



Historical Society of the Northern Territory

Patron: The Hon Austin Asche AC

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President's Report by Dr Brian Reid

For the past few months the Society's monthly lecture series has been suspended. The original intent of the series was to promote an awareness of, and interest in, Northern Territory history. We were obliged to move from the NT Museum and Art Gallery theatre after many years of use and took the opportunity to rethink the programme. We are now holding discussions with the Larrakeyah Branch of the NT National Trust which is located at the Myilly Point Heritage Precinct. That organisation as well, maintains a lecture series and is experiencing some of the difficulties our Society faced; declining attendance and member participation.

The vision is that we would put together a joint lecture series at Burnett House and share the effort and promotion involved. It is anticipated that the arrangement may allow us to look at other ways of recording and distributing the lectures. We hope it will enable us to provide a lecture series that is of more interest to members and the public. The discussions are aiming at a joint series for 2013.

Patron's Dinner – Wednesday 26 September – 7pm

The Patron's Dinner will be held at Christo's Restaurant on the Tipperary Waters Marina. The restaurant is in a wonderful setting overlooking the yachts and water of the marina.

The buffet will consist of an entrée of dips, a selection of calamari, fish, prawns, and Greek salads with a choice of Greek deserts. Coffee/tea is included.

The venue is licenced and drinks are extra. Cost \$40 p/p.

Our entertainment for the evening will be a talk on the Overland Telegraph Line and the recent 140th anniversary of the joining of the Line. Our speakers will be Earl James who will reminisce about his 1984 survey of the OLT line and Trevor Horman will follow-up on the 140th anniversary activities.

If you wish to attend, please send your cheque made out to the HSNT along with your details by 24 September.

Celebrating 140 Years of the Joining of the Overland Telegraph Line – 21-23 August 2012 – Engineers Heritage Australia

Representatives from the Friends of the North Australian Railway, Engineers Heritage Australia (NT, SA & VIC), the Historical Society of the NT, the Fannie Bay Historical Society, NT National Trust, the Motor Enthusiasts Club and Julian Todd, great grandson of Charles Todd, gathered at Dunmarra Roadhouse to celebrate the 140th anniversary.

In 1870, the SA Parliament passed a Bill to construct a single wire 3,178 km overland telegraph line between Adelaide and Darwin. The British and Australian Telegraph Company would lay a submarine cable from Java to Darwin which would then connect Australia with England. The responsibility for the construction of this grand and bold scheme was given to Charles Todd, SA Postmaster General. Todd's diary covering the construction of the line is gut-wrenching, heroic, and well worth the read.

The construction of the line was divided into three sections, south, midway and north. Todd had to complete the Line by 1 January 1872 or else pay a penalty of £100 for each day the line was late. Construction of the Line ended up being six months behind mainly due to the heavy and long wet season. By 1 January 1872, only the 421km section between Eley to Tennant Creek remained incomplete. To avoid the hefty fine, Todd organised a "pony express" to carry telegrams between the Line. The heat was off when the underwater cable between Java and Darwin failed. The reprieve allowed more time to complete the Line.

On 22 August 1872, Robert Patterson, the northern line contractor, joined the wires at Frew Ironstone Ponds.

Patterson wrote: "Half the party seized hold of me and the wire, and the other half of the other end, and stretched with all might and main to bring the two ends together. All our force could not do this. I then attached some binding wire to one end. The moment I brought it to the other end the current passed through my body from all the batteries on the line. I had to yell and let go. Next time I proceeded more cautiously, and used my handkerchief to seize the wire. In about five minutes I had the joint made complete, and Adelaide was in communication with Port Darwin. It would have been with England had not the [overseas] cable broken down".

The joining section is located on Hayfield station. Fifty two Oppenheimer telegraph poles with their wire remain in situ in an area of 9.8 hectares. (4.7km). A 1.5km corridor of the original line can be walked or driven under. We counted 20 poles on the route that we took.

To celebrate this incredible feat, Engineers Heritage Australia organised a fabulous two day event.

It was kicked started with a celebratory dinner at Dunmarra Wayside Inn. The menu consisted of kangaroo, buffalo, rabbit and barramundi with buckets of atmosphere and a stunning sunset.

Toasts and speeches included the January 1872 SA Parliamentary Debate followed with messages from the OLT contractors – "William Harvey", "John Lewis", and "Robert Patterson" and ending with a victory speech from "Charles Todd". Steve Sawyer had us all "rebuilding" the OLT with miniature models. The evening concluded with Earl James' account, (supported by a powerpoint presentation of digitised slides), from his 1984 survey of the OLT.

The Celebratory Dinner



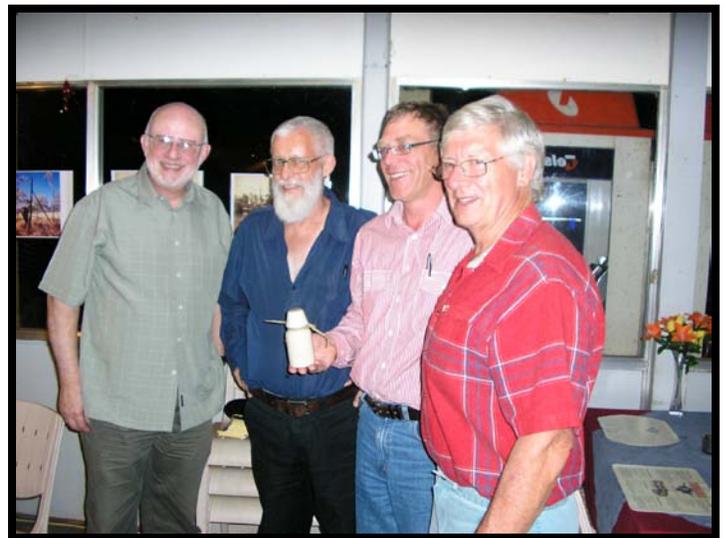
At the dinner, Lorna & Ted Mumme, Pam & Richard Venus, Wendy James, Kathleen Todd, Steve Sawyer, Julian Todd, Owen Peake, Janet & Eddie Weber



From left: Wendy James, Kathleen & Julian Todd, Earl James, Steve Sawyer & Owen Peake



Trevor Horman, Engineers Aust & Brownyn Russell, Director Engineers Aust, Northern Division



From left: Richard Venus, SA Engineers Aust; Owen Peake, Vic Engineers Aust & President of Engineering Heritage Aust; Steve Sawyer, Alice Springs Engineers Aust & Trevor Horman, Darwin Engineers Aust

The following morning involved plaquing ceremonies and interesting forays into the bush. First, on the agenda was a visit to Frew Ironstone Ponds which is on Hayfield Station. On arrival at the station we were greeted by the manager and got to watch the stockmen mustering by horse and motorbike and loading cattle onto trucks.



Hayfield Station stockyards

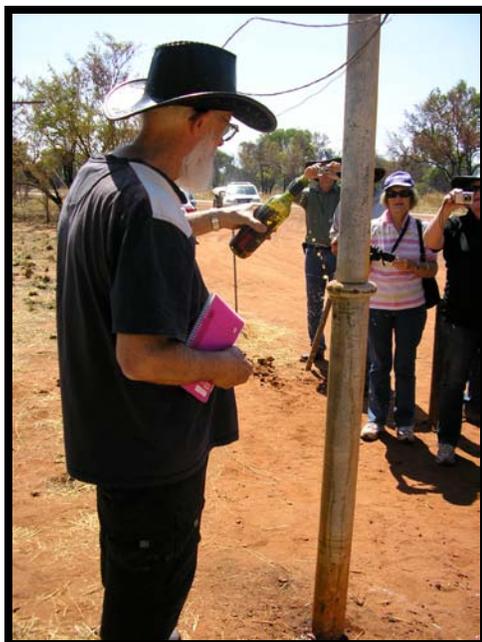


Motor Enthusiasts Club members, Ted and Lorna Mumme at Frew Ironstone Ponds

Charles Todd Memorial Obelisk

Next stop was at the Todd Memorial Obelisk (30km south of Dunmarra) on the Stuart Highway to mark the exact time that the wires were joined.

John Lewis who was the “pony express” rider, described the joining celebration at the time: “On 22 August, I went with Patterson and Mitchell to a point a few miles east of Frew’s Ironstone Ponds, where the two ends of the wire were to be joined, connecting Adelaide with Port Darwin. We met Will Harvey who told us the wires would not be joined until 12 o’clock, so we returned to camp, then made for the last join and arrived there at about 12 o’clock. At ten minutes past twelve on 22 August, 1872, the wires were really joined. Twenty-one shots were fired from our Colt revolvers, and a bottle of supposed brandy was broken over the last post (I think it was cold tea)”



To reenact the celebration that took place 140 years ago at the exact same time, Owen Peake poured the brandy over the Oppenheimer telegraph pole and party poppers and Trevor’s cap gun fired the 21 gun salute.

Next was the unveiling of the new Engineers Heritage Australia interpretive sign - Bronwyn Russell and Julian Todd had this honour. Champagne toasts out of "A" type insulators followed with a congratulatory message from the Morsecodians.



Bronwyn Russell & Julian Todd unveiling the sign

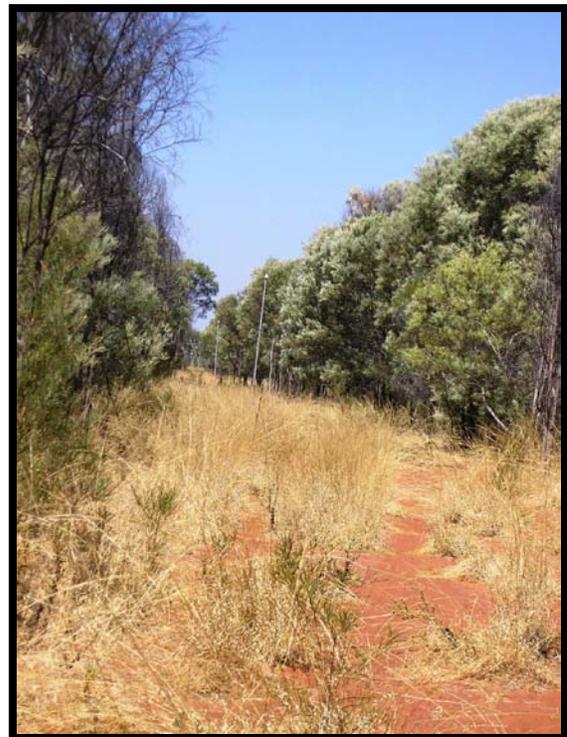


The OLT groupies who gathered to mark the occasion

The joining point and remnants of the OLT Line run parallel to the Stuart Highway, about 2km behind the Todd memorial. There is only 4WD access which meant a bit of good fun bush bashing.



Oppenheimer telegraph pole 4E28 where the joining took place. The original pole was timber but due to the white ant problem, the timber poles were gradually replaced with Oppenheimer poles from 1873 onwards.



A section of the 1.5km corridor of the OLT Line. Oppenheimer telegraph poles can be seen in the distance



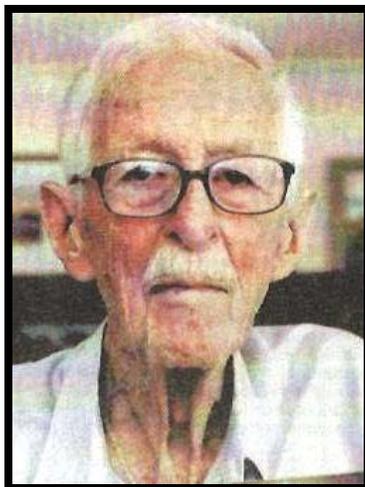
Engineers Heritage Australia commemorated the anniversary with the erection of an interpretive sign outlining the significance of Pole 4E28.

In the picturesque and tranquil surroundings of the bush, all formal proceedings were now concluded. The OLT group then retired to where you might expect - back at the pub.

Thanks to the great efforts of Engineers Heritage Australia and the team that made the two day event a memorable occasion.

Information on the history of the Overland Telegraph Line was obtained from Engineers Australia, *Nomination for Engineering Heritage Recognition: The Overland Telegraph Line "Joining Point", Frew Ponds, Northern Territory*, June 2012 & Department of Natural Resources, Environment, The Arts and Sport, Heritage Branch, *Frew Ponds Overland Telegraph Line Memorial Reserve*, April 2012.

Vale Jack Mulholland



Many of you would know Jack who was one of Darwin's colourful characters. Jack died in August after a long illness. He was 92 and was one of the last surviving Darwin Defenders.

Gunner Mulholland was only 20 when he manned an anti-aircraft gun during the bombing of Darwin on 19 February 1942. He said that he was "scared stiff" during the raids when 500 pound bombs were falling around him.

Jack was instrumental having the Darwin Defenders recognised in their war effort and he fought to keep the East Point Military Museum where it was when the Labor NT Government wanted to build a new one near Parliament House.

In 2007, one of Jack's books *Darwin Bombed: An Anti-Aircraft Gunner's Reflections* was nominated for the Chief Minister's NT History Book Award.

Information and photograph taken from *Sunday Territorian*, 19 August 2012.