

Talgarno Prohibitive Area

Historical Background

The Woomera Protective area [WPA], was as part of the Anglo-Australia Joint Project 1947, which required massive land for the British to test missile development after the Second World War. The establishment of a long -range weapons testing facility, was established in Woomera South Australia.

The area was declared a Prohibited Area in 1947 and the first military trial took place in December 1947.

- At its height, the WPA encompassed an area of 270,000 square kilometres, including a satellite range in north-west Western Australia known as the Talgarno Protective Area- [See Maps below]. Two areas were declared WPA.
- Woomera had a short-range impact area of some 400 kilometres from the range head.
- Talgarno in the north-western part of Western Australia was 1,800 kilometres down range from the launch area, with an impact area in the vicinity of Christmas Island in the Indian ocean, extending the impact area to 2,400 kilometres from Australia's north-east coast. This was needed to test long-range missiles like Blue Streak. Inert warheads, launched in Woomera. would fall in an area between Port Headland and the Bidyadanga-a region called the Talgarno prohibited area. It would take 10 minutes for a rocket launched in Woomera to land in the NW, and was to be monitored from Talgarno.
- Talgarno was a British government project to test the accuracy of rockets designed to carry missiles. Blue Streak rockets were Nuclear fuelled ballistic missiles, designed to carry a nuclear bomb.

So, in 1959-1960, the Department of Defence built Talgarno., at Anna Plains Station, in Western Australia. The Talgarno Base was located to the NE of the Anna Plains airfield and operated as a self-contained base/town.

Talgarno is an Aboriginal word meaning 'Dry Country and home to the Yaburrara people, who called the area Murujaja, which means "Hip Bone Sticking Out" in the Yaburrara language.

Under the Deforce ACT 1903 and under the Defence [Special Undertakings] ACT,1952, the Commonwealth, suspended access to users and the WPA was suspended under the Regulations and be excluded from the WPA for safety or security coincident with those exclusion periods that are determined under the WPA rules.

This included:

- Traditional owners
- Pastoral operators
- Rail owner and operator
- Mines with deeds of Access
- South Australian Government employees and agents

The north west of Western Australia was an isolated, rugged space in the late 1950s. So, it was seen as an ideal place to test rockets.

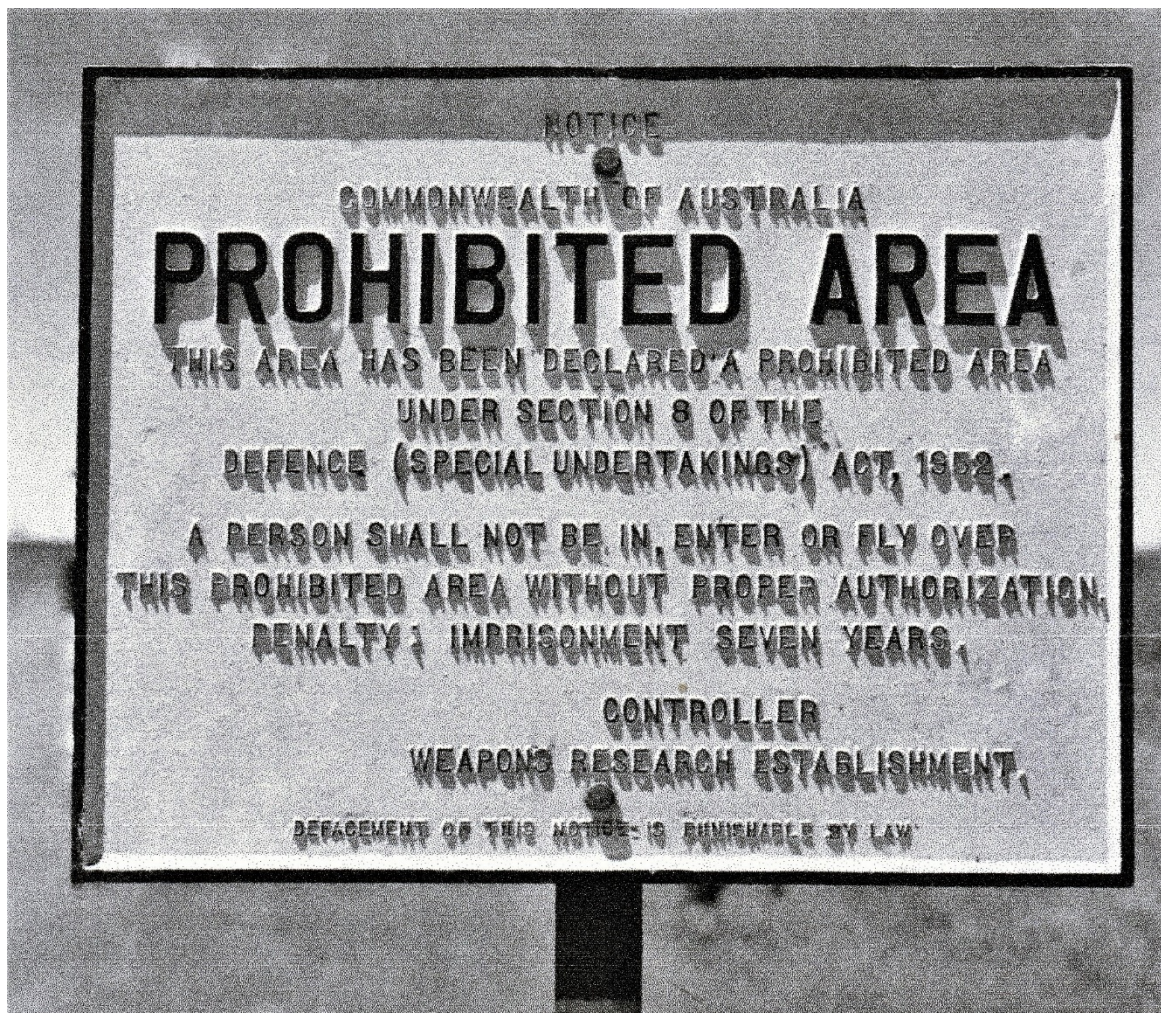
In order to understand the Talgarno WPA, it needs to be placed in the context of requiring great space in order for flight testing of many guided weapons and test vehicles with an atomic/nuclear connection. -Blue Danube, Blue Water, Blue Steel, Bloodhound, Seaslug, Ikara and eventually Blue Streak. Blue Streak was the biggest undertaking by the Joint Project. Hence Talgarno was built in order to have a fully instrumental impact zone in the north-west of Western Australia.

The primary cameras at Talgarno would chart the path of incoming dummy warhead and telemetry would record signals from the fuzes as they triggered on impact.

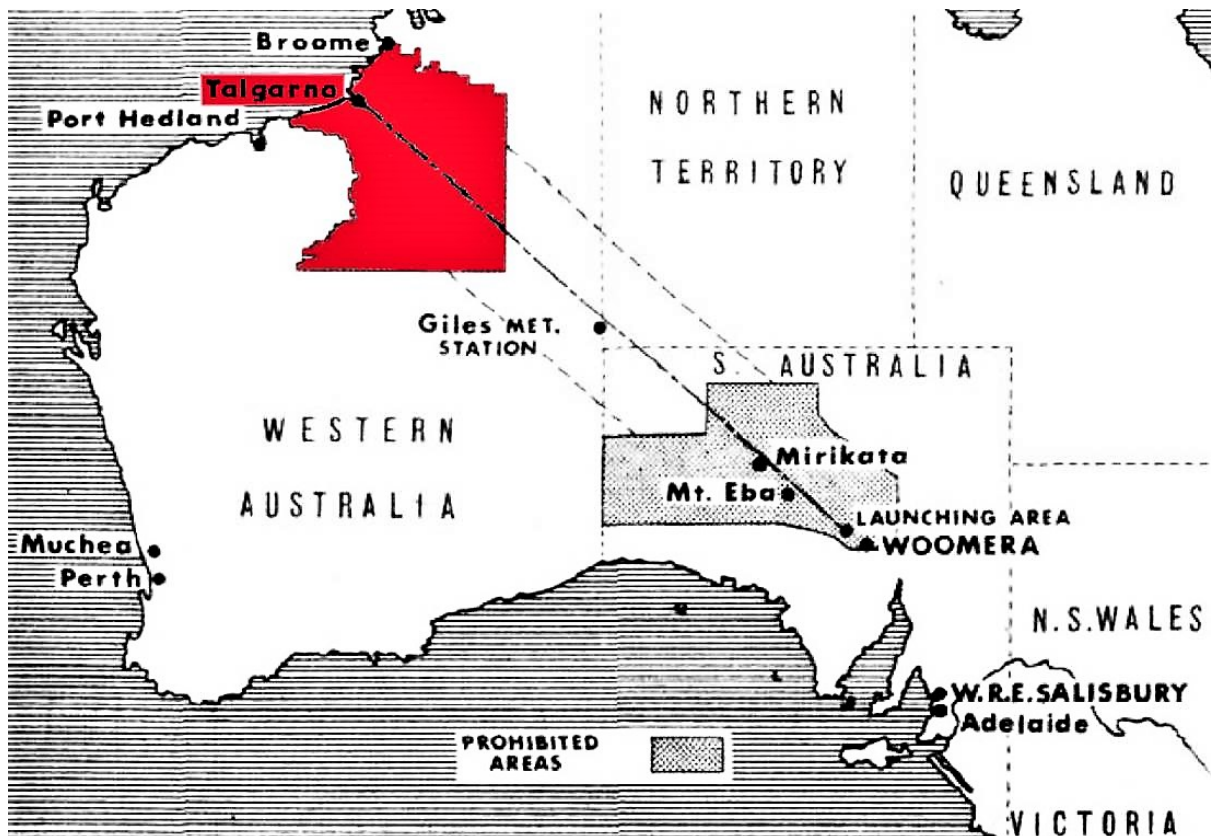
In addition, Talgarno operations collected data, on experiments into anti-ballistic missile decoy discrimination radar.

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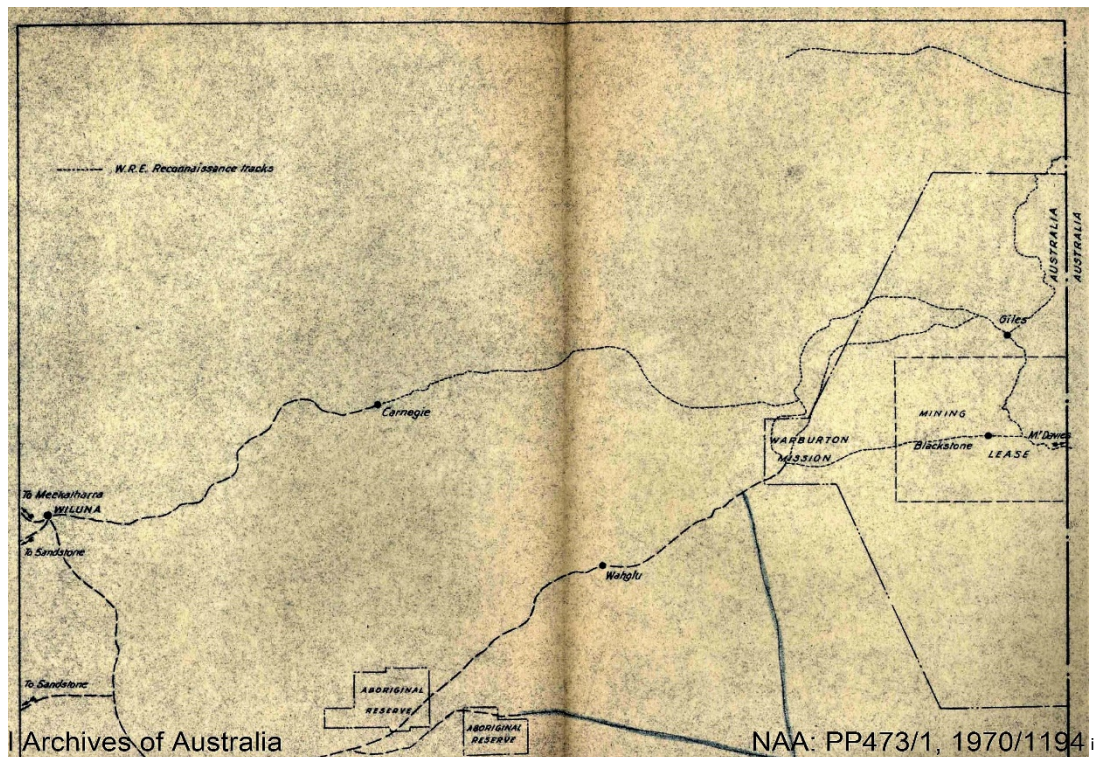
In 1959 the Talgarno village was built on land excised from Anna Plains station, 150 kilometres south of Broome.

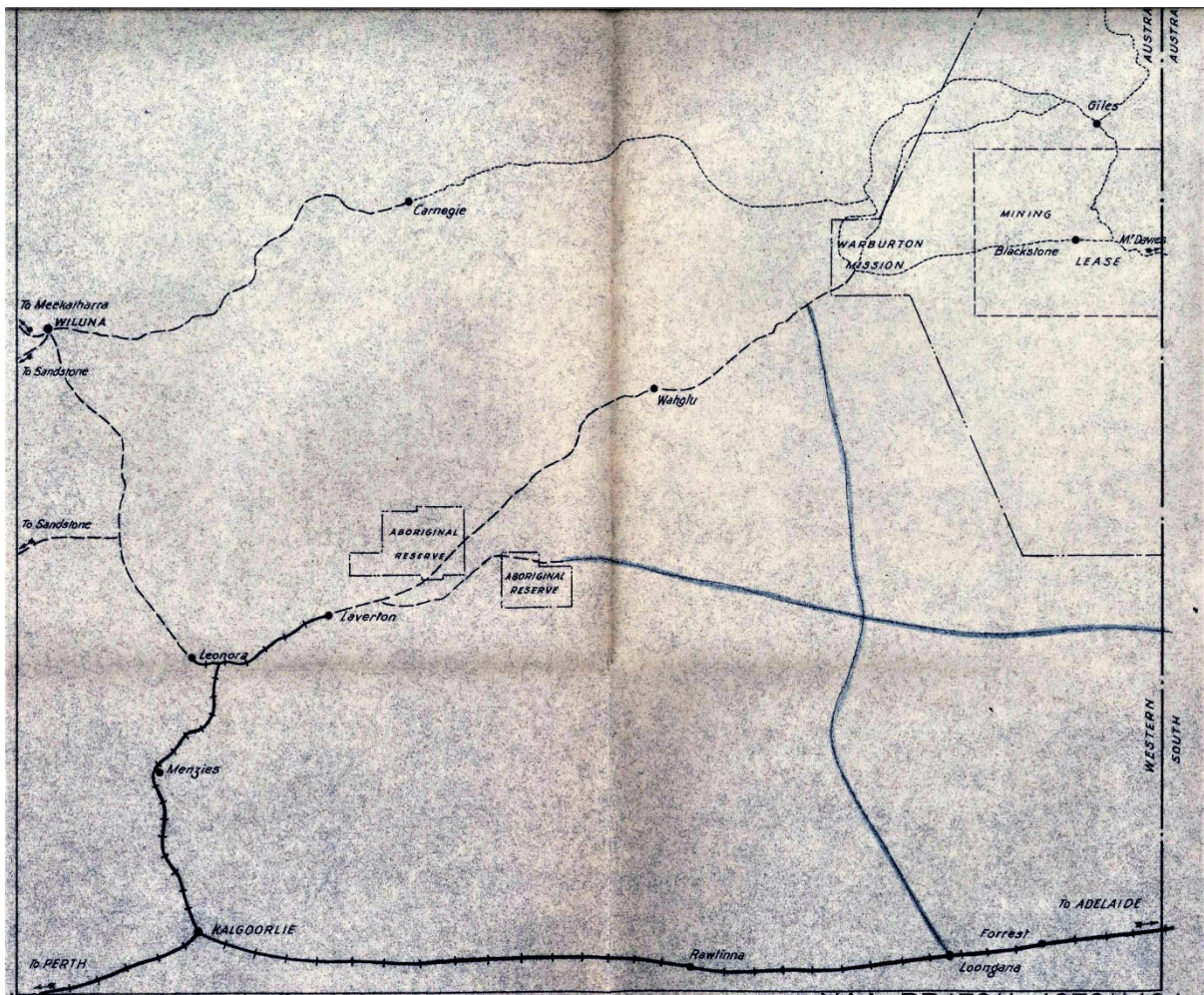


¹Sign at the entrance WRE, Talgarno. WA



Map 1: Talgarno Prohibited Area. Historical Map of the WPA in SA and WA.





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Woomera, operated by WRE at the time, was recognised: *"as the best-instrumented overland rocket range in the western world"* (Flight International, 1963). The range was selected by the European Launcher Development Organization (ELDO) as the launch site for its first space vehicle (Blue Streak), under a joint agreement between the United Kingdom and Australian Governments. In the late 1950s, WRE's main job was to prepare for the first test launch of the Blue Streak's first stage rocket, planned for 1960. WRE therefore required geodetic survey control in the Talgarno area (between Port Hedland and Broome WA, refer map at Figure 2) by the end of 1959.

The Talgarno facility, now abandoned, was near Anna Plains WA and had an airstrip, meteorological facilities and had the project proceeded was to grow to be a small town not unlike Woomera itself. Akin to Giles which was mid-range, Talgarno was down-range. The Talgarno Prohibited Area was more than just a stretch of desert about the size of France; since much of the value of the Blue Streak lay in how closely to the target it could land its nuclear warhead at the end of its long ballistic trajectory, Talgarno was to be well instrumented to fix the point of impact to within 30 metres.

To meet WRE's requirement, during 1958 and 1959, a 4400-kilometre loop between, Alice Springs - Finke - Giles - Rawlinson Range - Roy Hill - Derby - Halls Creek - Alice Springs, was surveyed. Nat map completed this work in late 1959 only to learn that the British Government had announced the project's cancellation. However, Ford (1979) observed: *"probably the Geodetic Survey of Australia came out best; it is most unlikely money would have been available to push the survey ahead at such a fast pace if it hadn't been for the Blue Streak requirement"*.

Later a modified Blue Streak became the first stage for the European “Europa” vehicle being developed for launching satellites. From 1964-70 there were nine successful launches of a “Europa” vehicle with the first three in the direction of Talgarno and the remainder over the Simpson Desert. As will be read later, a Nat map geodetic field party was responsible for recovering parts of one of these vehicles after its re-entry.

Talgarno was a military airbase on Anna Plains Station used in the post-Second World War period for the monitoring and recovery of British Blue Streak rockets, test-fired from Woomera in South Australia. The military base was established in 1958-1959 and was a well-equipped facility providing single and married quarters, and a range of services including a swimming pool, cinema and hospital. The airstrip on the site was well built and enabled large aircraft to land at the site. By September 1964, Talgarno was decommissioned and dismantled.

Talgarno Village



^ Overview of Talgarno Village



vi Photo of Talgarno Village circa 1960



vii Talgarno Building



Talgarno Circa 1961^{viii}



^{ix} Workers quarters Talgarno.



^x Town of Talgarno

ⁱ NLA. Picture 2635520958

ⁱⁱ NAA. PP541/1 ,241/4/4 Map of Talgarno

ⁱⁱⁱ NAA. PP 473/1 1970/1194 3-4 Map of Talgarno

^{iv} NAA. PP541/1 ,241/4/4 Map of Talgarno

^v NAA PP548/1 241/4/4

^{vi} NAA PP548/1 241/4/4

^{vii} NAA PP548/1 241/4/4

^{viii} NAA PP 548/1/241/4/4

^{ix} NAA PP548/1 241/4/4

^x NAA PP548/1 241/4/4