

Back o' Bourke



Vast sunburnt plains, crimson sunsets and empty horizons – far west NSW is every bit as spacious as you could imagine, rough and rugged, and oh so dry. Yet this dry country is one of the most interesting areas in the state, and much more diverse than it first appears. It produces much of New South Wales' wealth, particularly from the mines of Broken Hill, and it is home to some of the state's most interesting national parks; a wondrous combination of stunning natural environments and vastly significant Aboriginal heritage.

A startlingly empty land, the outback is sparsely populated both with plants and animals and with people. You need to be rather special to live out here. So the people you meet are special – larger than life, yet calm and caring. You won't hear a car horn in these towns.

From November to February the heat is intense – by 10am the Celsius landmark of 40°C is passed. That leaves another 10 hours of daylight for the current record, 51.7°C, to be broken. There's plenty to see and do, and you can get into the towns and most national parks in a 2WD. But seek local advice if you want to venture onto unsealed roads, even in a 4WD. They're corrugated dust, some with a high central hump, and a few drops of rain polishes them slick to swish you out of control.

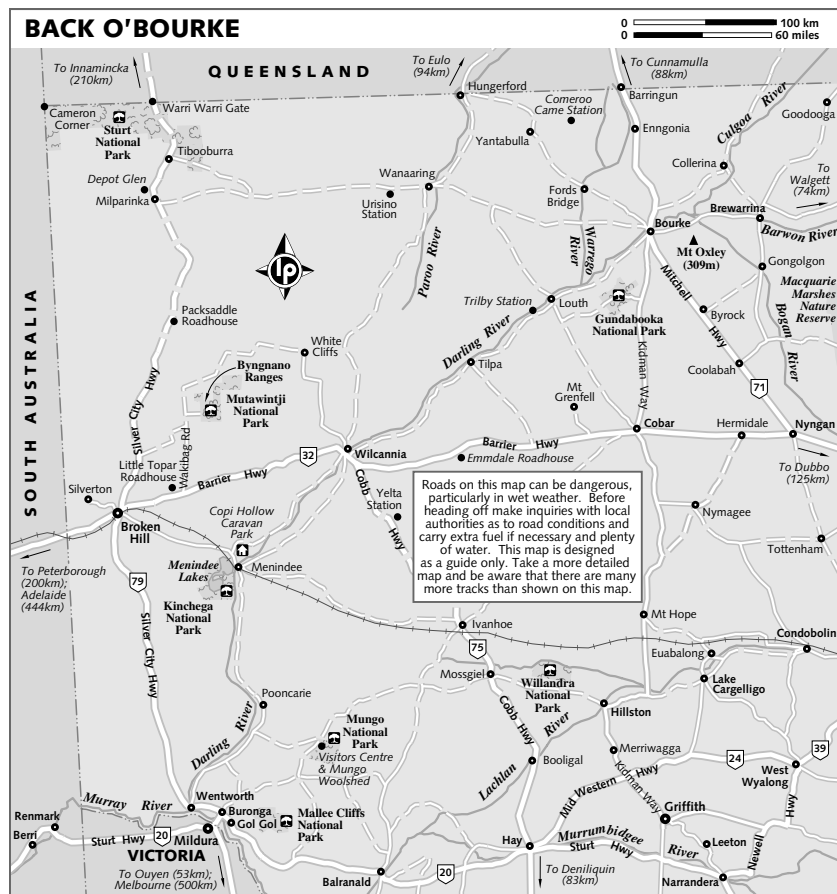
Although the country is flat to the horizon with small clumps of saltbush all over, there are plenty of birds, mobs of emus, cattle, feral goats and kangaroos along the roadside to watch – and to watch out for!

BACK O' BOURKE

HIGHLIGHTS

- Feel deeply moved as the sun sets on the **Broken Hill Sculpture Symposium** (p269)
- Squeeze down a mine shaft, digging your feet nervously into the rough-hewn steps, at **Daydream Mine** (p268) at Broken Hill
- Slip softly through the water of the **Menindee Lakes** (p272) looking for a good fishing spot
- Get up and out there on a camel trek at historic **Silverton** (p271)
- Wake to see birds of every colour bathing in the Bogan River at **Nyngan** (p262)
- Sleep underground, with your purchase of opals under your pillow, at **White Cliffs** (p265)
- Photograph baby pelicans from an **1895-replica paddle-wheeler** on the magnificent Darling River at Bourke (p259)
- See for yourself the extraordinary plains, dunes and archaeological records at **Mungo National Park** (p273)





BOURKE

☎ 02 / pop 3924

Immortalised for Australians in the expression 'back of Bourke', that is anything remote, this easy-going town on the Darling River sits right on the edge of the outback. Beyond Bourke, green pastoral lands stop abruptly, settlements are few and the country is flat, brown and alluring. Bourke itself is gorgeous, historic and quaint, sprawled along its beautiful river with its river gums and water birds. Besides, the space is exhilarating, and the very remoteness attractive.

History

The Ngemba people lived in a large area centred on the Brewarrina Fisheries – a series of

stone traps on the Darling River – including Bourke and Louth.

The first Europeans to see this area were in Charles Sturt's party of 1828. Sturt was unenthusiastic about the country but by 1860 there were enough grazer settlers for a paddle-wheeler to risk the difficult journey up to Bourke. By the 1880s, many of the Darling River's 200 paddle-steamers were calling at Bourke; it was possible for wool leaving here to be in London in just six weeks.

Bourke is still a major wool-producing area, but droughts and low prices have forced farmers to look to products such as cotton and rock melons. There's even a vineyard.

Bourke has hosted Australian legends. Poet and writer Henry Lawson lived at the Carriers

Arms Hotel in 1892 while painting the Great Western Hotel. Fred Hollows, the ophthalmic surgeon and hero for his philanthropic work in developing countries, chose to be buried here in the 'land without fences'.

Orientation & Information

The Mitchell Hwy winds through town then heads out across the old bridge to North Bourke (just a pub) 6km away. The shopping centre is on Oxley St between Sturt St and Richard St.

The **visitors centre** (☎ 6872 1222, 6872 2280; www.visitbourke.com; tourinfo@ozemail.com.au; Anson St; ☒ 9am-5pm, closed Sun in summer) has an excellent leaflet called *Bourke Mud Map Tours*, detailing a town walk and drives to places in the district.

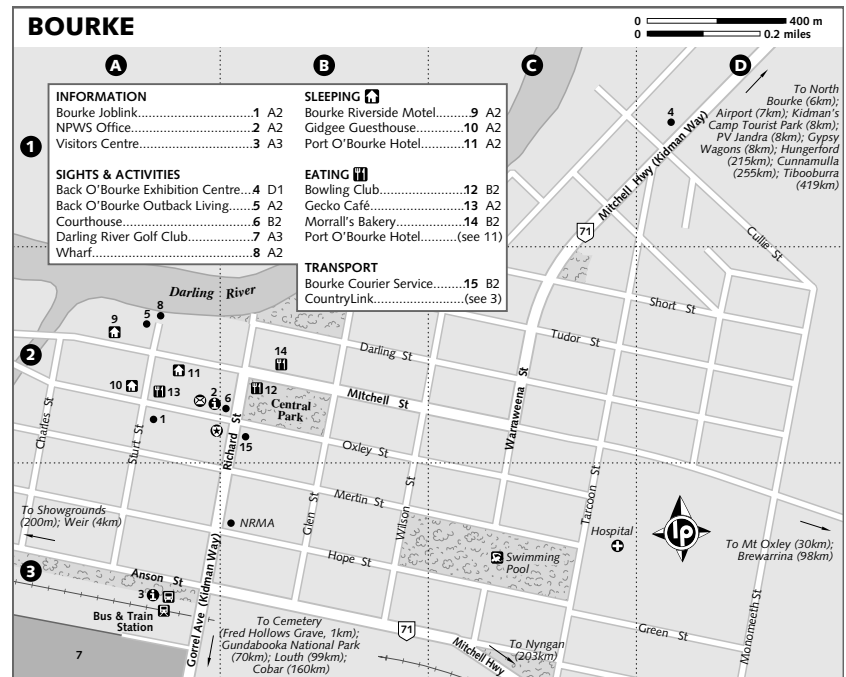
Limited seasonal work is available: picking grapes (December to January), rock melons (November or December), citrus fruits (May to October) and cotton chipping (weeding; November or December). Nearly all these activities take place in summer and it can be *hot!* For work opportunities contact **Bourke Joblink** (☎ 6870 1041; www.joblinkplus.com.au; 26 Oxley St).

Sights & Activities

The **Back O' Bourke Exhibition Centre** (☎ 6872 1321; www.backbourke.com.au; Kidman Way; stage 1 adult/child \$3.50/2.50) follows the legends of the back country from both indigenous and settler perspectives by using oral histories and innovative displays. It is fascinating and the final form of the three-stage exhibition (adult/child \$15/7.50) promises a unique experience.

There are many reminders of the time when the big paddle-wheelers were Bourke's lifeline. The impressive three-tiered **wharf** at the northern end of Sturt St is a faithful reconstruction of the original built in 1897 and, on the river, the **PV Jandra** (☎ 6872 1321; Kidman's Camp Tourist Park; adult/child \$14/10; ☒ cruises 9am & 3pm Mon-Sat, 2.30pm Sun) is a replica of an 1895 paddle-wheeler. The one-hour cruise on the *Jandra* lets you experience the legendary Darling, hear about the local history and see the great range of river birds, like the blue-eyed corellas and pelicans, and their babies.

Many old buildings in town are reminders of Bourke's important past. The **courthouse** (1900), on the corner of Oxley and Richard



Sts, is topped by a crowned spire, signifying that it can hear maritime cases!

Bourke's Historic Cemetery (Kidman Way) predates the town with many epitaphs saying simply 'perished in the bush'. Here too is the deeply emotive headstone to Professor Fred Hollows, the eye surgeon who was determined to help restore the sight of people going needlessly blind. It was carved by a team of international sculptors when he was buried here in 1993.

Darling River Golf Club (☎ 6872 2210; Kidman Way) is a great spot to enjoy some green grass amid the native trees. Just turn up and have a hit, but you need your own clubs. There's a basketball and squash court here, and ask about the tennis courts on Mitchell St.

Back O' Bourke Outback Living (☎ 6872 4242; Sturt St; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Fri, to 2pm Sat) is a gem for local art and crafts and historical displays. There's a Crossley engine out the back, next to the wharf.

Cotton is picked in March and April. From about May to August you can see the cotton gin in action by phoning **Clyde Agriculture** (☎ 6872 2528).

Tours

An excellent way to explore the town and surrounding areas is in a coaster bus. Go with **Mateship Country Tours** (☎ 6872 2280, 6872 1222; tourinfo@ozemail.com.au; adult/child \$25/11; ☎ tours 2pm Mon-Fri, 9.30am Sat) for 3½ hours of fun, leaving from the tourist centre.

For a challenge, the Gidgee Guesthouse (right) can arrange a farmstay and camel trek up north at **Comeroo Camel Station** (☎ 6874 7735; come@lisp.com.au) for one to five nights.

Gypsy Wagons (☎ 0429 927 185; Kidman's Camp Tourist Park; adult \$10; ☎ tours 11am) harnesses two cuddly-looking Clydesdales to take you past vineyards and bush to Nancy Bird-Walton Air Terminal and back through the local orchards.

Festivals & Events

Held in early October, the **Poets Trek** (☎ 6872 2055) is a weekend of adventure across the plains and along the tracks made famous by Australian bush poets.

Sleeping

Port O'Bourke Hotel (☎ 6872 2544; 32 Mitchell St; B&B s/d \$40/55, d with bathroom \$75; ☎) The pub's been renovated and is a cheerful place, serving breakfast in an elegant old dining room.

Gidgee Guesthouse (☎ 6870 1017; gidgee@auzzie.net; 17 Oxley St; dm/s/d \$28/40/58; ☎) The old London Bank building is now a great guesthouse with changing art exhibitions, music gear for use, and pleasant rooms around a peaceful sculpture garden. Your hosts will give you all the goss, arrange tours and get you up on a camel.

Bourke Riverside Motel (☎ 6872 2539; www.bourke-riversidemotel.com; 3 Mitchell St; standard s/d \$75/95, heritage d \$125; ☎ ☎ ☎) In an enchanting riverside garden, and reflecting all the magic that is Bourke itself, this friendly place includes the historic Telegraph Hotel, and many unique rooms, with antique furniture, even four-poster beds.

Kidman's Camp Tourist Park (☎ 6872 1612; Kidman Way; camp site \$23, cabin standard/with bathroom \$69/88; ☎ ☎) This quiet camping ground, just north of town, looks out on the plains along the Darling's banks. The deluxe cabins with timber decks look grand amid the trees.

Eating

Morrall's Bakery (☎ 6872 2086; 37 Mitchell St; mains \$7.50-10; ☎ breakfast & lunch daily, dinner Thu-Sun) You must try the award-winning pies but the best is breakfast, served from 6am, with specials like mushrooms on toast. It turns into a pizzeria (pizzas \$15 to \$18) Thursday to Sunday evening.

Gecko Café (☎ 6872 2701; 29 Oxley St; meals \$8.50-10.50; ☎ 9am-4pm Mon-Fri) A bright place serving excellent coffee, home-cooked lasagnes, soups and curries.

Bowling Club (☎ 6872 2190; Richard St; mains \$12-18; ☎ lunch & dinner) A Chinese restaurant hidden away upstairs also serves Oz food and delights like Mongolian lamb, using local produce.

Port O'Bourke Hotel (☎ 6872 2544; Mitchell St; mains \$15; ☎ lunch Tue-Sun, dinner Mon-Sat) It's a great spot for a roast and you can get a feel for life in the outback in this welcoming place.

Getting There & Away

Air Link (☎ 13 17 13; www.airlinkairlines.com.au) has five flights a week to/from Dubbo and on to Sydney. **CountryLink** (☎ 13 22 32; www.countrylink.info) buses run to Dubbo (four hours, four days a week) and connect with the XPT train to Sydney (11 hours). **Bourke Courier Service** (☎ 6872 2092; cnr Oxley & Richard Sts) sells bus and plane tickets (opening hours depend on flight times). Tickets from Bourke to Dubbo are \$63 and Dubbo to Sydney \$60.

DETOUR: PICNIC AT GUNDABOOKA NATIONAL PARK

Pack a basket of goodies and set off to **Gundabooka National Park**, about 70km southwest of Bourke off the Kidman Way (watch for the turn-offs), where there are wonderful views between the wild flowers and mulga, gorges and rusty cliffs. The rock pools often have water in them and Mt Gundabooka is of great cultural significance to the Ngemba and Paakintji Aboriginal people, whose rock-art painting can still be seen. Outback talk is that there may be some volcanic activity in Mt Gundabooka, and 60km away at Mt Oxley. Check it out on www.outbackonline.net/MysteriousOxley.htm before you go, and if you're game to stay overnight, visit the **National Parks & Wildlife Service** (NPWS; ☎ 6872 2744; 51 Oxley St; ☎ 8.30am-4.30pm Mon-Fri) and ask about accommodation. There's camping at Dry Tank, beds in a shearers' quarters, or the Belah Governess's Cottage. Ask, too, for the Gundabooka key (needed to open gates to see rock art).

A **road condition report** (☎ 6872 2055, 0419 722 055) is posted at service stations. All unsealed roads are closed when wet.

DARLING RIVER

Although it passes through some of the driest country in the state, the Darling River usually has some water and its banks are lined with massive river red gums. With the Murray, the Darling forms one of the world's longest exotic rivers – one that for much of its length flows through country from which it receives no water.

An unsealed road runs along the Darling's south bank downstream from Bourke to Wilcannia with a few places to check out on the way.

Tiny Louth (population 34), about 100km from Bourke, hosts up to 4000 people during the annual race meeting on the second Saturday in August. During the week before the races the local Shindy's Inn comes alive each night with events such as a damper bake-off. **Old Louth Post Office** (☎ 6874 7362; dr.white@bigpond.com; s/d \$45/90) has been lovingly restored and now operates as a B&B.

Trilby Station (☎ 6874 7420; www.trilbystation.com.au; camp site d/f \$20/25, bunkhouse s/d \$30/60, standard/large cottage d \$85/95; ☎ ☎), 20km west of Louth, offers an insight into outback life, including feeding animals, watching cattle mustering or sheep shearing, and listening to the School of the Air. Yabbing is fun, or go fishing and canoeing. The self-contained cottages are roomy, the bunkhouse cosy or you can camp by the river near the barbecue and gazebo.

Further downstream is the **Tilpa Hotel** (☎ 6837 3928; Tilpa; s/d/f \$30/40/60), all crunched and dusty, its name painted across the low-slung corrugated iron roof that holds up its veranda posts. There are meals (mains \$17 to

\$20; open lunch and dinner) like Bushman's Steak to fortify you, fuel and of course beer. The basic accommodation is in a separate building.

From Tilpa, the Darling flows down to **Wilcannia**, then through a system of lakes at **Menindee** (p272), surrounded by **Kincheha National Park** (p272), past **Pooncarie**, a pretty hamlet and a jumping-off point for **Mungo National Park** (p273), until it meets the Murray at **Wentworth** (p293). These places are accessible by sealed roads from Broken Hill.

CORNER COUNTRY

Out here, it's a different world. The outback is both harsh and peaceful, stretching forever to the endless sky. This far western corner of NSW is a semidesert of red plains, heat, dust and flies; to quote Henry Lawson (1893): 'There are no mountains out west, only ridges on the floor of hell'. But it's also pastoral lands, with huge properties running beef and sheep. Corner Country produces over a million kilograms of fine merino wool each year.

If you've come west from Bourke, the 413km to Tibooburra via Wanaaring has been an adventurous drive, on a challenging unsealed road. If you've come north on the Silver City Hwy which is mostly sealed but still monstrous after rain, you've passed through **Milparinka**, where members of Charles Sturt's expedition were forced to camp for six months in 1845. Milparinka courthouse is a fine sandstone building, which houses a local history centre and has maps for a heritage walking track. About 14km northwest at **Depot Glen** is the grave of James Poole, Sturt's second-in-command, who died of scurvy.

Whatever the adventures on the way, it's worth being here to experience for yourself the space, physical features and wildlife.

Watch out for kangaroos and emus, goannas and other lizards on the road, and wedge-tailed eagles above. Along the Queensland border is the dingo-proof fence, patrolled daily by boundary riders.

Tibooburra

☎ 08 / pop 150

Tiny Tibooburra, the hottest town in NSW, has two fine sandstone pubs and a small outdoor cinema. The town used to be called the Granites after the 400-million-year-old granite outcrops nearby, which are good to visit on a sunset walk. This is the closest town to Sturt National Park and there's a large **National Parks & Wildlife Service office** (NPWS; ☎ 8091 3308; ☎ 8.30am-4.30pm Mon-Fri) in the main street. Next door is the well-presented **Courthouse Museum Keeping Place** (☎ 8091 3435) features indigenous artefacts as well as art for sale from the Wadigali, Wengkumara and Malyangapa tribes.

Internet access is available at the **Telecentre** (☎ 8091 3388; tibooburra2880@hotmail.com; Sturt St; per ½/1hr \$4/6).

There's camping in the national park north of town at **Dead Horse Gully** (camp site 57); despite the immediate beauty it is rather exposed and dusty. In town, the **Granites Motel & Caravan Park** (☎ 8091 3305; Brown St; camp site \$18, cabin standard/deluxe \$50/60, motel s/d \$56/70; ☎) has a communal kitchen, cheery rooms, pleasant cabins and a few small trees struggling to provide shade.

The **Family Hotel** (☎ 8091 3314; motel unit s/d \$60/70; ☎) and **Tibooburra Hotel** (☎ 8091 3310) both have basic hotel rooms with shared facilities (single/double \$30/50). Both bars have character; the Tibooburra has a collection of more than 60 well-worn hats on the walls.

TJ's Roadhouse (☎ 8091 3477; meals \$12-18.50; ☎ 7am-9pm, to 6pm Sun) has bank, post office and laundry facilities, tourist and road information, and good country cooking. **Corner Country Store** (☎ 8091 3333; ☎ 7am-6pm), looking modern and cool, serves all-day breakfast, snacks and coffee, and has a barbecue area. It also sells fuel, groceries and camping equipment.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

There is fuel halfway between Milparinka and Broken Hill at the **Packsaddle Roadhouse** (☎ 8091 2539), which features meals, accommodation and wool industry memorabilia. If you're travelling west from Bourke, there's fuel at Wanaaring and White Cliffs (p264). Phone for **road info** (☎ 08 8082 6660, 13 27 01, 08 8091 5155).

Sturt National Park

Taking in vast stony plains, the towering red sand hills of the great Strzelecki Desert and the unusual flat-topped mesas around the Olive Downs, this park covers 340,000 hectares of classic outback terrain. Thanks to the protection of the dingo-proof fence, there are large populations of western grey and red kangaroos.

Sturt NP has 300km of drivable tracks, camping areas and walks. The NPWS at Tibooburra has brochures for each. A favourite destination for visitors is **Cameron Corner**. A post marks the spot where Queensland, South Australia and NSW meet. The Corner is reached by a well-signposted dirt road (allow two hours). In the Queensland corner, vine-covered **Cameron Corner Store** (☎ 08 8091 3872) has fuel, meals, accommodation and good advice on road conditions.

BARRIER HIGHWAY

The Barrier Hwy, part of the direct route between Sydney and Perth and an alternative route to Adelaide, is an excellent sealed road heading from Nyngan 594km to Broken Hill.

Nyngan

☎ 02 / pop 2500

Nyngan is a leafy country town on the banks of the Bogan River at the junction of the Barrier and Mitchell Hwys. Nyngan is also close to the centre of NSW; a cairn marks the exact spot 72km south.

The great flood of 1990, when the Bogan River overwhelmed the town and the entire population was evacuated by helicopter, still looms large in local memory. You can see photos of the flood at the **Railway Station Museum** (adult/child \$2/\$0.50; ☎ 10am-4pm). There is good bird-watching in Nyngan with 107 varieties that love the many little islands in the Bogan. Ideal spots are the **Rotary Park** near the Peter Sinclair Bridge and **Riverside**. Nyngan makes an excellent jumping-off point for visiting the Macquarie Marshes Nature Reserve (Map p250). The **visitors centre** (☎ 6832 1705, 13 20 77; 12 Old Warren Rd) is at the Nyngan Caravan Park, east of town over the railway line. West of town, over the bridge, there are free sheltered camping spots off Temples Lane.

Canonba Hotel/Motel (☎ 6832 1559; 129 Pangee St; s/d \$35/55; ☎) has motel-style rooms behind the pub, and your usual pub counter meals inside.

Country Manor Motor Inn (☎ 6832 1447, 1800 819 913; www.countrymanor.com.au; 145 Pangee St; s/d \$69/80; ☎) is an attractive new place near the pub. Owner Colin Duel will tell you about the local attractions.

Beancounters House (☎ 6832 2270; www.beancountershouse.com.au; 103 Pangee St; d incl breakfast \$99-130; ☎) is mostly on top of the Westpac bank with a modern kitchen off the verdant courtyard garden. Settle in for a comfortable stay in minimalist bedrooms, smart shared bathrooms and veranda access to watch the world go by.

Nyngan Riverside Caravan Park (☎ 6832 1729; enquiries@nynganriverside.com.au; Barrier Hwy; camp site \$20, cabin standard/deluxe \$50/70), west of town, is set on a sandy river beach on the Bogan, a great spot for water-skiing, swimming, canoeing and fishing. Day entry into the park is adult/child \$5/3. Your hosts provide a free taxi into town in the evenings.

The **Windmill Tavern** (☎ 6832 1244; 11 Pangee St; mains \$7.50-16; ☎ lunch & dinner) is a basic but spacious bar and bistro, serving meals like rissoles and veg.

CountryLink (☎ 13 2232) bus/XPT service between Sydney (\$78; nine hours) and Broken Hill (\$64; 6½ hours) stops here daily, and another bus runs to Bourke (\$27; two hours) four times weekly.

Cobar

☎ 02 / pop 5020

Cobar is a bustling mining town with a productive copper mine. Rich copper ore was discovered in 1871. Both the Great Cobar and

Cornish, Scottish & Australian (CSA) mines closed in the 1920s. The CSA mine reopened in the 1960s; it is 1km deep. The Endeavor mine, 47km west of Cobar, is currently exploiting a rich plug of zinc, lead and silver.

INFORMATION

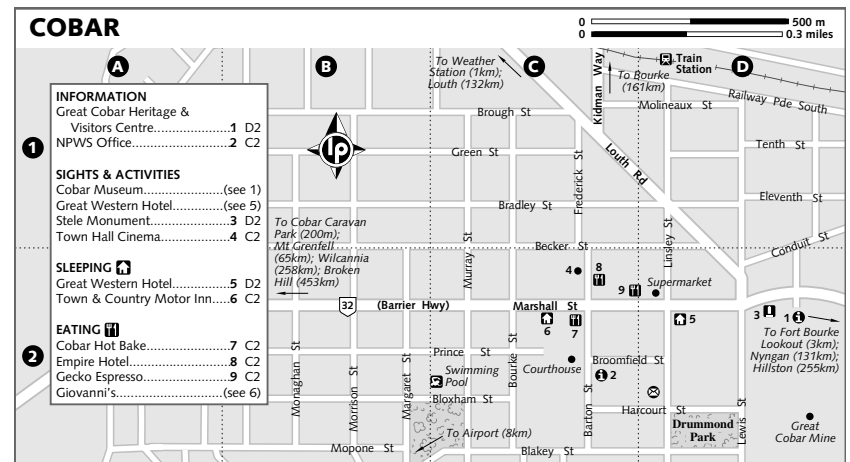
The **visitors centre** (☎ 6836 2448; cobarmus@bigpond.com; Barrier Hwy, Cobar; ☎ 8.30am-5pm), at the eastern end of town, is in the Great Cobar Heritage Centre. Pick up a Mud Map and Heritage Walk. There's also a **NPWS office** (☎ 6836 2692; 16 Barton St).

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

In the Mines Office (1910) of the Great Cobar Heritage Centre is the **Cobar Museum** (adult/child/family \$7/\$5/\$15; ☎ 8.30am-5pm) and many of the displays reflect this association. The hospital train carriage is interesting and there are also sophisticated displays on the environment, local Aboriginal life and the early Europeans. Don't miss it.

Next to the museum is the **Stele Monument**, dedicated to the town and its mining past. You'll find a surprising number of interesting buildings in Cobar including the enormous **Great Western Hotel** (1898), which has perhaps the longest iron-lace veranda in the world. The town also has some legendary characters; stories can be found at the visitors centre.

Take a sealed road to **Fort Bourke Lookout** and view Cobar and its surroundings. There is a viewing platform – look down on the old open-cut gold mine and watch the trucks



LET'S TALK ABOUT THE ROADS

Who would have thought, but the roads out here are a favourite topic. The dust that makes a road is so fine that you could use it to lubricate your engine. A sprinkle of rain turns it to glass. Slippery glass. Those dips in sealed roads aren't for fun. They make canals to carry rain away as it doesn't soak into the glassy soil. Those slithers of mud you see ahead are deep waterways waiting to whoosh you out onto the plains.

The mere hint of rain and everyone has a tale, of being land-locked for days, of digging all night to get out of a ditch, you know the sort of thing.

Then there are the animals. They look like clumps of mulga until they rush at you. No reason, they just rush out. This happens most at dusk and dawn. You're hungry, they're hungry. Great combination. One guy thought he'd died when everything went black and he saw dimly that he was covered in blood. Kangaroo blood, as it turned out, from it bounding through the windscreens.

You'll even meet the odd person who's tried to pass a road train and lived to tell about it.

Get up to Corner Country and road conversations are electrified with anxiety, challenge, simmering with details of walkie-talkie contact, two-way HF radio contact, CB radios, GPS readings, tracks, traps, fuel stocks, water stocks, flares, spare tyres and the sad situation of mobile phones that don't have network coverage anywhere you might need it. Everyone's read the advice at www.flyingdoctor.net/travelinfo.htm, and got brochures and travel advice by calling ☎ 1800 633 060.

The roads are the adventure out here, the land they slice through merely their backdrop.

heading down the deep decline through to the new mine

The **Weather Station** (☎ 6836 2149; Louth Rd; tour free; ☎ 8.45am) offers a 45-minute guided tour which includes the spectacular launching of its weather balloon at 9.15am (10.15am during daylight saving).

If you're in town on the weekend, check out the **Town Hall Cinema** (☎ 6836 38195; www.cinemacafe.com.au; Barton St; adult/child \$12/6; ☎ Fri-Sun) which screens current films in the afternoon and evening.

SLEEPING & EATING

Great Western Hotel (☎ 6836 2503; Marshall St; d incl breakfast \$50) A popular hotel with upstairs rooms that open onto the veranda, and basic motel-style units out the back. From 5.30am a cooked breakfast is served.

Town & Country Motor Inn (☎ 6836 1244; 52 Marshall St; s/d \$79/90, deluxe s/d \$98/108; ☎ ☎ ☎) Has a smart and crisply clean set of rooms behind a treed garden. Walk across the courtyard to Giovanni's (mains \$22.50 to \$28; open for dinner Monday to Saturday) and make sure you try the rack of lamb.

Cobar Hot Bake (☎ 6836 2007; 13 Barton St; meals \$2-8) Sells a range of home-baked pies and buns to take to Drummond Park for a picnic.

Empire Hotel (☎ 6836 2725; 6 Barton St; meals \$8-17) If you're looking for pub grub, the best bet is the bustling Empire, which cooks a mean steak.

Gecko Espresso (☎ 6836 4888; 35 Marshall St; meals \$6.30-9.50; ☎ 8am-6pm Thu & Fri, to 4pm Mon, Wed & Sat) A cheery and bright coffee bar with good cakes and excellent salads and wraps.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

CountryLink (☎ 13 22 32) bus/XPT service between Sydney (\$82; 10½ hours) and Broken Hill (\$51; five hours) stops here daily.

Mt Grenfell Historic Site

Taking in part of the Mt Grenfell Station, the Mt Grenfell historic site protects well-preserved and brilliantly coloured Aboriginal rock art in several caves along a watered gully, an important place for its Aboriginal owners, the Ngiyampaa Wangaaypuwan people. A 5km walking track leads you through some pretty country to the top of a ridge where you can look over the vast Cobar Pediplain.

You have pretty well unlimited access to Mt Grenfell, any time; for information, contact NPWS (☎ 02-6836 2692) or Cobar Aboriginal Lands Council (☎ 02-6836 1144).

The site is 32km north of the Barrier Hwy (it's signposted) on a good gravel road. There's water there but camping is not allowed.

WHITE CLIFFS

☎ 08 / pop 225

There are few stranger places in Australia than the tiny opal-mining town of White Cliffs. Surrounded by some of the harshest country

the outback has to offer, many residents have gone underground to escape the heat.

The town centre (a pub, a post office and a general store) is on flat land south of the main digging area. At the digging area, there are thousands of holes in the ground and miners' camps surrounded by car graveyards. The two bare hills, Turley's Hill (with the radiotelephone mast on top) and Smith's Hill (south of the centre), command the plains like diminutive city-states.

Although the town is still a key opal producer, tourism brings in almost as much money these days. You can fossick for opals around the old diggings, but watch the kids around those deep, unfenced holes. There are a number of opal showrooms with hand-crafted jewellery, souvenirs, rough opal and Aboriginal art for sale, or just talk to the artists. The **visitors centre** (☎ 8091 6611; ☎ 8am-8pm) at the White Cliffs Store has information, maps and a Heritage Trail guide map. It also sells takeaway food and fuel.

Many of the underground homes offer inspections to tourists. **Parkers' Dug-Out Home Tours** (☎ 8091 6635; adult/child \$5/free; ☎ 10am-4pm) includes a tour of a unique home and a display area of fossils, an opalised log and memorabilia.

In the town's centre is the **solar power station** (☎ tours 2pm) where emus often graze out the front. Local businesses each spent up to \$60,000 a year on diesel-generator electricity before the Australian National University updated their original solar-power project in 1993 and got them on the grid.

Sleeping & Eating

White Cliffs is busy during holiday periods, so it's best to book ahead. In the underground buildings, the walls need to stay dry to be stable, so bathrooms are near the exits and shared. You'll be glad the walls are stable when you're there.

White Cliffs Underground Motel (☎ 8091 6677; www.undergroundmotel.com.au; s/d \$79/99; 3-course set-menu dinner \$35; ☎ ☎) Custom-built with a tunnelling machine, its corridors are wide and lead to the lovely dining room with windows looking out onto the pool. Or take the back stairs up to a viewing platform that looks out over the town. It's all delightfully comfortable and when the lights are off the silence is total. Claustrophobics need not despair; there are two aboveground rooms available.

PJ's Underground (☎ 8091 6626; www.babs.com.au/pj; Turley's Hill; s/d with breakfast & mine tour \$100/130; self-help dinner \$35) Was once a mine and the owners have converted it into a cool sanctuary. Self-caterers can pay \$5 to use the barbecue and there's one room with an en suite (\$160).

White Cliffs Opal Pioneer Reserve (☎ 8091 6649; camp site \$9.50) Simmering peacefully under the sun, there's powered sites on flat dusty earth between saltbush clumps, a barbecue area and laundry.

Getting There & Away

The road north from Wilcannia is sealed, straight and fast. All other roads into White Cliffs are unsealed. **Road info** (☎ 8087 0660, 8091 5155) is posted outside the general store.

TOP FIVE DRINKING SPOTS

There's a good spot for a drink wherever you go out here, but these represent the range you'll find, all with a connection to the history of outback Australia.

Mungo Lodge (☎ 03-5029 7297; Mildura Rd, Mungo National Park) Sit around an open fire and chat to your Irish hosts about the latest archaeological finds in this extraordinary park (p273).

Mario's Palace Hotel (☎ 08-8088 1699; cnr Argent & Sulphide Sts, Broken Hill) Lounge across the very long bar under a glorious ceiling of murals, wide-screen sports at one end, bristle-haired lads at the other, and wonder just where in the world are you (p270).

Tilpa Hotel (☎ 02-6837 3928; Darling St, Tilpa) Perched on the bank of the Darling River with a shady beer garden, this is a classic bush pub. Have a yarn with the shearers or donate some money to the Flying Doctor Service for your chance to scribble on the walls (p261).

Family Hotel (☎ 08-8091 3314; Briscoe St, Tibooburra) Built in 1883, the Family is covered in original works of the artists Clifton Pugh, Russell Drysdale and Rick Amor who, fascinated by the desert, came here to paint it (p262).

Silverton Hotel (☎ 08-8088 5313; Laynard St, Silverton) Make like Mad Max and take a drink at the pub that has been used as a film location at least 140 times (p272).

MUTAWINTJI NATIONAL PARK

The exceptional Mutawintji National Park lies in the Byngnano Ranges, the eroded and sculptured remains of a 400 million-year-old seabed. The area teems with wildlife around its stunning gorges, dark rock pools and mulga plains that stretch to the horizon.

The reliable water supply was vital to the Malyankapa and Pandjikalai people who lived in the area for over 8000 years. There are important **rock engravings**, stencils and paintings as well as the scattered remains of the day-to-day life of the people. Some rock art has been damaged by vandals but can still be seen on **Mutawintji Heritage Tours** (☎ 08-8088 7000; adult/child/family \$20/10/40; 🚗 tours 11am Wed & Sat) between April and November.

There are many graded, marked walks for all levels of fitness, through crumbling sandstone hills and craggy cliffs to rock pools and tranquil valleys where rock paintings can be seen in the unrestricted areas.

There's a **camping ground** (adult/child \$5/3) at Homestead Creek, with toilets, showers and gas barbecues. Fuel and food are not available in the park; collect firewood

from the signposted areas near the park entrance.

Getting There & Away

Most people head out to Mutawintji from Broken Hill, up the Silver City Hwy to the turn-off then 68km to the park entrance along a good unsealed road – impassable after a little rain. The road down from White Cliffs is also good, albeit challenging, or take the Wakibag Rd off the Barrier Hwy. **Road closure info** (☎ 08-8082 6660, 13 27 01, 08-8091 5155).

BROKEN HILL

☎ 08 / pop 20,440

The Silver City, as Broken Hill is known, is a fascinating destination for its comfortable, oasislike existence in an extremely unwelcoming environment. Some of the state's best national parks are in the area, plus interesting near-ghost towns. Elements of 'traditional' Australian culture that are disappearing in other cities can still be found in Broken Hill, showing the sensibilities that come with access to a huge, unpopulated landscape. This has also inspired a major arts centre with

poets, writers, artists and sculptors offering a surprisingly different and delightful view of the great outback.

History

Charles Sturt stood on this hill of incredible wealth in 1842 and looked out across the plains, searching for an inland sea. Unfortunately it had dried up 20 million years earlier. It was another 41 years before the world's biggest hill of silver was noticed by a boundary rider, Charles Rasp, laying the foundations that took Australia from an agricultural country to an industrial nation.

An early syndicate of seven men formed to start mining, but one couldn't raise the £230. The group elected to play poker, including him if he won. He lost, which made it the richest game of poker ever played.

The Broken Hill Proprietary Company (now international giant BHP Billiton) was formed in 1885. Other mining claims were staked, but BHP was always the 'big mine' and dominated the town. Rasp went on to amass a personal fortune and BHP, which later diversified into steel production, became Australia's largest company.

Early conditions in the mine were appalling. Hundreds of miners died and many more suffered from lead poisoning and lung disease. This gave rise to the other great force in Broken Hill, the unions. Many miners were immigrants, but all were united in their efforts to improve mining conditions.

The first 35 years of Broken Hill saw a militancy rarely matched in Australian industrial relations. After many unsuccessful campaigns the turning point was the Big Strike of 1919–20, which lasted for over 18 months. The miners won a great victory, achieving a 35-hour week

and the end of dry drilling, responsible for the dust that afflicted so many miners. The concept of one big union, which had helped to win the strike, was formalised in 1923 with the formation of the Barrier Industrial Council.

Today the world's richest silver, lead and zinc deposit is still worked, though not by BHP, which ceased work in 1940, but by Zinifex, the only remaining operator. The ore body is diminishing and modern technology has greatly reduced the number of jobs. But while mining has declined, art has thrived.

Orientation & Information

The city is laid out in a grid with the streets named after metals and their compounds. Argent St is the main street.

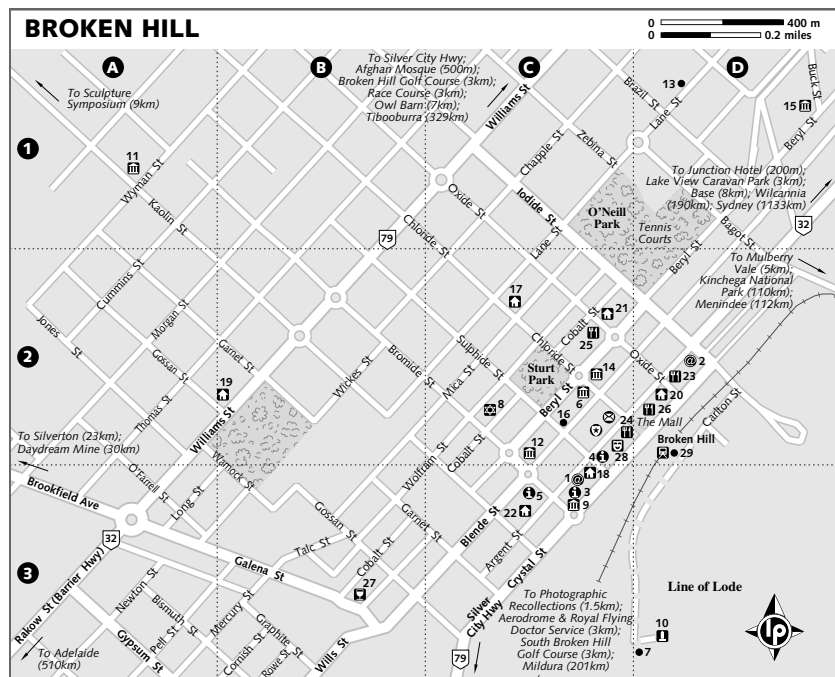
The **visitors centre** (☎ 8088 9700; www.visitbrokenhill.com.au; cnr Blende & Bromide Sts; 🕒 8.30am–5pm) has the excellent free booklet *Broken Hill, the Accessible Outback*, which is full of helpful regional information, and there is a handy guide to the art around town.

The visitors centre is also where buses arrive (book through the town's travel agents) and there's a car-rental desk on the premises.

The **NPWS office** (☎ 8080 3200; 183 Argent St; 🕒 8.30am–4.30pm Mon–Fri) can help with local national park inquiries and bookings.

The **Royal Automobile Association of South Australia** (RAASA; ☎ 8088 4999; 261 Argent St; 🕒 8.30am–5pm Mon–Fri, to 11.30am Sat) provides reciprocal service to other auto-club members.

Internet access is available at **Fully Loaded Computer Supplies** (☎ 8088 4255; www.fullyloaded.net.au; 195 Argent St; per 15/30/60min \$3/4/6; 🕒 10am–5pm) and **Tourist Centre Café** (☎ 8088 9700; cnr Blende & Bromide Sts; per 10min \$1; 🕒 8.30am–5pm). **Hungry Jack's** (cnr Argent & Iodide Sts) has a free 24-hour wifi hot spot.



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Sights & Activities

MINES

There's an excellent underground tour at **Delprat's Mine** (☎ 8088 1604; adult/child over 5 yr \$40/30; 🕒 tours 10.30am Mon-Fri, 2pm Sat) where you don miners gear and descend 130m in a cage for a two-hour tour of stopes and working equipment. Delprat's is signposted across the railway tracks.

The first mines were walk-in, pick-and-shovel horrors. For an amazing experience, tour the historic **Daydream Mine** (☎ 8088 5682; adult/child \$15/8; 🕒 10am-3.30pm), where you squeeze down the steps with your helmet-light quivering on your head. Daydream was established in 1882 and the guide has tales of baby-faced miners, which will have you giggling nervously. Sturdy footwear is essential for the one-hour tour. It's a scenic drive off the Silverton road, and the café serves the best Devonshire teas (\$6.50) while you wait for the next group to venture into the mine.

LINE OF LODE

The huge silver skip dump, which makes up Broken Hill's stark backdrop, also features the moving **Miners Memorial** (☎ 8087 1318; Federation Hill; admission \$4; 🕒 9am-6pm, later in summer). The memorial commemorates the deaths of over 800 men who have died in the mines since 1883. The list of the dead includes Dario Palumbo, an architecture student from the University of South Australia, who died suddenly during his work on the memorial, and whose story truly captures the emotions. The Broken Earth Café & Restaurant (p271) is attached.

ROYAL FLYING DOCTOR SERVICE

Flynn of the Inland's dream was a flying doctor service. Go to the airport to see the reality. The **Royal Flying Doctor Service** (☎ 8080 1714; www.flyingdoctors.org; airport; adult/child \$5.50/2.20; 🕒 9am-

5pm Mon-Fri, 11am-4pm Sat & Sun) exhibition includes the fascinating **Mantle of Safety Museum** with lots of quirky stories and things to see. The tour includes a DVD about the service, and you inspect the headquarters, aircraft and the radio room that handles calls from remote towns and stations. Tours run during the week, or visit the museum at any time.

SCHOOL OF THE AIR

For a back-to-school experience, sit in on **School of the Air** (Lane St; admission \$4.40; 🕒 broadcasts 8.30am Mon-Fri), which broadcasts to kids in isolated homesteads. You must book through the visitors centre the day before. During school holidays a tape will be played for you.

GALLERIES

With its dramatic scenery and empty spaces Broken Hill is an inspiring place, so it's not strange to find that the city houses a vibrant community of artists, from painters to performers. There are many galleries, including the **Pro Hart Gallery** (☎ 8088 2992; 108 Wyman St; adult \$4; 🕒 9am-5pm Mon-Sat). Pro Hart who died early in 2006 was a former miner. He is Broken Hill's best-known artist and his charming gallery displays many of his works from his private collection (like *The Holy Tower* and *Dragon Fly*), a superb collection of Australian art (such as Whiteley's *Nude*, Lindsay's *Selena* and Tucker's *Australian Girl in Paris*) and several works by international artists such as Picasso and Dali.

Broken Hill Regional Art Gallery (☎ 8088 6897; 404-408 Argent St; entry by donation; 🕒 10am-5pm) was established in 1904 to meet the needs of a 'city in isolation', making it the oldest regional gallery in NSW and with 1500 works in its permanent collection, possibly the largest. One room of the gallery is devoted to the artists of Broken Hill. Special exhibitions have included Brushmen of the Bush.

Thankakali Gallery (☎ 8087 6111; cnr Buck & Beryl Sts; 🕒 9am-4pm Mon-Fri) is the Aboriginal cultural centre, located in an old brewery. There is an extensive gallery downstairs as well as a range of hand-painted arts, crafts and didgeridoos by local artists, including Badger Bates' paintings – all for sale.

While on Argent St make sure you have a look at the murals in Mario's Palace Hotel (p270).

SCULPTURE SYMPOSIUM

A striking range of work on a hilltop north-west of town was created in 1993 by 12 international sculptors. They were responding to the limitless landscape, using some 52 tonnes of Wilcannia sandstone, borrowing the local miners' old tungsten carbide chisels to dent the tough rock, and camping in tents near their work. Their pieces took shape with names like *Under the Jaguar Sun* and *Moon Goddess*. The colours of the stone change constantly with the light. Bring water in summer, and consider visiting at dawn or sunset, to add another dimension to the romance of this wonderful place. The sculptures are signposted off to the right along Nine Mile Rd. Get the keys for the gates from the visitors centre and drive up to the top car park, where there's also wheelchair access to the sculptures. Or it's a 20-minute climb to the sculpture site from the lower car park.

HISTORIC BUILDINGS

Broken Hill has a rich and varied architectural heritage. It is well worth buying a copy of the *Heritage Trails* booklet from the visitors centre (\$2.20). The many listed sights include the old miners cottages and the slag heap. Locals say there is millions of dollars' worth of silver left in the slag heap but it can't be touched because of the heritage listing!

Trades Hall (cnr Sulphide & Blende Sts; 🕒 10am-3pm Mon-Tue & Thu-Fri, 1-4pm Sat), built between 1898 and 1904, houses the Barrier Industrial Council. It features a pressed-iron ceiling over its elaborately detailed interior, restored in 1988.

Afghan Mosque (cnr William & Buck Sts; admission \$2.50; 🕒 2-4pm Sun) is a simple corrugated-iron building c 1891. Afghan cameleers helped open up the outback and the mosque was built on the site of a camel camp.

The **former synagogue** (Wolfram St) dates from 1900, but it closed in 1962 and the religious scrolls were sent to Melbourne.

HEROES, LARRIKINS & VISIONARIES

Broken Hill has many famous sons and daughters. There's poet and revolutionary Dame Mary Gilmore, unionist Tom Mann, author Ion L Idriess, prima donna June Bronhill (her adopted name is a contraction of Broken Hill), actor Chips Rafferty, Private Reginald Inwood awarded the Victoria Cross in WWI, and so on – 25 people or groups that you will read about and connect with as you take the self-guided Heroes, Larrikins and Visionaries of Broken Hill Walk. Pick up the map from the visitors centre and follow the plaques along your way.

The 1.7km walk is a project of local artist and bush poet Allan Duffy. Look out for his satirical cartoon on page two of the free weekly newspaper, the *Barrier Miner*.

GOLF & TENNIS

Broken Hill Golf Course (☎ 8087 9099; Racecourse Rd; 9/18 holes \$16/25, club hire from \$12; 🕒 7.30am-5.30pm), a spectacular course around green rolling hills sprinkled with kangaroos and emus, provides a perfect break. Then check out the fun at **South Broken Hill Golf Course** (☎ 8087 4639; Jameison St; 18 holes \$4), which has gravel fairways and sand-scrape greens. It's open the same hours and will lend you some clubs.

Tennis (O'Neill Park, Beryl St; day/night \$5/7) is available, played on synthetic grass, if you have your own rackets and balls. Get the key from the visitors centre (\$20 deposit).

OTHER ATTRACTIONS

The wonderful **Photographic Recollections** (☎ 8087 9322; old Central Power Station, Eyre St; adult/child \$5/2; 🕒 10am-4.30pm Mon-Fri, 1-4.30pm Sat & Sun) exhibition is a pictorial history of Broken Hill.

There is more local history at the **Railway, Mineral & Train Museum** (☎ 8088 4660; cnr Blende & Bromide Sts; adult/child \$2.50/\$2; 🕒 10am-3pm). The museum is in the Silverton Tramway Company's old station. The tramway was a private railway running between Cockburn (SA) and Broken Hill via Silverton until 1970.

GeoCentre (☎ 8087 6538; cnr Bromide & Crystal Sts; adult/child \$4/2.50; 🕒 10am-4.45pm Mon-Fri, 1-4.45pm Sat & Sun) is an interactive geology museum bringing you beautiful and rare minerals and crystals. There are lots of touch-and-feel exhibits that display the story of Broken Hill's geological history and how minerals are

PHONES, TIMES & FOOTBALL

When the NSW government refused to give Broken Hill the services it needed, saying the town was just a pinprick on the map, the Barrier Industrial Council replied that Sydney was also a pinprick from where it was, and Broken Hill would henceforth be part of South Australia. Since the town was responsible for much of NSW's wealth there was an outcry, the federal government stepped in, and Broken Hill was told it was to remain part of NSW. In protest, the town adopted SA time, phone area code, and football, playing Australian Rules from then on.

Tourists beware, time in Broken Hill is Central Standard Time (CST), 30 minutes later than the surrounding area on Eastern Standard Time (EST); you're in the 08 phone code region; and don't talk about soccer in the pub.

processed. It's also home to a 42kg silver nugget and the *Silver Tree*, a large and intricate silver sculpture created in 1878 by German silversmith Harry Steiner.

Silver City Mint & Art Centre (☎ 8088 6166; 66 Chloride St; admission \$5; ☎ 10am-4pm) is home to the *Big Picture*, the largest continuous canvas in Australia, an amazing 100m-by-12m diorama of the Broken Hill outback.

Owl Barn (☎ 8088 5301; Silver City Hwy, Stephens Creek; admission by donation; ☎ 10am-4pm, closed Thu) has hundreds of owls, local crafts and memorabilia on display in a quirky old pub with its roof burnt off.

Tours

Two-hour guided walks (for a donation) of Broken Hill commence from the tourist centre at 10am Monday, Wednesday and Friday. Plenty of companies offer tours of the town and nearby attractions, some going further out to White Cliffs, Mutawintji National Park and other outback destinations. The visitors centre has information and takes bookings.

For a real buzz, hitch a ride with the **Bush Mail Run** (☎ 0411 102 339; adult \$88; ☎ 7am Wed & Sat), an outback mail delivery service that covers over 550km, stopping at isolated homesteads for the occasional cuppa. Several outfits have longer 4WD tours of the area, for example **Broken Hill's Outback Tours** (☎ 1800 670 120; www.outbacktours.net) has deluxe tours for up to nine days, and **Tri State Safaris** (☎ 8088 2389; www.tristate.com.au), a tourism award winner, runs half- to 20-day tours and goes to places like Corner Country, Birdsville and the Simpson Desert.

Festivals & Events

Held annually on the Saturday two weeks before Easter is **St Patrick's Race Day**. Thousands of people flock to the dirt-track racecourse on the outskirts of the city. Celebrations begin in town on the preceding Wednesday, and the actual event is followed by a recovery party at the Silvertown pub on the Sunday. But there's stacks more to do, so look at the calendar of events at www.visitbrokenhill.com.au/events.asp.

Sleeping

BUDGET

Tourist Lodge YHA (☎ 8088 2086; 100 Argent St; s/tw/d \$30/44/50; ☎ ☎ ☎) This popular and central YHA has a laid-back atmosphere and is set around a charming courtyard with a small

pool. Its gallery sells opals and arranges tours, its kitchen provides meals, and since there's no stairs it's also popular with seniors. Bike rental is \$15 a day.

Caledonian B&B (☎ 8087 1945; www.caledonianbnb.com.au; 140 Chloride St; s/d \$55/69; ☎ ☎) This cosy B&B is in a beautifully refurbished pub (1898). Your charming hosts cook up a storm and will swap your hearty breakfast for a gourmet affair (extra \$5) served at an antique dining table and surrounded by the colourful art work by local artist Allan Duffy.

Mario's Palace Hotel (☎ 8088 1699; cnr Argent & Sulphide Sts; s/d/tr/q \$55/75/85/95; ☎ ☎) Star of the hit Australian movie *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert*, this is an impressive old pub (1888) with large TV screens, great veranda and a coating of murals, like the owner Mario Celetto's tribute to Botticelli's *Birth of Venus* on the ceiling and walls of lavish Australiana landscapes. Stay in the Priscilla Room for \$110, or there are \$22 rooms with shared facilities. It's all a bit of fun.

Mulberry Vale (☎ 8088 1597; Menindee Rd; cabin d \$77; ☎ ☎) About 5km out of Broken Hill is this small oasis. The accommodation is comfortable; however, it's the peaceful environment that is the drawcard and it costs less the longer you stay.

Quandong Cottage (☎ 8087 1653; Lduffy@westnet.com.au; 78 Williams St; 4/6 people \$100/130; ☎) This gorgeous stone cottage (others are available), with its seriously thick walls for total peace, is set in a large native garden with a playground. There's a minimum two-night stay, but ask about the discount for longer stays and guess what – pets are welcome.

Lake View Caravan Park (☎ /fax 8088 2250; 1 Mann St; camp site \$19, cabin \$58, 2-room cottage with/without spa \$110/90; ☎ ☎) Looking down on Imperial Lake, you're high enough for cooling breezes and it's pleasantly green with grass and trees around a grand swimming pool.

MIDRANGE

Astra (☎ 8087 5428; www.theastra.com.au; 393 Argent St; d/deluxe/ste \$175/195/250; ☎ ☎ ☎) Sweep up the broad staircase to wide corridors and elegant rooms that open onto a magnificent veranda. Each room features stained glass, a spa and a homely feel. Ask about a single rate.

Imperial (☎ 8087 7444; imperial@pcpro.net.au; 88 Oxide St; d \$180; ☎ ☎ ☎) These rooms retain the feel of the grand old hotel the Imperial once was. There is a full-size billiard table in

the guest lounge. Use the guest kitchen if you wish to cook, and a help-yourself breakfast is provided.

Eating

Broken Hill's many clubs welcome diners if you like a background clang of pokies.

BUDGET

Charlotte's at the Grand (☎ 8087 2230; 317 Argent St; meals \$6-13; ☎ breakfast & lunch) A cosy place for lunch, with lots of tasty vegetarian and gluten-free options, sandwiches and smoothies.

Southern Cross Hotel (☎ 8088 4122; 357 Cobalt St; meals \$11-22; ☎ lunch & dinner) Has a good menu with standouts being the fresh fish, although the chicken with camembert and mango is very good. The dining room is pleasant and the staff friendly.

MIDRANGE

Argent St Café & Restaurant (☎ 8087 2637; 343 Argent St; mains \$15-25; ☎ 8.30am-4.30pm & 6pm-midnight Tue-Sat) Bright and shiny new, with Badger Bates' protégés' artworks on display, this place features an artists studio throughout summer. There's good old Aussie tucker (like lamb shanks Italian style!), and a great range of dairy-, lactose-, gluten- or meat-free meals. Great all-day breakfast, BYO and dine-and-wine. And coffee to walk a mile for.

Alfresco's Café (☎ 8087 5599; cnr Argent & Oxide Sts; mains \$17-24; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner) Always busy, serving plates of pancakes, roasts, salads and pasta dishes, but it's best known for its gourmet pizzas.

TOP END

Broken Earth Café & Restaurant (☎ 8087 1318; Line of Lode visitors centre; mains \$26-34; ☎ 8.30am-10pm) With its stunning views over Broken Hill, airy modern design and something-for-everyone menu, this is certainly the place to come. There's all-day coffee and cakes, fab Sunday breakfast, and the light lunch menu includes an excellent grilled kangaroo on sweet potato rosti.

Drinking & Entertainment

Broken Hill stays up late and people feel safe here, so you'll find pubs doing a roaring trade until almost dawn on Thursday, Friday and Saturday.

Rising Sun Hotel (☎ 8087 4856; 2 Beryl St) Has free games of pool and gets very lively on Friday night.

Southern Cross Hotel (☎ 8088 4122; 357 Cobalt St) Here you'll find a mellow atmosphere with '70s- and '80s-style music and an extensive cocktail list.

Musicians Club (267 Crystal St) A jolly place with a heaving mix of young and old. Country-music bands play on the weekends while the drinks flow. Two-up (gambling on the fall of two coins) is played on Friday and Saturday night from 10pm to 2am – Broken Hill claims to have retained the atmosphere of a real two-up school and the locals are happy to give you lessons.

Getting There & Away

Regional Express Airlines (Rex; ☎ 13 17 13) flies between Broken Hill and Adelaide (daily), and to and from Sydney via Dubbo (daily except Saturday).

CountryLink (☎ 13 22 32) runs the Broken Hill Outback Explorer to Sydney (\$106; 13½ hours) weekly. Dubbo XPT connects with a bus to Broken Hill daily (\$78; 16½ hours). The **CountryLink booking office** (☎ 8087 1400; ☎ 8am-5pm Mon-Fri) is at the train station.

The **Indian Pacific** (☎ 13 21 47; www.trainways.com.au) goes through Broken Hill on Tuesday and Friday (departing 6.30pm CST) bound for Sydney (\$200; 16 hours), and on Thursday and Sunday (8.20am CST) heading for Adelaide (\$87; seven hours) and on to Perth (\$425; 49 hours).

Getting Around

Some of the clubs have a free bus to drive you home after your night out. It leaves hourly between 6pm and midnight.

Murton's Citybus (☎ 8087 3311) operates four routes around Broken Hill. Pick up a timetable at the visitors centre. Its new **Dial'n Ride** (☎ 0429 179 552) operates Friday and Saturday nights till 12.30am.

Hertz Car & 4WD Hire (☎ 8087 2719) has an office at the visitors centre. There are several other car-rental companies or you can call for a taxi (☎ 8087 2222).

SILVERTOWN

☎ 08 / pop 50

It's absolutely obligatory to visit Silvertown, an old silver-mining town, where you walk inside a Drysdale painting and discover the charm of the outback. Silvertown's fortunes peaked in 1885, when it had a population of 3000 and public buildings designed to last for

centuries like the old gaol (now the museum). But in 1889 the mines closed and the people (and some houses) moved to the new boom town at Broken Hill.

Today it's a ghost town with a new lease of life due to the spirits at the pub (beer too) and a small community of artists. Several, including leather and leadlight workers, painters, and coin carvers, have studios here. The **visitors centre** (☎ 8088 7566; 🕒 8.30am-5pm) is in the original ice-cream shop, where you can find locally made gifts and a walking-tour map describing the old buildings.

Silverton was used as the setting for films such as *Mad Max II* and *A Town Like Alice*. The **Silverton Hotel** (☎ 8088 5313; 🕒 9am-9pm) displays photos taken on the film sets; ask at the bar about the infamous 'Silverton test'.

The friendly **café** (☎ 8088 6601; mains \$16; 🕒 8am-4pm Tue-Sun) has a menu with staples such as stockman's balls and damper. Not game? Then try the roast.

Barrier Range Camel Safaris (☎ 8088 5316; www.silvertoncamels.com; ½-/1hr tours \$15/25, 2hr sunset trek \$50) runs a variety of **camel tours** from Silverton, on friendly and quiet camels. The day/night safari (\$170) gives you an unforgettable taste of the outback.

Lush, green and treed **Penrose Park** (☎ 8088 5307; camp site s/f \$7/15, bunkhouse/self-contained cottage \$40/65) was established as a picnic and camping ground for miners' families. The buildings sleep six to eight. The road beyond Silverton leads to the **Mundi Mundi Lookout** where you look over the vast expanse of the Mundi Mundi Plain.

MENINDEE

☎ 08 / pop 980

This small town on the Darling River, an outback township since 1860, provides access to the Menindee Lakes, with Australia's best inland fishing, and Kinchega National Park.

The **visitors centre** (☎ 8091 4274; Menindee St; 🕒 10am-4pm) has stacks of useful information and touristy gifts and artefacts for sale.

Ah Chung's Bakehouse Gallery (☎ 8091 4322; 🕒 2-5pm, closed Wed & Sun), a cute old building (1880) off Haberfield St, has original ovens and bread-making tools and an interesting range of paintings and artefacts.

Menindee Lakes are a series of nine natural, ephemeral lakes adjacent to the Darling River (camping is free), but they have been dammed to ensure year-round water. Water was trans-

ported from here to Broken Hill by rail until 1960. The last water train to leave Menindee was derailed by floodwaters that broke the drought! Geoff Looney runs **boat tours** (☎ 8091 4437; per hr for 2 people \$50) throughout the lake system, for fishing or bird-watching. Get his *Menindee Wetlands Fishing & Birdwatching Guide* from the visitors centre.

There are caravan parks and cabins out by the lakes. **Copi Hollow Caravan Park** (☎ 8091 4880; Menindee-Broken Hill Rd; camp site/cabin \$18.50/40) is set around a lovely tree-lined swimming hole at the far end of the lakes and is very popular for its fishing, skiing and bushwalking.

Explorers Burke and Wills stayed at the historic **Maidens Hotel** (☎ 8091 4208; Yartla St; s/d/f \$35/55/70) where little old rooms, with crisp white linen on the new beds, open onto a courtyard. Or cross the road to the **Burke & Wills Motel** (☎ 8091 4313; Yartla St; s/d/tr \$60/70/80; 🚰) for a little outback luxury.

Menindee Café (☎ 8091 4644; Menindee St; mains \$9.80-16; 🕒 8am-9pm) feeds you very well, offering sandwiches, pies and pastas with enthusiasm.

The **Indian Pacific** (☎ 13 21 47; www.trainways.com.au) will stop at Menindee (if arranged) on its twice-weekly run between Broken Hill (\$21; 1½ hours) and Sydney (\$119; 14 hours). The visitors centre sells tickets. **CountryLink** (☎ 13 22 32) Broken Hill Outback Explorer to Sydney (13½ hours) stops here once weekly.

Central Darling (www.centraldarwin.nsw.gov.au) bus service runs between Menindee and Broken Hill (\$10; daily Monday to Friday).

If you are driving, call **roads info** (☎ 08 8087 0660, 08 8091 5155).

KINCHEGA NATIONAL PARK

Kinchega National Park is 20km out of Menindee and includes the Darling River and several of the lakes in the Menindee system. These glittering lakes are a haven for water birds living among the backwaters and drowned forests. The visitors centre is at the site of the old Kinchega homestead, about 16km from the park entrance. Kinchega shearing shed has been beautifully restored; the shearers quarters have **bunk accommodation** (☎ 8080 3200; adult/child \$16.50/8.25) but you must book, and there are plenty of **camp sites** (adult/child \$3/2) among the red gums along the Darling's banks. Pay the \$7 per day vehicle fee at the self-registration box near the woolshed.

MUNGO NATIONAL PARK

This remote, beautiful and most important place, full of great significance for the human species, covers 27,850 hectares of the Willandra Lakes World Heritage area. The echoes of over 400 centuries of continuous human habitation are almost tangible here, in Mungo National Park.

The story of both Australia and its oldest inhabitants is told in the dunes of Mungo. At least 60,000 years ago, Aborigines settled on the banks of the fertile lakes, living on the plentiful fish, mussels, birds and animals. Some of the animals were megafauna, much larger than their modern relatives (see a life-size replica at the visitors centre). After 45,000 years the climate changed, the lakes dried up and the Aborigines adapted to life in a harsh semidesert, with only periodic floods filling the lakes. The constant westerly wind drifted sand from the lakebed up onto the dunes, gradually burying old camp sites.

Europeans arrived with their sheep in the early 19th century, then Chinese miners came looking for work when the Victorian goldfields lost their appeal. These men named a fabulous 25km semicircle (lunette) of huge shimmering white sand dunes the **Walls of China**. Walk between these high sand sculptures that nature created with her westerly wind to feel how homesick the wall must have made the men.

Along with the remains of incredibly ancient animals and people, the dunes hold tracks of the Cobb & Co coaches, which cut across the lake last century. In 2006 the wind, which continually exposes ancient remains, revealed a walking track that's 23,000 years old yet the footprints look like they were made yesterday. Archaeologists have established the size, weight and fitness of the people who include a one-legged 1.98m-tall athlete who hopped along this track unaided.

Information

There's a visitors centre in the park by the old Mungo woolshed. A road leads across the dry lake bed to the Walls of China, and you can drive a complete 70km loop of the dunes when it's dry. There's a self-guided drive brochure at the visitors centre, which also runs lots of interesting **guided walks** (adult/child/family \$5.50/3.20/13.20) during all states' school holidays. The whole area is a playground for

photographers, bird-watchers, artists and 4WD enthusiasts.

Tours

Award-winning **Harry Nanya Tours** (☎ 1800 630 864, 03-5027 2076; www.harrynanyatours.com.au) has daily tours to Lake Mungo from Mildura and Wentworth, employing Aboriginal guides like charismatic Graeme Clark, who has lots of local knowledge of culture and history, Dreamtime stories, plants, animals and archaeology.

Sleeping & Eating

Places fill up during the school holidays. Book through the **NPWS** (☎ 03-5021 8900) at Buronga. There's no water supply out here, so these places use an interesting poly-tarp system to catch rain water.

Mungo Lodge (☎ 03-5029 7297; mungoldg@ruralnet.net.au; cabin s/d \$88/118) On the Mildura road, about 4km from the visitors centre, this is the place to be, with a great bar and restaurant (you must book ahead, and ask for the salt-bush lamb!). The little cabins with verandas are comfortable and quiet, and there's self-contained cottages for an extra \$10 a night. In low season (summer) ask for the special rates. The restaurant (mains \$18 to \$24; open for breakfast, lunch and dinner) serves delicious, home-cooked meals with veggies straight from the garden to you. The Aussie-Clean system it uses to regenerate all sewerage keeps the garden blooming.

The **Main Camp** (camp site adult/child \$3/2) is between the lodge and the visitors centre. It's a pleasant spot with plenty of flat ground, but can be extremely cold at night. **Belah Camp** (camp site adult/child \$3/2) is on the eastern side of the dunes.

To pay your camp fees and park entrance fee (per day \$7) put money in an envelope at the visitors centre.

Getting There & Away

The closest towns to Mungo are Mildura (110km) and Balranald (150km) but the corrugated, unsealed roads become instantly impassable after rain. Call **roads info** (☎ 08-8087 0660, 8091 5155) to make sure they're open. These towns are also the closest places selling fuel. If you take the sealed road towards Pooncarie you are left with only 65km of unsealed road from the Mungo turn-off.

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