



# Ryan Well Historical Reserve



Located approximately 129 kilometres north of Alice Springs on the Stuart Highway, Ryan Well serves as a rest area of historical interest for travellers. On the western side of the highway are the remains of an old well which was associated with the Overland Telegraph Line and early settlement of Central Australia. The South Australian Government named this well after Ned Ryan who, with his nephew, Jeremiah Ryan, completed Ryan Well in 1889.

On the eastern side of the highway are the remains of Glen Maggie, the homestead of a sheep and cattle station established in 1914 by Samuel and Elizabeth Nicker and their five children.

## Ryan Well

In 1872, the Overland Telegraph Line was built through the area from Adelaide to Darwin. Good rains had fallen and six wells built at the time were sufficient. It soon became evident, however, that more wells were needed, particularly when stock were beginning to be shifted along the Overland Telegraph Line route.

The mining rush to Ruby Gap and Arltunga further spurred the South Australian Government to commission some basic civil work in Central Australia. The most significant new works were undertaken by a party headed by Ned Ryan, and by 1884, the Superintendent of Posts and Telegraphs was able to report to the South Australian Parliament that there were now 16 wells on the Overland Telegraph Line

between Alice Springs and Katherine.

The wells were generally sunk by teams of four men - two digging at the bottom of the excavation, one at the surface pulling up buckets of soil with a windlass and one making timber framing.

Dressed bush timber collars and frames were used to retain the earth around the excavation wherever the ground was soft and likely to fall in. The framing followed the shaft down until more consolidated and firmer strata was reached. Below this the shaft was usually left un-timbered.

At first the wells along the Overland Telegraph Line were not equipped with more than windlasses for raising and lowering of buckets. Where large numbers of stock had to be watered the windlass system could not cope and accordingly holding tanks and whips were installed. A drover might send two men to a well a day or two in advance of the arrival of the travelling stock. The men would fill the tanks, enabling the stock to water quickly when they arrived.

Whips utilised animal power to draw water from the bottom of the well. A draught animal would be harnessed to a cable or rope each end of which was attached to well buckets. As the rope was pulled to and fro a full bucket was raised and an empty one lowered into the well. The distance walked by the draught animal in each direction was equivalent to the depth of the well.

## Safety and Comfort

- Observe park safety signs.
- Carry and drink plenty of water.
- Wear a shady hat, sunscreen, insect repellent, suitable clothing and footwear.
- Avoid strenuous activity during the heat of the day.
- Consider your health and fitness when choosing a walk.

## Please Remember

- Keep to designated roads and tracks.
- All historic, cultural items and wildlife are protected.
- Fires are not permitted in the reserve.
- Bins are not provided, please take your rubbish with you.
- Pets are permitted on a leash in the carpark only.
- Camping is not permitted.

## Samuel Nicker's station

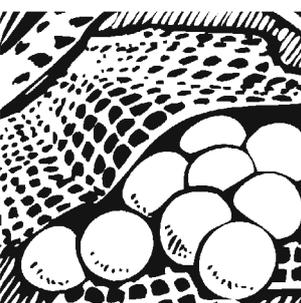
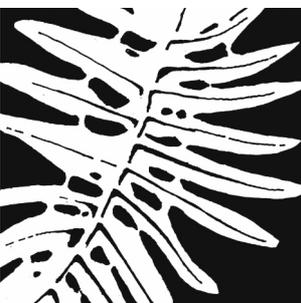
In late 1913 Samuel Nicker acquired an annual licence for land surrounding Connors Well and 200 square miles around Ryan Well. Nicker arranged the purchase of 500 head of sheep and went out to erect holding yards on his block. An eye infection then caused him to travel to Adelaide for treatment while his family waited in Alice Springs.

On his return in August 1914, the family set off northwards with a buggy, horse and dray, goats, milking cows and the sheep. They were accompanied by an Aboriginal couple, "Old Billy" and his wife who shepherded the sheep and goats.

On McGrath Flat the horse bolted and the dray ran into the buggy, breaking a wheel and causing it to

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## Information Sheet

be abandoned. All goods were then transferred to the dray and everyone walked. The dray finally gave out at Ryan Well where Nicker decided to form a permanent camp.

### Glen Maggie

The Nicker's earliest permanent dwelling at Ryan Well was constructed of mulga uprights, with clay filling the gaps between. The doors and prop open window shutters were made of an old iron water trough beaten flat. Nicker named the homestead "Glen Maggie" after his daughter Margaret. A woolshed constructed of bush timber was constructed alongside the house.

In 1918 or 1919 a two room stonework wing comprising a main bedroom and a sitting room with fireplace, was erected alongside the original dwelling. The stone structure, with bush timber roof framing and corrugated iron roof, is all that remains of Glen Maggie today.

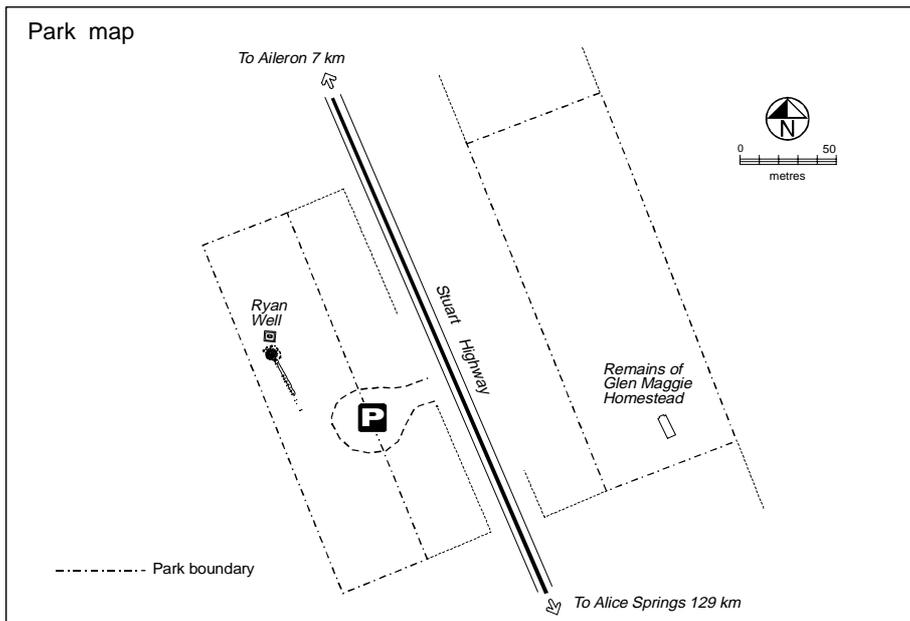
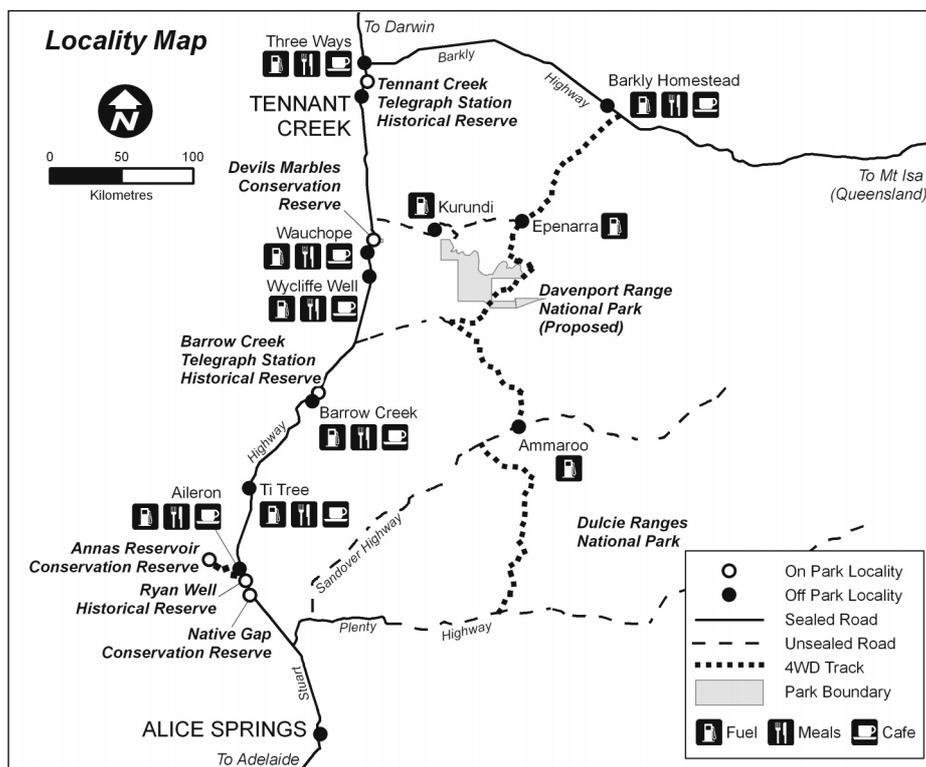
Written into the Nicker's 1919 lease was the provision to supply water to the travelling public and their stock for a fee. Fees charged were one halfpenny per head of cattle, one penny for each camel and ten shillings for each one thousand (1000) head of sheep or small cattle. Officers from the Post and Police Departments traveling on public business were to have their horses or camels watered free of charge by the lessee.

The water at Ryan Well was barely drinkable by humans and the Nickers carted their own water from Connors Well or from Annas Reservoir.

In October 1921, a non-official post office was opened at Glen Maggie as the building was located on the Overland Telegraph Line. This was upgraded to a telegraph office in 1923.

The Nickers struggled on after several dry seasons until, in 1929, Sam Nicker suffered a stroke and the family decided to sell the station and move to Alice Springs. Sam died in Adelaide hospital during Christmas 1930.

In 1930 Sam Nicker's station was purchased by "Norrie" Claxton, a well known cricketer and baseballer of the time, who is said to have purchased Glen Maggie for his adopted son Clarke.



Clarke it seems was keen on aeroplanes but not really interested in becoming a pastoralist. He renamed the station Aileron and Fred Colson was taken on to manage the station and begin a new homestead at the present Aileron site.

Aileron Station, including Glen Maggie, was acquired from Claxton by its manager Fred Colson in about

1935. During that year the post office at Glen Maggie was closed down and the service transferred to Aileron.

**Please do not climb on the well or disturb the stonework.**

Further information and a historic display can be viewed at the Aileron Road House, approximately 10 kilometres north of Ryan Well. Facilities and toilets are available.