Sturt's Stony Desert

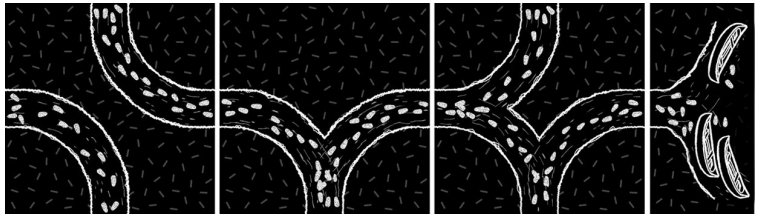
A tile placement strategy game by Günter Cornett

for 2 to 4 players aged 10 and up

Sturt's Stony Desert refers to the Australian desert whose area extends over 130,000 square kilometers in the states of South Australia, New South Wales and Queensland. It is named for the early explorer, Charles Sturt, who hypothesized the existence of a large lake in the center of the continent. For this reason his expedition across the desert carried a large collapsible boat.

Components

The reverse sides of the Down Under tiles are used to play this game:



22 double curves *22 forks* *24 triple curves* *8 terminals*

Goal of the Game

Together the players lay out a 5x5 tile area. One player takes the east and west edges and tries to create a route through the desert between them. The other player tries to do the same with the north and south edges.

Since all tiles change the path by 90 degrees, fundamentally, each tile is useful for both players.

Preparing for Play

The tiles are grouped into four stacks by type.

Playing the Game

The game consists of two phases. In the first phase players lay only tiles containing two curves. In the second phase, they lay tiles having triple curves. The terminal tiles serve to indicate completed routes.

The Game Begins

The players take turns placing a tile.

With the exception of the first one, each tile must connect to an existing one either orthogonally or diagonally. It is the player's choice to place a double curve or a fork.

It is expressly permitted to place a tile edge which has no path next to a tile edge which has a path (and vice versa).

The total area may never exceed 5x5 tiles in size from any standpoint. If a player manages to complete a route between his two sides in the first 25 tiles, he wins (With attentive players this is rare). When the 25th tile has been laid, the second phase of the game begins with the second player.

The second Phase

On a turn a player places a triple curve tile directly on top of an existing double curve tile. He may orient this tile in any way he likes so long as it rests squarely above the tile below it. It is not necessary to preserve the paths of the previous tile.

When a player manages to connect his two board edges in one or more ways, he must indicate this by placing terminal tiles at the ends of these routes. The opponent now has one chance to interrupt the route by placing a single triple curve tile. If he

cannot do so, he loses the game. Otherwise the game continues.

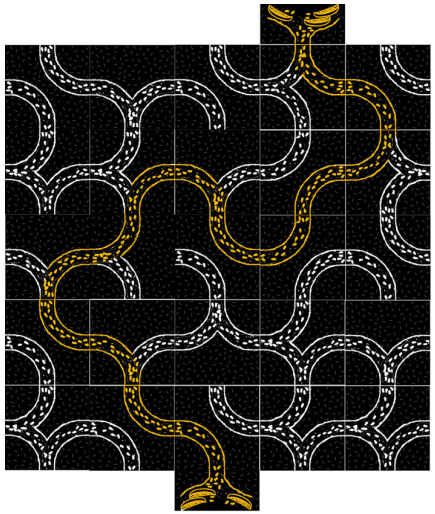
End of the game

A player wins when at the start of his turn there is a route between his two sides, regardless of whether or not it was completed by himself or the other player.

Tip: the entire winning route must be traversable by a virtual train traveling in a single direction. That is, no acute angle turns are permitted.

An example of a north-south route:

The east-west player can interrupt this route by placing a triple curve tile. (The placement of such tiles increases the number of paths and so interrupting a route becomes more and more difficult.)



Sometimes neither player is able to complete a route. In this case the game ends in a tie.

Variant

Players who do not like ties can use this rule instead:

If at the start of his turn a player notices that no player can complete a route, he can claim this. Now the other player lays as many tiles as he likes. If he manages to complete a route in either direction, he wins. Otherwise the player who made the claim wins.