

Tennant Creek Telegraph Station



Self Guided Walk

Welcome to the Tennant Creek Telegraph Station

This guide provides additional information to the signs located around the site. There is a map of the site on the last page of this leaflet that can help you find your way around as you take the self-guided tour. To explore inside the buildings, keys are available for hire from the tourist information desk at the Battery Hill Mining Centre in Tennant Creek.

Before you start, imagine...

As you enter the site take time to look around you. Imagine being here in the 1870s when the Overland Telegraph Line was first constructed. Besides members of the construction parties and Aboriginal inhabitants of the region, you and your team are isolated from the rest of your world except for communication through the Telegraph Line. Your supplies would arrive only once every six months via camel train from Port Augusta.

Meanwhile, you and your team are responsible for manning the

telegraph equipment 24 hours a day. You need to check and maintain the line itself north and south of the station. Your blacksmith is responsible for repairing and making any tools and equipment that you need. You are also responsible for a garden and small allocation of sheep and cattle to provide fresh food. You supply rations to local Aboriginal people and provide medical service in the absence of practitioners.

More than a Telegraph

This historic telegraph station has had several different uses. Aspects of the buildings and surrounds represent the changing uses over time.

The buildings were used as a telegraph station over the period from 1872 to 1935. After this time, the discovery of gold, and thus the development of mines and the town of Tennant Creek, 7 miles south of here, resulted in the closing of these buildings as a post and telegraph office. These functions were transferred to the nearby town along with all of the

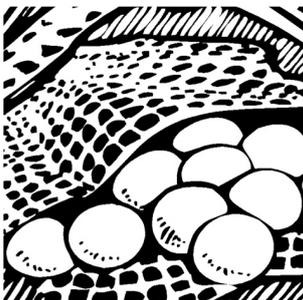
original equipment. However, the buildings continued to be used as accommodation for line maintenance staff until the 1950s.

Pastoral Era

The telegraph station has always had a pastoral history. When first established it had a 20 square mile grazing lease, in addition to the building site, and was stocked mainly with sheep for meat with some cattle for dairy products.

In 1946 Con Perry began to graze cattle and donkeys on the land within the telegraph reserve to provide meat for the nearby township and goldfields. By 1951 the last telegraph linesman had vacated the buildings to provide accommodation for Mr Perry's business. A butcher's shop was created with the addition of a cold store and chopping benches. Elements of the butcher's shop can still be seen today at the site.

Later the buildings became an outstation for the larger Tennant Creek Station and came under the ownership of a number of companies between 1970 and 1986.



Parks & Wildlife Commission of the Northern Territory

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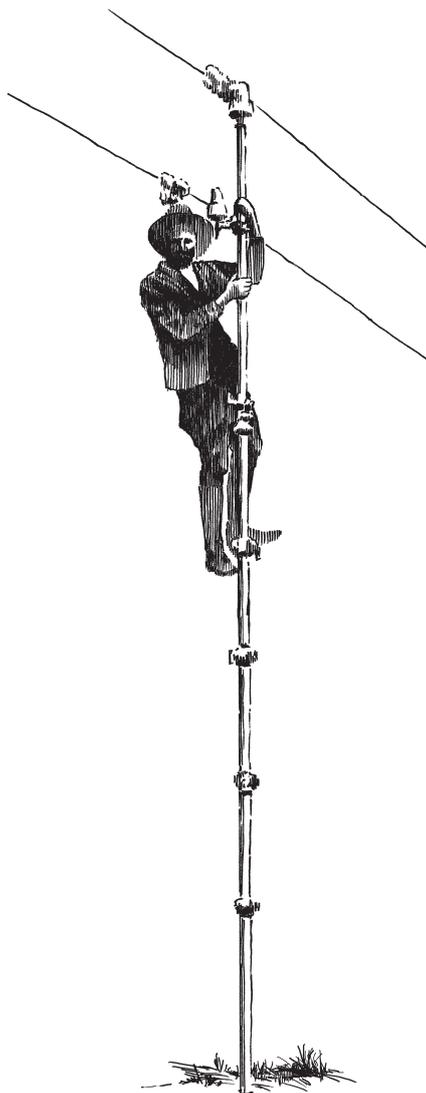


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Present

The Tennant Creek Telegraph Station today appears much the same as when it ceased being used as a cattle outstation. It is a declared heritage site and protected under Northern Territory and Federal Government legislation.

Extensive conservation works have been undertaken to maintain the condition of the site. Conservation work is undertaken as per the Australian ICOMOS charter for the conservation of places of cultural significance. This defines the basic principles and procedures to be observed in the conservation of important places. As such, the Reserve has a Conservation Plan as part of its Plan of Management.



START OF SELF GUIDED WALK:

The Cellar

WARNING: The stairs leading down are uneven and slippery. Please use caution. The inner walls of this building are fragile, please do not touch.

Whilst supplies of flour, sugar, salt, etc. arrived every six months, the mainstay of the food supply was the cultivation of local produce. Each telegraph station had its own garden to provide fresh vegetables. Stock were slaughtered on a weekly basis.

To keep them fresh, these food items were stored in the cellar. You will notice that the cellar has been dug down below the soil level to reach areas of lower temperature. In addition to this, the vent you see in the western wall was covered with wet hessian, through which air would pass into the cellar to enable evaporative cooling. Hot air would pass out at the top.

If you look up at the roof you can see an example of the restoration program. The wood in the roof has been replaced with hand adzed mulga, as the original would have been. The wooden structure is held together with wire twitches.

You may notice damage on the walls that has occurred due to rising dampness. In 1984, extensive underground drains and a pumping system were installed around the buildings to draw off excess water. Under the conservation program, the walls have been re-rendered and white washed.

Smoke House

Smoking was a common method of curing meat to prevent it going off. Meat not eaten straight away would be either salted or hung on racks and smoked to preserve it for future use.

As you look at the roof you will note that much, but not all, of the wood in the roof has been replaced. This is an example of the restoration program. Where possible, the original nails have been reused and some wood has been replaced with hand adzed mulga, as the original would have been. Notice that the front of the smokehouse roof is made from old flattened kerosene tins.

A bread oven made of clay or ant-bed (crushed termite mounds) would have stood alongside the smoke house.

Having the oven in this location ensured the heat was reduced in the kitchen area during the hot summer periods.

Kitchen / Living Area

You may enter this building using the key.

The large verandah you are standing under was added about 1911 as a response to the high temperatures experienced in summer.

The original buildings are of a Georgian design, representative of the period in England. As you enter the building, notice the thick walls and high ceilings. There are ventilation holes along the walls and the louvres allow air flow into the building. It is a lot cooler inside than outside. Is it any wonder that they chose to have the bread oven situated outside?

Look at the corners of the building and notice the series of stones protruding. These protruding stones are also noticeable inside the kitchen. Far from being shoddy workmanship, these are keystones which would have allowed extensions to the walls. These protruding stones indicate that original plans included a divided kitchen and an extension of the outer building to enclose a courtyard area.

If you do not have a key, please walk around under the verandah and have a look in through the louvre windows.

The Metters wood stove you see was probably introduced during the pastoral era and this era is also represented by the use of lino on the bench. The concrete floor was another later addition.

The final room in this building was the bedroom/sitting room. Please look around at the materials provided.

CAUTION: The organ in this room is extremely fragile. Please do not touch it.

Please ensure you lock the building.

To reach the Telegraph Office, walk around under the verandah and examine the outer walls of the building.

Originally, the stone for the buildings would have been quarried nearby and the lime and sand mixed to form a mortar to bind the rocks. The lime would have been produced locally in a lime pit.

The buildings originally would have had compacted gravel or ant-bed under the

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verandah. The present use of rock paving covers some of the extensive drainage system constructed in 1984 to prevent moisture damage to the buildings.

The buildings also have had silicon injected into the walls just above floor level to prevent water from wicking up the walls and causing damage.

Telegraph Office

The Telegraph Office was the hub of the station. It was manned 24 hours a day.

You may enter this building with the key. If you do not have a key, please walk anti-clockwise around the building and look through the louvres into the rooms.

The first room you come to was the Battery Room. In this room there were large banks of Meidinger cells. Each of these battery cells produced just over 1 volt, so many of them were needed to produce the operating voltage of 120 V.

Inside the building, you may see that dampness has effected the walls. This will be remortared and the walls lime-washed as part of the conservation program.

The central room is where the post and telegraph offices would have been situated. There is a fireplace to keep the operators warm on winter nights.

Initially all messages had to be manually retransmitted by the operators. Later automatic repeaters were installed.

The end room was used as a bedroom.

Please ensure you lock the building.

The Cemetery

From the Telegraph office head West and the pathway will take you to the cemetery where Archibald Cameron (a linesman) and Bryan Thomas Nugent (from Banka Banka Station) are buried. This walk is approximately 100 metres.

As you head along the path look towards the ranges in the south and you will see a windmill that was installed in the 1960s. The site contains the original well, which was dug to provide water when the waterhole in the creek dried up.

Head back along the track to the buildings.

Other Buildings

The remainder of the buildings represent the associated work areas of the complex. The first room, which you may access with the key, was the **men's hut** for accommodating linesmen. The complex also provided a shed for the wagon.

No access is allowed to the centre room as it is currently being used for storage.

The end room represents the **butcher's**

area. In the post war period after the telegraph and postal service had moved into the town, Con Perry's cattle station supplied beef to people in the township of Tennant Creek. Remains of the cool room, butcher's block table and infrastructure can still to be seen inside the building.

No access is allowed into the rear of this building as it is being used for storage.

Please ensure you lock the building.

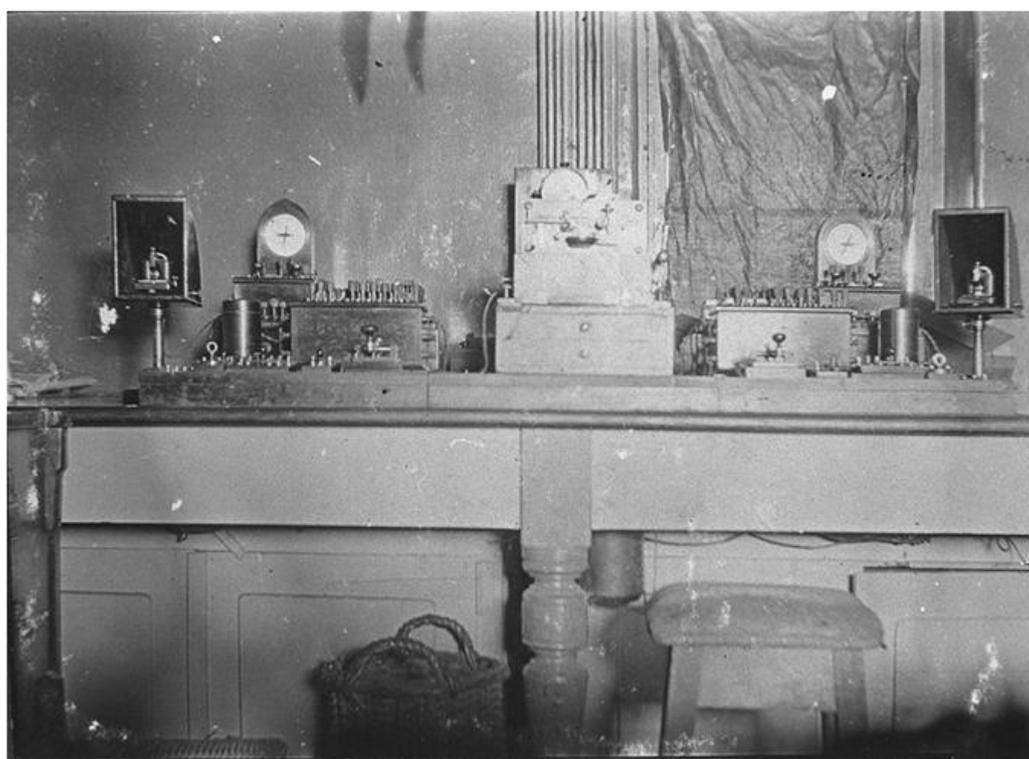
The final building is the **Blacksmith's workshop.** In this area, tools were made and equipment repaired. Some reshaping of horseshoes may have occurred but this was not the primary role of the blacksmith.

The bellows were used to create the heat required for the metal work.

A careful examination of the walls reveals some of the early attempts at conservation of this building.

A path leads from the blacksmith's towards the **stock yards**, which you can see in the distance, and then back to the entrance gate. This provides an alternative return route for those who are interested.

Remember to return your key.



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History of the Telegraph Line

The Overland Telegraph Line was a huge engineering feat and possibly one of the greatest engineering feats undertaken in Australia. The line covered over 3000 kilometres, along which 11 stations were built and 36000 poles were installed, for a total cost of £479000.

If you consider that a loaf of bread at the time was worth less than six pence (a loaf being \$3.50 in 2011), this was an extremely costly undertaking for its time.

The huge cost of using the telegraph, £1 for 10 words, or \$50 today, meant it was mainly used by big business, governments and newspapers and not the general person in the street.

Other Telegraph Stations

There are four telegraph stations still standing. Three of them are managed by the Parks and Wildlife Commission of the Northern Territory.

For those travelling south, the Barrow Creek and Alice Springs Telegraph Stations provide a different experience to Tennant Creek.

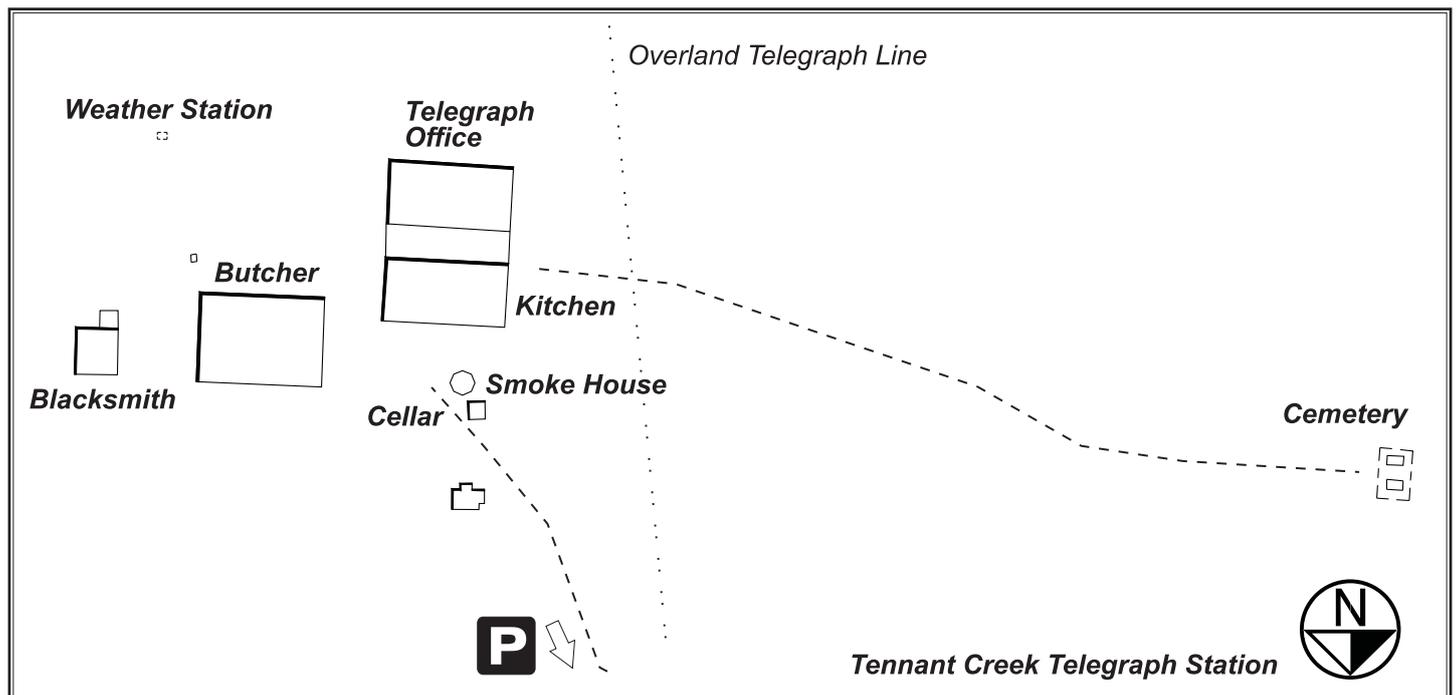
You can obtain information on the Barrow Creek Telegraph Station from the nearby roadhouse pub.

The Alice Springs Telegraph Station has tour guides and an extensive display. The buildings have been restored to represent life at the turn of the century.

Thank you for visiting the Tennant Creek Telegraph Station. We hope you have enjoyed your walk today.

Please contact the Ranger Station at Tennant Creek or the Parks and Wildlife Head Office in Alice Springs if you noticed any damage or improper behaviour during your visit. We appreciate your help in maintaining this reserve.

We hope you enjoy the rest of your time in the Barkly region.



Information sheets can be reused. Please return this sheet to the box if you do not wish to keep it.