

On this Day: February

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

4 February 1872

Todd reaches Roper landing in Young Australian

Charles Todd gives Captain George Calder a guarantee against any loss and persuades him to take the *Omeo* across a sandbar into the Roper River, "one of the finest rivers in Australia", on 27 January. The small steamer *Young Australian* arrives on 3 February and takes Todd further upstream to the landing where construction teams have been waiting since 19 December.¹

6 February 1872

OTL Bill receives assent

Two-thirds of the OTL has been built but there are cost overruns in the project: the line is longer than Todd originally estimated and the Northern Section is more difficult than expected. Additional funds of £100 000 are needed (about \$9 million today). A Loan Bill is passed by the Lower House on 30 January² and the Upper House on 31 January;³ the Governor gives his assent on 6 February.⁴

7 February 1871

Todd addresses Philosophical Society

On the evening of Tuesday 7 February, 30 people attend the Adelaide Philosophical Society meeting in the Institute building on North Terrace. Todd reminds them that "he brought the subject of the line before the Society when the colony only thought about carrying it out". He describes the work on the line and says it is a pity that the other colonies aren't involved in the project.⁵

10 February 1871

Dr Renner appointed

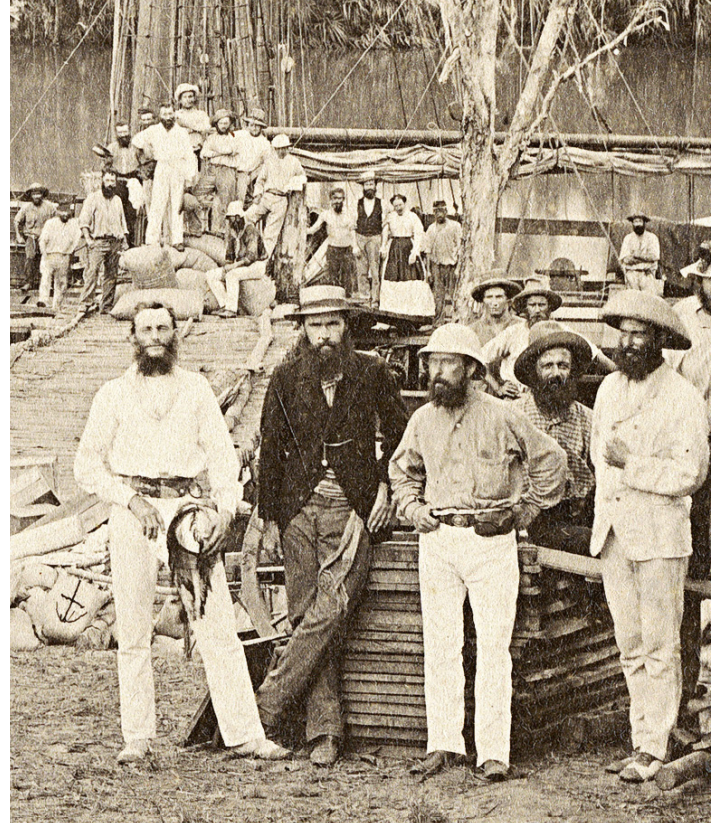
SAG appoints Dr Frederick Renner to be medical officer for the parties working on the Central Section.⁶ He sails to Port Augusta and heads inland on 21 February.⁷ Fortunately there is "little pressing need for his services"; however, his presence "has a most reassuring effect"⁸ He treats a case of scurvy (overseer Dick Knuckey says a good glass of brandy would have hastened convalescence) and, a few weeks later, a snake bite.⁹

After the completion of the OTL, Renner sets up practice in Kapunda.¹⁰ Renner Springs, NT, is named after him.¹¹

16 February 1872

Todd reports in detail from Roper

Todd prepares a report for the Chief Secretary which is sent to Adelaide via the *Omeo*. He describes the landing where Robert Patterson has built a substantial jetty. His priorities are to get provisions and materials to the



The construction crew at the Roper landing, photographed by Captain Samuel Sweet in 1872; the three men in the centre foreground are Alexander Mitchell, Robert Patterson, and Charles Todd [State Library SA PRG 742/5/87]

construction parties and to establish a horse express to bridge the gap between the two sections of wire.¹² (A telegraph operator travelled with each leading party to send messages over the completed sections.)

21 February 1872

Line open to Barrow Creek

On the morning of 21 February, William Cunningham, Acting Superintendent of Telegraphs, posts a notice at the Telegraph Office in Green's Exchange, King William Street:—"Communication on Adelaide and Port Darwin Line restored this morning. Line is now working as far as Barrow's Creek, near the north end of Section E."¹³ From 27 February, weather reports along the line as far as Barrow Creek are posted.¹⁴

Abbreviations:

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

23 February 1871

McMinn sees way through MacDonnell Ranges

Approaching from the south, the construction parties find the MacDonnell Ranges a “formidable” barrier.¹⁵ Alfred Woods has overall responsibility for getting the parties to their sections and sends Gilbert McMinn and William Mills ahead to find a suitable pass. On 18 February, McMinn climbs a hill near Simpsons Gap and believes he can see a way through which Mills will later follow.¹⁶

28 February 1872

Line working to northern end of Section E

On the afternoon of 28 February, Cunningham receives notice that, despite the heavy floods, the line to the northern end of Section E (north of Tennants Creek) is completed and working; in fact the line has been “carried on some distance beyond” into the Northern Section.¹⁷

References

- 1 *Evening Journal*, 21 March 1872, p3a
- 2 *Evening Journal*, 31 January 1872, p2g
- 3 *SA Register*, 1 February 1872, p4d
- 4 *Evening Journal*, 7 February 1872, p2g
- 5 *SA Register*, 8 February 1871, page 6bc
- 6 *SA Register*, 10 February 1871, p5c
- 7 *SA Register*, 29 March 1871, p6c
- 8 *SA Advertiser*, 15 June 1871, p2e
- 9 *SA Register*, 19 June 1871, p6b
- 10 *Kapunda Herald and Northern Intelligencer*, 3 January 1873, p2e
- 11 “Renner Springs”, *NT Place Names Register*, <ntlis.nt.gov.au/placenames/view.jsp?id=17986>
- 12 *Evening Journal*, 21 March 1872, page 3a
- 13 *Evening Journal*, 21 February 1872, p2c
- 14 *Evening Journal*, 28 February 1872, p2d
- 15 *SA Register*, 16 March 1871, p5b
- 16 *Diary of Gilbert McMinn*, State Records SA, GRG 154/8; Peter Taylor, 1980, *An End to Silence*, Methuen, Sydney, pp70-73
- 17 *SA Advertiser*, 1 March 1872, p6a