

Oppenheimer telegraph poles

Australians are rightly very proud of their Overland Telegraph Line (OTL). [Wikipedia information for the OTL](#). This was a 3,200 kilometre line that connected Darwin with Port Augusta in South Australia. Completed in 1872 the OTL allowed fast communication between Australia and the rest of the world.

The original 36,000 telegraph poles were a mixture of (Cypress) timber and galvanized Oppenheimer poles. Many of the timber poles were rapidly being destroyed by termites and in 1873 work commenced on their replacement. Kent suggests that this work continued until 1883 “when all the timber poles had been replaced with an assortment of telescopic galvanised iron poles, manufactured at Manchester in England, under J Oppenheimer’s patent”. The Oppenheimer poles were designed using three round or oval shaped galvanised pipes of different diameter and each pipe would slide inside the next. These telescopic poles were ideal for handling and storing and their reduced size made them much easier to transport and erect on site. Once on site they would be extended to their full height and a heated iron collar would then be placed over the joint. The iron collar would cool and shrink on the joint making it firm. Prior to the poles being installed cast iron base plates were fitted to the bottom of the poles to prevent them from moving. (information from [NT Government](#) site)



Then they were placed with an 80 metre spacing and with a repeater station every 250 km.

Most of the disused Oppenheimer poles have been used on properties for fence posts, tank stands and anywhere they could be put to good use. Small numbers though are still standing and are highly valued by the Australian communications historical community.

In our recent 2013 trip around Australia, we saw very few Oppenheimer poles still standing but many can be seen, particularly at museums in some of the towns along the Stuart Highway in SA and NT. We did though see many hundreds of Bullers Ltd iron poles in Western Australia. Bullers Ltd were based at Joiners Square Works, Hanley, Stoke-on-Trent. ([Some Bullers company history](#))

The best places that we found to see the poles and insulators etc were at -

- 1) Tennant Creek (NT) at the Historic Overland Telegraph Station where some poles have been used to support the veranda roof.



- 2) Alice Springs (NT) at the Historic Overland Telegraph Station.



3) Adelaide River (NT) at the Historic Rail Precinct, where they have the most extensive display of poles and all of their base plate and cross-arm fittings plus insulators. Many of the fittings look unused.



4) At home we have a number of these Oppenheimer poles, one of which is standing near our pergola area and doubles as our flagpole.

