

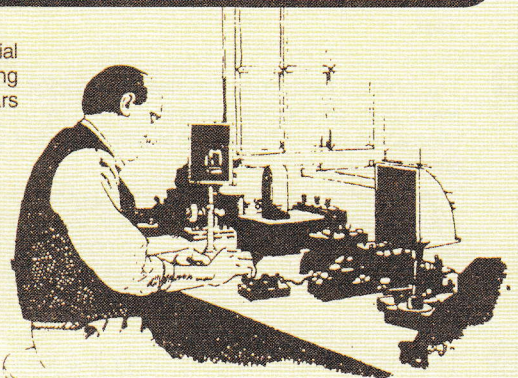
# YOUR GUIDE MAP OF THE TELEGRAPH STATION

**This guide** describes the buildings and operation at the Alice Springs Telegraph Station as it was between 1895 and 1905. It is the era's most intact Telegraph Station and the Parks and Wildlife Commission protects it as solid evidence of the lonely lives led by the pioneering men and women who first established Australia's telegraphic lifeline to the world. The guide map includes notes referring to numbered places of interest and the tour guides will help you if you'd like to know more.

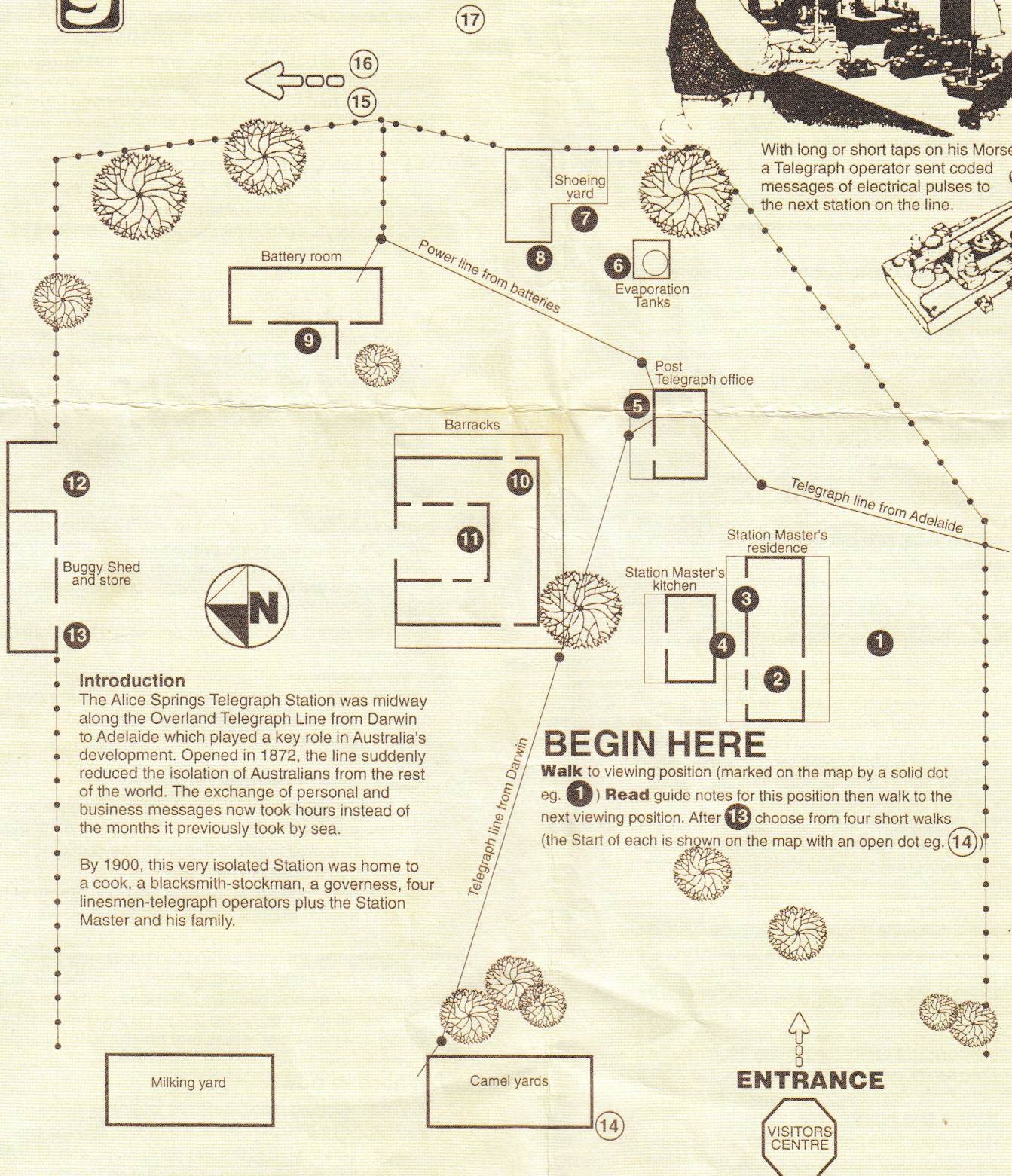
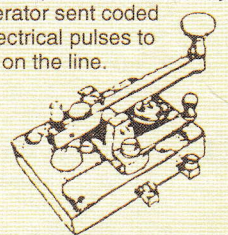
## VISITOR'S HISTORY GUIDE



The Telegraph operator had to receive and repeat confidential messages - of births, deaths, world news - never gossiping about it, just quietly "reading" the Morse code with his ears and "speaking" it with his fingers.



With long or short taps on his Morse key a Telegraph operator sent coded messages of electrical pulses to the next station on the line.



### Introduction

The Alice Springs Telegraph Station was midway along the Overland Telegraph Line from Darwin to Adelaide which played a key role in Australia's development. Opened in 1872, the line suddenly reduced the isolation of Australians from the rest of the world. The exchange of personal and business messages now took hours instead of the months it previously took by sea.

By 1900, this very isolated Station was home to a cook, a blacksmith-stockman, a governess, four linesmen-telegraph operators plus the Station Master and his family.

### BEGIN HERE

**Walk** to viewing position (marked on the map by a solid dot eg. 1) **Read** guide notes for this position then walk to the next viewing position. After 13 choose from four short walks (the Start of each is shown on the map with an open dot eg. 14)

**ENTRANCE**



## 1 The boss and his family

The Station Master was a man of great importance. As well as being in charge of the largest Station on the Telegraph Line, he ran the region's Post Office and was the government official responsible for Central Australian Aborigines. As the only magistrate in Central Australia, he held court at the Station; he sold rations to travellers and he even acted as an emergency doctor, following instructions telegraphed from Adelaide!

His **residence** was solidly constructed of local stone. Note the shady verandahs facing north and south, and the very thick walls; two practical ways of keeping out the summer heat.

2 The shared **bedroom** has few furnishings but remember that every item on the Station was carried by camel 500 kilometres from where the railway ended at Oodnadatta, South Australia.

The arrival of visitors at this remote outpost was an exciting event. They were made welcome in this **sitting room** and were often entertained with evening readings of stories and poems and everyone would join in the singing around the piano.

3 The Station Master and his family had their meals in this **dining room**. With solid chairs and the table covered with heavy green cloth, it was more elaborate than the simple room in which the other staff ate.

Imagine how welcome a fire in that large iron grate would have been on frosty winter mornings.

4 The **Station Master's kitchen** was originally divided in two. To your right was a children's bedroom and sewing room where the Station Master's wife made clothes for Aborigines who worked on the Station.

In the small kitchen to your left she washed, ironed and cooked for her family and the governess who taught the children.

## 5 Talking with the world

The **Telegraph Office** was the heart of the Station and it never stopped beating. It was constantly manned to allow for time differences between Australia and overseas, but most importantly, to boost the Morse code signals so they were carried at full strength over the great distance of the Telegraph line.

The instruments on the table are arranged as they would have been for an operator on duty. The curved box amplified an incoming signal's sound, in case the night shift operator was relaxing on the cowhide bunk which in summer was out on the verandah.

You can see holes in the back wall where a Sydney-to-London telegraph message might enter on wires which run down grooved wooden insulators to the repeating instruments on the table. The repeated message then flowed this way along more wall-mounted wires to emerge above the verandah and continue northward, being repeated many more times before reaching London.

The **Post Office** next door was more peaceful. Mail only arrived from South Australia every six weeks and there were few people in the area to drop in with letters to post.

## 6 Weather watch

At the Telegraph Station local weather information was collected and for the first time, scientists could study daily weather patterns right across Australia.

Every four hours, day and night, the operator on duty checked thermometers, barometers and a wind strength gauge. The rate of evaporation was also measured using these **evaporation tanks**, one inside the other, filled with water. The results were quickly telegraphed to Adelaide.

## 7 When the horse was king

Horses were the only transport for the people on the Station and about sixty horses were kept, mainly for the linesmen who maintained the Telegraph Line.

The **shoeing yard** is a fine example of bush carpentry. Have a look at the simple but effective sliprails forming the entrance. Here a horse waited while inside the blacksmith forged its new shoes.

8 Heat to soften the metal for shaping came from a fire smouldering in the stone **forge** near the blacksmith's front door. When needed, a leather sided bellows, connected by funnel to the fireplace was levered up and down, so that its strong blast of air blew the fire into life.

With all this activity going on, you can imagine how often the Station Master's children could be found watching the "smithy" at work.

## 9 Power house

The **battery room** "powered" the Alice Springs section of the Overland Telegraph Line. Messages telegraphed along the Line were boosted by electric power produced by huge wet-cell batteries.

Each battery consisted of 80 electrically-linked fluid-filled jars which covered a quarter of the buildings floor area.

As well as the battery on duty, another was always kept on standby while a third was being recharged. And because this system had to be kept in perfect working order 24 hours a day, all staff learnt how to maintain the batteries.

## 10 A first for Central Australia

This building, known as the **barracks** was the first major structure built in Central Australia and in January 1872, the Station's first telegraph message was transmitted to Adelaide from here.

In the century since then, the building has been altered many times and where there is now one long room, there were originally four.

At the Stockyards end, the children's teacher and one of the Station Master's girls shared a bedroom. The telegraph operator's bedroom was at the other end.

In between the combined boys' bedroom and school room, and a fourth room where the staff ate. This sometimes doubled as the courtroom where the Station Master heard cases of cattle stealing, cruelty to camels and other misdeeds.

11 In the semi-enclosed **courtyard** you'll see that the Adelaide designers of the barracks had defence in mind when they included gun holes high in the walls. Local Aborigines were peaceful however, and the Station never had to be defended.

In the right wing was the head operator's bedroom and a store room.

In the opposite wing the cook had a bedroom next to his busy **kitchen**. Bread was baked regularly but a mound oven built well out in the yard probably saved the cook some heat stress.

## 12 "Garage and pantry"

The **buggy shed** housed horse-drawn buggies, spare harness and the year's supply of flour, tea and sugar. Compare the wall finish of this workaday building to that of the barracks building behind you.

Look at the woodwork in the open section. Some of the uprights are the original timber, hand shaped with an adze.

13 In buggies like the one behind the doors, the Station Master's family might happily travel 50 kilometres to Simpsons Gap and back for a Sunday picnic. Imagine yourself being driven along rough tracks with bouncy springs, hard-padded seats and no shade in summer!

## Where to now?

Beyond the railing fence there are four other areas you can inspect: 14 the stockyards and gallows; 15 the small Station Cemetery; 16 the Trig Hill lookout; and 17 the Alice Springs Waterhole from which the Station took its name.