

## Day 3 Fact Sheet 5

### Tales of the Todd- Read all about it!

# Aboriginal History

#### Source NT Parks and Wildlife

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The present township of Alice Springs, and the A.S.T.S., lie within the Northern Aranda tribal area, which according to Tindale, occupies 14 820 Km<sup>2</sup>.

The Northern Aranda group is one of six related groups which together form the Aranda tribe. The tribal land covers a total area of 122 200 Km<sup>2</sup>. It has been estimated that before arrivals of Europeans, the Aranda country was generally capable of supporting 1 person for every 39 Km<sup>2</sup>. While the population was obviously subject to considerable fluctuation because of such factors as seasonal conditions, etc., on this basis, the local Aranda's may have numbered 360, while the entire tribe may have been made up to 3 100 Aborigines.


The Alice Springs area is of considerable mythological significance to Aborigines. For instance, Spencer and Gillen in the "The Native Tribes of Central Australia" refer to two maps which are criss-crossed by tracks of ancestral Dreamtime Beings, including those associated with the Achipla (wild cat), Erelia (emu) and Udnirringita (witchetty grub) totems. The maps also show numerous places which are concerned with various traditions, or where mythical beings were said to have camped.

The area visible from Anzac Hill (Unjailga Kunia Alknarinja), which includes the Historical Reserve, is known as Choritja country. It is from this that Choritja Hill, on the south-western side of the Reserve, got its name. The Alice Springs waterhole itself is called Turiara. Legend has it, that in the Dreamtime, an old Arunga (euro) man walked to the Todd River, close to the present site of the A.S.T.S., and that he then scratched out the waterhole. Subsequently, the site became an important camping and ceremonial site.

With the European presence, tribal life became disrupted for a number of reasons, so that eventually use of sacred sites diminished. Nevertheless, there are photographic records dating back to Bradshaw's time indicating that ceremonies were still being conducted in and around the Telegraph Station at the turn of the century.

Following the transfer of the post and telegraph office to the Alice Springs township in 1932, the Old telegraph Station site was taken over by the Department of Native Affairs as an Aboriginal Reserve. The Reserve had an initial area of 272 76 ha, which was subsequently increased to 436.66 ha in 1936. The purpose of the Reserve was the maintenance and education of part-coloured children from Aboriginal camps, cattle stations, and townships from south of Pine Creek to the S.A. border.

The building complex at the A.S.T.S. came to be known as the "The Bungalow". This name dates back to Ida Standley's first educational institution in Stuart. There is some uncertainty whether it refers to the school house or the residential building associated with it.



The School house itself, which stood at the back of the old gaol (Between the present court house and police station), was demolished in 1963. The building blocks were dumped in a heap at the northern end of the A.S.T.S. building complex, not far from the river bank. The structure was, however, never rebuilt and the stones still lie where they were unloaded, while the timber is now located near the present workshop.

The teaching facilities for part-Aboriginal children had in fact been transferred from the Stuart site to Jay Creek in 1927. This institution, which also went under the name of "The Bungalow", ran into water problems in 1932, and the functions were moved to the newly-created Aboriginal reserve at the A.S.T.S. Classes at the new site itself were conducted in the Battery Room, while the Stables were converted to an ablutions block and the Telegraph Office became a caretaker's cottage. A dormitory was also erected between the Barracks and the Stables, as clearly shown in a photograph of the period. The use to which other buildings were put is more difficult to ascertain, because of a lack of readily available written records.

After the bombing of Darwin in 1942, the inmates of the Aboriginal Reserve were evacuated and the Army took the buildings over as a Native Labour Headquarters. Control reverted to the Native Affairs Department in 1945, when the pre-war function of the Reserve was restored. However, the controlling body became the Welfare Branch of the Department of the N.T. in the early 50's. In the meantime, the Reserve status was retained until 1963, when the residents were once again moved, this time to Amoonguna, thus ending thro formal association of the A.S.T.S. with Aborigines.

The original significance of the area has not, however, been entirely forgotten. When the question of the recreation Lake came up again recently, certain places were claimed as sacred sites of significance to women. The location of these sites was not disclosed to the public.