

## CHAPTER VII.

### ARLTUNGA.

About sixty-five miles east of Alice Springs is the abandoned town of Arltunga. Empty buildings, roofless and open to the sky, abandoned machinery and a few ragged date palms are all that remain of the tiny town.

The credit for the first discovery of gold in the area goes to the ex-cameleer and teamster, Joseph Hele, and a mate, Isaac Smith. In the creekbed near Paddy's Rockhole they found alluvial gold in the sand and rocks. This was in April, 1887.

Prospectors had first come into the MacDonnell Ranges in search of "rubies" which were discovered by the explorer-surveyor, David Lindsay, at Glen Annie in 1886, (Glen Annie is now known as Ruby Gap.) These "rubies" were later identified as garnets.

By August, 1887, there were almost a hundred men in the area - some searching for "rubies" but a few searching for gold near Paddy's Rockhole. Each miner had to be issued with a Miner's Right, which was a licence to prospect for gold and these were issued at the Police Station at Heavitree Gap at Alice Springs. The policeman, Mounted-Constable W.H. Willshire, was appointed Goldfields Warden in the MacDonnell ranges in 1887.

To get the gold from the rock a crusher was needed, and the first one was brought into the area by one of the companies formed to mine the gold, the Wheel Fortune Mining Co. Their mill took four months to reach the field being carried overland by horse-drawn wagon from Oodnadatta. This crusher (or battery) began crushing in August, 1889.

At about this time a drought struck the area and water was in short supply. Wells went dry and crushers were forced to stop working as there wasn't sufficient water to keep them operating. In 1890, the little settlement at Paddy's Rockhole had a population of 12, including 2 storekeepers and butchers. The well at Paddy's Rockhole was deepened but even then the supply of water was not enough for the people, animals and the small crusher belonging to William Benstead, which was operating there. However, despite the dry conditions, the tiny settlement progressed.

The first Post Office was started in 1891 by Mr. Joseph Harding, who was one of the two storekeepers and he became the first Postmaster. The mail was carried once a month between Alice Springs and the Arltunga area by a contractor, R.R. Smith, who had been a colt-breaker before this. He was paid £70 per year.

For the next few years the miners were just able to keep going. Life was very hard - water was short and costs were high. Finally, in 1895, the geologist H. Y. L. Brown suggested to the Government of South Australia that a Government Battery be erected at the field. In December, the first manager of the MacDonnell Range Battery and Cyanide Works was appointed. He was Mr. James Gilbert Woolcott. The machinery left Oodnadatta in early 1897 and was hauled overland by horses. Mr. Woolcott had a month-long trip overland by camel from Oodnadatta and he found the conditions very trying.

While the battery was coming, a further important discovery was made when, in 1897, J. Byrne discovered alluvial gold in the White Range area, about four miles north-east of Arltunga. A short time later Henry Luce found reef gold in the same area. These discoveries meant more work for the crusher.

The site chosen at Claraville was found to be unsuitable for the battery as the water supply was not reliable. Mr. Woolcott decided to change the site to the Star of the North Well which was on a creek at Arltunga.