

HEAVITREE GAP POLICE STATION

A resume of events compiled by Keith Mooney-Smith

At its meeting in May 1993 the Northern Territory Heritage Advisory Council accepted a nomination from the National Trust of Australia (NT) in respect of a place described as the Heavitree Gap Police Station located at the southern entrance through the Macdonnell Ranges to the Town of Alice Springs.

The land (Lot 1044) had been Proclaimed a reserve under Section 103 of the *Crown Lands Act* as a site for a historical building on 23 January 1958 (CG No.8 of 6 February 1958) and subsequently declared a reserve under Section 12 of the *Territory Parks and Wildlife Conservation Act* by notification appearing in NT Gazette No 26A of 30 June 1978. The Reserve was named the Heavitree Gap Police Station Historical Reserve by notification appearing in the NT Gazette No 38 of 21 September 1979.

It was held by the Conservation Land Corporation and administered by the then Conservation Commission.

Processes were put in place which culminated in the site being declared a Heritage Site under the Northern Territory Heritage Conservation Act.

N T G G No. G3 of 19 January 1994 p 4.

As is required under the aforesaid Act, a "Statement of Heritage Value" was approved which read as follows:-

"The former Police Station site at Heavitree Gap, Alice Springs, has special significance to the Territory as a focal point in demonstrating a way of life of the early police and their task of applying Law and Order in a remote and sometimes hostile environment.

Although an initial police camp had been established in 1879 at the Alice Springs

Telegraph Station, the move to the site at Heavitree Gap on 21 April 1886 determined the first officially regarded permanent police presence in Central Australia.

As custodians of Law and Order, the police duties were widely varied and involved undertaking patrols of long duration and covering large tracts of land, most of which was sparsely inhabited.

Up to this point, accommodation facilities provided for both police and prisoners were minimal, consisting of tents supplemented by bough sheds.

When constructed in 1889, the two roomed thatched dwelling became the focal point for a gradual change in living conditions for all concerned which ultimately led to its abandonment when it no longer met those requirements.

Becoming, in 1904, the first official gaol, prison and house of correction in Central Australia until closed in 1909, the site has had a chequered career degenerating to an abandoned ruin till its complete restoration as a historic building in 1971".

I had first sighted the building early in 1964 when arriving in Alice Springs to take up an appointment as Assistant Chief Draftsman with the then Lands and Survey Branch of the Northern Territory Administration. Thirty years later, it was my task to evaluate the site and to prepare a report from a historical and heritage perspective.

The Conservation Commission had already effected a great deal of research including obtaining copies of relevant archive material, particularly that from South Australia, which was used to compile the report .