

On this Day: January

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

2 January 1872

Todd takes leave of his staff

This evening, Todd invites his staff to meet with him in the newly-completed GPO. He calls upon them to work together in his absence. There are speeches and toasts "of a most friendly character".¹

3 January 1870

BAT issues prospectus

The British Australian Telegraph Company issues its prospectus in London; the capital of £600 000 is eagerly subscribed.² BAT's purpose is to connect Australia to the expanding Indian telegraph network via a cable to be made and laid by the Telegraph Construction and Maintenance Company.³

3 January 1871

Todd provides report on OT; forwarded to England

Todd provides a progress report on the OT construction. The work has now been divided into three sections. Materials are arriving and the work parties are making good progress. "Not a hitch has occurred," he says. A copy of the report is sent to the SA Agent-General in England.⁴

3 January 1872

First message from Alice Springs; Central Section completed

Benjamin Clark signals from Alice Springs that the Central Section of the line has been completed. His instructions are to push on to the furthest point of the wire and then send someone on horseback with messages to be sent overseas via Darwin over the completed Northern Section.⁵

4 January 1872

Todd and Omeo depart Port Adelaide

The steamship *Omeo* leaves the Port Adelaide wharf on 3 January, laden with horses, materials, and stores and the supplementary construction party. It then waits at the anchorage until the next afternoon for Todd who has to oversee the despatch of the mails for England.⁶

17 January 1872

Todd at Bowen (Qld); plans horse express

Omeo reaches Bowen (between Mackay and Townsville), the furthest point of the Queensland telegraph network.⁷ It left Newcastle on 12 January after loading coal, "looking like a floating farmyard with a small colliery in its centre".⁸

⁸ Todd says his first priority will be to establish a horse express between the Central and Northern Sections.⁹



The Omeo (behind), the Young Australian, and the Bengal anchored in the Roper River, 1872, by Samuel Sweet [State Library SA B4641]

19 January 1872

SAG to raise £100 000 loan to complete the Overland Telegraph

In a speech to the newly-elected Parliament, the Governor Sir James Fergusson asks them to raise a loan for various works including £100 000 to complete the Overland Telegraph. He also informs them that he has agreed to a request from BAT to guarantee a payment of 5% on their capital from 1 January 1872 until the line is completed.¹⁰

22 January 1870

BAT applies to SAG to cross NT; orders cable

BAT writes from London seeking SA's agreement to their building a line across the NT to Normantown in Queensland, on the Gulf of Carpentaria. SAG agrees but says they would prefer a line direct from Port Augusta.¹¹ TCMC also advises SAG that they have received an order from BAT for the cable.¹²

Abbreviations:

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

25 January 1872

Tararua arrives in Adelaide from Melbourne

Because the *Omeo* cannot carry all that is needed in the NT, SAG engages the *Tararua*, a steamer operating between the east coast and New Zealand, to carry the additional stock, stores, and materials.¹³ The *Tararua* is faster and has greater capacity than the *Omeo*.¹⁴ (Ironically, the local agent is Joseph Darwent, the dismissed contractor for the Northern Section.)

In 1881, the *Tararua* sank with the loss of 131 lives, the worst civilian shipwreck in New Zealand's history.¹⁵

27 January 1872

Todd reaches Maria Island, mouth of Roper River

The *Omeo* reaches Maria Island on the morning of 27 January, 23 days after leaving Port Adelaide. Todd is met by Captain Samuel Sweet, in charge of the *Larrakeeyah* (now better known for his photographs) and later by Robert Patterson and John Little who have been camped on the island waiting the arrival of the *Omeo*.¹⁶ Little, formerly Telegraph Master at Robe, had been appointed Telegraph Master at Port Darwin in June 1871.¹⁷

30 January 1872

Tararua departs Port Adelaide for Darwin

Loaded with men, stock and stores, the *Tararua* leaves the anchorage at 4 am.¹⁸ The departure is delayed by the sudden illness of Captain James Hagley and Drew, the chief officer, has to take charge.¹⁹ The unfortunate Captain dies a few days later and flags are flown at half-mast by vessels in the Port.²⁰

References

- 1 *Evening Journal*, 3 January 1872, p3a
- 2 *Sydney Morning Herald*, 15 February 1870, p5f
- 3 *SA Register*, 16 March 1870, p5c
- 4 *Evening Journal*, 6 January 1871, p2e
- 5 *SA Advertiser*, 4 January 1872, p2d
- 6 *SA Register*, 5 January 1872, p5a
- 7 *SA Register*, 19 January 1872, p5a
- 8 *Express and Telegraph*, 14 February 1872, p2b
- 9 *SA Advertiser*, 20 January 1872, p2d
- 10 *Evening Journal*, 20 March 1872, p2g
- 11 *SA Register*, 25 April 1870, p5a
- 12 *SA Register*, 30 May 1870, p5c
- 13 *Evening Journal*, 26 January 1872, p2d
- 14 *SA Register*, 1 February 1872, p2f
- 15 *New Zealand History* website, <nzhistory.govt.nz/page/131-perish-worst-civilian-shipwreck-nz-waters>
- 16 *Evening Journal*, 21 March 1872, p3a
- 17 *Border Watch* (Mount Gambier), 3 June 1871, p2c
- 18 *Evening Journal*, 30 January 1872, p2c
- 19 *SA Advertiser*, 2 February 1872, p2h
- 20 *Express and Telegraph*, 3 February 1872, p2e