



OT-150 KEY DATES No 6

On this Day: April

Sources are given for all key dates; if you have evidence that a date is incorrect, please advise the OT-150 group and we will correct it

1 April 1871

Queensland attacks SA's Overland Telegraph

William Cracknell, Superintendent of Telegraphs, tells the Queensland Government that he will soon have a line completed to the Gulf of Carpentaria where it can join BAT's undersea cable. The Government has already told the company that SA's proposed overland scheme is "absurd" and "impractical" and that they should carry out their original proposal to connect with Queensland.¹

11 April 1870

BAT's representative meets with Todd

English news can now reach Australia in 27 days² but the best is yet to come. BAT's representative Captain Noel Osborne arrives in Adelaide³ to negotiate the crossing of the Northern Territory with a land line to Queensland. He meets with Charles Todd and reveals that, contrary to rumours, the company has not made a firm commitment to Queensland.⁴

12 April 1871

First shipment of iron poles despatched

Todd has seen the need to use iron poles in bushfire-prone areas and orders 3000 of them from England: being stronger than timber, only 16 to the mile would be needed.⁵ The first load of poles are sent to Port Augusta and another shipment will be sent to Port Darwin.⁶ In some sections they will be erected alternately with timber poles.⁷

18 April 1870

Todd recommends SA build OTL from Port Augusta

After meeting with Osborn, Todd prepares a report for the Treasurer; he recommends that the Government immediately raise a loan of £120 000 to construct "a line of telegraph from Port Augusta to Port Darwin" if BAT agrees to land its cable at the latter place. Todd understands that Osborn is "quite willing" to make that recommendation to the company. He also adds that Queensland "should be invited to connect with us at some convenient point".⁸

21 April 1860

Stuart reaches the "Centre of Australia"

Scottish explorer John MacDouall Stuart has made several expeditions to the inland areas of Australia, each time getting further north. On his fourth expedition, his observations tell him he has reached "the centre of Australia"; he names a nearby hill Mount Sturt⁹ but the name is changed to Mount Stuart in his honour after he returns to Adelaide.¹⁰ When tenders are first called for the



*A sketch of Central Mount Stuart made by Stephen King in 1862
[State Library SA B486/22]*

construction of the OTL, part of the route will be "on Stuart's track".¹¹

24 April 1872

Patterson sends report from Daly Waters

When the rains eased and the rivers began to subside, Robert Patterson was able to leave the Roper River camp on 25 March and return to the Line. At Daly Waters he writes a message which John Roberts carries to Tennant Creek from where it is telegraphed to Adelaide, arriving three weeks later on 14 May.¹² Patterson's official report is pessimistic, highlighting delays, sickness, loss of stock, and two deaths; but other telegrams, sent privately, are less gloomy. There is "every reason to believe that the worst is past".¹³

References

1. *Brisbane Courier*, 13 May 1871, p6bc
2. *Empire* (Sydney), 13 April 1870, p4a
3. *Evening Journal*, 12 April 1870, p2b
4. *SA Register*, 20 April 1870, p4e
5. *Evening Journal*, 1 July 1870, p2c
6. *Evening Journal*, 13 April 1871, p2c
7. *Illustrated Adelaide Post*, 22 April 1871, p10a
8. *SA Register*, 25 April 1870, p5a
9. Stuart's own note, State Library SA, PRG 833/3
10. Bessie Threadgill, 1922, *South Australian Land Exploration, 1856 to 1880*, Board of Governors of the Public Library, Adelaide, p51
11. *Express and Telegraph*, 27 June 1870, p1b
12. *SA Register*, 15 May 1872, p6c
13. *Express and Telegraph*, 15 May 1872, p2c

Abbreviations:

BAT	British-Australian Telegraph Company
OTL	Overland Telegraph Line
SAG	South Australian Government
TCMC	Telegraph Construction and Maintenance Company