

Alice Springs

Located 1524 km from Darwin and 293 km north of the South Australian border, Alice Springs is the second largest town in the Northern Territory with a population of over 25 000 and an annual growth rate of nearly 6 per cent. Recognised as the 'Centre of Australia' Alice Springs owes its modern popularity to a booming tourist industry which brings people to 'The Alice' to either explore the beauty of 'The Centre', particularly the magnificent MacDonnell Ranges, or head off to **Uluru** (Ayers Rock) and Kata Tjuta (The Olgas) which lie to the south-west.

Historically it owes its existence to the fact that it was a vital link on the Overland Telegraph Line. The present town site, 3 km south of the Alice Springs Telegraph Station, was surveyed as a railhead and originally named Stuart. It was a tough frontier town serviced by camel trains from the railhead at Oodnadatta. The railway from Adelaide reached Stuart in 1929 and it became a major terminus centre. The Telegraph Station situated next to a permanent waterhole, closed and the Post Office was relocated to Stuart in 1932.

Alice Springs is 576 metres above sea level and lies on the often dry Todd River. It is in the MacDonnell Ranges and lies on a rich alluvial plain. The Todd River, which was first discovered and named in 1871 by the parties building the Overland Telegraph, flows only after heavy rains. It rises in the MacDonnell Ranges and disappears 320 km south-east into the sands of the Simpson Desert.

The springs, after which the town is named, lie to the north-east of the town and were discovered in 1871 by the team building the Overland Telegraph. The surveyors were William Whitfield Mills and John Ross and there is some dispute as to which of these two men found the springs and named them. Mills did write that he had discovered a pass through the MacDonnell Ranges which led to an area 'with numerous waterholes and springs, the principal of which is the Alice Spring which I had the honor of naming after Mrs. Todd.'

The reason for this 'honor' was that Sir Charles Todd, the then Postmaster-General of South Australia, had been the driving force behind the building of the Overland Telegraph. Lady Alice Todd was his wife.

Prior to the arrival of Europeans the area had been the home of the Aranda Aborigines who had been living in the area for at least 10 000 years. The Aboriginal presence here is strong' their **cultural** and **spiritual** connection to this region echoes in every rock and landmark.

A notice at the Alice Springs Repeater Station conveys the antiquity of Aboriginal habitation neatly when it points out 'it is worth remembering that the probable occupation of this site spans 330 generations of Aborigines as well as 5 generations of Europeans.'

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The repeater station which was built at Alice Spring in 1871-2 was the first European building constructed in Central Australia. The station was closed in 1932 and is now open for inspection as an important part of the early European history of the area. Built of local stone the station consisted of the postmaster's residence, an observatory and store room, the telegraph room and barracks. The buildings have had a chequered history being used at various times as an Aboriginal reserve for the maintenance and education of part-Aboriginal children, an Army camp and an administration block. They were improved in the 1960s which accounts for their pristine condition and all the new cement work.

The town still acts as a service centre for a number of the local communities expanding around 400kms in circumference. It offers all services of a major city on smaller scale. Daily flights are available to all major Capital Cities, with the famous "Ghan" railway operating twice weekly.

For current and useful information on the town, please visit

<http://www.alicesprings.nt.gov.au/>