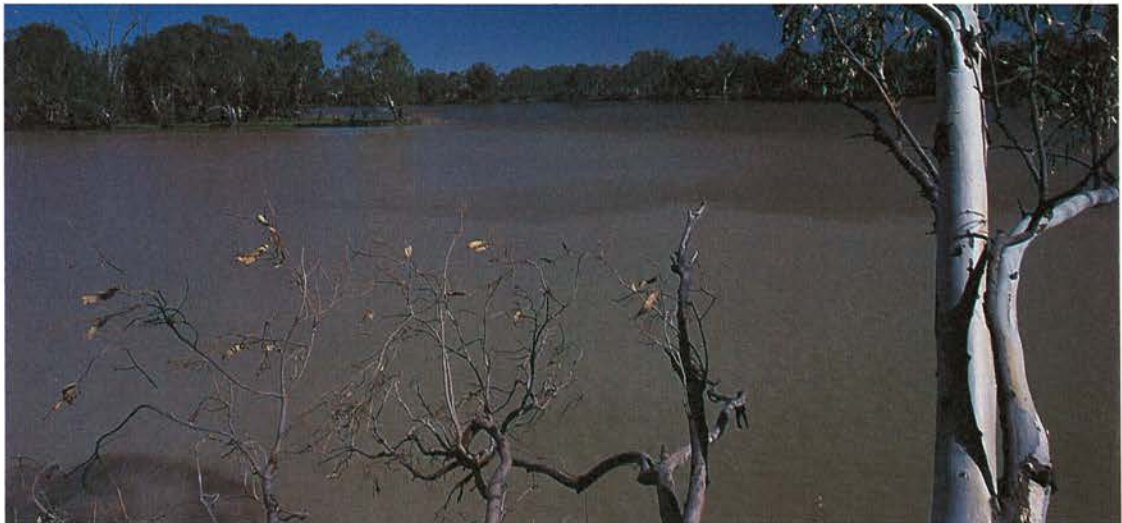


THE DARLING AND FAR WEST



MAJOR ARCHAEOLOGICAL FINDS at **Lake Mungo** from 1967 have revealed evidence of the earliest Aboriginal occupation yet known in Australia. This evidence dates from approximately 40 000 years ago and includes the earliest known example of cremation in the world, dating from approximately 26 000 years ago. Population densities were, at least seasonally, highest along the Darling River and around other water bodies such as the Menindee Lakes and Lake Mungo. Away from these sources of food and water, densities were very low, and even near them low-water conditions set severe limits on numbers.

This early human habitat lies mainly below 200 m, but reaches over 400 m above sea level in the Barrier Range (see Broken Hill) and 855 m at Scope to the east. The region is composed almost entirely of Cainozoic and Mesozoic deposits laid down in an ancient sea bed in the Murray–Darling Basin: exceptions are the older mineralised rocks in the Barrier Range and to its north. Sand plains with dune systems occur in the northwest and southwest. Average summer maximum temperatures can reach over 36°C. Rainfall is seasonally uniform apart from a summer maximum in the north, but averages less than 250 mm throughout the region. As a result drainage in much of the region is internal and indeterminate. The Darling River is the only major stream and even that has dried up completely in drought years. Brackish lakes to the west of it lie on an important overflow route, but there are also others to the east including **Lake Mungo**. Ground water is particularly important in parts of the north of the region: artesian water was first discovered in Australia at Kallara station in the **Bourke** district in 1878. Pre-European vegetation consisted of scrub or, in the extreme northwest, tussock grassland. Except for the extreme south where there is some arable farming, pastoral land-uses, particularly low-density sheep grazing, are dominant.



The junction of the Darling and Murray river system. Nearly 2600 kilometres in length, the Murray River drains more than one million square kilometres of the inland Australia. Photograph by Ray Joyce.

WELDON TRANNIES

Charles Sturt explored the upper Darling River in 1829 and, on a separate expedition, reached its junction with the Murray River in 1830. Thomas Mitchell explored the Darling between **Bourke** and **Menindee** in 1835 and built Fort Bourke as a stockade against hostile Aborigines. Sturt returned in 1844, this time exploring the Barrier Range area (see Broken Hill) in 1844 and the **Milparinka** and **Tibooburra** district in 1845.

Wentworth was probably the first permanent European settlement in the region when it became a popular camp for overlanders in the 1840s. Permanent European settlement of the upper Darling River occurred from 1857: there had been earlier settlement in the 1840s, but this was abandoned after Aboriginal attacks. Pastoral settlement along the lower river began in 1850 with most of the river frontages below **Bourke** being taken up for sheep by about 1860. Land in the **Cobar** district and in the area between the Darling, Macquarie and Lachlan rivers was taken up in the 1860s; land west of the Darling was largely vacant until the 1870s or as late as the 1880s in the **Tibooburra** district.

William Randell brought his paddle-steamer upstream to **Bourke** and **Brewarrina** in 1859 and to **Walgett** in 1861. Many towns along the river were established in the 1860s after the steamers had reached their sites. The river trade thrived in the 1870s to 1890s. Camels were sometimes used to bring wool to the river ports. The railway to Bourke opened in 1885, to Brewarrina in 1901 and to Menindee in 1919. The river trade declined as a result, the last riverboats running to Bourke in 1931 and to Menindee in 1942.

Copper ores were discovered at **Cobar** in 1870, leading to the granting of mining leases and the establishment of the town in 1871. Mines there have had their ups and downs until the present, but the new Elura copper, lead and zinc mine began production in 1983. Silver was discovered at **Thackaringa** in 1876, gold in 1882. Gold was also found in the **Milparinka** district in the early 1880s and at **Tibooburra** in 1881. Opals were discovered at **White Cliffs** in 1884 and at **Lightning Ridge** in 1902.

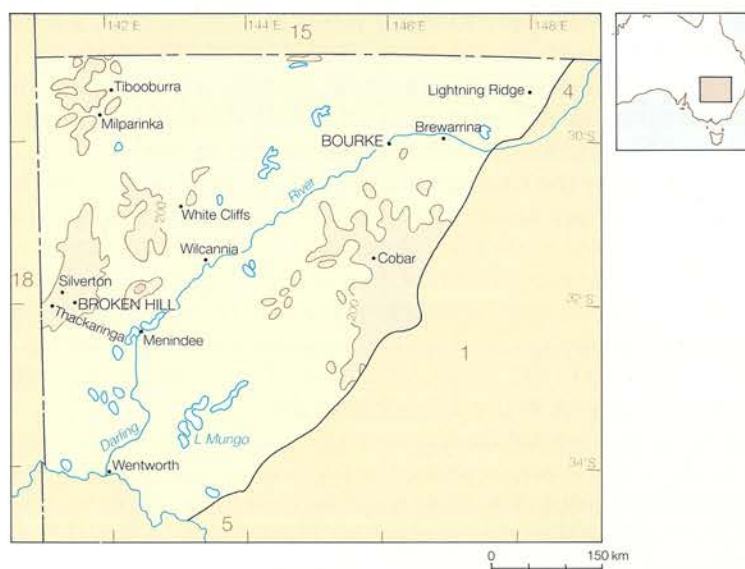
By far the most important mineral discoveries were, however, in the Barrier Range area. Silver ores were first found at **Silverton** in 1882, but that field soon lost its supremacy to the new one at **Broken Hill** and the former field closed in 1889. Ore bodies at Broken Hill, discovered in 1883 by Charles Rasp, proved to be the richest silver-lead-zinc deposits then known in the world. Broken Hill Proprietary Co was established in 1885. Smelting began locally in 1886, but was progressively transferred to **Port Pirie** from 1898. Conzinc Riotinto and the Electrolytic Zinc Co were also established to mine and process Broken Hill ore. Various mines have closed or threatened to as mineral prices have slumped from time to time or particular ore bodies have become uneconomic to mine. Major closures seemed possible in the 1970s-80s, but were at least temporarily avoided to the end of 1985. Broken Hill is also known as an extremely strong centre of unionism and holds a very special place in Australian trade union history.

The far west of New South Wales continues to be almost entirely dependent on two rather precarious industries, mining and grazing. Both are greatly affected by the rise and fall of world commodity prices. Grazing is also at the mercy of drought and, along the rivers, flood. In addition, overstocking in poor seasons has led to major soil erosion problems. Mining has also seen good times and bad. The major difference is that, while ore deposits can be completely mined, the soil and native vegetation can, with due care, continue to yield indefinitely.

Graeme Aplin

SUGGESTED READING

- G. Blainey, *The rise of Broken Hill*, Melbourne 1968.
 B. Hardy, *West of the Darling*, Brisbane 1969.
 R.L. Heathcote, *Back of Bourke: a study of land appraisal and settlement in semi-arid Australia*, Melbourne 1965.

**BOURKE**

[30°05'S 145°58'E]

Popn: 318 (1871), 1571 (1911), 3622 (1971), 3326 (1981). Explorer Thomas Mitchell named Fort Bourke after gov of NSW, Richard Bourke. Charles Sturt explored Darling River in district in 1828–29. Mitchell built Fort Bourke to south in 1835 as stockade against hostile Aboriges. Capt William Randell brought paddle-steamer *Gemini* up the Darling River to town site in 1859. Town laid out and post office opened in 1862; latter replaced in 1880. First town land sales, hospital and hotel licenses in 1863. Soon afterwards town began to dominate upper Darling River and supply part of southwest Qld: thriving river port in the 1870s–90s. Capt Thunderbolt (Frederick Ward) carried out several armed robberies in district c1865. First local newspaper, the *Central Australian*, and official ferry service estab in 1868. Gaol built in 1873, closed in 1909; used as internment camp for Germans during 1914–18 war, then demolished. Telegraph service opened in 1873, Roman Catholic church in 1874, Anglican church in 1875. Pastoral and agric show first held in 1874. Courthouse built in 1876, a second (RNE) in 1900. First discovery of artesian water in Aust made at Kallara station in district in 1878. Municipality estab in 1878, merged with shire in 1910 after town council became bankrupt in 1906. Camel trains used in area in the 1870s–1920s. Bridge with lifting span over Darling R opened in 1883. Rlwy opened in 1885 and river trade began to decline. Dunlop station had first large flock of sheep in world shorn entirely by machine in 1887–88. Toorale in 1887 became first station in Aust to be lit by electricity. Serious flood in 1890. Rabbits reached area in 1891. Water for town supplied from Bourke Weir since 1892. New wharf completed in 1898. Telephone exchange opened in 1911. Bourke Meat Preserving Co opened first country meatworks in Aust in 1892, but not a success: present meatworks opened in 1938. Ross and Keith Smith landed here in 1920 on return flight to England: commercial flights

began in 1935. Last riverboat called at Bourke wharves in 1931. Large US airfield in district opened in 1942; much military activity in rural areas during war. Monument on Fort Bourke site erected in 1951. Increase in popn in the early 1950s due to high wool prices.

BREWARRINA

[29°57'S 146°53'E]

Popn: 344 (1881), 1137 (1911), 804 (1933), 1445 (1971), 1236 (1981). Name: Aborig = 'place where acacias grow'. Some European settlement in district in 1839, more runs taken up after depasturing licences issued from 1849. Developed as wool port after William Randell's riverboat *Gemini* reached town site in 1859. Town laid out in 1861 at head of navigation on Darling River. Rlwy opened in 1901, leading to renewed town growth. Aborig stone fish traps (RNE) found in Barwon R nearby.

BROKEN HILL

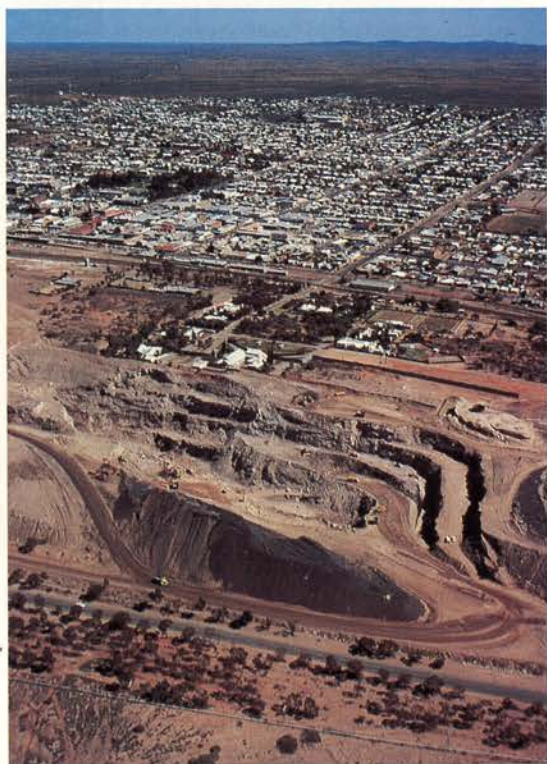
[31°57'S 141°28'E]

Popn: 19 789 (1891), 30 953 (1911), 26 925 (1933), 31 351 (1954), 26 913 (1981). Descriptive name. Barrier Range described by Charles Sturt in 1844. Mt Gipps station taken up c1863 by Barrier Range Co.

Mining history Charles Rasp discov ore body on Mt Gipps station in 1883; richest silver–lead–zinc deposit yet discov in world. Broken Hill Proprietary Co (BHP) estab in 1885, paid first dividend in 1886. Broken Hill South opened works in 1885, but ore in area poorer quality and no dividend until 1897; no dividends at North Broken Hill until 1899. Smelting began here in 1886, but ceased in 1898 after **Port Pirie** smelter had opened. Zinc residues stockpiled waiting for suitable extraction process. Herbert Hoover, later US president, bought tailings and formed Zinc Corporation in 1905 to extract zinc: company started its own mine, New Broken Hill Consolidated. Companies later became CRA (Conzinc Riotinto of Aust) Ltd. In 1909 Amalgamated Zinc Ltd built zinc

extraction plant: selective flotation process discov by F.J. Lyster and A. de Bavay in 1912; was parent company for Electrolytic Zinc Co of Aust formed in 1916 to process ores by newly developed electrolytic process. Ten companies employed about 8800 men by 1914. BHP ceased mining in 1939. Central mine of Sulphide Corporation closed in 1940. New Broken Hill Consolidated opened new mine in 1944–45. Broken Hill South mine closed in 1972. Field has declined somewhat in the 1970s–80s as ore has become more difficult and expensive to mine and as world mineral prices have fluctuated.

Town development Broken Hill township reserve proclaimed in 1885, surveyed in 1886, opened for occupation in 1887. First local newspaper estab in 1886. Municipality incorporated in 1888. Broken Hill Water Supply Co formed in 1890. Narrow-gauge **Silverton** rlwy to Cockburn, SA, opened in 1888, converted to broad gauge in 1969. Rlwy station (RNE) built in 1895, now a transport museum. Court-house (RNE) built in 1889, post office (RNE) in 1891, town hall (RNE) c1890. Mosque built in 1891 for Afghan camel drivers and other Moslems. BHP rlwy to limestone quarries at Tarrawingee opened in 1891, closed in 1932. First trams ran in 1902, last in 1926. City Art Gallery began collection in 1904. First motor mail service in NSW here in 1911. In 1915 the 'Battle of Broken Hill', when two Turks fired on train of 1200 Manchester United Lodge picnickers, led to attorney-general deciding to intern all enemy nationals in Aust.



Broken Hill from the air. Photograph by Mike Jensen, 1981.
AUSTRALIAN INFORMATION SERVICE

NSW rlwy to **Menindee** opened in 1919. Soprano June Gough born here in 1930, changed surname to Bronhill to honour birthplace. Large-scale vegetation regeneration scheme after loam drifts threatened mines and town in 1936. Special trains brought water from Menindee 1944–46; water pipeline from there opened in 1952.

The unions Barrier Ranges Miners Assoc moved here from **Silverton** in 1886. First miners' strike in 1889, others in 1890 and 1892: last of these, against use of 'scab' labour, led to imprisonment of leaders. Trades Hall (RNE) built 1891–1905 was first building in Aust owned by the unions. The *Barrier Truth* founded in 1898, became first union-owned daily paper in Aust in 1908. Town elected first Labor mayor in Aust in 1900. Industrial disputes 1909–21, reinforced by World War I and the Russian Revolution, gave town its militant reputation. Unionists won 35 hr week in 1920. All unions represented in city united as Barrier Industrial Council in 1924.

COBAR

[31°29'S 145°51'E]

Popn: 1859 (1881), 1189 (1891), 4619 (1911), 1163 (1933), 3756 (1971), 3339 (1976), 3583 (1981). Name: Aborig *kubbur* = 'red ochre', obtained at local well. Copper ore discov and first leases granted in 1870. Town site surveyed in 1871. Main mines amalgamated in 1876 as Great Cobar Copper Mine. CSA Co formed and began operation in 1905. Smelter opened in 1913. Mines office (RNE, now museum) built in 1910. Main mine closed in 1920. CSA copper mine reopened in the mid-1960s by new company: annual output of 600 000 tonnes of copper and copper-zinc ores. United goldmine opened in 1871, reopened in 1889 as New Occidental mine. Gold mined again in 1932 and 1938–52. Police station (RNE) built in 1886; courthouse (RNE) in 1887. Ruins of stone and mud huts built for miners in the 1890s. Rlwy station built in 1892 when line opened. Great Western Hotel (RNE) built in 1895. Water pipeline from **Nyngan** opened in 1966. Many important Aborig sites in area, including Mt Grenfell site (RNE) to west with impressive galleries of rock paintings. Elura copper, lead and zinc mine 41 km to north began production in 1983: ore railed to **Newcastle** for shipping to Risdon, Tas, for processing.

LAKE MUNGO

[33°44'S 143°05'E]

Detailed research in area begun in 1967. Cremated remains of Aborig woman from about 26 000 yrs ago discov in 1969: earliest known example of cremation in world. Later a 30 000 yr old burial found. Oldest lakeside ovens, shell middens and stone tools found in Aust discov here and dated at about 33 000 yrs ago. Recent work has suggested even earlier habitation. Nat Pk declared in 1978.

LIGHTNING RIDGE

[29°27'S 148°00'E]

Popn: 225 (1933), 286 (1947), 176 (1954), 1112 (1981). Surface opal discov in 1902, field developed in 1903, commercial production began in 1905. Public school built in 1912, but no electricity supply until 1962, first permanent doctor not until 1977. Several new opal finds in district in 1969.

MENINDEE [32°23'S 142°26'E]

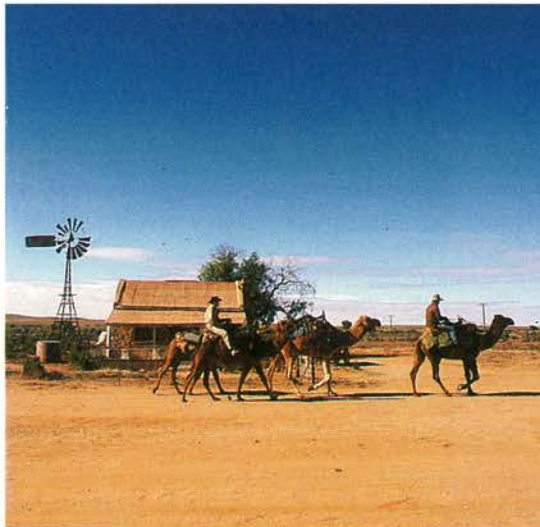
Popn: 261 (1881), 177 (1911), 509 (1933), 373 (1947), 644 (1954), 455 (1981). Local Aborig name. Known as Perry 1861–66. Thomas Mitchell explored area in 1835, Charles Sturt in 1844. European settlement west of the Darling River took place in the 1850s–60s: Kinchega station taken up in the early 1850s, covered 405 000 ha by 1884. Hotel estab at river crossing c1853. Riverboat captain Francis Cadell built store here in 1859. Explorers Robert O'Hara Burke and William Wills stayed in township on journey north in 1860. Post office opened in 1861. School opened in 1868, only one in a 322 km radius. Most important town on middle Darling R until lost position to **Wilcannia** with rise of **Cobar** as copper centre in the 1870s. Rlwy opened in 1919. Last paddle-steamer reached here in 1942. Menindee Lakes storage scheme completed in 1960 to supply **Broken Hill**, also used for recreation. Kinchega Nat Pk declared in 1967, includes 1880s woolshed.

MILPARINKA [29°44'S 141°53'E]

Popn: 87 (1911), 38 (1954), 149 (1961). Name: Aborig = 'water to be found here'. Charles Sturt led expedition through district in 1845, camped at Depot Glen (RNE) where second in command James Poole was buried. Gold found at Depot Glen in 1880, at Mt Browne in 1881, leading to rush and town of about 600 in the 1880s. Albert Hotel licensed since 1881, school opened in 1883, courthouse and gaol begun in 1885, hospital opened in 1889.

SILVERTON [31°52'S 141°15'E]

Popn: 1397 (1891), 286 (1901), 103 (1947), 137 (1961). Earlier called Umberumberka, renamed when silver chlorides discov in 1882. Town site surveyed in 1883. Rlwy opened in 1888. Popn reached approx 3000 but field closed in 1889. Town began to be overshadowed



The importance of camels in nineteenth-century Silvertown is recreated by these latter-day adventurers. Photograph, 1984.

TOURISM COMMISSION OF NEW SOUTH WALES

by **Broken Hill** by the mid-1880s. Gaol built in 1889, closed in 1943, now a museum. Township listed on RNE.

THACKARINGA [32°02'S 141°04'E]

Popn: 55 (1911), 23 (1933). Hotel and store opened in 1875. Silver discov in 1876, goldmining syndicates set up in 1882. Isolation and transport costs prevented major development. Smelter opened in 1885 at Pinnacles mining centre to east. Pinnacles mines operated spasmodically until 1971. School operated 1889–1903.

TIBOOBURRA [29°25'S 142°02'E]

Popn: 172 (1911), 210 (1933), 135 (1947), 211 (1976). Charles Sturt was first European to travel through area in 1845. Robert O'Hara Burke and William Wills passed through area in 1860. Qld–NSW border surveyed in 1881–82. Pastoral holdings in district by the 1880s. Gold found in 1881, approx 1000 diggers by 1882. Family Hotel and post office built in that year. School opened in 1885. Courthouse built in 1888, Tibooburra Hotel in 1890. Hospital estab c1890. Plant and animal life in district suffered from overgrazing, but recovery in Sturt Nat Pk to northwest since dedication in 1972.

WENTWORTH [34°06'S 141°56'E]

Popn: 222 (1861), 445 (1871), 214 (1881), 849 (1933), 2528 (1947), 4034 (1954), 1037 (1971), 1180 (1981). Named after W.C. Wentworth, early NSW politician. Explorer Charles Sturt discov junction of Darling River and Murray River in 1830. Site of town became popular camp for overlanders from NSW to SA in the 1840s. First houses erected in 1851. Town site surveyed in 1858. St John's Anglican church built in 1871. Courthouse built in 1878 to replace earlier log courthouse. Old gaol (RNE) built 1878–81. Proclaimed a municipality in 1879. Farm irrigation scheme in district opened in 1890. Formerly one of Aust's busiest river ports, mainly handling wool from southwest NSW; in the 1890s an intercolonial trade centre.

WHITE CLIFFS [30°51'S 143°06'E]

Popn: 598 (1911), 33 (1954), 210 (1981). Aust's oldest commercial opal field, discov in 1884. Popn of approx 5000 at peak, 5 hotels. Mining declined from 1902. Opalised plesiosaur skeleton found in 1976. First solar power station in Aust opened here in late 1983.

WILCANNIA [31°32'S 143°23'E]

Popn: 264 (1871), 1424 (1881), 623 (1933), 982 (1981). Francis Cadell took the *Albury* up the Darling River to Mt Murchison station near town site in 1859. Post office estab on station in 1860. Town site surveyed in 1865, first store estab in 1866. *Wilcannia Times* estab in 1873. Coaching centre for routes to goldfields to west in the 1870s. Hospital built in 1879. Aust's third largest inland port in the 1880s–90s when huge wool clip of northwestern NSW loaded here and town became more important than **Menindee**. Atheneum Building, now museum, built in 1883. Police station, gaol residence and courthouse (all RNE) built c1888. Bridge (RNE) opened in 1896. Declined in the 1920s with advent of motor transport.