

FREW PONDS RESERVE

With the 150th anniversary of the joining of the Overland Telegraph Line at Frew Ponds this year, it is a good time to reflect on the declaration and management of the reserve.

The Reserve NT Portions 499 and 500, was proclaimed as Frew Ponds Overland Telegraph Line Memorial Reserve 1085 in June 1962 by the Commonwealth Minister for Territories, Paul Hasluck. The Reserve is approximately 4.7 kilometres long contained within 9.8 hectares on Hayfield Station south of Dunmarra. Portion 499 being the roadside monument and Portion 500 being the line and access.

Plans were well in advance by 1953 for the erection of the Todd Memorial at the site with a ceremony marking the joining of the Overland Telegraph Line at Frew Ponds - (*Fought and Won by John Lewis 1922*) describes the event 22nd August 1872 as taking place at ten minutes past twelve. He also casts doubt on the contents of a brandy bottle which was broken to celebrate the event. A marble monument was constructed adjacent to the joining point on the Stuart Highway in 1954, this was later removed and returned to South Australia to the training school to acknowledge the work of the Overland telegraph linesman. This was replaced with the present granite obelisk in the early 1960s.

For many years the Reserve was under management from Alice Springs. The advent of self-government and amalgamation of a number of government departments in the early 1980 saw responsibility for management being shifted to the then Parks and Wildlife Commission.

In 1998 responsibility for management was shifted to the newly formed Gulf District of the Katherine Region Parks and Wildlife Service.

The NT Minister for Natural Resources, Environment and Heritage, Marion Scrymgour declared Frew Ponds a Heritage Place on 22nd August 2006.



Line cleared and wire restrung southern end of reserve

An initial inspection found the line still intact although very overgrown through the heavily timbered Lancewood (*Acacia shirleii*) which forms the main vegetation type on timber line corridor at Frew Ponds.



Joining Pole prior to the line being cleared and the pole straightened

In 2006 the line was initially cleared by Park staff using chainsaws as a number of poles had been bent down with wires on the ground and it was felt that use of machinery would cause more damage. Once poles were straightened and wires lifted than machinery could be utilised.

In June 2012 Engineers Australia nominated for heritage recognition “*The Overland Telegraph Line Joining Point Frew Ponds Northern Territory*”.

In August that year Engineers Australia held a ceremony at Frew Ponds, with Owen Peake ceremoniously pouring out a bottle of brandy and in keeping with tradition, the contents of this bottle was also suspect.

The Engineers Australia report can be viewed [HERE](#).



Original enamel signs at either end of the Reserve



Lincoln Wilson with line cleared at joining point. The sign is a hand stamped piece of 100mm flat steel



Joining point pole with Engineers Australia sign placed there in 2012



Todd Memorial, Stuart Highway, Frew Ponds 2012

Eddie Webber Gulf Branch member