

Telegraph and Railway

Overland Telegraph Line

In 1870 construction of a 3178 km telegraph line, from Port Augusta to Port Darwin, was commenced to speed up communication between England and the isolated colonies of Australia. Strangways was one of many repeater stations established at intervals of around 250 km to re-transmit the telegraph signals along the line.

Construction of the telegraph line involved tremendous organisation. Some 36 000 poles had to be erected across the continent and hauled many kilometres by horses and bullocks into arid land and through searing heat.

Overall control of the project was given over to Charles Todd (South Australian Postmaster General, Superintendent of Telegraphs and Government Astronomer). The project was split into three sections: Southern, Central and Northern. By December 1871 the line from Port Augusta to Tennant Creek was complete, but progress on the Northern line, which started at Darwin, was slowed by the onset of the wet season.

The working parties persisted and on 22 August 1872 the final link of the telegraph line was made at Frew's Pond 500 km south of Darwin after much anxiety over the delays. Strangways Repeater Station and Telegraph Office opened officially on the same day.



Strangways was an important centre for many years, but on 8 October 1896 its post and telegraph services were closed and transferred to the nearby town of William Creek on the recently completed Marree-Oodnadatta railway.

The ruins that remain at Strangways illustrate the history of the pastoral and telegraph eras. Stabilisation of the ruins was carried out by the Heritage Branch of the Department for Environment and Heritage in March 1995.

Great Northern Railway

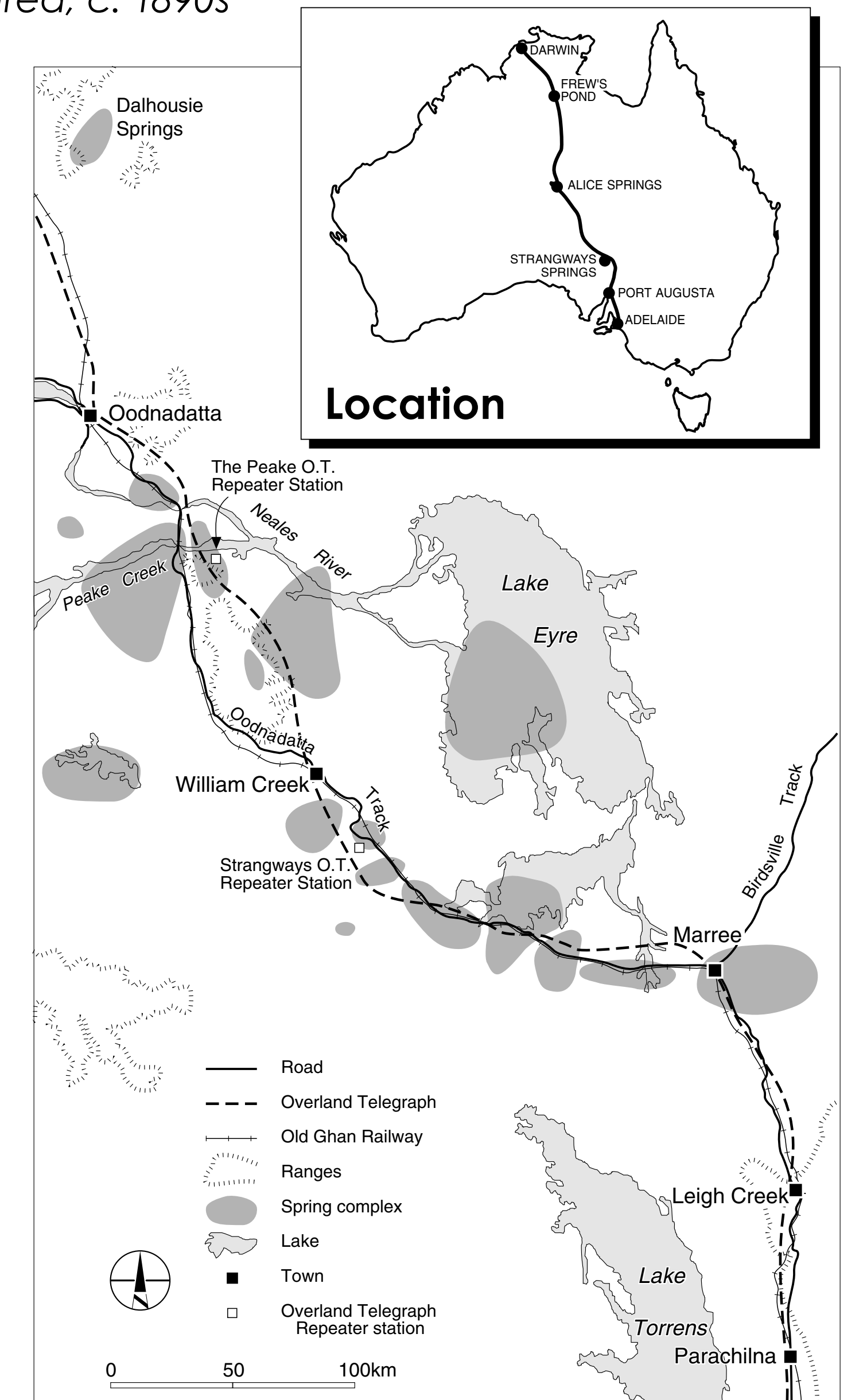
In June 1882 plans were announced to extend the 'Great Northern Railway' from its terminus at Farina to Herrgott Springs (now Marree).

The track reached Herrgott in 1884, and in July construction was started on the next section to Strangways Springs. Five to six hundred unemployed men, recruited from Adelaide, travelled northwards temporarily residing in the area and increasing the level of activity at Strangways.

A canvas and iron settlement arose about two kilometres north east of the repeater station with temporary structures such as Bennet's eating house and store catering for railway workers, iron sheds for clerks, and tents for a butcher and saddler. More substantial structures came with a hotel built in 1886, and a police station erected in the same year to deter sly grog sellers (with little success by all accounts). Race meetings kept workers entertained. Following completion of railway construction to Oodnadatta in 1891 most of the workers left, resulting in the closure of the police station a few years later.



A work camp in the area, c. 1890s



Mound springs and associated cultural features

For further information contact:

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Phone 8204 1910 or www.environment.sa.gov.au



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Early European Explorers and Pastoralism

Peter Edgerton Warburton, then South Australian Commissioner of Police, traversed this country in late 1858 and noted the springs at Strangways, naming them after State Parliamentarian Henry Bull Templar Strangways.

Another explorer, John McDouall Stuart, described numerous additional springs when traversing the area during his inland explorations of 1859.

With their assured water supply the mound springs were an essential stepping stone for early European exploration and development of the centre of the continent. Pastoral development of Strangways closely followed its European discovery and in November 1862 it was taken up under pastoral lease by a syndicate consisting of John Warren, Julius Jeffreys and William Bakewell.

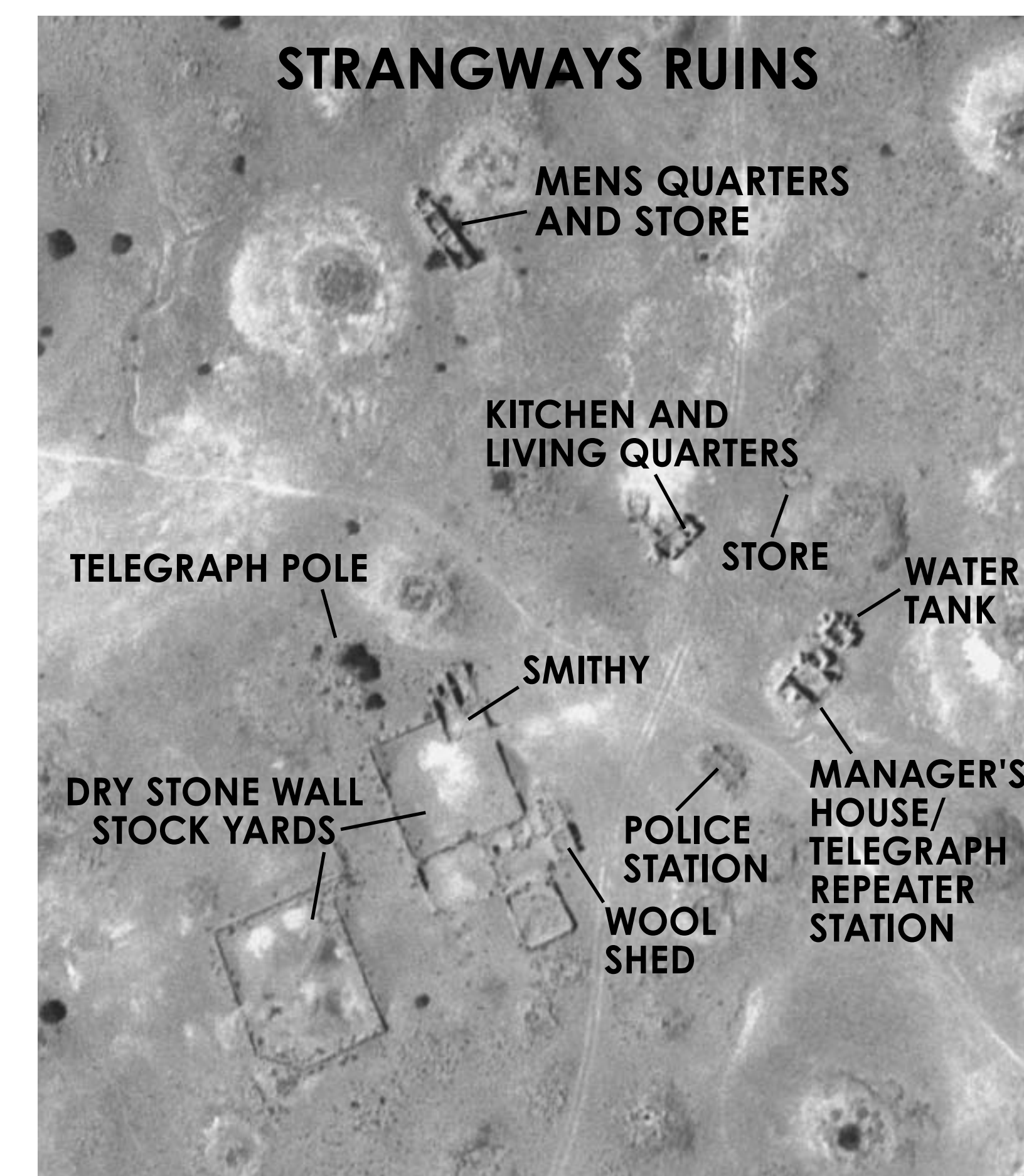
Woolscouring at Strangways Station c. 1870



Strangways in the 1870s

By 1863 3000 ewes, 300 rams and 40 head of cattle had reached the springs. Unaware of a developing drought the syndicate brought in a further 3500 sheep and by 1865 half the livestock and cattle had died. The drought ended in 1866 and the pastoralists continued their activities, with wool being carted to Port Augusta and sold to English markets. Many structures were built for the pastoral run including a head station and dry-stone wall yards. In 1870 Strangways was selected as a site for one of the repeater stations of the Overland Telegraph and the pastoral activities were re-located over a period of some years to nearby Anna Creek.

**In view of the age and condition of these ruins please take care during your visit.
Do not climb on the walls. Flat and enclosed footwear is recommended.**



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Strangways Springs/Pangki Warrunha

Strangways Springs is one of many clusters of mound springs in the Far North of South Australia.

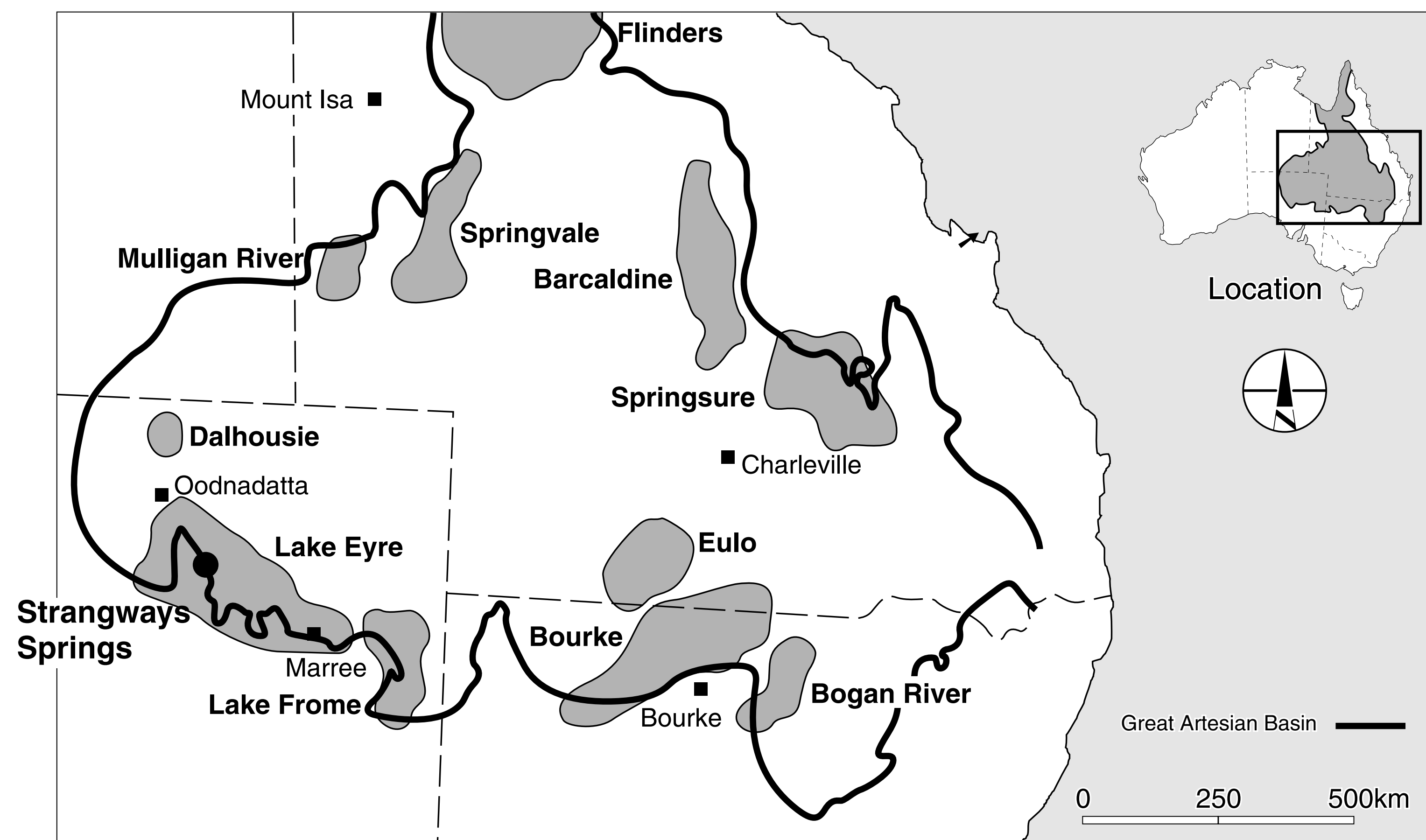
Mound springs are natural outlets for the underground waters of the Great Artesian Basin and many hundreds occur around the margins of the Basin in Queensland, north western New South Wales and northern South Australia.

Many, but not all, of the springs have the characteristic mound which has given them their common name. The mounds are composed of precipitates and sediments from the spring waters as well as wind blown surface material.

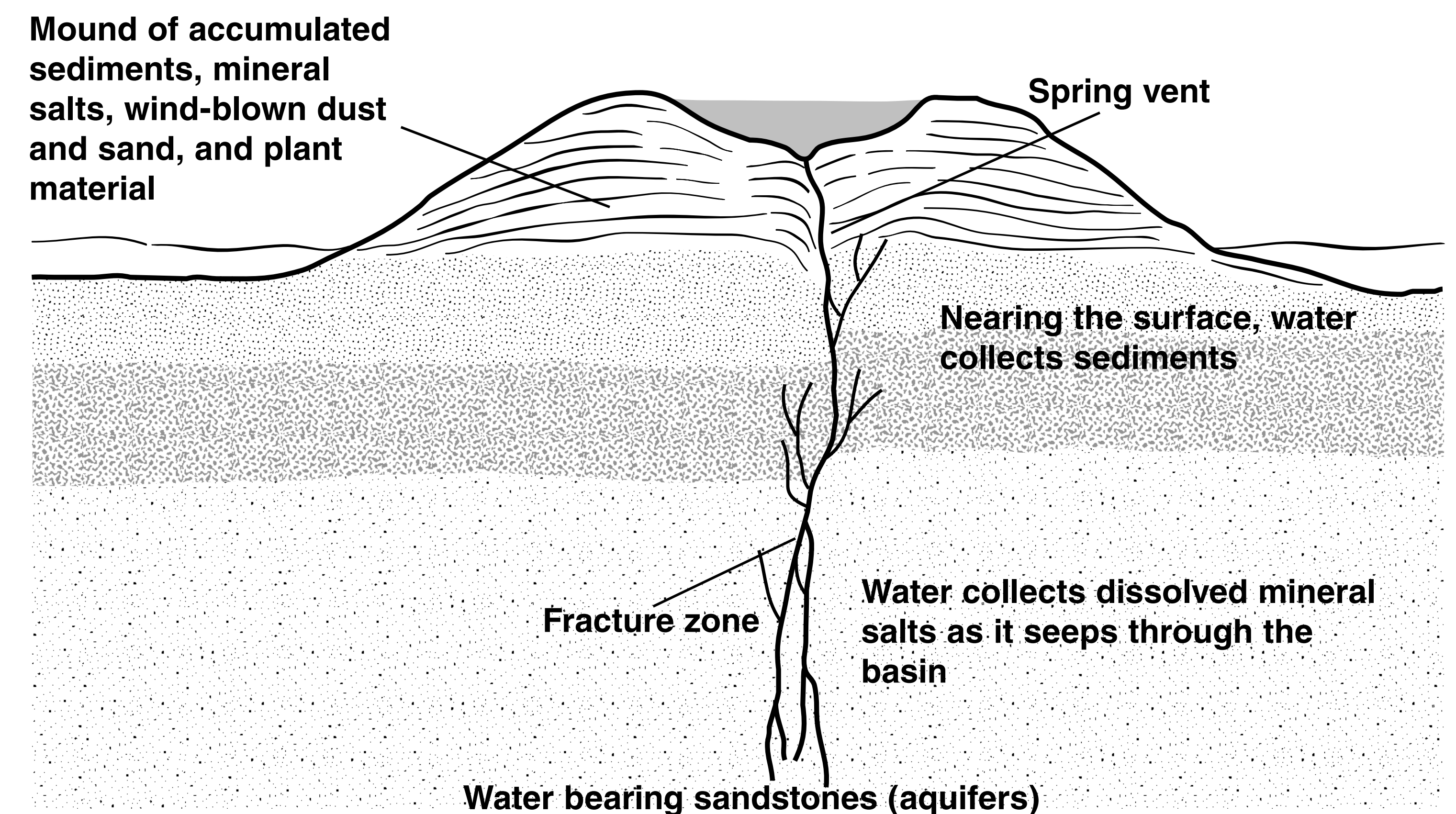
Spring activity varies greatly, with flows ranging from seepages up to a maximum of around 14 million litres per day from one of the springs at Dalhousie north east of Oodnadatta.

Many of the springs around Strangways (and elsewhere) have stopped flowing, a process which has been hastened since European settlement by the sinking of numerous artesian bores.

Protection and conservation of this area has been made possible by the co-operative efforts of: S. Kidman & Co, The Marree Arabunna People's Committee, the Commonwealth Government and the South Australian Department for Environment and Heritage.



Great Artesian Basin showing principal areas of mound spring activity



Cross-section of a typical mound spring

Strangways Springs/Pangki Warrunha

As permanent sources of water in an otherwise arid environment, the springs support distinctive plant and animal populations, with many species unique to the springs environment.

Human populations have also been supported by the springs for many thousands of years. Before European settlement they were an unfailing drought refuge for the local Aboriginal people, featuring prominently in the rituals and mythology of the Arabunna people, among others.

From the mid nineteenth century the springs were vital to early European exploration, the establishment of pastoral runs and the construction of the Overland Telegraph and Great Northern (Ghan) Railway.

Further information is provided along the short walking track to the Overland Telegraph Repeater Station and pastoral ruins.

This is a nationally significant site and visitors are urged to treat it with care and respect.



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Strangways Springs — Fauna and Flora

Having evolved within a desert environment the wetlands of the mound springs have a unique and nationally important range of native plants and animals, and Strangways Springs are no exception.

Strangways includes a large number of mounds, many of which have ceased to flow due, in part, to the sinking of bores in the Great Artesian Basin. Ten springs still support wetland communities. These active springs vary in size, age and flow rate, and have a diverse array of vegetation. Thirteen aquatic plant species have been recorded, including cutting grass (*Gahnia trifida*), which is of particular interest as it is normally associated with wetland areas hundreds of kilometres to the south.

In addition, there are other native plants not directly associated with the spring waters, the most noteworthy being a threatened species known as the shrubby pigface (*Hemichroa mesembryanthemum*), which is now being protected and monitored.

The fauna of the Strangways springs include four species of invertebrates found only in the mound springs area, and one fish species, the Lake Eyre Hardyhead (*Craterocephalus eyresii*). The conservation of these species is a high priority.

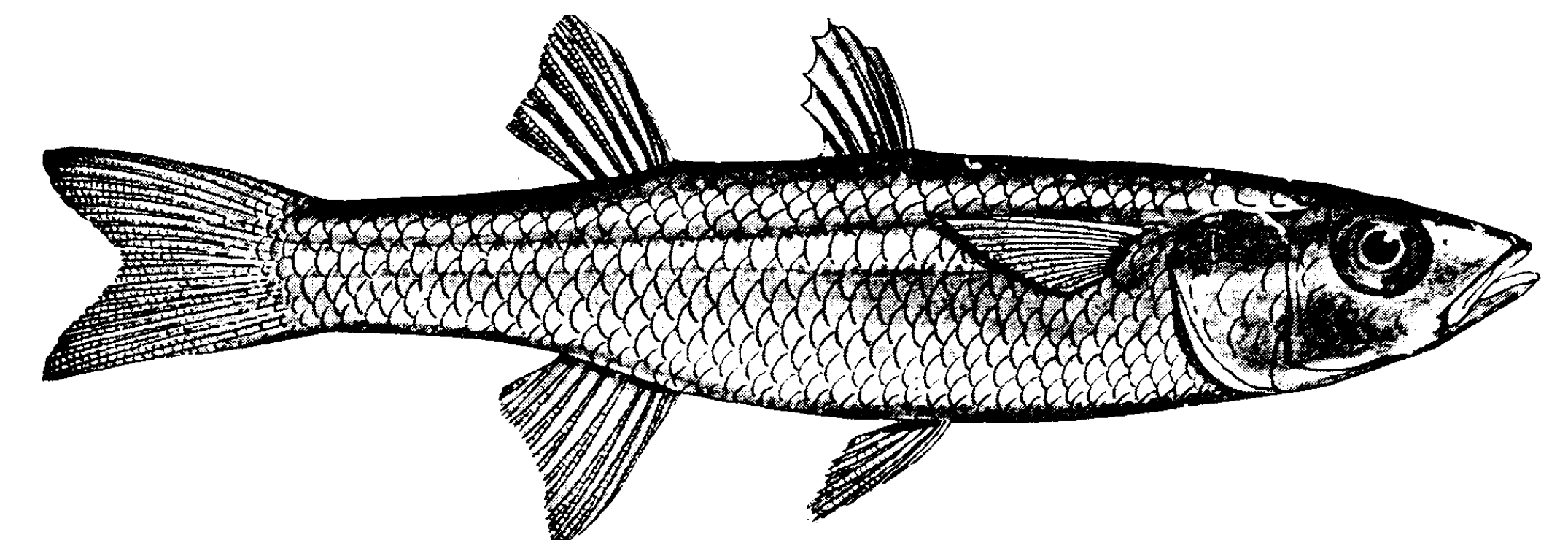
For the first two or three decades of pastoral activity at Strangways the springs' flora and fauna remained relatively unmodified.



Gahnia trifida

Conscious of the need to protect the water resource and to prevent stock being bogged, the early pastoralists fenced off many of the key springs. After bores were sunk to tap the vast underground water resources of the Great Artesian Basin the importance of the mound springs for stock watering diminished, and the protective fencing was allowed to fall into disrepair.

A long period of degradation by stock and other animals followed, and more recently off-road vehicles have added to the damage. In the mid 1980s ten springs, at Strangways and elsewhere, were fenced. The program of protective works at Strangways represents a further step in the conservation of the features of the Lake Eyre Basin.



Central Australian Hardyhead
(*Craterocephalus eyresii*)
Scale: approx. 1:7

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Arabunna People



Strangways Springs have been, and still are important to the Arabunna people both physically and spiritually.

Physically the springs were an unfailing reserve of water in the frequent dry times, although Aboriginal people did prefer the less saline water from rock holes, soaks and creek lines when available. Archaeological material such as grinding stone fragments, flakes, chips, cores, hearthstones and animal bones are very common around Strangways, and most other mound springs, providing abundant evidence of long Aboriginal occupation.

Spiritually Strangways has been an important mythological site. Until European exploration it was known as Pangki Warrunha which means 'White Ribs', a reference to the white banding that occurs on a number of the springs.

The myth relating to this site refers to the two ancestral Snakes Kurkari (Green Snake) and Yurkunangku (Red-bellied Black Snake). Yurkunangku had come from Kulatanha (Kurlarta) Springs in the Northern Territory, while Kurkari came from Arltunda (Erldunda), also in the Northern Territory.

The Snakes are involved in the creation of the mound springs and other natural landmarks and together they journey great distances, and have many adventures on the way. They camp overnight at Strangways and waking in the morning they say: 'Eh, old fellow my friend, our ribs have turned white! It's because we have travelled such a long way!'. The Snakes continue their journey south to Yarra Wurta cliff at the northern end of Lake Torrens before returning to their final resting place at Margaret Springs 21 km away.

The Snake mythology extends from the Northern Territory to South Australia, linking the Lower Southern Aranda, Arabunna, and Kuyani people who lived here before European occupation.

European settlement quickly followed exploration and Arabunna people were dispossessed. Cattle grazing and drought impacted heavily on traditional food sources and many Arabunna moved for rations and employment to the various major centres - Strangways, Anna Creek, Wood Duck, the Peake, Cootanoorina, Wandillina (near Mt. Dutton), Oodnadatta and Finniss Springs. Others camped near railway sidings living in semi-traditional fashion.

An influenza epidemic in 1919 wiped out whole families and even whole groups, particularly those camped by the railway lines. The majority of remaining Arabunna live in localities such as Marree and Pt. Augusta.

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