Occasional Papers No. 11

PIONEERS OF THE OLD TRACK
Oodnadatta — Alice Springs
1870 — 1929

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Map grid Nos inserted.
This is the first known road map of the track from
Oodnadatta to
Arltunga
and
WINNECHE'S DEPOT
GOLDFIELDS.

Robt. S. Frearson,
PUBLISHER,
MINING AND ADVERTISING
AGENT.
ALFRED CHAMBERS, CURRIE ST.
ADELAIDE.

Guide and Handbook to
the Arltunga and
Winneche's Depot
Goldfield. MacDonnell
Ranges, South Australia.
(Adealaide 1903).
INTRODUCTION

The first bush track, hereafter designated the 'TRACK', from Northern South Australia to the MacDonnell Ranges, used by packhorse, dray and wagon, was plotted by the teamsters hauling the equipment and supplies for the construction of the 1870-1872 Overland Telegraph Line from Port Augusta to Port Darwin. The construction of this Telegraph Line was the sole responsibility of the South Australian Government and as it traversed what was until 1911 the Northern Territory of South Australia, the same Government also had responsibility for the costly administration in this undeveloped Territory.

In the section now under consideration, the teamsters with the construction team, as did those who followed during the next sixty years, soon learned the places to avoid on sandhills, boggy ground and riverbed quicksand. The Track underwent changes that were always influenced by proximity to water. Due to this necessity, there were areas where the Track deviated a considerable distance from the Telegraph Line. When they found water near the surface in riverbeds, the Telegraph construction workers put down shallow wells. However, these wells and river waterholes frequently evaporated or became undrinkable through salinity. Due to this uncertainty, lone travellers and numbers of animals perished in a drought stricken land.

THE ROUTE

The Surveyors made very little change from the route blazed across Central Australia by the great explorer McDouall Stuart during his three crossings of the Centre between 1860 and 1862. Without using the map grid references, the simplest description of the route under consideration is to relate it, using a suitable atlas, to the OLD Ghan railway. The township of Oodnadatta was established in 1891 as the temporary terminus of 'The Great Northern Railway' which, in general, followed the Telegraph Line and the Track through the northern Flinders Ranges to Hergott Springs (Marree); then west past the southern edge of Lake Eyre, before turning NW to Oodnadatta.

The construction of the railway from Oodnadatta to Alice Springs was completed in August 1929. By this time the grand title, 'The Great Northern Railway', was no longer in use. The Marree to Oodnadatta train had been affectionately known for many years as 'The Ghan'; so thirty-eight years later, it was THE GHAN that finally reached Alice Springs. From the Angle Pole to the Finke River, the 1929 Ghan railway was constructed on the west side of the Telegraph Line. At the Finke, the Railway crossed the Telegraph and the Track and continued on the east side of both to Alice Springs.

In 1870, at the time of construction, a special ANGLE POLE (still known as THE ANGLE POLE) marked the change to the more northerly direction of the Telegraph. This Pole, and the nearby waterholes on the north branch of the Neales River, indicated a major goal for travellers and a good camping place. Close to this camping spot, the township of Oodnadatta was erected.

Prior to the construction of the 1891 railway to Oodnadatta, the teamsters and travellers had a journey of up to 1,400 kilometres from Port Augusta to the Alice Springs Telegraph Station. From 1891, for the next thirty-eight years, they still had a journey of almost 600 kilometres to the Alice Springs Telegraph Station, traversing some of the worst terrain on the Overland route to Darwin.

The Telegraph Line and the Track passed over stony plains as far as Charlotte Waters, and across sandy country to the Finke. The few waterholes on the Stevenson and its tributaries, and the Dalhousie Springs, kept the Track on the east side of the Telegraph Line until both converged on Charlotte Waters Repeater Station. To keep near the Finke River, the Track
Charlotte Waters Telegraph Station foundations. The original building had an enclosed courtyard on the same plan as the main building at Alice Springs. Unlike Alice Springs this one had an underground rain water tank inside the courtyard, the top of which was above ground level, as is seen in this picture. There were also galvanised rain water tanks, one of which is seen 'in situ' on the left side of this photo. The trees seen in the top right hand corner of the photo mark the site of the Bore, Windmill and the (later) Pump.

The old Bore at Charlotte Waters is no longer in use. The water holes on the Coglin Creek, named after Lady Charlotte Bacon, are behind the trees in this picture.
once more continued east of the Telegraph till both again converged and crossed the Finke near its junction with Lilla Creek.

From this crossing near Lilla Creek, the Telegraph and the Track remained on the east side of the Finke. From Horseshoe Bend both crossed the notorious Depot Sandhills to the junction of the Finke and the Hugh River. Thereafter, with repeated crossings from side to side, they followed the Hugh through the Waterhouse Range. There they left the river and continued NE into the MacDonnell Ranges through Temple Bar Gap, now erroneously named Honeymoon Gap, and so to the Telegraph Station.

However, from the beginning, camels were able to leave the Hugh River at Francis Creek (Maryvale Station) and travel the 100 km or more of waterless country on a shorter route through Heavitree Gap to the Telegraph Station.

This 'main road' from the Angle Pole/Oodnadatta to Alice Springs remained a bush track for the sixty years of its existence. For the whole of that time the teamsters were almost the sole road makers. There is only one known instance of an official construction improvement to the Track. In the eighties, the Government initiated a significant program for the supply of permanent water at major points on the Track, by sinking bores south of the Finke, and deep wells on the north. It was not due to discrimination that the bores ended at Charlotte Waters — it was impossible to haul massive boring equipment across the Finke River.

Due primarily to the 1887 discovery of gold at Arltunga, and the great increase in 'traffic', it was obvious that wells on the 100 km waterless track from Maryvale to the MacDonnell Ranges would cut days from the travelling time to Arltunga and Alice Springs. In 1888, to meet this need, a government well-sinking party under a man named Ryan put down a well, known ever since as 'Deep Well'. To give access on this route to the next water at the Ooraminna Rock Hole, Ryan's men made a cutting in a 'jump-up' in the Ooraminna Range known as the
‘Pinch’. This cutting was so inadequate that a complaint to the Minister responsible by a teamster named Harding, resulted in some authorised repair work. On 30 April 1895 the Alice Springs Telegraph Master, F J Gillen, sent a memo to Adelaide, stating: *Ooraminna Gap completed in ten days, wages £7.10 [S14.20] — A thorough good job.* Thereafter this shorter route became the first major alternative to the original track along the Hugh River.

After passing through the Ooraminna Range the track branched, with one leading to the Telegraph Station through Heavitree Gap, and the other NE to the Arltunga gold fields. Strangely, the Telegraph Line remained on the Hugh River route until 1899 when it was rerouted from Maryvale through Heavitree Gap.

When the Railway finally arrived in 1929, it followed the 1899 Telegraph Line through Heavitree Gap to the town. We need to remember that this town was, by a South Australian Government proclamation on 30 November 1889, named Stuart! On 31 August 1933, by a Commonwealth Government proclamation, it was officially changed to Alice Springs!

The completion of the modern Stuart Highway from Port Augusta via Coober Pedy is far to the west from the original track until it passes over it at the Hugh River. From Alice Springs to Darwin it is generally close to the track of the great explorer whose name it bears.

The road from Abminga through Charlotte Waters to Finke township, and between Temple Bar (Honeymoon Gap) and Alice Springs, are the only sections of the Old Track still in public use. Much of the remainder is no longer discernible.

HAZARDS AND COMFORTS ON THE TRACK, 1870 - 1929

During the 1870s, the explorers Ernest Giles, Gosse, and Major Warburton travelled the Track using the Charlotte Waters Repeater Station for rest and refreshment. Prior to the Arltunga gold rush of 1888, there was NOWHERE north of the Flinders Ranges where travellers could purchase provisions — a thousand kilometres or more to a store!

Even after 1891 the journey from Oodnadatta to the Alice Telegraph Station took two weeks for a buggy or coach, three or four weeks for pack horses and camels and a month to three months for wagons. As chaff or other fodder was unobtainable, all animals were dependent on bush herbage which, except after good rain, was always eaten out along the Track. Horse riders, drovers and camels would leave the Track to feed and camp near better bush-grazing along the rivers.

All vehicles were compelled to keep to the beaten track. Consequently, in the frequent drought years, most vehicles were withdrawn, including Kidman’s camel wagons. When operating, the coach carried the mail either the whole distance or to Horseshoe Bend. Coaches were governed, not only by absence of feed on the Track, but also by economic viability. Under these conditions, camels or packhorse mailmen replaced the coach.

The frequency of the mail was governed by the arrival or not of the fortnightly passenger train from Adelaide, or by floods on the Finke! Fortuitous rain or summer floods could delay any form of transport for weeks, especially vehicles. There were occasions when drovers had to camp near water for months waiting for rain to commence, or less frequently, to cease!

The Arltunga gold rush of 1888 prompted several enterprising individuals to establish bush stores along the Track and provide meals for travellers. Some only lasted during the first ‘rush’ to Arltunga and faded away with the disillusionment that followed. Three that endured are noted in this paper.

BLOODS CREEK, some 120 km north of Oodnadatta, with two waterholes, was from the beginning a good camping place. I do not know who built the first bush store but it passed
through several owners, the more reputable ones providing meals, limited accommodation and friendly assistance to travellers. One proprietor imported a piano and organised social evenings for travellers.

At the other extreme, when F J Gillen and Baldwin Spencer called there in 1901, Gillen noted in his camp jottings:

... a miserable little store and eating house and grog shanty. Kept by a man named Harvey. Found half a dozen men there including the proprietor all more or less drunk — principally more. We moved on to the creek where we camped.

In 1901 the Government put down a 2002 ft bore at Bloods Creek and a giant windmill to reach the hot sub-artesian water which rose within 140 feet of the surface. One unknown traveller died at Bloods Creek. The late Billie McCoy helped bury him. They only had enough whisky crates to make a short coffin with an open end. They buried the deceased with his legs sticking out of the end!

On a more cheerful note, John Bailes, the boring contractor who put down the Bloods Creek bore, later retired there and established a garden oasis and a fine goat herd. All that remains today is the giant windmill turning uselessly in the wind, a few scattered chimney stones and a low mound of ancient Angora goat dung!

CROWN POINT, originally an early cattle station bush homestead, abandoned around 1901 for a new site downstream, was soon after taken over as a store by Ephraim Sommerfield. This building was on the Finke at Crown Point where the Telegraph Line was rerouted in 1881 to cross the river at the point where it flows through a great gorge in the range. The Track followed the Line through this Crown Point crossing, but, due to the high banks and cliff on either side, travellers were compelled to keep to the wide bed of the river for at least three kilometres before they could get out on the opposite bank!

During the twenties, unless the sand was damp and hard, motorists had to bed the wheel tracks with coconut matting, occasionally for the whole distance! Why they abandoned the 300 metre 1870 crossing upstream, just to save time, is anyone's guess. It is assumed that heavy wagons continued to use the original crossing.

All that remains to mark human habitation at this dramatic Crown Point crossing are a few stones from the original building, and, hidden in the dense scrub, the lonely grave of the Sommerfield's little girl.

HORSESHOE BEND is a cattle station upstream from Crown Point. For many years the second owners, Sergeant and Elliot, conducted a hotel at their homestead on the east bank of the Finke. It was situated near the entry of the Telegraph Line and Track across the Depot Sandhills to the junction of the Hugh and Finke Rivers. It was here that Pastor Strehlow spent his last hours in 1922, after enduring a 250 km journey by buggy down the Finke from Hermannsburg, in an attempt to seek medical help in Adelaide. His grave is at Horseshoe Bend. The 1929 railway, and new tracks further west, left the old Track to fade into history.

OVERLANDERS

W WHITFIELD MILLS, the officer in charge of the section through the MacDonnell Ranges, informed Todd on 12 December 1870 of his progress:

To the Lady Charlotte Waters . . . the greatest obstacle we met was with the stony nature of the country, the whole of its plains, hills and tableland being

half a dozen = 6
2002 feet = 610 metres
140 feet = 43 metres
one mass of stones; ... the drays being necessarily detained for 2 or 3 days whilst the country was being explored, advantage was taken of these delays to tire the wheels, shoe horses, cue bullocks and many other necessary jobs.

To 'cue' bullocks, the 'farrier' nailed a pair of half shoes to a bullock's divided hoof, the bovine equivalent of shoeing a horse. 'Charlotte Waters', just across the border in NT, was named after Lady Charlotte Bacon; the 'Ianthe' of a poem by Lord Byron. Her son, Harley Bacon, was officer in charge of the providoring on the Telegraph Line. Charlotte Waters Repeater Station was roughly midway between the Peake (south of Oodnadatta) and Alice Springs Stations.

Mills made two significant discoveries - the first suitable route for drays through the MacDonnell ranges, and:

... a river bed with numerous waterholes and springs, the principal of which is the Alice Spring which I had the honour of naming after Mrs Todd.

CROWN POINT, on the south-west side of the Finke, is the highest point on either side of what was originally known as Cunningham Gorge. This photo was taken from the north-east side of the crossing and upstream from where the high shoulder of Crown Point, seen on the left, comes down to the south-west edge of the Finke.

BENJAMIN CLARKE was the officer in charge of operations between Charlotte Waters and the Alice Springs Repeater Stations, then under construction. One of his party, Kraegan, was anxious to go ahead to contact Todd. Clarke's diary of December 1871 tells the tale:

As it was considered unsafe for less than three to go along, it was thought best for Messrs Kraegan, Muller and Watson to go ahead on horseback with two packhorses so that they would be able to get things in advance in readiness for the Instruments and Batteries on our arrival.

Benjamin Clarke followed with their heavy wagonload of equipment and rations, inspecting the line as he travelled. While waiting near the junction of the Finke and Hugh Rivers for the wagon, Watson and Muller returned with the disturbing news that Kraegan had gone ahead looking for water and had not returned, nor could they find him.
This photo was taken from the high shoulder of Crown Point looking directly across the river to the high cliff on the north-east side of the river. The 4-wheel-drive vehicle is facing downstream and is at least 2 km from the point upstream where the travellers could leave the riverbed on the north-east side of the Finke en route to Horseshoe Bend. Afghans were the first to use this shorter crossing which once bore the name — Afghan Crossing.

Several days later they found Kraegan’s body not far from water. He had perished from thirst! He was the first white man to die on the Track from thirst, but not the last. A lone foot traveller threw away his empty water bag and died in the lee of a big sandhill ignorant of the proximity of Horseshoe Bend a few hundred metres away on the other side! Kraegan, unlike most of the unnumbered others who perished and lie in unknown graves, is remembered by a gravestone where he died.

RALPH MILNER was the first drover on the Telegraph Line. In 1870 he set out with his brother John and eight other men with an estimated 4 300 sheep to win a $4 000 award for the first drover to take a mob of sheep across the Centre to Darwin. At great cost he succeeded but, because of a change of Government in SA, never collected the award!

Milner arrived at the Finke crossing as it came down in flood. Ashwin, Milner’s head stockman, recorded the crossing in his diary:

We camped there for five weeks and then tried to cross the sheep. The Finke a quarter of a mile wide and up to our arm pits, the sheep had to swim all the way… When the first lot of sheep got in the edge… about 100 of them went to their bellies in the quick-sand and it took a long time for us to work [i.e. tramp] the water out of the sand and loosen their legs but after we got them out it settled down hard and firm. We had a few goats and we found them very useful to lead the sheep… the current took the sheep downstream and we had

* a quarter of a mile = 400 metres
Ralph Milner's wife died not long before he undertook this great droving feat. A second tragedy struck with the murder of his brother John at Attack Creek; then a lesser one later, with the loss of 1 500 sheep near the Devils Marbles from eating the poisonous Gastrolobium. On the credit side, Milner saved the flood-bound Telegraph construction party, near the Roper River, from a diet of damper by selling 1 000 sheep for $2 500 to Patterson, the Supervisor. In spite of all his losses, thanks to lambing during the long trek, Ashwin estimated that he still had 2 000 sheep. It is assumed that he sold them in Darwin.

**BAGOT, SMITH AND GILBERT**

Edward Mead Bagot, head of the firm of E B Bagot, Cattle and Commission Agents, Adelaide, secured Lease Nos 1 and 2 in the Northern Territory of South Australia on 1 April 1872. These were situated in the MacDonnell Ranges surrounding the Telegraph Station. The original No. 2 is still a part of Undoolya Station. On 14 March that year, Bagot's son Ted, his stepson Churchill Smith and William Gilbert, the son of Joseph Gilbert, who held the second NT leases, Nos 3-5, drove 1 000 head of cattle to the MacDonnell Ranges.

They had wagons and drays carrying provisions, tools for building construction and repairs to harness and wagons, horseshoes, iron for repairing and fabricating new equipment, drovers and bush carpenters and a blacksmith — the technician of the bush. The leaders were young adventurers. Ted celebrated his 24th birthday on the track and Churchill Smith his 21st. In nine months these three young men not only completed one of the great droving feats in pioneering Australia but were responsible for establishing the first two authorised cattle stations in the Northern Territory.

*The Finke River at Horseshoe Bend is seen from the Homestead on the east side of the river. Though the original track over the Depot Sandhills on the east remained in regular use, from around 1915 some travellers avoided the Depot Sandhills by crossing the Finke at this point and following it upstream to recross it and rejoin the original track along the Hugh River to Maryvale.*
Churchill Smith worked on the Alice Springs section of the Telegraph Line before returning home to navigate this expedition, during which he kept a daily diary.

October 5 - Mr Todd and all his party arrived here in the evening. Had a jocund evening, all hands including Mr Todd singing.

October 23 - Went as far as the Angle Pole and camped on the Neales Creek.

November 10 - Mr Goss's exploring party arrived here today on their way to the MacDonnell Ranges.

November 24 - Went to Bloods Creek. Major Warburton was camped here fancying he was on the Abminga.

December 25 - Had a jolly spread... comprised of Roast Beef, Soup, Blanche Mange and Plum Duff. 2 Bottles of Brandy and 2 dozen 'home-made beer. (They were camped near the Charlotte Waters Repeater Station for Christmas)

March 21 - No water, went on in moonlight. Arrived Fen's Gap at daylight, and then to Temple Bar and camped.

Ted Bagot and Churchill Smith continued on to Emily Gap, on the Bagot Lease, where they established their initial camp. Bagot returned south with some of their men to bring up another mob of bullocks, while Smith and his men commenced building the first 'Undoolya Homestead'. Churchill Smith's diary contains a day by day record of the construction of the first Northern Territory cattle station homestead.

ALFRED AND ARTHUR GILES

Alfred, Arthur and Christopher Giles, sons of a pioneer pastoralist, all volunteered to work on the Overland Telegraph Line. Alfred initially went with John Ross on his unsuccessful exploration to find a better route for the Telegraph than the McDouall Stuart track. During this expedition he and his namesake, the explorer Ernest Giles, met for the first and probably the only time.

In 1873 and again in 1875, at Todd's request, he overlanded 5 000 sheep to supply the repeater stations as far north as The Shackle on Yam Creek. While crossing the Depot Sandhills in 1873 the front wheels of a wagonette collapsed. Using a handsaw, Giles cut the body in half and moved the back wheels forward to make a dray with shafts cut from two saplings. This was a typical improvisation essential to survival.

In 1877 he and brother Arthur were engaged by Dr W J Browne, an SA pastoralist, to stock his NT leases to be administered from 'Springvale', on the Katherine River. The detailed planning and organisation for the cattle drive under Arthur Giles was remarkable, requiring over forty men, including a surveyor who was also the financial manager. Arthur Giles set out in October 1877 with the cattle, and Alfred the following year with the sheep. The sheep travelled faster than the cattle, taking 14 months while the cattle, held up by drought, took 20 months to reach the Katherine River in June 1897.

Alfred Giles said that he was astonished by the magnitude of the venture:

I found that he had already purchased some 2 500 highly bred cattle... from the River Darling and these had been travelled right down the Darling and Murray rivers to Nor West Bend — now Morgan — ... and the herd had already been started on its long journey across the continent to the Katherine River some 1 800 miles.*

The party was also provided with ploughs and scoops and also an Abyssinian pump, the idea being to plough and scoop out long wide trenches in the sandy bed of the Finke, Hugh and other rivers enroute, where the water is only three

* 2 dozen = 24
1800 miles = 2896 kilometres
or four feet* under the surface, and the trench so formed would be about 100 yards** long and ten feet* wide and would permit the cattle or sheep to drink. A well-sinking party was equipped to proceed a way in advance to sink wells in likely places and light iron troughs were carried with which to water the stock at the wells.

The cattle were divided into mobs of about 500 each, each with a man in charge and three stockmen and a cook who had to drive the ration cart, with cooking utensils and men’s swags. A small 25 gallon*** tank was also fitted to the tailboard of the cart to supply the party with water on a dry stage. Each party was therefore complete in itself, but the supply wagons, bullocks and horse teams would, as they passed each mob, supply them with rations and then go right ahead and camp until each mob passed them again, and so on...

All told they numbered some forty men and sometimes more.

As it transpired, this masterly organisation was particularly relevant due to drought south of the MacDonnell Ranges. Brown suggested 30 000 sheep but was soon convinced by Giles that droving such numbers over arid country, and the uncertainty about sheep in the tropics, was courting possible disaster. Alfred Giles then set out with 12 000 sheep, 800 bullocks, 18 stud bulls and a number of stallions, and an estimated thirty-five men (minimum) as drovers, teamsters, camp cooks, etc.

Giles established a camp at Charlotte Waters and shore the sheep. He built a platform on which to stack the wool-packs which were left for back-loading by teamsters returning south!

**Mrs William Hayes**

William and Mary Hayes were engaged by Thomas Elder to construct fencing and sink dams on his Maryvale Station. They set out in 1884 with their family of four boys and two girls. The youngest boy, Edward, was a baby in arms. They travelled with five bullock wagons, three loaded with stores and all their household possessions, and two more with fencing wire, scoops, harness and all tools necessary for survival. They were several months on the journey which took them over the 1870 Finke crossing, the Depot Sandhills and the seven crossings on the Hugh before they arrived at Maryvale.

By 1895, William Hayes had taken over the first of Elder’s abandoned leases, to continue until, in his lifetime, the Hayes family had become the most successful station owners in Central Australia. The Hayes men and women worked as a team, with the women sharing in the stock work.

One drought they shifted cattle to the Diamantina where they bought a flock of sheep. The boys returned home with the cattle, while Mrs Hayes and her daughters drove more than a thousand sheep the 600 kilometres to Maryvale. Mrs Hayes walked the whole distance with the sheep. On one occasion the sheep became bogged and years later, Mrs Hayes, talking to a reporter, said:

*I lost my boots in the bog, but we got the sheep home, although some of them went cranky eating poison plants... we bred from the flock, shore them, then Elizabeth and I drove them to Oodnadatta. The wild dogs compelled us to give up the sheep.*

She was born Mary Stratford, in a tent on the banks of the Torrens when Adelaide was still a village. The early pioneer women who travelled that same track were few in number but none to equal Mrs William Hayes. She was a most worthy forerunner of the small band of women

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1 foot = 30.48 centimetres
100 yards = 91 metres
25 gallons = 115 litres
who established the solidarity of family life amongst the dispersed and fragmented male communities of last century.

This essay only permits space for representatives of each category of traveller. Mesdames Gillen, Bradshaw, Stott, Ross, Standley and Price all lifted community standards and experienced the vicissitudes of the Track.

Mrs Price was the first lone woman to establish a Centralian station. Prior to his death, her husband was Telegraph Master (1916 - 1924) at Alice Springs. In 1924, while they were on holiday in Adelaide, Fred Price died leaving his widow with five children, four of whom were under sixteen.

Mrs Price returned to Oodnadatta with the four youngest children and a mob of sheep trucked by train from Burra. She collected her buggy and horses, purchased three camels and a dray, and set out for home. Syd, an Aborigine who worked for the Price family, handled the dray and camels. Mrs Price drove the buggy with her two young boys, organised the sheep camps and handled the chores for each night as they headed home. Her teenage daughters walked with the sheep from camp to camp on the six weeks' journey from Oodnadatta to Alice Springs; then to the small undeveloped station lease her husband had purchased in preparation for retirement (Harper's Springs, near Ti Tree).

THE MINERS

The Arltunga gold brought an estimated 200 prospectors to the fields in 1888. Considering the hazards of the 1 400 kilometre desert track from Port Augusta, this was a big number. No-one knows how many died on the way. The almost constant shortage of water at Arltunga compelled miners to use dry-blowing to separate the specks of gold from sand and stones, and numbers began to decline.

Hope was renewed when a local teamster was engaged to haul the first boiler for the battery installed at Arltunga in 1897. Woolcock, the manager, sent several reports to Adelaide stating that the boiler made very bad loading ... and in many places he has to form the road himself to prevent the load upsetting. However, in 1901 this second-hand boiler blew up.

The Government acted quickly in securing a replacement boiler. With new hope, the Mine Manager reported a population increase from 92 to 135.

A 'Cornish' boiler was dispatched by rail to Oodnadatta. The Old Timers Museum in Alice Springs has a photo of this massive boiler and the forty-horse team. The boiler was mounted on its own undercarriage and judging from the height of the men in the photo it must have reached 3 metres above the ground. Larry Rosenbaum, an Arltunga horse breeder, was possibly the contractor as it seems the horses were his. Steve Adams, Fred Raggatt, Charlie South with Larry comprised the human team. On the good sections they would use a twenty-horse team and rotate the teams each day or half day. When the wagon was on the long sections between water, this would also allow the 'horse tailer' to take half the team back, or forward, to the water. The four men would be fully occupied.

It is almost certain that they used the 1870 Finke crossing where, compared with Crown Point, they would have a short distance of 300 metres, or less, to bed down with logs to construct a 'corduroy' crossing.

There were seven shorter but equally difficult crossings on the Hugh River, prior to leaving it at Maryvale for the Arltunga turn-off. Every river crossing would have to be corduroyed —
fortunately there were dense forests of saplings among the bigger rivergums to supply their needs. Photographic evidence proves that lightweight saplings laid down by previous teamsters would not carry this enormous weight of approximately 40 tons*.

William Coulthard, the second with the same Christian name, then in Central Australia, recalled meeting Larry Rosenbaum at the Ooraminna Rockhole in January 1902. He had forty horses and a wagon taking the big boiler up to Arltunga cyanide works: used to do about three miles** a day. Oral history records the incidence of heavy rain and boggy ground, which added to the heavy haulage necessary over sandhills, riverbeds and up the hills. On many occasions the great iron wheels of the undercarriage would sink so deep, it is remarkable that forty horses as one team could move the load.

The average of three miles** a day confirms the estimate made from the mine manager's reports that it took a minimum of five months from Oodnadatta to Arltunga, and over three of these to get as far as the Arltunga turn-off at the Ooraminna Range.

Hauling this load up the Ooraminna Pinch was the second amazing feat. When Gillen's contractors repaired this cutting they chipped footholds in the rock, which are still clearly discernible. Several years ago the late Ted Hayes of Undoolya and I spent several hours at the Pinch discussing the logistics of hauling that load up that 3 metre wide steep cutting, made more difficult by a crown and bend at the top.

Both of us, as young men, had experience with horse teams. We agreed that due to the crown at the top it would only be possible to use all the horses by hooking half of them in tandem and pulling on a separate linkage from the wagon undercarriage. Even with the chipped foot grips, the horses could only haul this load up by a series of short bursts using maximum horse power and chocking the wheels to rest the team every few metres. This boiler can still be seen 'in situ' at Arltunga — a memorial to the men who hauled it there.

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*40 tons = 40.64 tonnes
**3 miles = 5 kilometres
A GOVERNOR SETS NINETEENTH CENTURY RECORD ACROSS AUSTRALIA

In 1891 Lord Kintore, the Governor of South Australia, travelling by ship from Adelaide, arrived at Port Darwin on 22 March. The following extract is from his report to the Rt Hon Lord Knutsford, Colonial Office, London:

Leaving Palmerston on 8 April, accompanied by Dr E C Stirling, we proceeded by railway to Pine Creek, a distance of 146 miles. From thence to the head of the Great Northern Railway at Oodnadatta, a distance of 1,227 miles, we rode or drove. Oodnadatta was reached without serious accident on 20 May, and Adelaide on 23rd.

My journey, although the most rapid which has been made across the Australian Continent, afforded me abundant opportunities of seeing how numerous and valuable are the resources of the Northern Territory.

That I was able to accomplish a journey of 1,227 miles from railway to railway in 38 travelling days, over a track often indistinguishable and frequently for long distances without water, speaks well for the completeness of the arrangements. The fatigues of the journey were shared with me by Dr Stirling, whose scientific attainments in geology and ethnology are widely known... made his companionship of great value, and added materially to the interest of my journey.

The staff of the Overland Telegraph, with horses or buggies, conveyed Lord Kintore and Dr Stirling from each repeater station to the next, and so to Oodnadatta, in this last century record-breaking time. The old Ghan took three days from Oodnadatta to Adelaide! It travelled by day and stopped overnight at Marree and Quorn.

These documented records of some of the pioneer travellers on the old Oodnadatta to Alice Springs Track demonstrate how they overcame the hazards of the testing conditions by adjusting to the 'pace' in the harsh land. This not only required the ability to read the 'signs' but the temperament that accepts the discipline the land imposes upon man. Those who came to stay were the battlers who, as C T Madigan said, 'always travelled hopefully'. In Central Australia, the accolade belongs to McDouall Stuart.

Stuart was a member of Charles Sturt's 1844-46 expedition. During his final return journey across the Stony Desert, Charles Sturt found his outward bound waterholes were, unexpectedly, completely dry. On the day when the condition of both man and horse ended hope of survival Sturt recorded, with emotion:

Suddenly a pigeon... passing us like lightening, it pitched for a moment on the plain, about a quarter of a mile from us and then flew away... Mr Stuart had marked the spot and there was water... I leave it to make its own impression on the reader.

McDouall Stuart's uncanny ability to read the signs the desert teaches those who have 'eyes to see', saved their lives. McDouall Stuart lived to make the 1872 Overland Telegraph a reality for Australia. A desert pigeon made this possible! John McDouall Stuart, alone, read the sign!
END NOTES

1. The Angle Pole (Oodnadatta): 27° 33' S 135° 26' E
2. Hamilton Bore: 26° 39' S 135° 20' E
3. Bloods Creek:
   There were waterholes in both areas prior to the sinking of a deep bore at each place.
   Hamilton was artesian and Bloods Creek sub-artesian.

5. Finke Crossing (Lilla Ck):
   25° 29' S 134° 15' E
7. Waterhouse Range exit: 24° 00' S 133° 26' E
8. Francis Well (Maryvale): 24° 41' S 134° 04' E
10. Finke Crossing Crown Point: 25° 30' S 134° 23' E
11. Ashwin's number not verified by Milner (4 300) or his own final reckoning.

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Manuscript Sources:
Australian Archives, Nightcliff and Canberra; South Australian Archives, Adelaide and the State Reference Library, Darwin.

Copies of old maps from Lands Branch, Alice Springs; Lands Department, Adelaide, and Telecom Museum, Adelaide.

Bibliography: Direct reference;
Camp Jottings: Francis J Gillen.

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