

The establishment of the Government Battery began the township of Arltunga. In February, 1898, Mr. F. J. Gillen, Postmaster at the Telegraph Station at Alice Springs, opened the battery by turning on the steam and the plant commenced crushing. From then on all the activities of the area were centred around this site. In March, 1899, the Post Office was shifted (from Paddy's Rockhole) to Arltunga and the mail service became twice monthly. January 14, 1899, saw the establishment of a Police Station not far from the little township and Mounted-Constable Patrick Johnson was sent from Alice Springs as the first policeman.

The first police station was built of wooden logs until it was replaced by a stone building in 1912. This was built by Mr. Gerhardt Johannsen and the remains of it can still be seen today.

Miners worked the mines in the Arltunga and White Range area with varying success up until quite recently, but the Battery closed down in 1916 when the supply of ore became too small for economic operation. Sometime later, much of the machinery was removed. The remainder of the boilers and the settling tanks used in the Cyanide Process to extract the gold can still be seen today.

Other buildings also stand in ruins at Arltunga - all that remains of the Post Office are the chimney and small pieces of the walls. At the crossroads, approaching the little town are the remains of the Hotel which was run by "Sandy Myrtle" MacDonald and, opposite it, the old bakehouse.

Life on the Goldfields.

When a miner decided on a site for a claim an area was pegged out and registered with the Government Officer or Warden. Then the great task of digging into the hill or ground was begun. In the case of a hillside, a shaft was usually driven into the hillside and then a "drive" went off to the right or left or down. Most shafts were about 60' deep and the rock was extracted with picks and shovels. Sometimes the rock was broken up and loosened with dynamite. The extracted ore was lifted to the main shaft in buckets by a series of ledges, then carried by wheelbarrow to the main opening where it was dumped onto a bullock hide to be sorted. Aborigines were often used to sort the useless rock from the gold-bearing rock. The useless rock was dumped over the side of the entrance of the mine, out onto the hillside and the ore-bearing quartz was put aside. Later this rock was taken to the battery by cart or wagon to be crushed and the gold extracted.

At the battery the ore was crushed and treated with chemicals to extract the gold. When this was done the gold was weighed and the miner was paid by the Government Assayer (3.14.10d. per ounce). In about 15 years, 11,673 ounces of gold were taken out of the Arltunga-White Range goldfield, valued at 43,698 in those days.

At the height of its prosperity Arltunga is said to have had 500 people living there and most of these lived in tents, log huts or "tent huts". The remains of these "Tent-huts" can be seen all over the place in the hills near the town. They consist of a low stone wall with a doorway at one end of the rectangle of stone and sometimes a chimney at the other. The stones are cemented together with mud in the better ones but many are built of stones piled on top of one another. The tents were erected on top of these walls and the stones acted as a windbreak and gave extra head-room for the users. Occasionally a stone hut was built and this, too, had a canvas roof because roofing iron was extremely expensive.

The first Post Office had a stone chimney, which is still standing, and walls of upright poles stuck in the ground. The poles were cemented together with mud and it had an iron roof. The mail was carried, together with the gold, to Alice Springs in a four-wheeled buggy pulled by four horses with the driver and one other man as escort. There was little fear of robbery because there was little hope of escape in such an isolated area.