

Joining Point of the Overland Telegraph, 22 August 1872

An important link in the electric chain ...

Charles Todd's message from Central Mount Stuart on the night the Overland Telegraph was finally joined

Hours not Months ...

The 3178 kilometre Overland Telegraph Line completed the first communication link between Australia and Europe. The Line from Adelaide was connected to an undersea cable from Darwin to Java (Indonesia). From there, telegraph lines ran through Asia, India, the Middle East, and Europe.

Messages could now be sent by telegraph between Australia and England in hours rather than sending a letter by ship when a one-way trip could take as long as 100 days.

Although the Line was joined in August, the undersea cable to Java had failed on 23 June 1872. It took four months before it could be repaired. The first telegraph messages from overseas were received in Adelaide on 21 October 1872.

Today, messages are sent through fibre-optic cables, microwave transmitters, and satellites, and take only seconds to arrive anywhere in the world.



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John Little, Robert Patterson, Charles Todd and Alexander Mitchell at Roper River

A Monumental Undertaking ...

Even by today's standards, the Overland Telegraph Line was a massive project but it was built in less than two years. Nearly 36 000 poles had to be fitted with insulators and lightning rods and erected in the bush. Some poles were cut from local timber; other poles were made of iron and imported from England. The project was planned in the finest detail by Sir Charles Todd, Superintendent of Posts and Telegraphs for South Australia. Todd personally supervised the completion of the line and then rode with a small party 2500 kilometres from Frews Ponds to Adelaide to inspect the work.



Engineering Heritage National Marker placed on the 140th anniversary of the joining of the wire, 22 August 2012
Engineers Australia Northern Division – Northern Territory Government



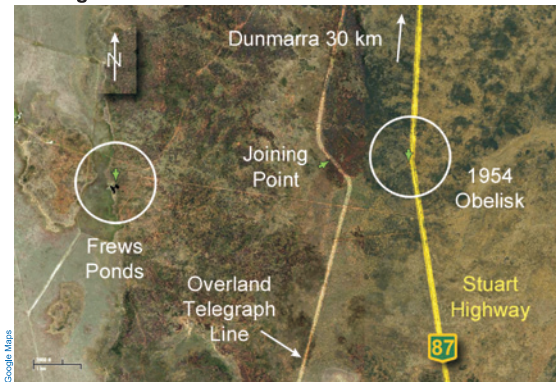
For more details about this and other engineering heritage works, go to www.engineersaustralia.org.au/heritageregister/search

A Shocking Result ...

The final join in the Overland Telegraph was made just 1.6 kilometres to the west of here by engineer Robert Patterson on 22 August 1872. He wrote this account in his diary:

"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."

Joining Point Location Plan



Sir Charles Todd (1826 - 1910)

Charles Todd was an extraordinarily vigorous man with many skills who served South Australia and Australia well for more than half a century. His achievements as an electrical engineer, astronomer, meteorologist, project manager, and public administrator are all noteworthy. Despite his mammoth achievements, Todd was a kind, mild-mannered man, much loved and admired by his staff and colleagues as a "benevolent autocrat".

Robert Patterson (1844 - 1907)

Patterson, who had the task of joining the wires, was a competent and experienced railway engineer. He had been selected to manage the difficult northern section of the line after the original contractor had fallen behind schedule. His achievements in completing the Overland Telegraph project were very considerable.

John Little later became Superintendent of Posts and Telegraphs at Darwin

Alexander Mitchell

was also a member of the survey party who laid out Darwin in 1869-70

