

Lesson 10

READ THIS STORY #1, Basic

The Great Barrier Reef

The Great Barrier Reef stretches more than twelve hundred miles along the eastern coast of Australia and out to the sea for up to two hundred miles. It's the largest structure ever built by living plants and animals.

The major builders of the reef are coral animals called polyps. These soft, fleshy creatures are only one-half inch long. Each polyp forms an external skeleton of limestone that becomes attached to existing rock. They reproduce by growing "buds" that branch off and become new polyps. It probably took twenty-five million years for the coral colonies to grow to their present size.

The reef is a wilderness area that covers eighty-thousand square miles. Much of it has not been explored. It may have survived because it was so remote and dangerous to the early explorers. The Great Barrier Reef is reported to be the graveyard for at least five hundred ships.

Now that it is accessible by aircraft, this reef has become popular as a tourist attraction. Some fear that its existence will be threatened by too many human visitors.