

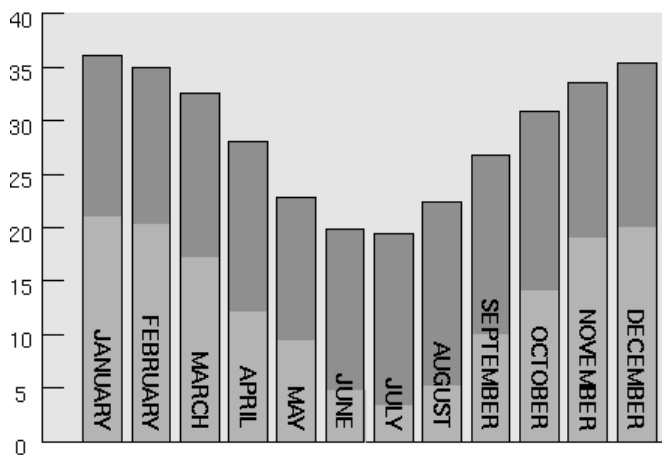
Day 8 - Fact Sheet 19

Tales of the Todd- Read all about it!

The Central Australian Climate

Central Australia's climate is one of clear blue skies through most of the year, infrequent rain and an average of 9 hours of sunshine all day. This is the typical weather pattern of a desert region which has low erratic rainfall, long hot summers and short, sunny winters with frosty mornings.

The temperature for most of the year goes above twenty six degrees Celsius. For five months the maximum temperature is over thirty degrees. Evaporation levels are high for most of the year with the highest levels reached over the spring/summer months (October-February). The hottest months in Central Australia are December, January and February although temperatures over the period October to March are still very warm.



Central Australia has fewer than forty rain days in a year. The average rainfall to the north of Alice Springs is 305 millimetres as you travel south this goes down to 127 millimetres. Seventy five percent of the rain occurs during the spring/summer months and is influenced by the monsoonal activities to the north-west Kimberly region and the Northern region. This is usually the time that you will see the normally dry riverbeds become full of water and some flooding can occur.

The general lack of surface water bodies both severely limits the amount of water-based recreation possible and increases the cultural importance of the naturally occurring water resources such as water holes. Alice Springs appears to have overcome the former by installing backyard pools and holidaying at the beach. With respect to the water holes, some of the few permanent water holes and associated landforms are major tourist attractions in central Australia (Standley Chasm, Simpsons Gap, etc.). Water holes were very important to Aboriginals and natural wild life, and there is an extensive mythology which relates to water.

The annual held Henley-on-Todd regatta is literally 'run' on the dry bed of the Todd River, and it is very rare to have outdoor activities cancelled due to wet weather (see Centralian Advocate article on Henley-on-Todd cancellation).

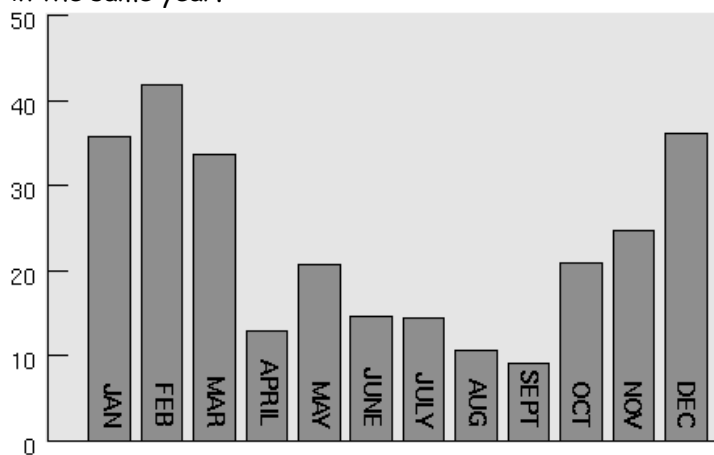
Drawing of
"Todd River"
By: Anthony
Age: 8

Alice Springs because it lies centrally in the MacDonnell Ranges has a higher rainfall and lower temperatures than the surrounding areas which have a lower altitude. A number of significant Todd River flood events are known to have occurred since the town of Alice Springs was first settled. The largest flood recorded in the last 90 years occurred in March 1988. This flood caused a significant number of residential and commercial properties in Alice Springs to become waterlogged.

The winters in Central Australia have days which are usually fine, sunny and warm by lunchtime, the maximum of 20 degrees does not last long and the temperatures at this time of year regularly zoom down to freezing point at night. Forty percent of winter nights carry a high frost risk, There are also occasions in June and July when strong south-east winds cause the temperatures to drop considerably due to wind chill.

It is important to note that the climate of desert areas is well known for its departure from the normal. There are occasions where rainfall patterns and temperature can change quite dramatically.

The highest maximum temperature ever recorded in Alice Springs was 46.7 in 1883 and 46.6 in 1879. The lowest minimum has been -7.5 in 1976. The lowest maximum was seven degrees in the same year.



In the arid inland many months pass by with little or no rain and severe droughts have occurred over a period of 10 or more years. There have also been a lot of surprises as well with 313 millimetres of rain recorded in just 1 month in 1974. Rain is most welcome anytime in the outback even if it does cause some inconvenience. Until the opening of the Stott Bridge in the late 70s, the only flood access for eastside residents to the main city centre was via a footbridge across the Todd River. At these times a fire engine and ambulance were placed on the east side when flooding was imminent in case of emergency. There are now 3 major bridges across the river and access is no longer a problem, it is good however the footbridge remains as a practical and useful reminder of the days when there were none.

Central Australia has not always been such a dry environment. It once had a rainfall to be believed to be as high as Darwin's is today. The study of fossil remains and ancient plants such as those found in Palm Valley show that many of thousands of years ago the region had lots of tropical vegetation and an abundant water supply.

