

What is there to see here?

Although small, there are plenty of things to discover during your brief stopover in Cook. If there's some spare time after the self-guided tour, have a chat to the locals who have many a story to share.

For your own safety please remain on the left side of the track and do not for any reason step onto or try to cross the rail line as freight trains pass without warning.

The administrators of Cook would like us to stress that NO TRESPASSING is allowed into any abandoned building including the school and residential properties. Some of these buildings are now condemned and all are unsafe to enter. This is a legal matter and may be enforced to protect the general public.

There is no public address system at Cook so listen out for one long blast of the Cook fire siren. That will be your call to re-board the train.



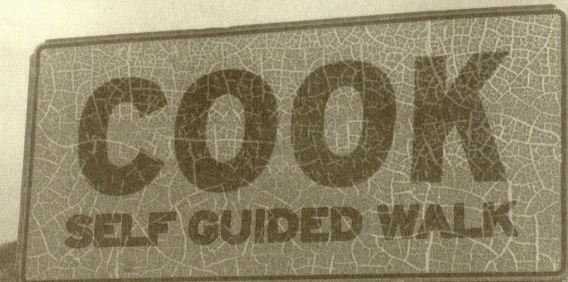
Great Southern Rail Travel Pty Ltd
PO Box 445, Marleston Business Centre, SA 5033

Phone 13 21 47 (+61 8 8213 4444)
Facsimile +61 8 8213 4329

www.greatsouthernrail.com.au



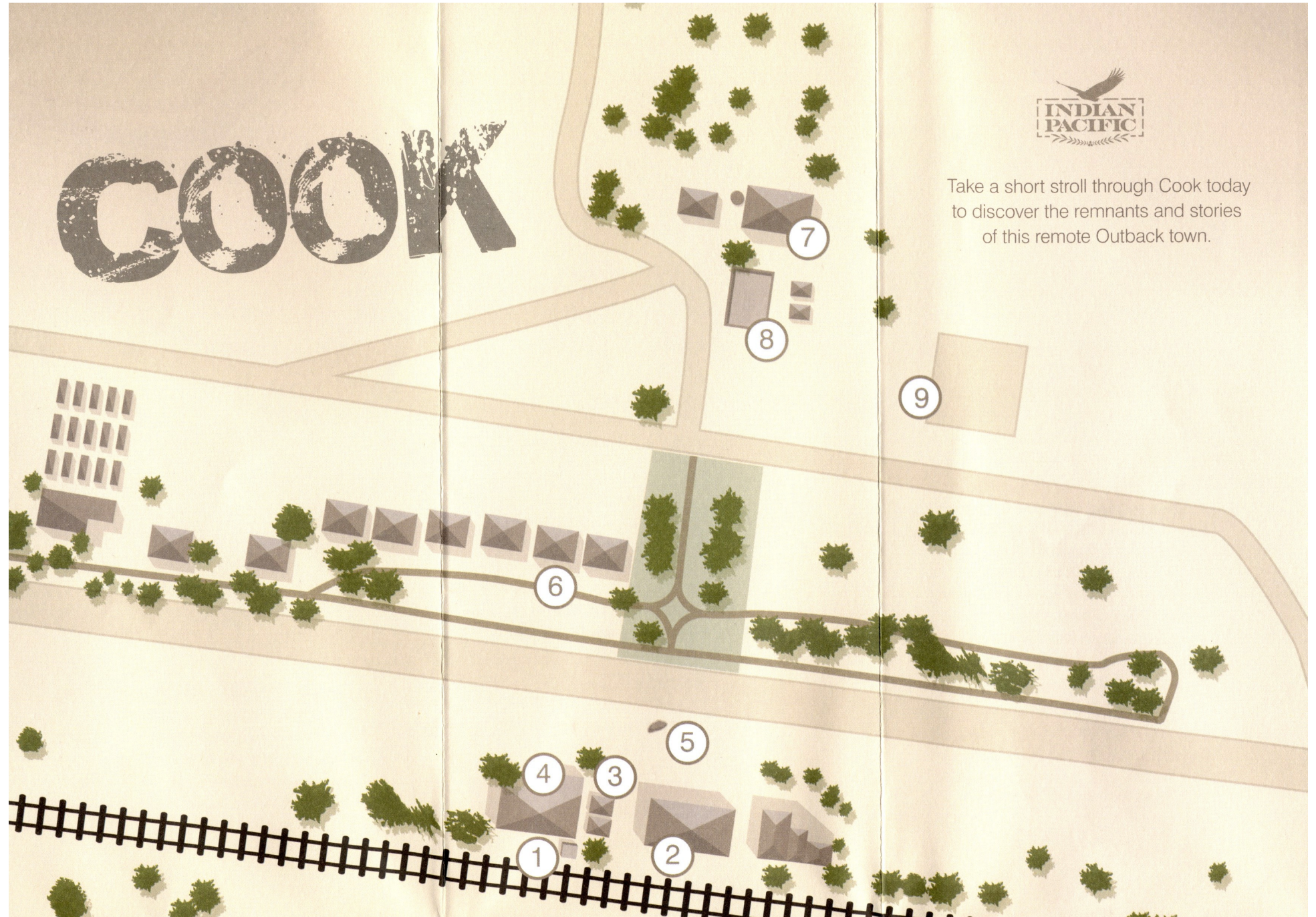
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COOK



Take a short stroll through Cook today to discover the remnants and stories of this remote Outback town.



① If you're crook, come to Cook

The sign that greets you as you step off the Indian Pacific shows Cook's previous residents either had a sense of humour or a desperate need for patients to keep the township's hospital viable – or both! Many small hospitals were once located at outposts along the rail route. Cook's Bishop Kirkby Memorial Hospital closed in the 1990s.

② Cook Train Station

The train station now serves as an office for town managers to communicate with various track authorities and drivers, as well as the rest of the world. The building's façade boasts a 2004 plaque commemorating French artist Laurent Mulot's extended stay in Cook. The town inspired the creation of Mulot's art installation, 'They Only Come Out At Night', which has been exhibited worldwide.

③ Gaol Cells

They may look like outhouses but these two corrugated iron structures are actually matching 'His' and 'Hers' gaol cells. Prisoners weren't held in the cells for long, as they were regularly sent out of Cook on the next train. The cells should have easily deterred anyone looking to get into trouble, as being locked up in one of these would have been like being imprisoned in a cooking pot.

④ General Store, Post Office and Repeater Station

When John Edward Eyre, the first European to cross the Nullarbor Plain, proved that a communications link between South Australia and Western Australia was possible, work started on building eight repeater stations along the Nullarbor for telegraph communications. A repeater station was located in this building, along with a post office and a general store.

⑤ Memorial Rock

The word 'Nullarbor' derives from the Latin words meaning 'absence of trees'. In 2006, an effort was made to defy this concept when 1000 trees were planted in Cook. Some trees survived and now stand as some of the tallest in the Nullarbor, providing natural shade from the harsh desert sun. A plaque on this large rock marks the efforts of those who took part in this project.

⑥ Town Managers' Houses

Although it is a small town, Cook is a bustling hive of activity for its four permanent residents. These residents are the town managers who not only provide water and fuel for diesel locomotive trains that pass through the town, but also manage the upkeep of the driver accommodation buildings. Most of the houses are now abandoned, with only a few houses occupied by town managers.

⑦ School

Wander through the bike racks, playground equipment and murals in the abandoned Cook Area School grounds to get an idea of what life was like for some 30 local schoolchildren. In 2003, artist Laurent Mulot discovered student drawings and stories relating to the nocturnal habits of wombats. Inspired by a story caption 'They only come out at night', Mulot created an audio-visual art installation later exhibited internationally.

⑧ Swimming Pool

Years ago, the pool would have been the best place to retreat when Nullarbor temperatures soared past 40 degrees. After the town's closure, the pool soon dried up. While it's no longer a great place for a dip, it is still an ideal spot for a photograph, with quirky signs and graffiti scattered around the area.

⑨ Hospital

In 1936, the Bush Church Aid Society established a cottage hospital in Cook and named it the Bishop Kirkby Memorial Hospital after the society's founding member. The hospital closed in the 1990s – however, it remains quite significant that one existed in a small town on the Nullarbor Plain in the first place. Cook is now solely serviced by the Royal Flying Doctor Service when the need arises.

Where on Earth am I?

You're in Cook, a small outback town located on the longest straight stretch of track in the world that spans a distance of 478 kilometres from Ooldea to Loongana. The desert stretches as far as the eye can see in any direction, giving the town an almost eerie sense of isolation.



It doesn't get much more isolated than this!

Cook sits 1138 kilometres from Adelaide and 1523 kilometres from Perth. The closest highway is the Eyre Highway, a 100 kilometre drive away.

The nearest major town is Ceduna, approximately a five hour drive south-east and the local doctor is located about a 12 hour drive away in Port Augusta. Due to the distance, the relationship between the town of Cook and the Indian Pacific is important, as the train brings food and supplies and the residents provide the train with fuel and water.

Why is Cook here?

The town sits on the Nullarbor Plain, a hot, barren plateau twice the size of England. Cook was named after the former Australian Prime Minister, Sir Joseph Cook, and was established to support the east-west Trans Australian Railway, which was completed in 1917.

To assist with the maintenance of the line, small settlements 30 kilometres apart were built along the most remote sections of the track on the Nullarbor Plain. From very small beginnings, Cook developed into a major base for maintenance groups along the line and provided accommodation to railway crews.

Cook was once a thriving community boasting a school, swimming pool, general store and housing to accommodate a 200-strong population. After the privatisation of the railway, numbers in Cook dwindled, leaving the town virtually abandoned.

