

# Salt mining in South Australia

In Australia, salt is produced by solar evaporation from sea water, saline lake waters and underground brines, and by harvesting from dry lake beds. Salt is one of the few minerals mined that is eaten in quantity by humans. In most countries salt is mined from rock salt. Australia has many shallow salt lakes that provide salt.

During the early 1800s, at the time of unofficial settlement on Kangaroo Island, south of Adelaide, salt was scraped from the beds of empty or drying lakes. Most of this was used for domestic purposes, meat preservation and the tanning of hides, which would be pegged out on wooden boards or on flat ground and coated with salt.

Occasionally, sealing vessels also called in to collect a supply of salt. Both hides and salt were bartered for tea, rum and sugar as the miners had no need or use for money. 'Exports' of salt from Kangaroo Island to Adelaide in 1843 amounted to 13 tonnes. In 1844 this had increased to 80 tonnes and by 1913 it was a massive 20 000 tonnes.

The method of obtaining salt from seawater evaporation commenced at Yorkeys Crossing, 10 kilometres north of Port Augusta, in 1915, at Port Paterson by the Solar Salt Company in 1915 and at Port Price on Wills Creek in 1919. This method now accounts for most of South Australia's salt production. Production by the Solar Salt Company at Port Paterson was suspended in 1966.

Salt production at Port Augusta itself was started in 1917 by the Crystal Salt Company. The works were taken over by the Ocean Salt Company but abandoned in 1932. Solar salt production still occurs at Port Price, 10 kilometres north of Ardrossan, a small town on the Yorke Peninsula.

The focus of salt mining has moved to another state. Today about 80 per cent of all Australian salt is produced in Western Australia. Before 1966 South Australia produced that amount. At present, only 14 per cent of Australian salt is produced in South Australia.

Source: <http://www.southaustralianhistory.com.au/salt.htm>