The City of Broken Hill National Heritage Listing

The City of Broken Hill was included in the National Heritage List on 20 January 2015.

The City of Broken Hill is of outstanding heritage value to the nation for its significant role in the development of Australia as a modern and prosperous country. This listing recognises the City of Broken Hill's mining operations, its contribution to technical developments in the field of mining, its pioneering role in the development of occupational health and safety standards, and its early practice of regenerating the environment in and around mining operations.

Broken Hill is 935 km north-west of Sydney, 725 km north-west of Melbourne and 420 km north-east of Adelaide. The city's isolated location means the town has developed its own distinctive characteristics expressed in the town's architecture, design and landscaping. The people of Broken Hill have a strong connection to their heritage and surrounding dramatic desert landscape and are recognised for their self reliance and resilience as a remote inland community.

Building a nation

Discovered by boundary rider and prospector, Charles Rasp in 1883, Broken Hill contains one of the world's largest deposits of silver, lead and zinc. The ore seam known as the Line of Lode continues to be mined today.

With the average life span of a mine being approximately 20 years, the continuous operation, over more than 130 years, of large scale mining at Broken Hill is unique. The wealth and influence of Broken Hill mining operations stretched from the isolated outback community to the South Australian coastal town of Port Pirie, the steel mills of Newcastle and the financial centres of Melbourne and London.

By 1966 the total ore mined at Broken Hill reached 100 million tons, yielding 12.98 million tons of lead, 9.26 million tons of zinc and 693.4 million ounces of silver valued at £1 336 million. Mining revenues from Broken Hill were vital to the development of Australia, contributing hundreds of millions of dollars to government administration, defence, education and research.

The rich mineral deposits of Broken Hill enabled the creation and growth of some of the world's largest mining companies such as BHP Billiton, Rio Tinto and Pasminco. Consequently this Australian outback town can take credit for its significant role in the development of mining in Australia and internationally. As mining production grew Australia became well known as one of the world's major providers of raw materials.

Photos: (top) The Outback (Maxime Coquard; Destination NSW) (above) Line of Lode from Sulphide Street (Broken Hill City Council)
Over 130 years, mining operations at Broken Hill have trained and influenced generations of Australian miners, engineers, managers and technical staff who have gone on to discover and mine ore deposits around Australia. This expertise spread and contributed to the development of many metal, coal mining, engineering, chemical and manufacturing industries, notably steel and its associated operations.

Broken Hill has contributed several world ranking innovative mining and metallurgical practices which were to benefit later lead and zinc mines. The development and application of a froth flotation process for separation of mineral ores by Melbourne based chemist Charles Potter and Broken Hill engineer Guillaume Delprat expanded the life of the mining operation and enabled the recovery of lead and zinc from existing mine tailings. By 1915 the new process had resulted in 5.7 million tonnes of tailings dumping being processed at Broken Hill and zinc recovered to the value of £30 million.

In addition Broken Hill is important as the place where occupational health and safety provision for workers, in particular miners, were developed and measures were first taken to protect the local community from the environmental impact of mining operations.

Industrial action from 1919–1920 resulted in the introduction of improved underground work conditions and the 35 hour week. In the 1930s Broken Hill resident Albert Morris, with the support of the Zinc Corporation, began experimenting with fencing and plantings of native species to combat the impact of dust storms. In 1936 this innovative approach of regeneration was adopted at Broken Hill and was subsequently used by mining companies throughout Australia, particularly in arid zones. The Albert Morris ‘Green Belts’ can be seen in Broken Hill today.

Broken Hill is an exciting geological area of national and international renown. It provides a window into 2 300 million years of the Earth’s history. In the field of mineralogy the Broken Hill deposit has achieved wide international recognition as one of the world’s great ‘mineralogical rainforests’ with approximately 300 mineral species.
A rare and unique community

The City of Broken Hill is a distinctive example of Australia’s three-tiered (local, state and federal) system of governance and administration. Located in the far west of New South Wales, just 44 kilometres from the South Australian border, the state government of New South Wales and the local council provide water and other infrastructure. In relation to the city’s transport infrastructure, its main rail corridor begins in Adelaide with the last 56 kilometres located on the privately built Silverton Tramway because the then NSW Government refused to allow an extension of the South Australian Government railway into NSW. While its closest capital city is Adelaide, a representative from Broken Hill sits in the NSW Parliament. In the late 19th and early 20th century financial interests for Broken Hill mining companies were managed from Melbourne in Victoria, and London provided investment capital.

This unusual and complicated mix of government and private administration is further reflected in the architecture of Broken Hill. Its historic government buildings reflect the NSW colonial government style of architecture, with residential buildings reflecting those of South Australia. Commercial buildings display characteristics similar to Melbourne’s Victorian architectural period.

Broken Hill is significant as a city set in a dramatic desert landscape with mining features located close to the central business area. In combination these elements create a distinctive visual character that provides tangible evidence of Broken Hill’s industrial heritage.

Photos: (top to bottom) Court House (Department of the Environment), former Bond Store (Department of the Environment), Old power house (Department of the Environment), Outback landscape (Department of the Environment)
Broken Hill is recognised for its strong community spirit, the resilience of its people and its isolated location. It has come to symbolise the challenges and remoteness of living in the Australian outback. This symbolism and the city's distinctive aesthetic, history and culture has drawn artists, writers, painters and poets to Broken Hill since its inception.

The city is recognised for its artistic community such as the 'Brushmen of the Bush' including Pro Hart, Jack Absalom, Hugh Schulz, Eric Minchin and John Pickup. Iconic Australian novels have been set or based on Broken Hill and its community. In 1961 Ken Cook's novel *Wake in Fright* was published. It has been republished several times, including in 2009 and made into a film in 1968. Although not always a positive reflection, *Wake in Fright*'s depiction of the bush and landscape of heat, dust and isolation has endured. Australian poets like C.J. Dennis and Broken Hill born Rae Desmond Jones have written about the place and community.

The resilience of the Broken Hill community and their strong connection to their city is reflected in the design and construction of the Miners Memorial in 2001 that commemorates the deaths of over 800 men who have died in the mines since 1883. Its public art, memorials and murals further display the community's strong sense of place.

**National Heritage Listing**

A National Heritage listing recognises the outstanding significance of Broken Hill to Australia. The conservation of Broken Hill's historical character and its unique outback characteristics provide an ever present reminder of its vital mining legacy: the Line of Lode.

The City of Broken Hill is the 103rd place included in the National Heritage List.

For more information go to: [www.environment.gov.au](http://www.environment.gov.au)