

Overland Telegraph
150th Anniversary
1872-2022

July Newsletter

As advised in an earlier email, OT-150 (Overland Telegraph Line Sesquicentennial) will be emailing you at the beginning of each month until August

If you wish to withdraw from this email list, please advise by return email... thank-you

www.ot150.net

(this email is optimised for viewing for MS Outlook mail. If the layout is confused in your email system, [click here](#) to download a PDF copy)

<https://www.ot150.net/library/newsletters/nl07.pdf>

On this Day in July

In the ot150.net Library – Key dates – July: On the 10th of July, 1872, after just over a year of construction, things are going well. There's an operator at Beltana in the Southern Section and a way has been found through the MacDonnell Ranges in the Central Section. A team was even sent ahead to make a start on the lower part of the Northern Section. News from there is slow to arrive – the latest report was dated 27 March. And then William McMinn, the Government Overseer, arrives in Adelaide to say he has sacked the contractors!



Cutting a path for the Overland Telegraph Line through the Top End jungle [Illustrated Adelaide Post, 10 July 1872, p1]

Todd Corner

Charles Todd's early hands-on approach to getting the job done is illustrated by the personal effort that went into planning his first significant telegraph line, the one connecting Adelaide and Melbourne. It is well known that on his return from a meeting in Melbourne in 1856, he surveyed, on horseback, the possible track for the line through the South East. Todd TROVE researcher Gavin Beinke, in his reading of accounts at the time, discovered some of the personal price Todd paid. To

get to Melbourne, Todd endured several days of severe sea sickness. On return by land, he was accompanied from Portland by Trooper Ewens, who kept a diary of the trip, portions of which details Todd's further travails:

Sept 1st : *In Portland with Mr. Todd preparing him for the road by buying him whip & spurs & giving him a turn on the beach on old Coppin. Found he could not ride & the old horse did not like it.*

Sept 2nd : *I started for the Mount with Mr. Todd, had some fine fun with Mr. T – bad riding old Coppin's bolting &c*

Sept 3rd : *We arrived all safe at Mount Gambier. Coppin bolted again past the station – too much spurs.*

Sept 18th : *In the Bay. (Todd) Very queer, taking physic. (medicine).*

Sept 22nd : *Arriving at Mr. Cooks station near Maria Creek. Mr. Todd caught a severe cold – jumping up in his sleep against the shelves &c &c fine fun calling out whoa Coppin.*

Sept 26th : *Started for the Goolwa in the boat but nearly got swamped & turned about to go round the lake. Boat cracked and leaking.*

Being an early scientist and technology entrepreneur sure had its costs!

An Original Approach to Assessing the OT Line

The construction of the OT is still claimed as possibly the greatest engineering project of colonial Australia. At the opening of infrastructure projects today, politicians like to declare that they were delivered on time and on budget. At her recent OT-150 presentation to the Royal Geographic Society Susie Herzberg took the original approach of using a modern SWOT analysis to measure-up the OT in 21st century terms. Highlights from here talk included:

Strengths: The project benefitted from Todd's extraordinary planning and compulsive list making and the fact that influential figures supported the endeavour.

Weaknesses: Parts of the Line had not previously been surveyed and created delays, there was a shortage of sufficient skilled labour, and limited timber was available for the poles, made worse by the problem of white ants.

Opportunities: The Line immediately promised faster communication between colonial Australia and the rest of the world. For South Australia there was also the generation of revenue from its use by other Colonies.

Threats: The dependence on Todd as the main proponent of the Line, its architect and detailed project, manager was risky, and the financial threat of a £70 levy, payable to the British Australia Telegraph Company for each day overdue were both serious concerns.

Culturally the project was not 21st C family, nor LGBTQI+ friendly, nor gender balanced. The greatest omission was little understanding of and limited evidence of respect for the Aboriginal population and no consultation. There was little appreciation of Indigenous spiritual and sustainable connection with the land or knowledge of languages.

Images – Some had it better than others

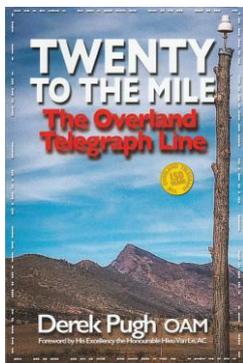
These two images of OT telegraph stations, Port Darwin on the left (during OT construction) and the Peake (1880) show the improvements that continued after the “completion” of the OT Line in 1872



Research Funds Available

Through a bequest from the late Major-General George William Symes CB MC, the Royal Geographical Society has grant money for research into the history of South Australia and the Northern Territory in so far as the latter affects the history of South Australia. The Society welcomes applications from authors of academic, peer-reviewed papers, completed in the last two years that relate to the history of South Australia or the Northern Territory (during its colonial link with SA). Papers should be substantially informed by the discipline of geography. Anyone is encouraged to contact the Society after reading about the details of the [award here](#)

Dealing With the Elements



Extract from “Twenty to the Mile, The Overland Telegraph”

Author Derek Pugh OAM

Speaker at the upcoming OT-150 Symposium, July 19

Modern communications have been haunted by natural phenomenon, whether solar flairs, electromagnetic interference, even deep space cosmic rays. Sections of the OT were affected by more local phenomenon. Section A of the Overland Telegraph was built by Richard Knuckey. A part of this line ran through desolate country, often completely treeless.

With bare vegetation, Knuckey had to use 50 kilogram Oppenheimer metal poles. These telescopic, galvanised steel poles were short enough to be carried by camels and were extended on site. They were a German invention manufactured near Manchester in England, so they were not cheap. However, they brought their own problem, lightning, especially between the Peak and Charlotte Waters stations. Lightening could interrupt telegraph messages or insulators could be smashed leaving the wire in contact with the iron pole, thus earthing and stopping the communication. A piece of ordinary line wire was therefore placed on every alternate pole as a lightning conductor, the wire was stapled down the length of the pole and it ended in a coil beneath the base, so it was difficult to remove. They proved an effective protection from lightning.

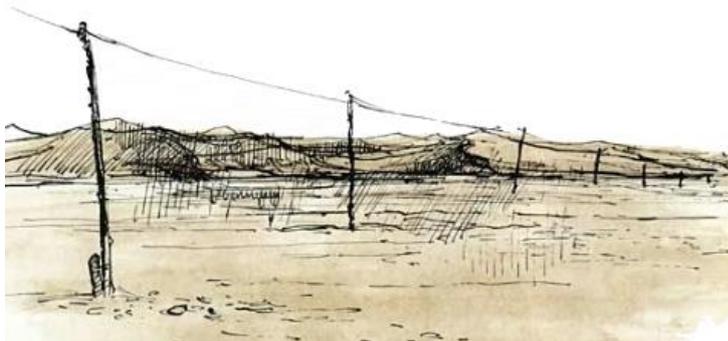
Did you realise

LONDON, March 28, 1.4 p.m.
Received April 3, 7.35 p.m.
Colonel Andrew Clark has been gazetted as K.C.B.
Money and Discount. — Money is easier. Discount, 4 per cent. Large withdrawals of gold are expected. Stocks are recovering.
Securities.—Victorian Six per Cents, April - October, £110½; New South Wales Fives, 1888 - 1901, £106½; New Zealand Sixes, £111.
Bank—Australian, £52 10s.
Tallow is steady; mutton, £42 to £44; beef, £41 to £42.
Sydney oil, £30 to £33.
Copper is steady; Wallaroo, £96.
Tin is firm; Straits, £147.
Hides are unaltered.
In leather there is a full supply, and the price has declined 0½d.
New Zealand hemp is from £23 to £26.
Wheat is dull.
Preserved meats of all sizes are scarcer and dearer.
Butter by the Jason and Wave has been sold at 90.

The term “digital disrupter” appears frequently in descriptions of 21st century technology. It typically refers to internet-based applications that disrupt more traditional ways of carrying out a task or accomplishing an outcome. The best known disrupter is social media which has radically changed the way we communicate and how we consume news. It’s been blamed for what some see as a number of modern social and political ills.

There is also another disrupter commonly covered in the news covering finance. “Fintech” is changing the way business and even individuals work in commerce. An extreme example is bitcoin, a digital-only currency. But financial disruption isn’t just a 21st century phenomenon. The OT delivered financial information that was only hours or days old. This article from the Advertiser of April 1873 delivers financial data directly to the producers and consumers, data that only the year before would have been a month or more old. No doubt the OT disrupted traditional channels of business as consumers and producers alike reacted more quickly to information that was critical to their financial decision making.

OT 150 Events South Australia



JUL.
21

Overland Telegraph Sesquicentennial Symposium

by OT-150 Committee

The Symposium, mounted by the OT-150 Committee is scheduled for 9.30am to 1pm on Thursday the 19 of this month. To be opened by Her Excellency the Honourable Frances Adamson AC, Governor of South Australia, it will be compered by Keith Conlon AO, Chair at the South Australian Heritage Council. Featured will be a kaleidoscope of speakers presenting newly researched information about the Overland Telegraph Line, what preceded it, the heroic efforts to build it and what followed. All speakers are experts in their topics, bringing interesting facts and themes that will stimulate your thoughts. Details are available [by clicking here](#) or google “overland telegraph symposium”. Registration is essential

Northern Territories



ACTIVITY	National Trust Darwin display and walk
TYPE	Display of OTL artefacts and photographs
DATE	April to November 2022
VENUE	Roadmasters House. 1 McMinn Street, Darwin
COORDINATOR	National Trust Darwin
CONTACT	Trevor Menzies menzies2@bigpond.net.au

Talk to us

The OT-150 Committee is very interested in hearing about the work of our community members. Please contact us with any material you have developed or discovered that you believe will be of interest, whether for the Newsletter or the website. info@ot150.net

Mac Benoy, OT-150 Coordinator