

On this Day: March

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

11 March 1871

William Mills follows route through MacDonnell Ranges

Acting on advice from Gilbert McMinn, surveyor William Mills works his way north of the first major ridge of the MacDonnell Ranges. To the east, he follows a dry river bed and finds a number of waterholes and springs, the largest of which he names the Alice Spring after Mrs Todd.¹ The reliable water supply means a telegraph station will be established here.

17 March 1862

Charles Todd proposes land line to SA Governor Daly

Todd writes to the new Governor Sir Dominic Daly saying a land line to the north coast is the best option for connecting with the international telegraph scheme being proposed by Lionel Gisborne.²

[A copy of the letter was found in 1913 by Todd's son, Dr Charles Todd, and published in the *Register*]

Todd had reported on Gisborne's scheme in 1859 and considered it the most promising; John McDouall Stuart's explorations of the interior had confirmed the possibility of an overland route.³

22 March 1871

Todd reports on "progress and prospects"

Todd receives messages from the Central Section and provides a detailed report to the Government. Many miles of poles have been cut and planted but some of the iron poles might be needed. A stone depot has been erected at the Peake. John Ross, leading the advance party, finds Stuart's 1860 message at the top of Central Mount Stuart.⁴

25 March 1872

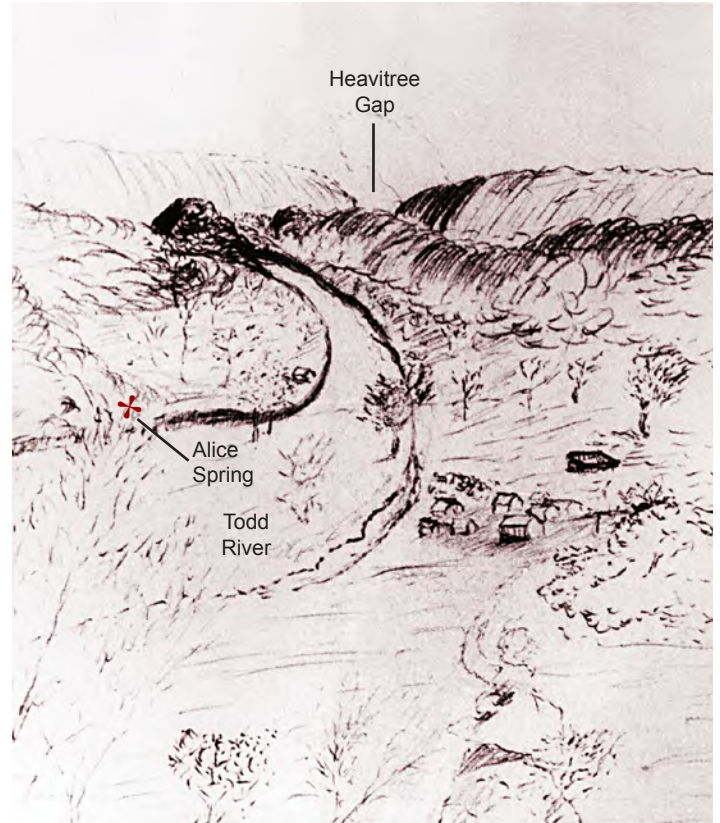
Patterson leaves Roper River for the Line

The Northern construction parties, including the reinforcements brought from Adelaide by Charles Todd, have been stuck at the Roper River camp for months. Finally, the rains ease and the waters begin to subside. Robert Patterson leaves the camp to resume construction on the Line.⁵ Todd plans to go to Port Darwin the next day on the *Young Australian* but doesn't leave until 21 April, arriving on 8 May.⁶

29 March 1870

SA Government prefers a line to Port Augusta

The SA Government tells BAT they will give the company the necessary approvals to build a landline across the



A sketch of the Alice Springs Telegraph Station, looking south towards Heavitree Gap, made in about 1874 by Gilbert McMinn; the cross marks the position of the original spring named by William Mills [State Library SA B18299]

Northern Territory to connect with the Queensland telegraph network. However, they offer to construct a line themselves from Port Augusta, thus ensuring Port Darwin is the connection point and not bypassed by an undersea cable direct to Queensland.⁷

References

- 1 *SA Register*, 20 April 1871, p5a
- 2 Letter to Governor Daly in *Register*, 28 August 1913, p6e
- 3 *SA Register*, 21 July 1859, p3h
- 4 *SA Register*, 29 March 1871, p6a-c
- 5 *SA Register*, 15 May 1872, p6c
- 6 *SA Register*, 1 June 1872, p4e
- 7 Letter from Charles to Alice, 12 May 1872 [State Library SA, PRG 630/2, letter 28]

Abbreviations:

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