



Overland Telegraph
150th Anniversary
1872-2022

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

On this Day in May

In the ot150.net Library – Key dates – May: On the 31st May 1872, Charles Todd has sailed to Port Darwin to inspect the 300 miles of the Northern Section of the Line which had been completed before work was stopped by the Wet. To inspect the rest of the Line he has to return to the Roper River camp. This journey takes half the time because Todd has purchased coal for the Young Australian's boiler, doing away with the need to stop every few days and cut timber.



Roper River Camp, 1872 - Charles Todd in dark shirt and light trousers, right foreground [SLSA B4635]

In the press

Defending the Line: In a weird echo of current global aggression, the [Adelaide Observer, 4th of April 1885](#) details the need to defend the Line and its undersea connection from attack by the Russians.

The Adelaide Observer reports:

The protection of the cable at Fort Darwin and Banjoewangie would probably be left to Admiral Tryon and the Imperial Government, who, it is understood, have been in communication on the subject. When the scare was at its height there was great alarm felt in all the colonies with regard to the cable. It was thought that Russia might land at Port Darwin, take possession of the telegraphic station there, intercept all messages from England, and by dispatching bogus messages to Adelaide conceal their presence. But by the adoption of a secret system of prefixes and affixes, to be changed every day, these tactics would be rendered impossible, and the danger now most

feared is that the Russians would cut the cable. This could only be prevented by employing war-vessels to cruise along the line of the cable and to protect the repairing ships.

Todd Corner

Todd's role in defending the Colony: In the same article outlining the defence of the OT Line, Todd is put front and centre in defending Adelaide should the Russians sail up the Gulph:

The passage would be obstructed by means of a boom, that is a strong iron chain or cable with batteries attached. Two such chains might be used, one to afford resistance if the enemy has penetrated the other. They would be moored and floated by logs, and the batteries or mines attached which, we are informed, could readily be improvised, would be exploded by electricity from the shore. This part of the arrangement would be entrusted to Mr. Todd, who has in his possession all the necessary appliances."

OT-150 Events

South Australia: The Royal Geographic Society of South Australia has a display titled "The OTL story told through the diaries of Stuart, Giles and others. Charles Todd's work as a founding member of the RGSSA". A PDF list of the Society's extensive material is [available for download](#). The display is scheduled for May to Dec 2022 with opening times Tuesday to Friday 10 am to 1 pm at the State Library of South Australia, upstairs south side of the Mortlock Wing.

Northern Territory: The Northern Territory Library and Archives is launching Derek Pugh's 'Twenty to the Mile' with a talk by the author. It is scheduled for 5 pm, 11 May 2022 at the N T Library, Parliament House

Following this event is the 2022 Barbara James Memorial Lecture titled "The Overland Telegraph Line: Connecting Australia to the World". Sponsored by the National Trust, it is scheduled for May 12 2022, 6-7 pm at the Burnett House gardens

New to the OT-150 Website

Given the amount of coverage of OT-150 in the press, the website now has a new page detailing material recently finding its way into public media. These include videos, newspaper and journal articles and even a postage stamp and a coin. James and Mark Todd featured in the [Australian newspaper on Tuesday, April 19](#). They are great great grandsons of Sir Charles. Along with their brother Julian, they are the Sydney 'connection' of the OT-150 community.

Also included on the media page are links to Derek Pugh's recent interview on Radio National's Conversations program, a teaser video by Channel 7 Adelaide for an SA History Festival titled [A Walk With Visionary Charles Todd](#), hosted by Richard Venus and Keith Conlon on May 15, and a Radio National Science Show special program titled "[A Wire Around the World](#)" with Robyn Williams talking to Julian Todd.

Featured Image

Andrew Crouch, in Telegram 12 in the OT-150 website Library relates the story of one of the most difficult parts of finding a path for the Line. It "broadly followed John McDouall Stuart's 1862 route because no other European had traversed most of the country through the centre of Australia to Port Darwin on the north coast. There was one particular problem – Stuart's men on horseback had followed a path through the rugged MacDonnell Ranges in Central Australia which was deemed too rough for wagon transport: another path through that short but challenging barrier had to be found. Bushman and pastoralist John Ross was chosen by Charles Todd in July 1870 to lead a small "flying expedition" of four men ... to search out an OTL route well in advance of the construction parties, with the particular and critical goal of finding a trafficable route through the MacDonnell Ranges.

Ross made two separate attempts.” Andrew goes on to relate the human side of finding an appropriate route and how Ross’s decisions in the matter have been a matter of controversy.

This is the view from the top of the Georgina Range, looking WSW. Ross’s 18 December campsite was at the base of this range. Alice Springs is 60 kilometres away on the far horizon, slightly left of centre.



[Photo: Andrew Crouch]

It may be "Overland" but "UnderSea" it was

Ever wondered how the telegraph messages were carried to the "mother country" after leaving our shores? An article in the [Melbourne Argus newspaper, 3 July 1872](#), page 6 outlines the complete length of the line as being 1,349 miles of land wire and 9,146 miles of undersea cable. Thus, close to 90% of the length was securely under the sea with a large percentage of the remaining land wire running through British colonial lands in the Middle East and South Asia. The Argus article lyrically outlines its path:

Australia had been joined to the great telegraphic system that now forms a loose network nearly around the globe. And thus the long line we have been following across the wreck strewn bottom of the Bay of Biscay, in the blue depths of the Mediterranean, down in the heated waters of the Red Sea, across the broad stretch of the Arabian Sea, through Central India, again plunging into the sea in the Bay of Bengal, threading the channels of the Straits of Malacca, crossing through the rich tropical scenery and amidst the towering volcanoes of Java, then once more diving down into the coral depths of the ocean, finally makes a landing on the low mangrove covered shores of North Australia.

Do you realise...

The OT was planned and built in about the same amount of time that we've been talking about COVID? It took 25 months to commission and finish the OT while COVID has featured for 26+ months in our public discourse.

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