

But we know now that the bed of Lake Torrens is about 100 feet above sea level.

And engineers are able to state that due to the high rate of evaporation, which is 100 inches a year in the Centre, a channel at least 200 miles long, 12 feet deep, and more than a mile wide would be needed to fill Lake Eyre and the surrounding country, much of which is below sea level, with sea water from Port Augusta.

Engineers have no idea if it is possible to cut a channel through the mud of Lake Torrens, or if they would strike rock at the top end of the Flinders Range, which is about 120 feet above sea level.

One estimate is that the channel would have to be 170 feet deep for nearly 100 miles at one end.

Although the scheme may be an engineering possibility, at present it is not practicable.

So if we wish to make a greater use of Lake Eyre we will have to consider the alternate suggestions of the late Dr. J. J. C. Bradfield and of Mr. Ion L. Idriess in his fine book, "The Great Boomerang," and learn how to use the vast flood of water that pours down into Lake Eyre from the north and east before it runs to waste in the Lake.

However, the possibility of economically turning salt water into fresh opens up enormous new possibilities for Lake Eyre.

If it is not possible to fill Lake Eyre from the sea it might be possible to use modern earth-moving machinery to scoop out many large tanks, not only in the dry parts of Lake Eyre, but also in the hundreds of other large salt lakes that stretch right across our Inland to the Indian Ocean.

The water could be treated and used to irrigate the so-called desert to grow food, as is being done in the Sahara and other deserts of the Middle East.

Since Lake Eyre was filled a few years ago scientists have been trying to discover if water from the Lake seeps into the artesian basin and increases the flow of bore water. So far they have found no evidence that it does.

However, the theory around bush camp-fires is that much of that water that does not evaporate goes down to feed the great caverns of fresh water under the Nullabor Plains and the "bubbler" springs around Lake Eyre.

How many people know that there are springs of fresh or drinkable water in the driest part of Australia?

The average rainfall is only five inches a year, but the soil is so rich that five inches is enough—so squatters who have spent a lifetime in the country tell me—provided that the fall is regular.

There are fresh springs at the Finnis, the Coward, at Marree (once called Hergott), and a few other places.

The springs are on the top of low mounds, about 50 yards in circumference, and 10 feet or 12 feet deep.

The bed of Lake Eyre is about 4,000 square miles in area, and when a plane skims over the Lake it is flying below sea level. Much of the railway line between Marree and Oodnadatta is below sea level. If at any time we did flood Lake Eyre from the sea we would at the same time flood 10,000 square miles of country.

What we can do with all that lake country in Central Australia will be an interesting question for a long time in Australia.

I have seen the country in a drought when we had to drove cattle for 90 miles without a drink.

Then I have seen the country when the Cooper was pouring down in a flood three miles wide into Lake Eyre.

I have seen flocks of seagulls over the water of the Lake, the water teeming with fish, every known waterfowl, pelicans, wild donkeys, wild horses, wild camels, thousands of dingoes, kangaroos, a plague of rats, and the country for hundreds of miles a blaze of colours with the beautiful herbage.

What a country to think and dream about!



A fine sketch by Valerie Binge, of Boggabilla Station. The country drawn by Valerie is very similar to that country, which Michael Sawtell describes so well in his interesting articles.