

Regions of Australia

The map on the following page shows some geographical regions of Australia.

Specifically the regions which are shown are the following:

- the **Great Dividing Range**
- the **Great Barrier Reef**
- the **Lake Eyre Basin**
- the **Simpson Desert**
- the **Nullabor Plain**

The **Murray** and **Darling Rivers** are also shown as they have the largest drainage basin in Australia.

The Great Dividing Range

The Great Dividing **Range** is also known as the Eastern Highlands. It is Australia's largest **mountain range** and the 3rd longest **range of mountains** in the world. The Great Dividing **Range** is more than 3,500 km long, stretching from Victoria to Cape York in Queensland. In fact, the Great Dividing **Range** is not a single **mountain range**, but a series of **ranges**, upland areas and escarpments.



Three Sisters, Great Dividing Range, NSW

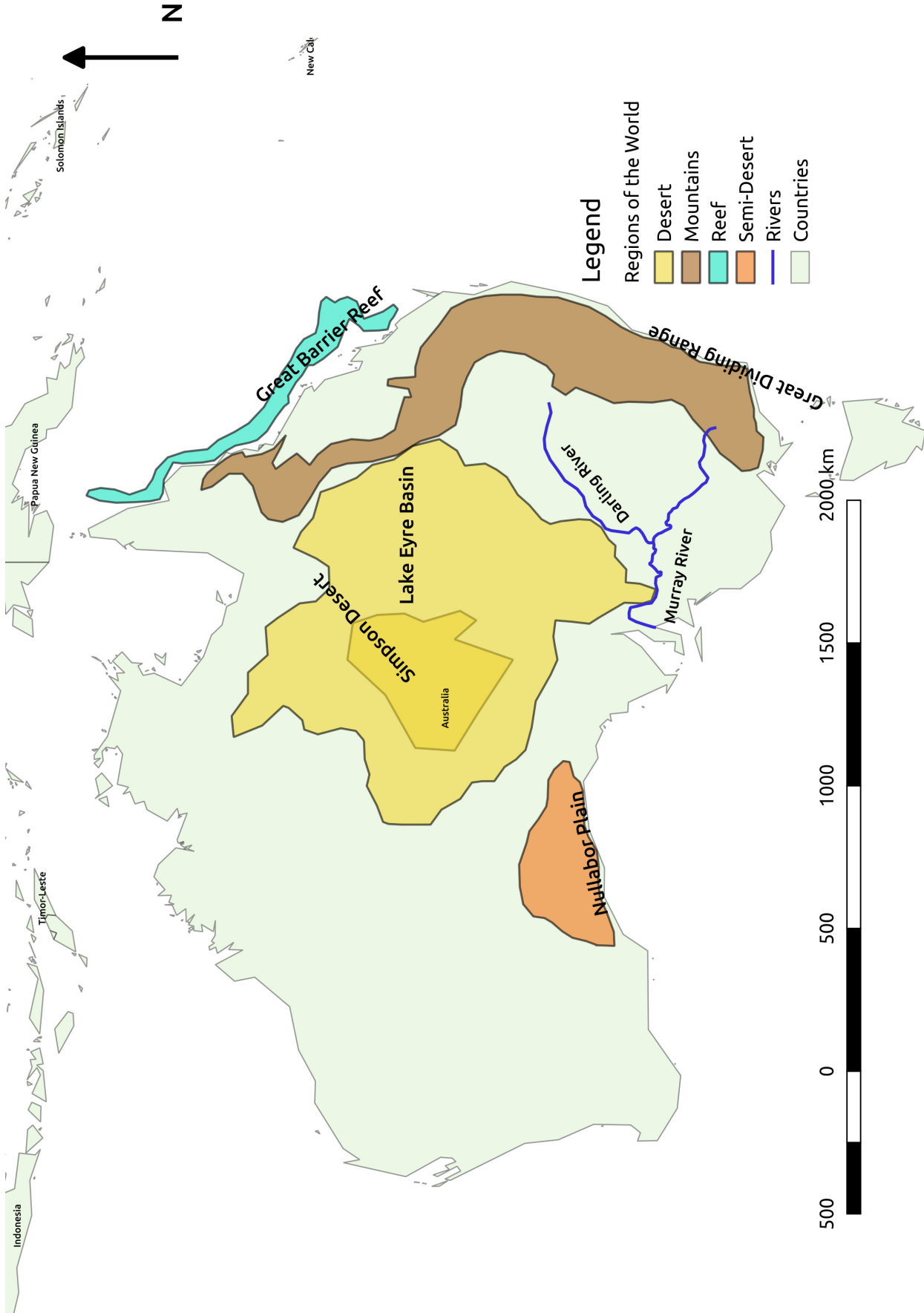


Snow in mountains of New South Wales.

On the Eastern side of the **mountains** the **rivers** run down to the Pacific Ocean or Bass Strait and on the Western side the **rivers** mostly drain into the Murray and Darling **Rivers**. The **mountains** help to keep the interior of Australia **dry** by blocking **rain** from the East coast from crossing to the West. Some **snow** falls on parts of the Great Dividing **Range** in **winter**.



Regions of Australia



In the North the climate is **hot** and humid and the **mountains** are covered in tropical **rainforest**. In the South the climate is temperate in the **mountains**, with cooler temperatures. Aboriginal people have lived in these **mountains** since soon after they reached Australia. However, the Great Dividing **Range** posed a serious obstacle to European explorers and settlers in Australia and also hindered the development of roads and railways.

The Great Barrier Reef

The Great Barrier Reef is the world's largest **coral** reef system and lies off the north-eastern coast of Queensland. It is more than 2,300 km long and includes more than 900 **islands** and more than 2,900 reefs. The Great Barrier Reef was listed as a World Heritage Site in 1981. Many, many kinds of **fish**, **birds** and **sea animals** live in the Great Barrier Reef, some live nowhere else. There are more than 30 species of **dolphins**, **whales** and **porpoises**. Humpback **whales** have their babies in the **waters** of the Great Barrier Reef. There are 6 species of **marine turtle** in the Great Barrier Reef and only 7 in the whole world. There are 242 species of **birds**, over 1,500 species of **fish** and over 4,000 species of shellfish.



Green Sea Turtle. Image by Brocken Inaglory.



Coral reef

The Great Barrier Reef has a lot of smaller **environments** within it. A few of these are shallow **coral** reefs, deep **coral** reefs, **sandy beaches**, rocky **beaches**, **sand** banks, **coral** cays, **mangroves** and mudflats. It is a very popular place for people to visit, especially for snorkelling and diving, but also to stay on the **islands** and visit the **beaches** and rocky shorelines. The

Great Barrier Reef has been affected by pollution, shipping passing through it (which sometimes breaks the **coral** or spills nasty things into the **sea**), overfishing and the Crown of Thorns Starfish, which sometimes occurs in large numbers and eats the **coral**. The Great Barrier Reef has been affected by warmer **water** and an increase of carbon dioxide



in the [water](#) in recent years. People are trying to find ways to protect the reef and measure how much is damaged and work out what damages it, so that it can be managed to preserve it.

Lake Eyre Basin

The [Lake](#) Eyre Basin is a drainage area that has no outflow into a [river](#) or [sea](#). It is one of the largest of these in the world. There are several [deserts](#) in this basin, which produce most of the dust in the Southern Hemisphere. The area is very [dry](#) and [arid](#). When [rain](#) falls it drains along the creeks into Kati Thanda – [Lake](#) Eyre, which only fills a few times a century. Sometimes Kati Thanda – [Lake](#) Eyre dries completely, leaving only a layer of salt.



Lake Eyre. Image: Matt Malone



Lake Eyre salt crust

The evaporation rate is very high because this area is so [dry](#). If the Murray and Darling [Rivers](#) flowed into [Lake](#) Eyre they would just replace the [water](#) lost to evaporation. If the Mississippi [River](#) flowed into [Lake](#) Eyre it would take 22 days to fill it. The Amazon [River](#) could fill it in 3 days. The surrounding [deserts](#) all contribute to the [dry](#) air and high evaporation rate.

The Simpson Desert

The Simpson [Desert](#) is part of the [Lake](#) Eyre Basin. It is the 4th largest [desert](#) in Australia. The 3 larger [deserts](#) (the Great Victoria [Desert](#), the Great [Sandy Desert](#) and the Tanami [Desert](#)) are all in Western Australia, North of the Nullabor Plain. The Simpson [Desert](#) lies over the South-western edge of the Great Artesian Basin, an enormous underground reservoir of

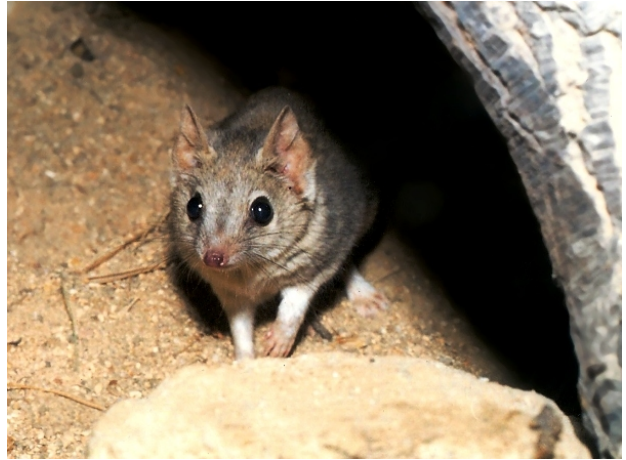


Simpson Desert



fresh **water**. There are many natural **springs** of **water** bubbling up from the Great Artesian Basin in the Simpson **Desert**.

The Simpson **Desert** contains the world's longest parallel **sand dunes**, which lie North – South. The climate is very **hot** and **dry**. Temperatures can reach close to 50°C in **summer**, with **sandstorms**. **Winters** are usually cool, but can have **hot** days. The **rainfall** is usually very low. the Simpson **Desert** is home to emus, many **birds** and a marsupial rat called the Kowari.



Kowari. Image: Kořínek Milan



Ted Colson, Simpson Desert, 1936.

Charles Sturt was the first European to see the Simpson **Desert** in 1844, but the first non-indigenous person to cross the **desert** was Ted Colson, who crossed it with camels in 1936. Aboriginal people knew of the location of **springs** and **wells** in the **desert** and a Wangkangurru man helped the surveyor David Lindsay to find **water** in the **desert** in 1886.

The Nullarbor Plain

The Nullarbor Plain was named from the Latin words “*nullus*” (“not any”) and “*arbor*” (“**tree**”). It is indeed a place with very few **trees**. It stretches inland from the coast in southern Western Australia, where the Great Australian Bight (an open bay) forms a long curve. On the northern side, the Nullarbor Plain has the Great Victoria **Desert**, the largest **desert** in Australia. The Nullarbor Plain has a **desert** climate with very little **rain**, **summer**



Nullarbor Plain. Image: 17177



temperatures close to 50°C in the day and winter nights below freezing.

The Nullarbor Plain is formed of a layer of limestone bedrock, which was the base of an ancient sea. It has steep cliffs fronting onto the sea. Caves in these cliffs sometimes form blowholes which blow fountains of spray into the air above the cliffs, sometimes several hundred metres inland. There are also underground rivers and lakes. The vegetation of the Nullarbor is mostly small, scrubby plants like saltbush and bluebush. Animals include the southern



Southern Hairy-nosed Wombat. Image: Jason Pratt.

hairy-nosed wombat, red kangaroos, dingoes, which also live in the desert. “Crossing the Nullarbor” is regarded as a significant achievement in Australia.

The Murray and Darling Rivers



Flood on the Darling River, 1890. Painting by William Piguénit.

The Murray River is Australia's longest river (2,508 km long), running from the Australian Alps, through New South Wales and Victoria, to the sea in South Australia. The Darling River is the 3rd longest river in Australia and flows into the Murray River. The rivers that feed the Darling River start in Queensland, although the Darling River itself only runs in New South Wales. Together the

Murray and Darling make the longest river system in Australia.

The amount of water in the Murray and Darling Rivers varies from year to year. The Darling River often dries out completely. It is rare for the Murray River to dry out completely. In the 19th century paddle steamers transported goods and people on both rivers. It is still possible to cruise on the Murray River in an historic paddle steamer. Most of the boats on the Murray River today are recreational. Both rivers have been affected by the



Paddle steamer on the Murray River. Image: Scott Davis



use of their [water](#) for irrigation, pollution from pesticides and fertilisers and droughts. The Darling [River](#), in particular, has been in poor health.

The Murray [River](#) is particularly important to indigenous Australians. Several language groups amongst the Aboriginal People along the [river](#) share a story about a hunter chasing a Murray cod (a [fish](#)), which then carved out the Murray [River](#). In the story told by the people of [Lake Alexandrina](#) the hunter is called *Ngurunderi* and the Murray cod is called *Pondi*. The chase started in New South Wales, and Ngurunderi threw



Murray Cod. Image: Codman

spears at *Pondi*. In avoiding the spears, *Pondi* carved out the curves and branches of the [river](#). Although Ngurunderi managed to spear *Pondi* in the tail, which made him jump forwards in a straight line, *Pondi* escaped into [Lake Alexandrina](#).

The Murray cod is only one of several native [fish](#) in these [river](#) systems. Many of these are endangered due to the bad health of the [rivers](#) and introduced [fish](#). There are also [turtles](#), crayfish, yabbies, shrimp, [water](#) rats and platypus. [Forests](#) of [red river](#) gums and other [trees](#) grow along the banks. These [rivers](#) are extremely important for both the indigenous life, as well as the farmers of New South Wales and Victoria. They also have important history for both indigenous and non-indigenous Australians.



Confluence of the Murray and Darling Rivers. Image: Jjron

