In May 1829 Captain Charles Fremantle laid claim to the West – and made limited preparations for the arrival of Captain James Stirling and the new colonists. The Parmelia arrived on 1 June 1829. Five ships had departed England by June 1829. Stirling’s enthusiasm for the West (as well as positive publicity by the press in Britain over the generous land grants of 40 acres (16.2ha) of land for every £3 of assets invested) led to a “Mania” for the newest colony.* By December 1829, five hundred colonists had arrived, followed by another thousand over the next 7 months.

Unfortunately there was inadequate preparation for these early arrivals. Land had not been sufficiently explored or surveyed and fertile land was taken up very quickly. Arriving in winter and spring the settlers were buffeted by storms with limited shelter available. Possessions were ruined and the new settlers spent several uncomfortable months protected by canvas shelters on the Fremantle beach. The onset of summer with flies, fleas, shortages of fresh water and food caused many to leave for the eastern colonies. They made sure everyone heard of the disaster they had experienced. News of the problems in this harsh and isolated colony spread via sailing ships to other colonies and eventually to Britain. During 1831 the net increase in population of the colony (due to immigration) was only 44, while in 1832 more people left the Swan River Colony than arrived.

There were other problems as well – inadequate money in the colony meant that servants went unpaid. This caused dissatisfaction and the growth of a labour shortage which would last until 1850. The wet winter of 1830 caused the Swan River to flood, damaging struggling crops and new homes. Added to this was the failure of Thomas Peel’s land venture at Clarence. In July 1830 Dr Collie reported on the health of the Peel settlers. He found of the 400 people at Clarence, 28 had died of diseases, mainly dysentery and scurvy and one had been speared. The surviving settlers were given grants of land in Guildford.

It was a slow and disappointing start for the young colony, but amid hardship and grief there were many who worked to create a new life for their families in this harsh environment. The colony began to grow after 1834 with the expansion of agriculture, new industries such as whaling and timber, and the establishment of the Bank of Western Australia in 1837.

*See: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Land_grants_in_the_Swan_River_Colony

Captain Fremantle made these comments about Perth and Fremantle when he returned to the colony after three years, in September 1832:

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“I was much disappointed at the appearance of the capital as it does not appear to have made much progress, very few houses having been built and many of those scarcely worthy of the name, being mostly of wood and very small.... Perth has not kept pace with Fremantle, as the latter has many pretty tolerable houses and several are in progress, and in spite of its sandy and unpromising appearance at landing, I have no doubt if the colony continues of its being in time a place of consequence.” Fremantle, pp 87 – 88

According to Captain Fremantle the price of food in the colony in 1832 was:

- Mutton 2 shillings per pound
- Kangaroo 1 shilling 8 pence a pound
- Flour 10d
- Butter 5s a pound

Labour is expensive and difficult to get:

A craftsman was paid 10s 6d per day. Fremantle, pp 89 – 90