



Australian Government

AUSTRALIA'S

National Heritage



Elizabeth Springs

Australia is home to the largest artesian system in the world. The Great Artesian Basin, which covers more than 20 per cent of the Australian continent, has around 600 artesian spring complexes in twelve major groups.

Artesian springs are the natural outlets of the extensive artesian aquifer from which the groundwater of the basin flows to the surface. Springs can range in size from only a few metres across to large clusters of freshwater pools known as 'supergroups'. Elizabeth Springs forms part of the Springvale supergroup of springs that, with the exception of Elizabeth Springs, are largely extinct. The Elizabeth Springs complex extends over an area of approximately 400 by 500 metres.



'Mound' Springs

Elizabeth Springs is situated approximately 300 kilometres south-southeast of Mount Isa in western Queensland. It is a complex of 'mound' springs, which means the groundwater flow deposits calcium and other salts from the mineral-rich waters. These deposits, combined with wind-blown sand, mud and accumulated plant debris, settle around the spring outflow forming mounds that resemble small volcanos.

Great Artesian Basin groundwater movement rates are slow; between one to five metres per year. As a result some water in the centre of the basin, on the South Australian and Queensland border, is more than one million years old. Dating techniques that measure groundwater flow reveal that Great Artesian Basin springs are predominately recharged by rainfall on the Great Dividing Range on the eastern margin of the basin, where the basin's aquifer outcrops, allowing water to percolate into the vast groundwater system.

Evolution on display

Great Artesian Basin springs have been significant in providing reliable water and habitat as the Australian continent progressively dried out over the last 1.8 million years. Elizabeth Springs is a significant refuge for a number of plants and animals that, due to the springs' isolation, have evolved into distinct species not found anywhere else in the world, including a freshwater hydrobiid snail and the threatened Elizabeth Springs goby.

National Heritage List

Due to its extraordinary natural and evolutionary qualities, Elizabeth Springs is considered to have outstanding heritage value to the nation and has been included in the Australian National Heritage List. The National Heritage List recognises and protects our most valued natural, Indigenous and historic heritage sites. Places listed in the National Heritage List are protected under the Commonwealth *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*.

For more information visit www.heritage.gov.au