

Crossing a Desert River

Katherine Russell
Adelaide City Council, South Australia

Abstract

Adelaide is the only city in the world to be completely surrounded by park lands. Its river switches between a muddy trickle, and a raging torrent. For European settlers, the River Torrens was an unreliable water source, a constant hurdle, and impassable when rain rushes out of the nearby hills.

This is a challenge for civic planners and their bridge builders. To survive the floods, bridges must be stronger than necessary for the usual span. They could not always counter possibility of disaster, and some sites use their third bridge in 150 years. Bridges are the key to the cultural landscape.

Just as the Sydney Harbour Bridge opened up the North Shore, so the bridges of Adelaide were essential to the growth of the City of Adelaide.

The Adelaide Park Lands are a National Heritage Place, and potentially a World Heritage Place. Bridges contribute as architectural icons, engineering marvels and sculptural focal points. Bridges are the ultimate heritage item, where European settlement had to meet the realities of the landscape.

The Park Lands are the achievement of Colonel William Light of the British military, the first Surveyor-General. Light designed the two major city areas separated by the River Torrens. Bridges have been central to the Adelaide Plan, though their protection status is not clear. River crossings need to adapt from the past to the future. Melbourne's Sandridge Bridge is a disused rail bridge made into a history walk, telling pedestrians the tale of immigration in Victoria. We need to plan the next step for the bridges of Adelaide and their place in the 21st century, using examples from the world.

This presentation shows how people have built, lost and rebuilt bridges to keep a city's life flowing. It tells a story from 1836 to the present day, with current and archival images.

Katherine Russell LL.B. B.A. is a Senior Park Lands Planner for the Adelaide City Council. Katherine holds a Masters Degree in Heritage Conservation from the University of Sydney and was awarded the University's Rodney Connors Prize for Conservation Studies as the outstanding candidate in the Heritage Conservation Program. Having worked in heritage management for 20 years, she has over 12 years' experience in cultural landscapes.

