

The Snowy Mountains Scheme

The Great Dividing Range, which runs the entire length of the east coast of Australia, marks the border between the well-watered coastal areas and the vast drier inland plains. The inland is crossed by a network of long rivers which eventually find their way to the sea near Adelaide. However these rivers have a low level of water flow and are prone to drought. They are not reliable sources of water for inland farms.

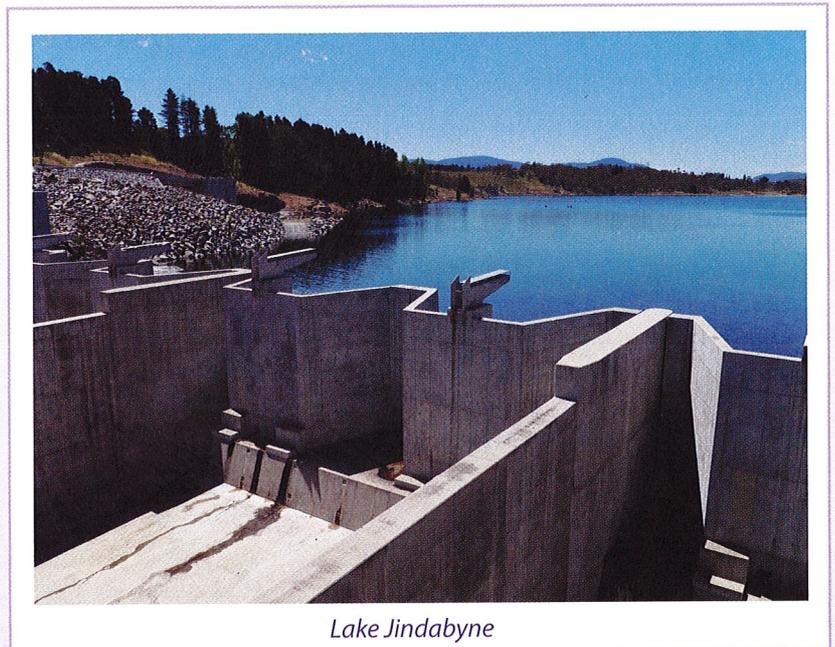
One of the great wild rivers is the Snowy, which rises near Mount Kosciuszko and flows south through eastern Victoria, entering the sea in Bass Strait. After World War II, a scheme was developed to divert the water of the Snowy River through huge tunnels to the head of the Murray and Murrumbidgee Rivers, increasing the flow of the main westward-flowing rivers. The extra water could then be used to irrigate farms in the dry areas of south-eastern Australia. As a bonus, the water would also be used to generate electricity.

Valleys Flooded

Sixteen dams were built, linked by 145 kilometres of tunnels and 80 kilometres of aqueducts. Seven hydro-electric power stations provided electricity for New South Wales, Victoria and Canberra. Entire valleys were flooded, and several towns disappeared beneath the waters of the new dams. People living in these areas were relocated to new towns nearby, and farmers whose land was inundated were paid compensation. Work on the Snowy Mountains Scheme started in 1949, and was finally completed in 1972.

Immigrant Workers

Many workers were needed on the Snowy Mountains Scheme. About seventy per cent of the workers came from overseas. Migrants were employed in large numbers, making towns such as Cooma (where the Snowy Mountains Authority was based) among the most multicultural towns in Australia at that time. More than 100 000 people from over 30 countries were employed. Most of them came from European nations, including Britain, Germany, Greece, Italy, Ireland, Hungary, Norway, Poland and Yugoslavia (now the separate nations of Slovenia, Serbia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro and Macedonia).



Lake Jindabyne

Two large dams on the eastern side of the Snowy Mountains are Lake Eucumbene and Lake Jindabyne. Water is stored in the two large dams, and pumped through tunnels under the range to the smaller reservoirs. From there the water is released into the Murray and Murrumbidgee Rivers.