

Down Under

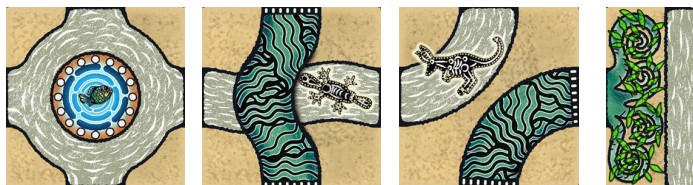
A tile placement strategy game for 2 to 4 players aged 8 and up

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Translation: Rick Heli www.spotlightongames.com

Components

There are 76 path tiles:

4 Billabong (pond) **4 sets of 18 tiles each, consisting of:**
7 straight 9 curved 2 terminal



The billabong tiles do not belong to any player. All of the other tiles have paths in two colors, one in the player's color and one in gray which does not belong to any player.

The gray parts of the straight and curved tiles each contain an icon, one of a kangaroo (4 cases), emu (4 cases), duck-billed platypus (3 cases), rabbit (4 cases) or dingo (1 case). These animals are only important for special scoring (cf. *End of the Game and Scoring*).

Goal of the Game

The goal of the game is to connect up path tiles in one's own color and gray to form a single route. A player wins by completing the longest route in his color inside a defined space. If playing with special scoring, there are bonus points and reductions for the animals on the route.

Preparing for Play

Each player receives all of the path cards of a single color and separates the straight from the curved tiles (if using special scoring, also group them by animal). The billabong tiles are placed nearby. (They are only needed in special situations which in most playings do not come up.)

The players decide the size of the playing area. Depending on the degree of desired difficulty, these are as follows:

Degree of difficulty	2 players	3 players	4 players
Easy:	6x6 tiles	7x7 tiles	8x8 tiles
Recommended:	5x7 tiles	6x8 tiles or 5x9 tiles	7x9 tiles or 6x10 tiles
Difficult:	4x8 tiles	4x10 tiles	5x11 tiles

Note that only the size of the playing area is defined, not its exact position, which is only determined during the course of play (for more information see *The border comes into being*).

Playing the Game

The Game Begins

The first player places one of his straight or curved tiles on the table. In turn each player adds one of their tiles, connecting to an existing tile either orthogonally or diagonally.



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Important: A player may not place a tile so as to join together paths of two different player colors.

From the second round on, each player must place a tile that continues his personal route using the path on his tile which shows his own color.

However, in adding to his path it is permitted for the gray path on the new tile to simultaneously connect to a path of his own color. In future turns this second path can be added to as if it were of his or another color. (The way to tell is to follow the gray path and see that eventually it becomes his color.)

In future turns this gray and colored path can be extended using either gray paths or paths of the original color.

Sometimes in extending one's own route it's necessary, using the gray part of the tile, to lengthen that of an opponent as well. This is permitted. But this also provides the chance to decide in which direction the opponent's route will be extended.

The border comes into being:

The exact position of the borders of the playing area are determined when the maximum numbers of horizontal and vertical tiles are achieved.

Not allowed:



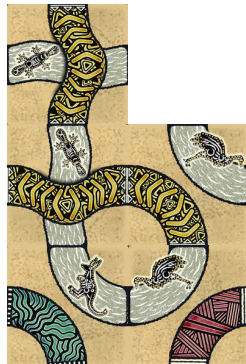
Not allowed:



Correct:



Correct:



all of the yellow path tiles are connected together

For example, suppose a 7x9 playing area was chosen, Now a player lays the 8th tile in a direction. This has the consequence that this axis will have a maximum of 9 tiles. The 9th tile can be placed on either side and only when it is placed is the exact border on that axis determined. The other axis will have a maximum of 7 tiles.

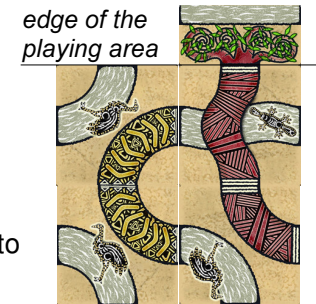
Only terminal tiles may be placed outside the pre-defined playing area.

End of the Road

Normally it is not a good idea to place a terminal tile on one's path because this reduces one's options for playing future tiles.

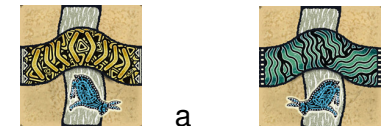
But a terminal tile must be placed when a player's route reaches the edge of the playing area.

Placing a terminal tile in this way counts as a normal turn. It is not required to place this tile as soon as the situation arises. It can be postponed if there are opportunities to play on the other end of the route.



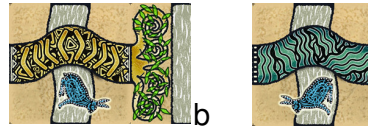
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Especially toward the end of the game, placing a terminal tile can be the only way to place a tile without connecting one's path with that of another

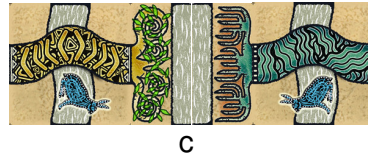


player. For example, this is the case if one cannot place a straight tile because the route is blocked by an opponent's path and the curved tiles have been exhausted. This is the situation shown where Yellow wishes to place a tile at (a).

In this case, Yellow places a terminal tile as shown at (b).



The Blue opponent can then only place his own terminal tile above (c). Between the two tiles there is only a gray path.



Note: It is legal to use a "half" gray path to extend a route (see picture at right).



A Route Is Ended

If both ends of a route are capped with terminal tiles, the player cannot place any more tiles. The opponents continue to play, however, until their routes are complete.

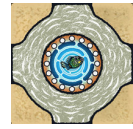
An Infinite Route?!

It's possible that both ends of a player's route become connected together, either during an opponent's turn or for tactical reasons by the player himself. Obviously, this situation prevents the player from extending his route.

In this case, he does not place a tile. Instead, he is permitted to rotate by 90 degrees one of his tiles which is already in the playing area, so that two new placement locations are created. Of course, after the rotation the tile must obey the usual rules. If this is not legally possible, then the player stops his participation in the game until Scoring.

Using the Billabong Tiles

Sometimes a player cannot legally play any of his straight, curved or terminal tiles. In this case he places a billabong tile.



The following cases are possible:

1. Routes from three different players lead into the same space.

The player who was the last to place a tile that created this situation immediately places a billabong tile in the space. Then he also immediately extends his route out of the billabong tile (ending up playing three tiles in the same turn). The routes of the other two players end here.

2. Routes from four different players lead into the same space.

As above, the player who was the last to place a tile that created this situation immediately places a billabong tile in the space. The routes of all four of the players end here.

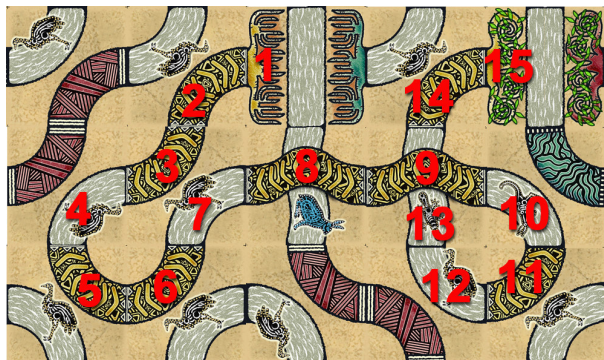
3. Two routes each from two players lead into the same space, but one of the players no longer has any curved tiles.

The player who played the last tile to create this situation may place a billabong tile instead of a curved tile. Now both players' routes continue past the billabong tile.

End of the Game and Scoring

The game ends when all players have finished their routes. The winner is the player having the longest route. This is the route which contains the most tiles, including terminal tiles. Neutral tiles count the same as tiles of one's own color.

Excerpt of the playing area:



The yellow route consists of 15 paths.

Thus, without considering special scoring, Yellow receives 15 points.

Note that the 9th and the 13th path are on the same tile.

Using Special Scoring

The animal icons on the tiles represent rare animals discovered by the player. They affect scoring as follows:

- For each **set of an emu, kangaroo and duck-billed platypus** on a player's route, he receives **5 extra points**. The location and order of these icons do not matter. To determine the number of sets, simply count which of these three types of icons appears on the route the least.
- If a player has **no dingo** icon on his route, **each rabbit** on his route **subtracts two points** (Rabbits are a plague, the dingo their foe).
- Any player who, at the end of the game, has not played his dingo tile, automatically loses.

Additional note: The animal designs of Japanese commercial artist Ro Sato share the X-ray style of Aboriginal art. The Aborigines represent not only the outside shape of an organism, but also the skeleton and organs.

Tactical Tips

In placing tiles the goal is to include as many gray tiles in one's route as possible. However, having enough space in the long term should always be carefully considered.

A route which reaches the edge of the playing area early has hardly any chance to win. Also, if too many curved tiles are used at the start, difficulties will soon follow. A curved tile always offers two different possible directions, but a straight tile only one -- directly to the edge.

Down Under Variants

Despite the simple components, Down Under is an especially variable game. Not only does it offer rich tactical possibilities, but also many rules variants

Players can pick and choose from the following extra rules to create their own favorite way of playing Down Under.

Simple Game for Younger Children

Play without the concept of a restricted playing area. A route is never stopped by reaching a border. Note that it's still a good idea to stick to the middle of the playing area, however, as there are many gray paths available there.

Fixed Playing Area (for 2-3 players)

The unused tiles of the fourth player can be used to form a line which passes through the entire playing area. The line need not be straight and may be serpentine, but it must start in the lower left corner and end in the upper right corner. The locations of the tiles in the corners thus define the length and width of the playing area. In order to avoid making it too difficult to cross the line, straight tiles should be employed in the middle sections of it.

When there are only two players, unused tiles can be used to completely assemble a frame around the playing area. Place the gray curved tiles in pairs so that they connect back into the playing area.

Paths Grow From Only One End (for 2-4 players)

In the first round of the game each player places a terminal tile, the second player and the fourth players placing theirs at the back side of the terminal tiles of the first and third players, respectively.

Two Routes Per Player (for 2 players)

With two players it's possible for each to play two routes. Each uses two colors to accomplish this.

First the players place for each of their two routes a terminal tile so that each time two tiles form a square.

Then the starting player places a straight or a curved tile to extend one of his routes.

Then it is the next player's turn. Starting with this turn, players always place two tiles, one of each color. The order of these two tiles is up to the player.

This variant is also of interest when each player is only permitted to place one tile per turn. One must decide which one of one's routes to extend. (Terminal tiles should also be placed first in this version.)

Tactics: Now one player's short route may be pursued by the other's long route. It's a good tactic to place a terminal tile between them because then the shorter route's tiles can no longer be used. The threat alone of such a move is a very strong weapon.