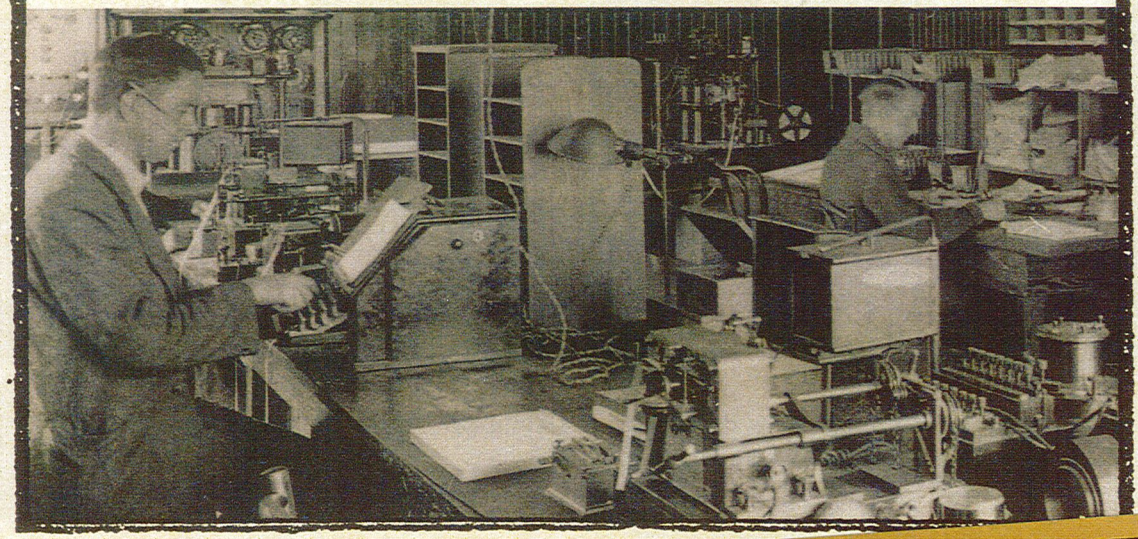
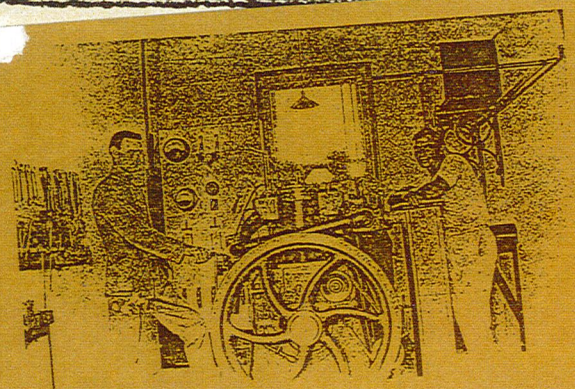


Gentlemen of the Cable Service

A pictorial history of Australia's overseas cable telecommunications service 1870 - 1934





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Preface

THE HISTORY this book relates is not one which is familiar to many people; it's a history of ordinary men who often devoted the majority of their lives to working for the good of the Empire.

These 'Gentlemen of the Service' frequently endured difficult and sometimes dangerous conditions to keep Australia in touch with the rest of the world.

Their dedication to duty, their steadfastness, ingenuity and tenacity allowed Australia and its people to participate in the world economy, play a part on the international political stage and strengthen ties with the 'mother country'.

The AOTC Archive has a fascinating collection of photographs which document those early years in cable telegraphy. Many were deposited by members of the Overseas Telecommunications Veterans' Association of Australia, to whom we extend our deepest gratitude.

But one archive cannot hope to hold a complete pictorial record of all events in cable telegraphy during this period; the serious researcher must look further afield.

As a record of social and living conditions of those cable operators and their families, this book provides a valuable insight into an often overlooked aspect of Australia's past.

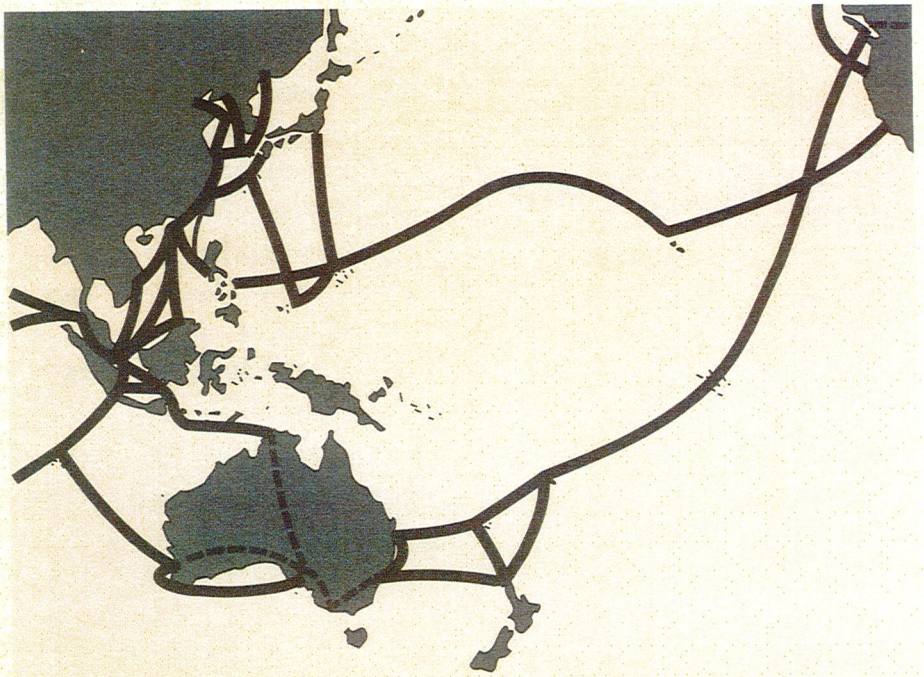
We've come a long way since those early days, but we should never forget the enormous legacy of those who worked to provide the vital links between Australia and the rest of the world.

This book, and others in the series, is dedicated to the memory of that pioneering spirit. The communicators' creed of 1870 remains unchanged today:

The message must get through!

Steve Burdon

S W R Burdon
Group Managing Director
Australian and Overseas Telecommunications Corporation



International Cable Routes — Pacific/Oceania region, late 1920s.

A marvel of the age

ONE of the marvels of the mid-nineteenth century was the electric telegraph, an invention which dramatically changed the nature of communications throughout the world.

Experimentation earlier in the century had paved the way for major technological developments: the invention of a simple form of electric telegraph equipment by the Russian, Baron Schilling; the development of the five-needle electromagnetic telegraphic system by the English partners William Fothergill Cooke and Charles Wheatstone; and the creation of a standard code by the American, Samuel Morse.

The effect of these developments was to rapidly expand communications systems throughout the world. Soon, telegraph wires were slung over the length and breadth of America, Britain and Europe.

As inland telegraph systems burgeoned, the urge to forge international links grew and British, American and German companies experimented to find a suitable form of insulation for cables which could be laid on the sea bed.

In 1849, a successful trial was held using a ship-to-shore wire over which messages were exchanged from London to a vessel in the English Channel. The wire was insulated with gutta percha, a latex substance from trees in the Malay Peninsula.

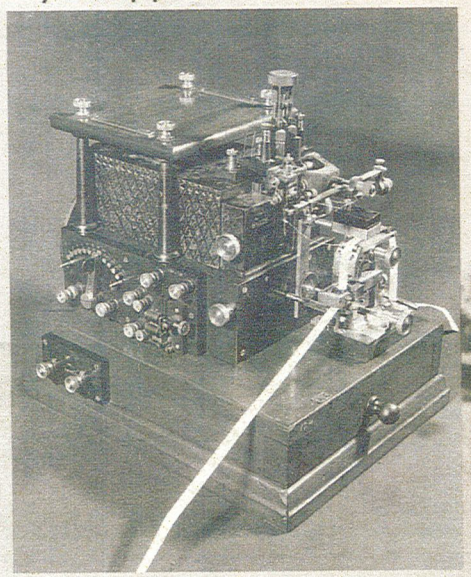
The following year, Jacob and Joseph Watkins-Brett laid the first submarine cable from Dover to Cape Gris Nez in France. Messages were garbled and the wire failed within twenty-four hours, but a second successful cable was laid in 1851. This was insulated by tarred hemp and galvanised iron wires with a covering of gutta percha.

Soon there was a boom in cable production and British companies were formed to lay cables to all parts of the globe.

By 1870, there were cables linking Suez to Bombay and on to Madras, Penang and Singapore; but perhaps the greatest feat was the laying of the trans-Atlantic cable by the vessel *The Great Eastern* in 1866. Several previous attempts to lay the cable had failed, at a cost of hundreds of thousands of pounds.



Landing the Java cable at Port Darwin on 7 November 1871 — the first step in Australia's cable links with the rest of the world. (Original photograph held by AOTC Historical Museum.)



Early cable equipment.



A great and wondrous event ...

AUSTRALIA'S first telegraph line was opened between Melbourne and Williamstown, Victoria in 1854, and others followed in rapid succession.

In 1859, the continent's first submarine cable was laid across Bass Strait, linking the telegraph system of Tasmania to that of the mainland.

Eleven years later, the British Australian Telegraph Company (BAT) was formed to link Australia direct to British telegraph cables, by extending the cable from Singapore via Java to Port Darwin.

South Australia was awarded the contract to lay the overland telegraph from Port Augusta to Port Darwin, the agreement being that the landline would be completed no later than 1 January 1872.

Charles Todd was chosen to supervise the project and divided the work into northern, central and southern sections; the central section he supervised himself. However, the wet season, disease and transport problems delayed construction on the northern section, and it was not until 22 August 1872 that the overland telegraph was completed.

Meanwhile, the cable laying vessels *Hibernia* and *Edinburgh* were paying out cable towards Banjoewangi in Java; on 20 November 1871, the task was completed.

But due to the failure of the Port Darwin-Java cable just before the overland section was completed, and the problems with the overland telegraph, it was not until 22 October 1872 that messages could be sent direct from London to Adelaide.

The following month, the cable was extended to Sydney.

The impact on Australia's social, economic and political future was enormous. No longer did news have to come by sea, often taking a year or more to exchange letters.

Direct international trade was more than possible, and Australia could take its place on the world political stage.

In 1873, three British companies, The British India Extension Telegraph Company, The British Australian Telegraph Company and The China Submarine Telegraph Company were amalgamated to form the Eastern Extension Australasia and China Telegraph Company (Eastern Extension).

This company's first major work was to lay a cable between Australia and New

Zealand. The cable, from La Perouse to Wakapauka, opened for traffic on 21 February 1876.

By the turn of the century, the Banjoewangi-Port Darwin cable had been duplicated (1880), a third cable had been laid between Banjoewangi and Roebuck Bay (1889), the New Zealand-Australia cable was duplicated (1890), and Australia was linked to New Caledonia by a cable which was laid from Bundaberg to Mon Repos (1893) by a French company.

In 1902, the Eastern Extension Company lost its monopoly on international telegraph systems in Australia, although moves to set up a second cable company had been made as early as 1879, under a plan to link Great Britain to all its greater colonies. It was proposed that this cable would only pass through British territory; the concept became known as the All Red Route.

In 1896, a Pacific Cable Committee was appointed to consider all aspects of the proposal, and in 1901 the Pacific Cable Board was established with eight members: three from England, two from Canada, two from Australia and one from New Zealand.

The Board was responsible for management of the Pacific Cable and was empowered to obtain tenders for surveying and laying a cable from Vancouver to Fanning Island, Norfolk Island, New Zealand and Queensland.

Funding and ownership of the cable was shared between the British, Canadian, New Zealand, New South Wales, Victorian and Queensland governments, and cable laying commenced in 1902.

A new cable vessel, the *Colonia*, was built; it was capable of holding the 8000 tonnes of cable required for the Bamfield to Fanning Island section. By the end of the year, the cable was open to traffic, having cost about two million pounds to complete.

In reply, the Eastern Extension Company lowered its rates and began laying a cable across the Indian Ocean to rival the Pacific Cable Board's service.

This cable would travel from Mauritius to the Cocos Islands, on to Perth and finally to Adelaide. Construction of the Cocos to Perth section was completed in 1901, and the Perth to Adelaide section opened a year later.

By the 1920s, increased traffic slowed cable operation, and in 1926, to compete with the newly introduced beam wireless system, both companies duplicated their cables with new loaded cable. This had a thin wire permalloy wound spirally around a copper core to increase its inductance.

The duplicate Pacific Cable was laid by the *CS Dominia* which had been specially built for the purpose.

Colonial governments, which had subsidised the construction and maintenance of the Pacific Cable, became alarmed when their revenue fell dramatically in 1927 after the introduction of beam wireless.

An Imperial Wireless and Cable Conference was held in London in 1928, and it was decided to recommend to the British Parliament that the overseas cable and wireless services be merged into one system.

The Pacific Cable Board and Eastern Extension Company became part of Imperial and International Communications Ltd in 1929, which in turn was operated by Cable and Wireless Ltd from 1934.

Men on board the cable laying vessel *CS Dominia* changing cable from one tank to another during operations to lay the new high-speed duplicate Pacific Cable, 1926.



All in a day's work

MANY EMPLOYEES of both the Eastern Extension Company and the Pacific Cable Board entered the service at a young age and continued for the rest of their working lives.

Recruits were accepted at about 15 or 16 years of age and then had to undergo a period of intensive training lasting one or two years.

During training, they were given books, stationery materials and tools free of charge, accommodation was provided for those requiring it, and a small salary was paid amounting to little more than pocket money.

Training was rigorous and examinations were frequently held to test the boys' proficiency. Repeated failure often meant dismissal.

On graduating as probationary officers, the fledgling operators were presented with a copy of their employer's rules and regulations which detailed terms of employment, mandatory life assurance schemes, salaries and methods of obtaining promotion.

Allowances for foreign service, housing, sickness benefits, leave and payment of passages between postings were also detailed, but many of these benefits could be withdrawn if set standards of proficiency were not maintained or an employee's conduct did not warrant them.

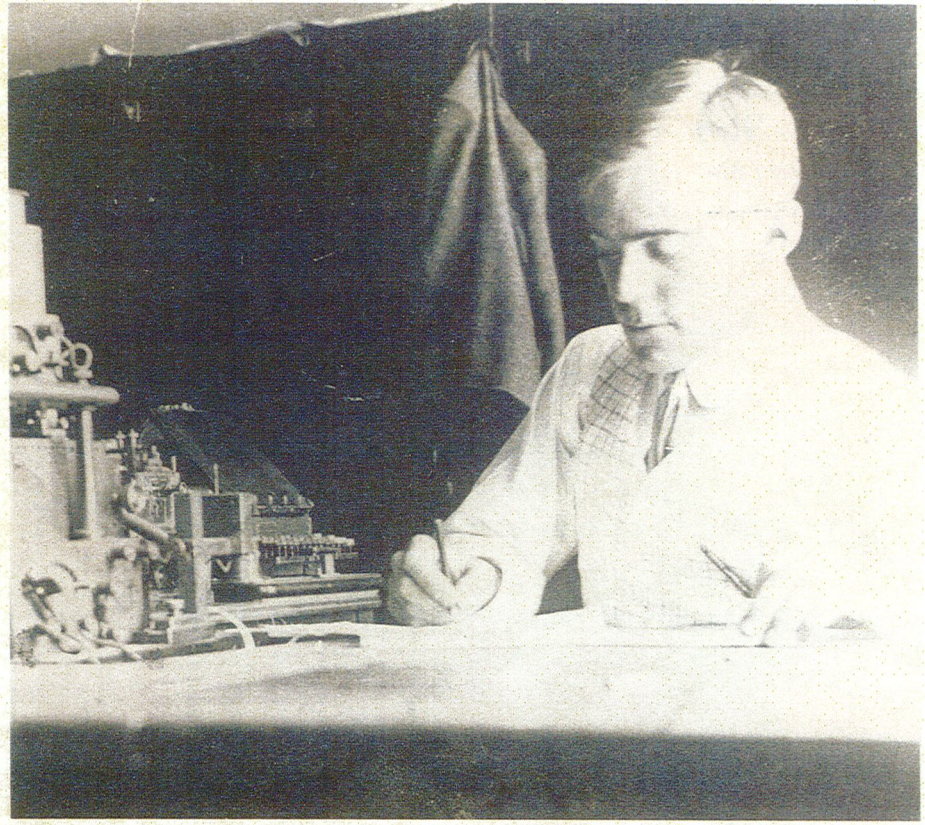
In addition, elevation in rank could be denied regardless of the number of years served.

Some infringements of the rules meant instant dismissal, especially in matters of secrecy. Insobriety and insubordination, the use of improper language or 'quarrelling on the instrument' were not tolerated.

The companies discouraged their younger staff from marriage even to the point of threatening to terminate their employment if certain age, rank or salary had not been attained when the marriage was announced.

On completing his probationary period, an operator was liable for transfer to any of his employer's cable stations or to serve abroad on one of the cable repair ships.

Station managers maintained a file on each employee's performance; in particular, the number of errors made by each operator in his job.



Cable operator writing off a cable at the Eastern Extension Company's Adelaide office, 1908.

Operators not only had to keep up a certain speed, they also had to be accurate. If they accumulated more than a designated percentage of errors in a month, and continued to do so, their annual increment was not recommended. This meant a permanent loss of seniority.

Normal hours of duty were six- or seven-hour shifts, six days a week; Sundays and certain public holidays were paid at the overtime rate.

Operators were also called on to perform tasks over and above the line of duty, as a crisis could occur at any time. Men often worked to the point of exhaustion to ensure the service was not interrupted.

But no matter how difficult the conditions, many operators stayed with the cable service for the whole of their working lives.

Darwin Cable Station

ON 7 NOVEMBER 1871, the cable linking Darwin to Banjoewangi in Java was brought ashore and connected to instruments in a cable hut on the beach.

The first staff at the station lived in uncomfortable conditions. They were housed in small canvas tents, which were intensely hot during the day, and ate a diet of preserved food.

According to one early telegraphist, 'We had evidently landed at the wrong end of Australia. We had a good share of roughing it before we became acclimatised and accustomed to the fact that we were cut off from the rest of the world except by an under-sea wire!...'

A few years later, the company built the permanent station and residence. This housed offices, twenty rooms, a ballroom, showers, gardens, stables and a tennis court. Hindu servants were hired and even Aboriginal 'punka wallas' were engaged to waft away the heat.

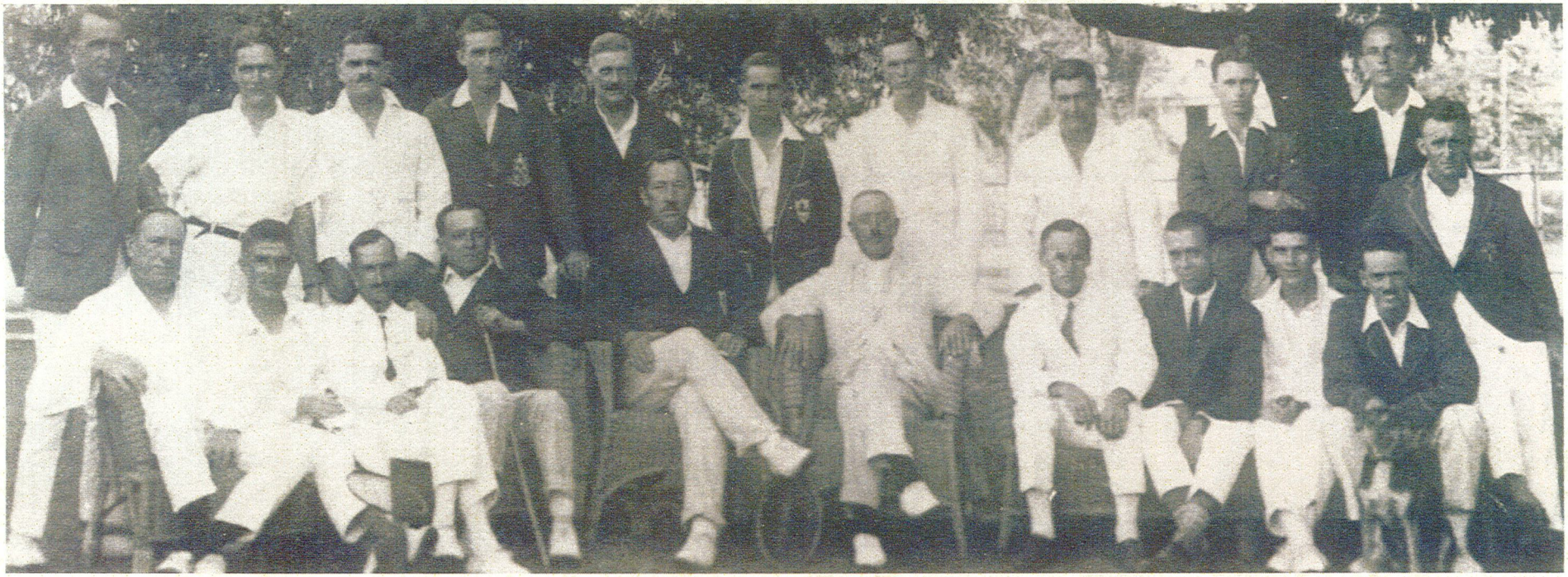
By the mid-1920s, life was very civilised for the 20 or 30 staff working at the station. Pre-lunch and dinner drinks were served on the veranda where games of pahit were played in the evenings.

Many staff hunted the plentiful gamebirds in the area, and for those after bigger game, buffalo roamed on the Adelaide Plain, 50 kilometres from the station.

Darwin cable station was taken out of service in 1938, and in 1942, the buildings were bombed by Japanese fighter planes. The site was finally abandoned in 1950.

On 20 April 1959, a cairn built of stone from the old station was unveiled in Darwin to commemorate the landing of the Darwin-Java cable, Australia's first direct telegraphic link with the outside world.

Darwin cable station staff, 1926.



Adelaide Cable Office

WHEN THE overland telegraph line was completed between South Australia and Darwin in 1872, the cable's southern end terminated in the Adelaide General Post Office.

The Eastern Extension Company moved its office several times before settling in the Citizens Life Assurance Building in King William Street in 1921. It was this building that became known as 'Electra House' when Cable and Wireless Ltd took over the Australian cable systems in 1934.

By the time operations had been moved into Electra House, the company had approximately eighty employees: telegraphists, support staff, messengers and trainee operators.

The Adelaide office also served as one of the training schools for young trainee telegraph operators. After reaching a sufficient level of proficiency in all aspects of telegraphic operations, the trainees graduated to the first floor operating room where they took turns in manning various circuits.

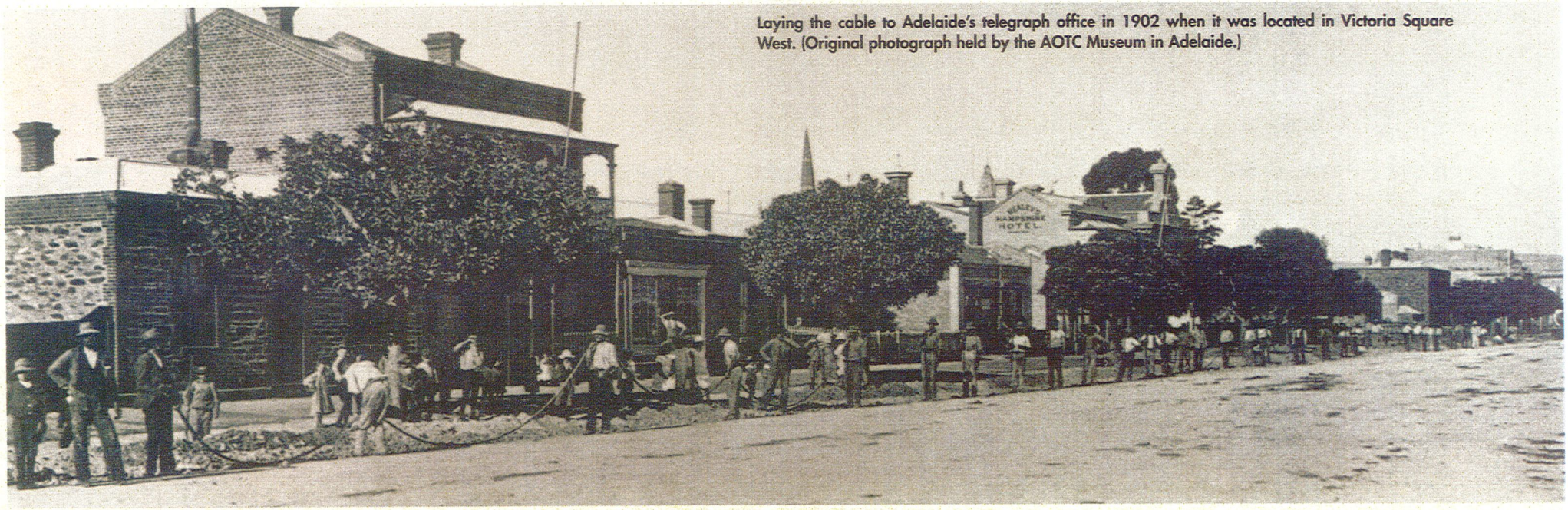
The operating room was manned around the clock, with four shifts of six hours every day of the week, including Sundays paid at the overtime rate of one and a quarter time.

Despite long hours, staff still had the time and energy to take part in the many sporting activities organised by the staff sports club including bowls, tennis, an annual athletics meeting, an annual swimming carnival, cricket, football and golf.

After the introduction of the beam wireless service in 1927, the fortunes of the Eastern Extension Company declined and the number of operators at the Adelaide office was reduced dramatically.

The cable station was officially closed on 15 January 1949.

The Commonwealth Government, which had bought the property that year, allowed OTC to maintain an accepting office in the building and this remained operational until 28 February 1955.



Laying the cable to Adelaide's telegraph office in 1902 when it was located in Victoria Square West. (Original photograph held by the AOTC Museum in Adelaide.)

Cottesloe Cable Station



Cottesloe cable station.

WHEN THE trans-Indian Ocean cable was laid by the Eastern Extension Company in 1901, the section from the Cocos Islands to the west coast of Australia terminated at a cable hut located on an area of Crown Land at the southern end of 'The Esplanade', in the Perth suburb of Cottesloe.

From there, a landline was laid to the company's accepting office and operating room in the T&G building in Perth.

In 1926, this section of the cable was duplicated with the loaded or 'high-speed' cable, and the new cable terminated at a cable station which was erected on the old site.

The station closed in June 1966.

Cocos Islands Cable Station



Fancy dress tennis match.

WHEN THE Eastern Extension Company decided to run a cable from Mauritius to Western Australia in 1901, the Cocos Islands was chosen as the site for a relay station.

The Cocos (Keeling) Islands consist of twenty-seven tiny coral islands in the Indian Ocean, 2752 kilometres north-west of Perth and 3664 kilometres west of Darwin.

Before establishing a cable station on one of the islands, the company had to negotiate with their owner, George Clunies-Ross, whose ancestor Captain John Clunies-Ross had first settled the islands more than 60 years earlier.

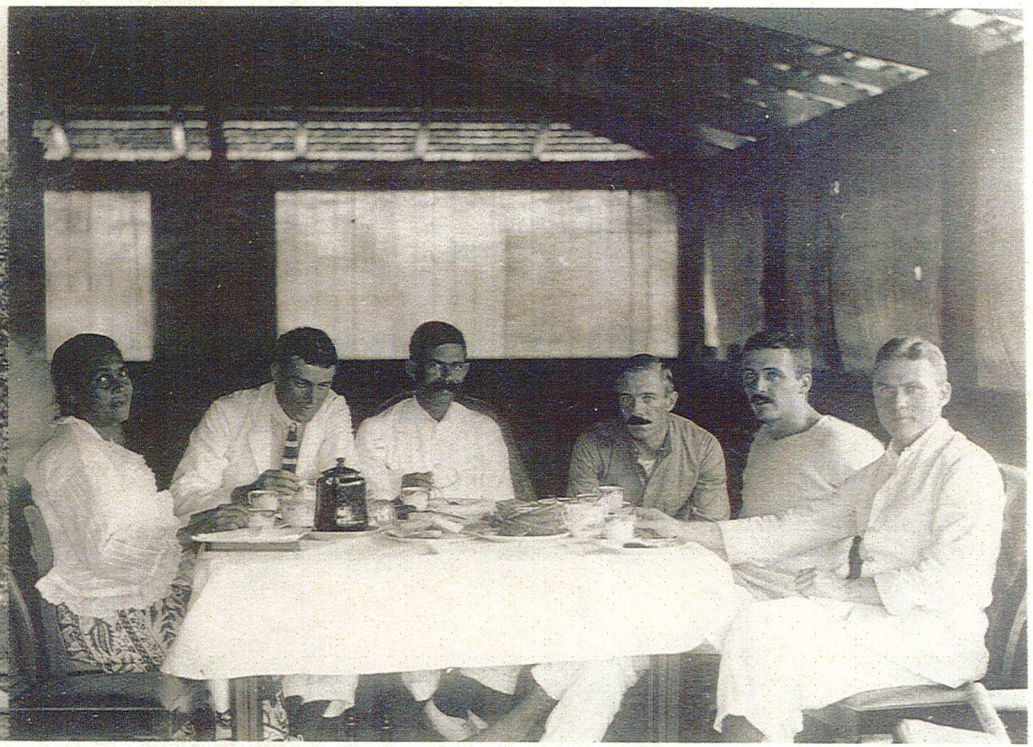
Clunies-Ross leased the company 16 hectares of land on Direction Island (also known as Pulo Tikus or Rat Island).

On 6 August 1901, cable staff and supplies arrived on Direction Island from Singapore on the vessel *Giang Ann*.

The cable was landed on Direction Island on 3 October 1901, and opened for



Several cable station staff members standing on the railway trolley which carried staff and supplies to and from the landing site, c. 1923. (Photograph donated to Overseas Telecommunications Veterans' Association by Brax Horrocks.)



Staff from the cable station were often entertained by members of the Clunies-Ross family in their magnificent residence 'Top House' on Home Island. Here, staff enjoy a tea party c. 1912.

traffic the next day. The same year, the line connecting Perth to Cocos opened on 1 November and the Cocos Islands were connected to Java by cable in 1908.

Built on the highest point on the island, the cable station was only two metres above the high water mark. The buildings were slightly elevated to provide ventilation; they consisted of an operating room, manager's quarters, married staff housing and bachelor quarters. There was also a sizeable mess hall, billiard room, library and, for outdoors recreation, two concrete tennis courts.

One event which put the Cocos Islands in the history books was the sinking of the German cruiser *Emden* off the islands on 9 November 1914.

The destruction of Britain's cable stations was seen by the Germans as the way to totally disrupt Imperial communications, and the *Emden* was sent to Cocos to destroy the cable station equipment and cut the undersea cables.

Unfortunately for the Germans, the cable station staff were able to send warning before communications were cut, with the result that *HMAS Sydney* was sent to battle the *Emden* and succeeded in destroying it.

Staff at the station were commended by the Eastern Extension Company Board for their actions.

Life continued peacefully on Direction Island. Every three months, a supply ship would bring food, alcohol, tobacco and mail. Not long after its departure, a sumptuous staff dinner would be held where the men performed their own concerts or plays.

The preparation of these productions would keep many amused until the next welcome sight of the supply ship; this not only brought the much needed supplies, but it broke the isolation for a brief time.



La Perouse Cable Station

THE CABLE from Australia-New Zealand began operating on 21 February 1876 from La Perouse, just a few kilometres south of Sydney.

The cable house was built a few metres from the beach at a place called Frenchman's Bay. A permanent station building was not completed until 1882, and housed both cable operations and a training school for the Eastern Extension Company until after the turn of the century.

In 1890, a second cable was laid, connecting Wellington to La Perouse, and was landed at Yarra Bay because of its freedom from shipping. The shore end of the original cable was also moved to this point.

A new building was erected in 1902-3 named 'Yarra House'; it accommodated operating rooms, a post office, and superintendent's quarters. The cable station buildings of 1882 were converted into quarters for the single staff.

There was no electricity in these quarters; wood fires were used for cooking and kerosene lamps for lighting in the mess and billiard room and some of the bedrooms. Juniors were allowed candles only.

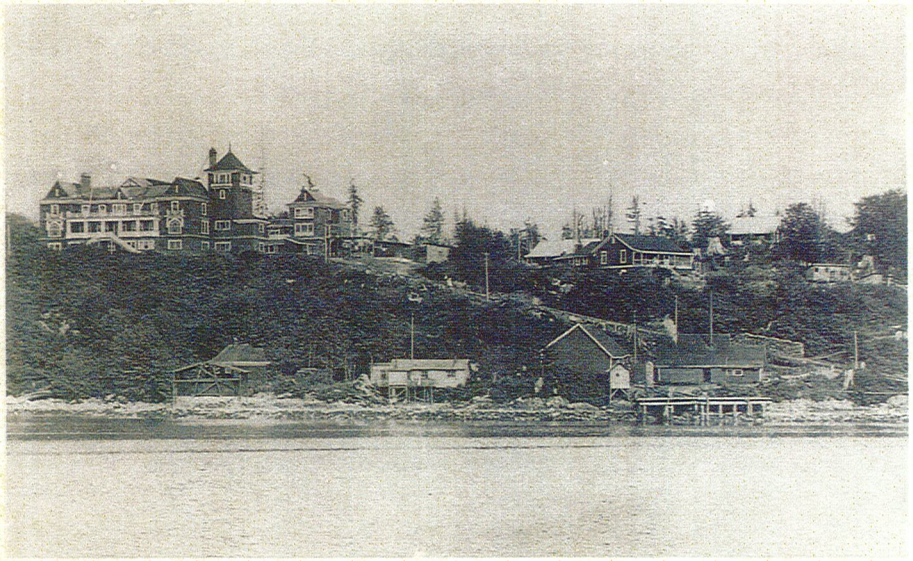
Staff at La Perouse engaged in activities such as tennis, cricket, sailing, fishing, shooting, swimming and surfing, or taking long walks.

In the early days, the pubs at Botany Bay were out of bounds to the young cable station staff and to the nurses at Long Bay — except on State occasions.

La Perouse cable station remained in operation until 1917, when the company decided to move the landing site of the Australia-New Zealand cable to Bondi and operate the line directly from its Sydney office in O'Connell Street.

After the station closed on 8 April 1917, the single men's quarters were used as accommodation for the nurses working at the hospital at Little Bay. For many years after 1944, the buildings were used as a women's refuge run by the Salvation Army.

◀ **Cable engineers and staff, 1876. The huts on the right are temporary cable station buildings.**



View of Bamfield cable station and wharf at Bamfield Creek c. 1916. On the hill to the left is the main building which housed the manager's office, operating room, bachelors' quarters, mess hall and telegraph room. Married staff cottages can be seen on the right, and in the centre front is the engine room.

Bamfield Cable Station

BAMFIELD was chosen as the landing site for the Canadian shore end of the Pacific Cable, mainly because it was the furthest point west and thus shortened the already enormously long distance which the cable had to travel between Canada and Fanning Island.

In late 1901, the Canadian Pacific Railway Company began clearing the heavily wooded site in preparation for building the new cable station. The Railway Company was responsible for transmitting messages across Canada on its overland telegraph line as part of a continuation of the All Red Route.

On 19 September 1902, the *CS Colonia* arrived at Bamfield to begin laying the cable to Fanning Island. The cable laying was completed by the first week in October.

Bamfield's main building was a three-storey wooden structure overlooking Barkley Sound, built in the style of a luxury hotel of the day.

In 1910, there was literally nothing but the cable station in the area and social life outside the station was very restricted, apart from the occasional trip up the coast to Port Alberni and a visit to the local general store!

The cost of this isolation was high for the Pacific Cable Board as well. All materials were shipped in by sea three times a month, on a service operated by the Canadian Pacific Railway Company.

In 1918, there was an outbreak of a deadly flu and the cable station lost several men. The Pacific Cable Board eased this loss and compensated for long hours worked during the war by presenting the staff with a movie projector and a new hall housing a badminton court. A new tennis court was built soon after.

After this, life at Bamfield improved dramatically. Staff could enjoy tennis, boating, fishing, swimming, hunting and hiking. There was also a library, dance hall with music supplied by a staff orchestra, movies every Saturday night and frequent bridge games.

There were also annual events such as the tennis dance and a New Year's dance, and special Christmas celebrations.

Although it operated at a loss in its early years, the outbreak of World War I and the need for communication led to higher profits.

The cable itself was slow, but by operating over a 24-hour period, approximately 34,500 words could be sent in each direction per day.

Greater demand made it necessary to increase cable capacity, and in 1926 a duplicate 'loaded' cable was laid by the *CS Dominia* across the Pacific. This new cable increased capacity five-fold, and meant that the cable station needed to be enlarged.

The high cost of operating the Canadian section of the Pacific link fell to the Canadian Government in 1950 and, when the Canadian Overseas Telecommunications Corporation devised a means of remotely controlling the cable from Vancouver, the Corporation decided to close Bamfield cable station.

On 20 June 1959, the last message was sent from the old station.

For some years, the buildings remained empty; furniture and equipment being covered in dust sheets. In 1963, with the advent of the COMPAC cable, Bamfield no longer even housed the shore end of a functioning cable.



Staff of the Bamfield cable station at a frozen lake near Bamfield after a game of ice-hockey, 1919.

Two years later, the bachelors' quarters were torn down and twelve of the houses used as married staff quarters were burned to the ground; and the old equipment was sold to souvenir hunters.

The rest of the station was saved when, in 1969, five Western Canadian universities bought the property and opened a marine biological station which still operates today.



Fanning Island cable station c. 1926. The view shows the rear of the main buildings, two single men's quarters, and on the left, a married officer's residence.

Fanning Island

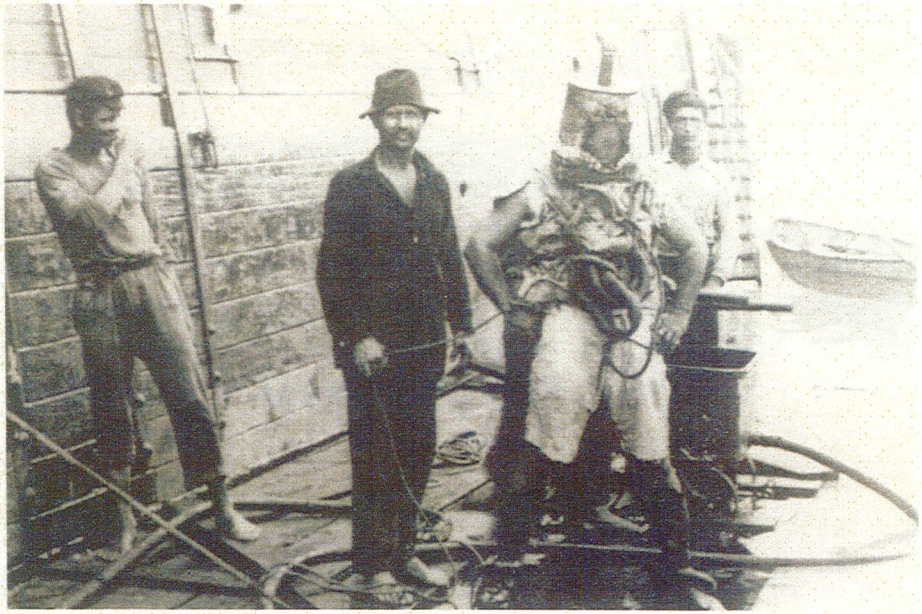
FANNING ISLAND is a small low-lying coral atoll, roughly oval in shape, located in the Pacific Ocean 228 nautical miles north of the equator.

The island was first discovered in 1798 by an American whaling ship captained by Edmund Fanning, after whom the island was named. In years to come, it was visited by many other whaling vessels and one of the breaks in the coral reef to the north of the island is aptly named 'Whalers' Anchorage'.

Surveyors for the Pacific Cable Board found Fanning Island to be the most suitable location to build a relay station which would break the long route from Bamfield to Suva and maintain continuity of the All Red Route.

The distance spanned by the cable from Bamfield to Fanning meant laying the longest continuous cable in the world, 3458 nautical miles in total.

Apart from its obvious isolation (Honolulu being the nearest civilisation 1920 kilometres away), Fanning Island was found to have a good climate and appeared disease-free, so it would not be likely to present cable station employees with undue hardships.



Cableman Hugh Greig dressed in improvised diving equipment, preparing to retrieve the ends of the undersea telegraph cable cut by the *Nurnberg*.



The highlight of the year was the annual sports day held each New Year's Day.

Apart from the occasional plague of mosquitos, most of the cable staff who served on Fanning Island reported pleasant conditions.

The island also housed a coconut plantation, which had been developed in the late nineteenth century and was owned by Burns Philp Co Ltd.

Cable station buildings were constructed on the north-west of the island close to Whalers' Anchorage, and included a manager's office, operating room, bachelors' mess hall and accommodation for staff: a manager, doctor, about six married men and their families, and twenty bachelors.

During World War I Fanning Island, like Cocos Islands cable station, was strategically significant for British Imperial communications and it too was targeted by the Germans.

Marines from the German cruiser *Nurnberg* invaded Fanning Island, destroying the radio equipment and severing the Fanning-Suva cable.

In Vancouver, the line from Fanning was dead, so the Pacific Cable Board sent the steamer *Kestrel* to the island loaded with supplies, cable and instruments.

Meanwhile, a cableman — Hugh Greig — succeeded in repairing the Fanning-Suva cable and, as station staff had managed to reconstruct some of the equipment, communications were resumed with Suva.

The *Kestrel* arrived two weeks later.

Despite this incident, there was plenty to amuse staff during their stay on the island. Outdoor pursuits were most popular although, like all other stations, the company had provided a billiard table, piano and gramophone player, well-stocked library and dance hall.

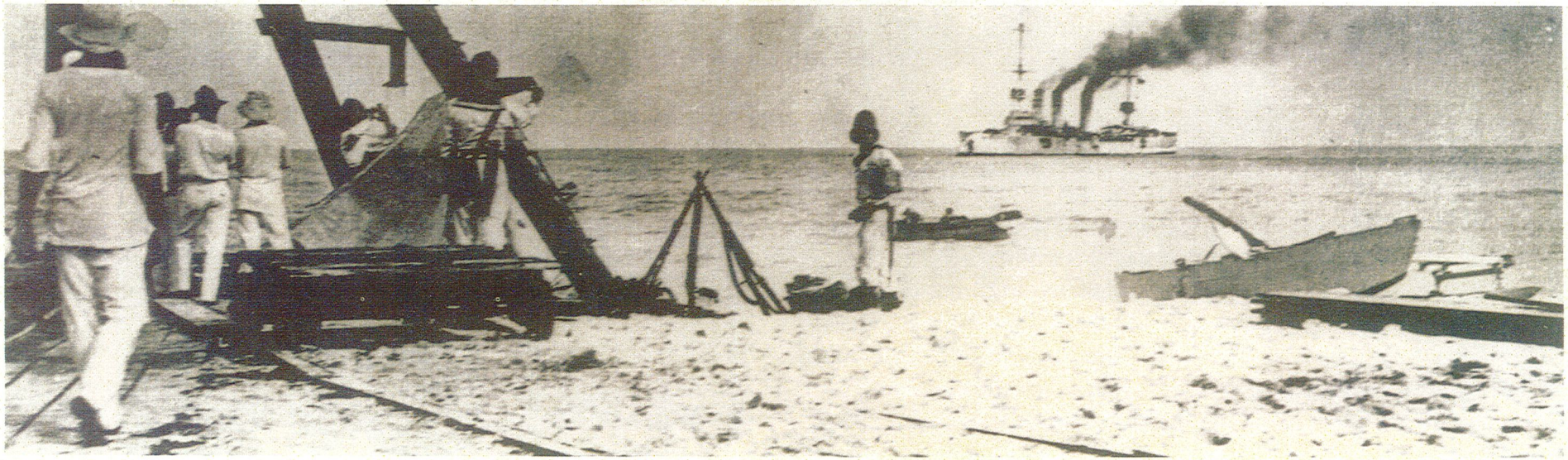
Some staff indulged in amateur photography, developing and printing their own film. Fish abounded both in the sea and lagoon, and sailing was a popular pastime.

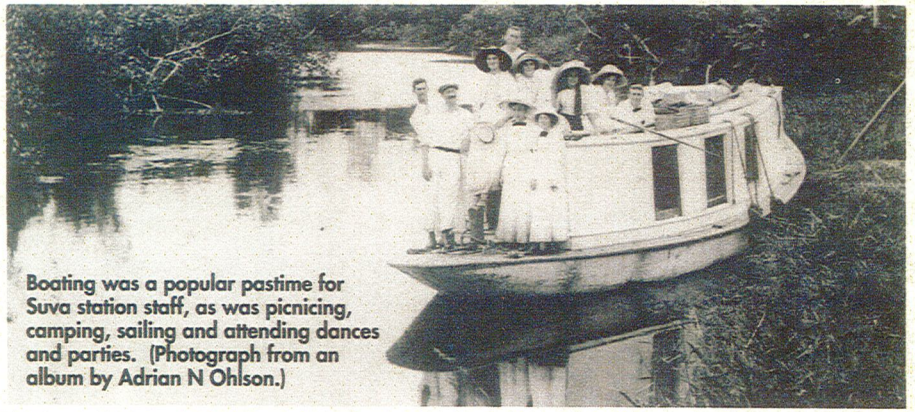
Fanning Island was also seen by staff as a way of saving money. An extra locality allowance for tropical service, and the inexpensive living, were very attractive — particularly for staff who contemplated marriage when they had saved enough money.

In short, many staff saw an opportunity of being posted to Fanning as one not to be missed.

The cable station closed on 16 January 1964.

German warship *Nurnberg* anchored at sea. Marines from the *Nurnberg* went ashore and destroyed the engine room and transmitting equipment at the cable station; the collier sailing with the *Nurnberg* cut the Pacific Cable. German marines can be seen standing guard on the shore while staff from the cable station look on.





Boating was a popular pastime for Suva station staff, as was picnicing, camping, sailing and attending dances and parties. (Photograph from an album by Adrian N Ohlson.)

Suva Cable Station

A CABLE STATION was established by the Pacific Cable Board at Suva on the island of Fiji in 1902 to provide a link between Fanning Island and Norfolk Island.

Completion of the Norfolk Island-Suva section of the Pacific Cable was accomplished in April 1902 and the section between Suva and Fanning Island was laid in October that year, but it was not until 1923 that Suva was linked directly with Auckland.

The early cable office was a picturesque two-storey wooden building, and the cable offices were later moved to a new concrete structure located in the centre of the town.

Suva, a thriving community, was often used as a 'breaking in' station for young operators on their first overseas posting. As well as being the administration headquarters for the British colony, it was also the commercial centre and had a thriving port, from which sugar was exported.

Life in Suva was very pleasant for the young operators. There was no shortage of amusements and, despite the heavy rainfall, outdoor pursuits rated high on the list of activities. Tennis, cricket, rugby, hockey and golf were popular sports.

Suva presented the PCB fledglings with an opportunity to prove themselves 'gentlemen on Imperial service' whilst providing them with a gentle introduction to life away from their home country and preparing them for postings to more remote stations in the future.

Norfolk Island Cable Station

NORFOLK ISLAND was chosen as one of the landing sites for the Pacific Cable and it was here the cable was to branch into three sections. The first was laid from Southport to Norfolk Island in March 1902, and the second section from Norfolk Island to Doubtless Bay in New Zealand was completed later that month. In April, the third section was laid from Norfolk Island to Suva.

Anson Bay, located in the north-west corner of the island, was chosen as the site for the cable station because of its small sandy beach and relatively sheltered position.

The cable station was built at a bend in the old Anson Bay Road, and opened in August 1902, although the Pacific Cable did not open for commercial traffic until December that year.

As the cable station suffered from constant humidity, permanently covering the instruments in moisture, a fire was kept burning most days to keep the air dry. The operating equipment was also regularly checked for accuracy, with adjustments being made to allow for changes in temperature.

By 1915, the Pacific Cable Board had supplied an engine and dynamo together with storage batteries, and the cable station became one of the first centres on Norfolk Island to have electricity.

This equipment provided enough power to run office equipment and lighting, but there was not enough power to operate domestic appliances until the 1950s.

Although life on Norfolk Island could be pleasant, the isolation of both the island and the cable station site meant that supplies had to be shipped to the station on a regular basis.

In the early days, goods were sometimes not landed or boxes were found broken, and the station had to wait several more weeks for staples such as flour or potatoes. Fresh meat was often in short supply.

To counter this frequent supply shortage, most of the cable staff kept cows and chickens and many grew their own vegetables.

Like staff in other stations, those on Norfolk Island enjoyed a number of different sporting activities. Tennis was played regularly, although as the tennis court was on cliff tops behind the station, play was restricted on windy days. The lawn

behind the superintendent's house could be used as a bowling green, and croquet was also played.

In 1914, the cable station was switched to automatic relay and by the early 1920s the number of staff had begun to dwindle.

Norfolk Island cable staff were seen to have contributed significantly to the social and economic life on the island, and several of the bachelors married local girls and settled permanently on the island.

The Norfolk Island Administration paid tribute to the cable staff when the station closed in 1962. It subsequently re-opened in 1983 and remains operational to this day.

Doubtless Bay

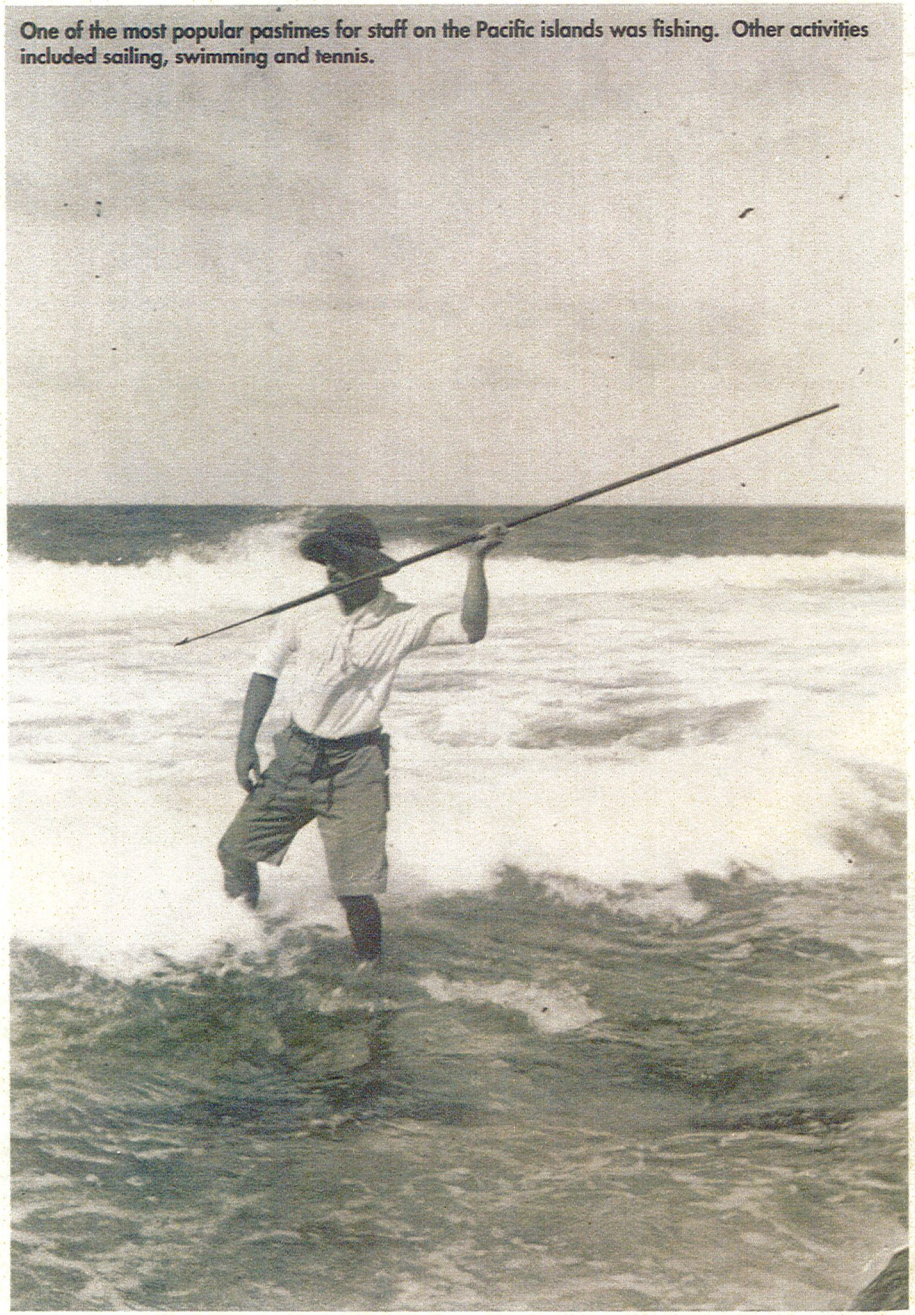
ON 26 March 1902, the cable-laying ship *CS Anglia* sailed to Doubtless Bay on the coast of New Zealand to lay the shore end of the Norfolk Island - New Zealand section of the Pacific Cable.

The cable station at Doubtless Bay was located on an isolated section of the coast, but some comforts were provided for staff. The cable station comprised a large two-storey wooden structure which housed the cable operating room, the bachelors' quarters and a separate house for the superintendent. It also had a tennis court, hall, billiard and smoke room.

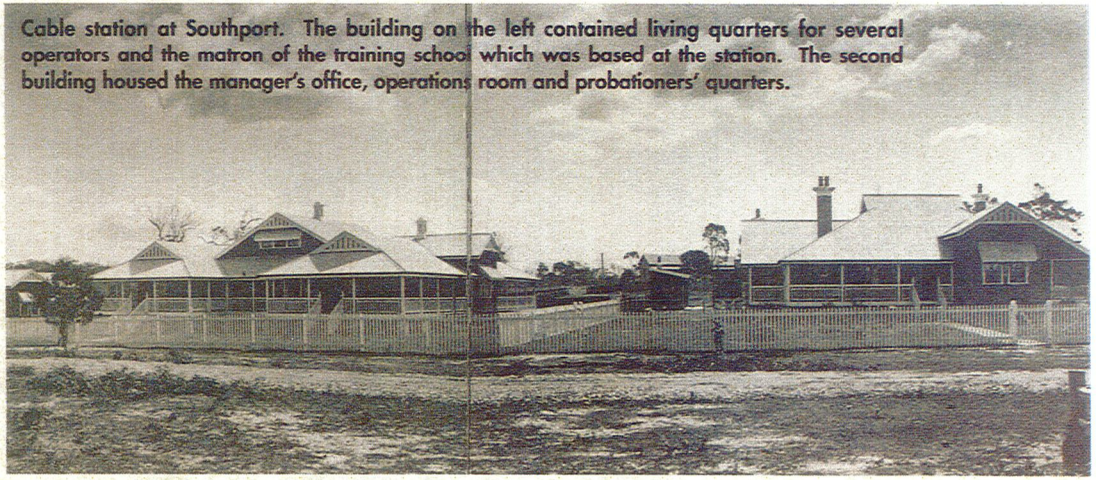
The life of the cable station at Doubtless Bay was short-lived. In 1912, the Pacific Cable Board laid its new cable from Bondi Beach to Auckland and a cable was laid from Doubtless Bay to Auckland where it terminated on the top floor of the Central Post Office. Operators were moved to Auckland and the cable station at Doubtless Bay was abandoned shortly after.

Landing the shore end of the Pacific Cable at Anson Bay, 1902.





One of the most popular pastimes for staff on the Pacific islands was fishing. Other activities included sailing, swimming and tennis.



Cable station at Southport. The building on the left contained living quarters for several operators and the matron of the training school which was based at the station. The second building housed the manager's office, operations room and probationers' quarters.

Southport Training School

THE FIRST section of the Pacific Cable was laid from Southport to Norfolk Island by the *CS Anglia* in March 1902. Southport was the terminus for the Pacific Cable — a landline was constructed to connect Southport to the Pacific Cable offices in Sydney.

Southport, located 80 kilometres south of Brisbane, was then a small seaside town. The cable station buildings were erected near the centre of town in Bauer Street and, besides housing the cable station, also contained a training school for newly recruited operators.

Unlike many other cable stations, isolation wasn't a problem for Southport staff. The town had 5000 residents and there were plenty of leisuretime activities, including films at the School of Arts and surfing in summer.

But probationers were always under the watchful eyes of their superintendent and matron, and rules and regulations were strictly enforced. Church attendance was compulsory at least once on Sundays, and there was a 10 pm curfew each night unless waived by special written permission, which was obtained in only the rarest of circumstances.

Examinations were frequent, and all facets of cable operation had to be learned to company standards before a boy was eligible for transfer as a probationary operator.

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**All due care has been taken to acknowledge the original source and/or ownership of photographs. Our sincere apologies to anyone inadvertently omitted from the above list or not credited in the photo captions.*

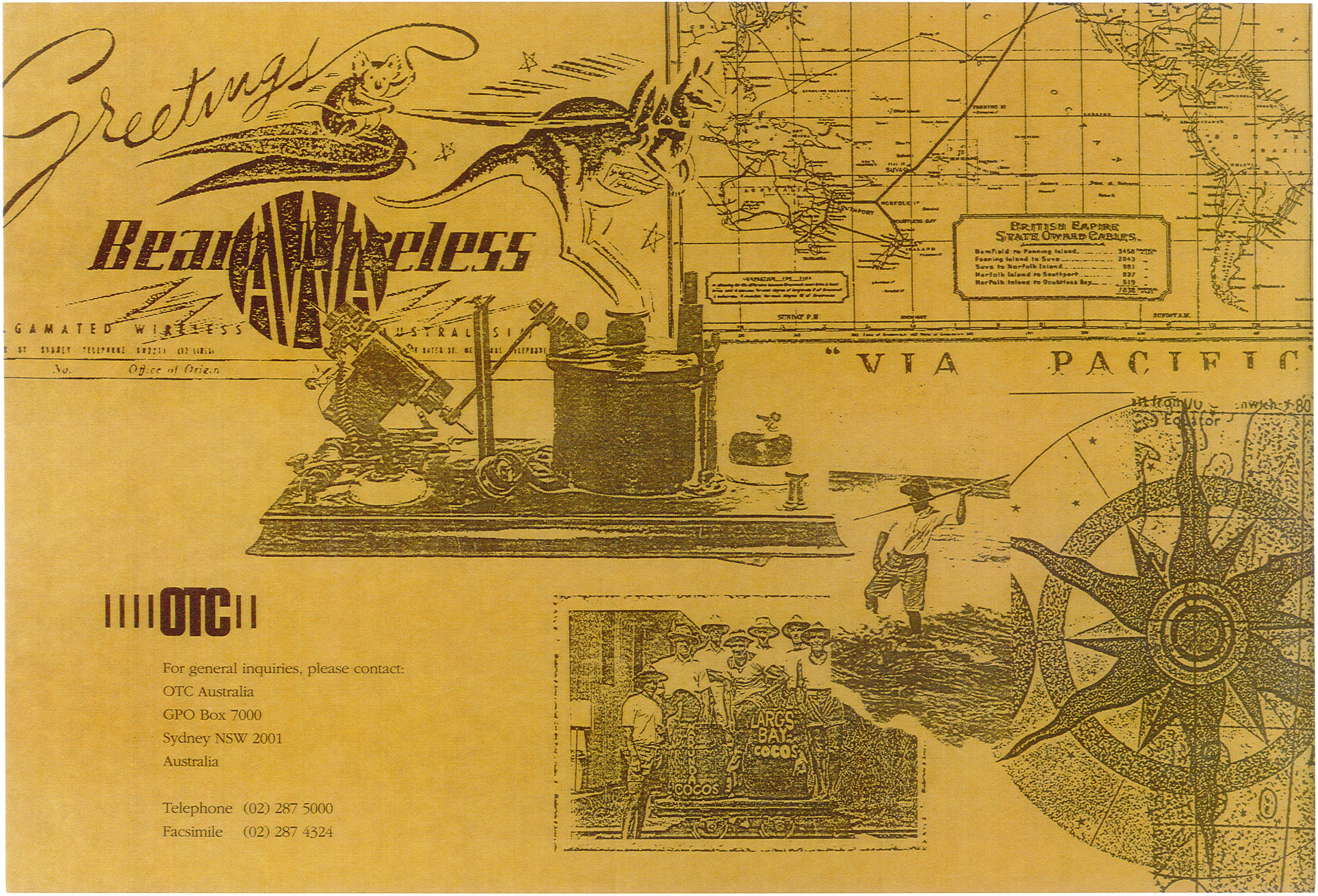
The first major work of the Eastern Extension Company was the laying of the Australia-New Zealand cable. Here, employees land the the cable at La Perouse on 11 February 1876. (Original glass plate negative held by the NSW Government Printing Office.)



Researched and written by Margaret Miller
Edited by Elizabeth Gray and Martin Ratia
Produced and published by OTC Australia and Publimedia Pty Ltd
The publishers wish to express their gratitude to AOTC Archivist, Kimberly O'Sullivan, for her assistance with this project.
Australian and Overseas Telecommunications Corporation Limited ACN 051 775 556
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