military operation.
- Cyclone Tracy, which struck Darwin on Christmas Day 1974, destroyed all but 400 of the city's 13,000 houses.
- The spread of rabbits across Australia was the fastest and most extensive animal colonisation in history.
- In 1932, the worst year of the Great Depression, the official rate of unemployment reached 29%. The true figure was probably twice as high.
- The eventual cost of the Snowy Mountain Mountains scheme was equal to the entire taxation revenue of every Australian government in the year construction began.
- In the 1960s, scientists warned there would be a water crisis in Australia by 2000.