

Exploring Arltunga



Welcome to Arltunga, the site of Central Australia's first town.

A brief history of Arltunga - A rush that slowed

In 1886 the surveyor and explorer, David Lindsay, reported rubies in the sands of the Hale River at Ruby Gap, 40 kms east of here. Hopeful miners rushed the area but the 'rubies' were actually garnets and almost worthless. Meanwhile, the gold bearing potential of the country had been recognised and in 1887 gold was discovered in the creek sands below Paddy's Rockhole.

Central Australia's first industry-based settlement followed. In anticipation, the South Australian Government commissioned Lindsay to survey the town of Stuart, now Alice Springs, which would supply the new Arltunga goldfield.

The miners used hand operated blow dryers to separate alluvial gold from creek sands and gravel, or they dug into the soft schist rock to extract gold-bearing quartz for crushing.

Arltunga developed slowly, the harsh conditions, the lack of water and the extreme isolation meant the miners and their families had a hard life.

Big future, big plans

When rich reef gold was discovered at nearby White Range, the future of the field really did look promising. Digging into the tough quartzite rock was much harder, but the gold yields were greater.

In 1898, the Government Battery and Cyanide Works began crushing and treating the miners ore and the following year a police camp was established. Arltunga looked like making it big and many dreamt of large company owned mines. The promising future did not arrive. The problems were many. In 1890, drought played havoc as wells dried up starving horse teams became too weak to cart ore to the battery. When the boiler at the Government Battery burst in 1901, ore could not be crushed for several months and the miners were forced to live on borrowed money.

The short lived gold rush to nearby Winneckie Depot in 1903 helped save Arltunga, since it brought several hundred newcomers to the area. In 1905 a township was surveyed at the crossroads and it became the commercial centre of Arltunga, with a well, store and a hotel. However, activity on the field was waning and as gold became harder to get, the miners moved on.

Waves of hope

Since the Arltunga Battery closed in 1913 there have been sporadic attempts to mine the area, including a rush of more than a hundred miners on the 1930s depression years. In the 1950s the White Range area was reworked and today miners are again interested in the area.

Arltunga for Australia

Arltunga is now recognised as an important part of Australia's heritage. Since it was declared a Historical Reserve in 1977, there has been ongoing research and conservation work to preserve historical sites and provide information for visitors. Arltunga Historical Reserve represents one of the first major settlements in Central Australia. The Reserve's historic buildings have not altered much over the years, so you will get a good idea of pioneer life on a remote turn-of-the-century goldfield.

Other sites of interest

Paddy's Rockhole - the Eastern Arrernte Aboriginal people called this rockhole 'Annurra ntinga' which means smelly water. To the early miners this sounded like 'Arltunga' and the name was adopted for the whole goldfield.

Little Flower Mission - During World War 2 the Catholic Mission for Aboriginal people moved from Alice Springs to Arltunga. Approximately 200 people lived at the mission until 1953, when it was moved to Santa Teresa.

What to see and do at:

1. Government Works: self guided walk, 250m return. This area containing Arltunga's richest collection of historic buildings and associated sites for the visitor to discover. Pick up a brochure from the pamphlet box at the carpark and explore the site of the Government Battery and

Parks & Wildlife Service of the Northern Territory

Regional Office - Arid Zone Research Institute, Tom Hare Building
 South Stuart Highway, ALICE SPRINGS NT 0870
 PO Box 1120 ALICE SPRINGS NT 0871
 Ph: (08) 8951 8211 Fax: (08) 8951 8290



Cyanide Works, which once processed the quartz ore of the area to find the elusive gold. Walk through the Manager's and Assayer's Residence and compare the government officials accommodation to that of the miners which can be seen elsewhere in the Reserve. Also stroll about the remains of the Post Office, Blacksmith Shop, Gold Room and offices. You can also enjoy a short walk to the Police Station of 1.5 km (20 - 30 minutes).

2. The Old Police Station: was built in 1912, and was the subject of the Reserves most major reconstruction effort in 1985. Step into the gaol and sense what it might have been like to be a prisoner in those days. Nearby you can examine the Two-stamp Battery erected to crush White Range ore by the McIntyre family in the late 1950s. Nearby is Kangaroo Well, a 23 m deep permanent water supply, which was one of the most productive wells in the district.

3. Historic Mine Walks: MacDonnell Range Reef Mine: a self guided walk, 0.9 km return. Climb down ladders into this old mine and back into history to experience the world of gold-miners almost a century ago. Take time to let your eyes adjust to the darkness, and see the seams of quartz that were dug out only using hand tools, in the pursuit of gold. This mine is one of the few underground mines at Arltunga. Don't forget to take a torch!

4. Golden Chance Mine: a self guided walk, 1.7 km return. The walk to this mine offers the opportunity to examine one of the miners huts of 'dry stone' construction. Also from the mine, a short 200 m ascent to the top of the hill will reward you with a spectacular panoramic view of Arltunga.

5. Crossroads Area: In the 1900s the Crossroads area was chosen as a township site for Arltunga. This did not eventuate due to the waning prosperity of the gold fields. View the remains of the bakehouse, and the site of the Glencoe Hotel.

6. Crossroads Cemetery: see the gravesites of early miners James Woodford and what is believed to be the grave of William Smith who worked the Great Western Mine. His grave is surrounded by timber posts and a rail fence.

7. Joker Gorge: a self guided walk of 200 m return. This short walk will bring you to some early stone buildings, which are associated with the Joker Mine, and includes the interesting Roundhouse. Joker Mine can be reached by scrambling a further 200m uphill, and offers a splendid opportunity to experience Arltunga's rich flora and fauna. If you are quiet, you may see some of the resident Black-footed Rock-wallabies.

8. Great Western Mine: a self guided walk, 600 m return. This walk will take you to what was once the second most productive mine at White Range, producing 600 ounces of gold. Scramble into this cavernous mine and explore its many secrets. Along the track you will discover the remains of miners stone buildings, and wooden buildings left from later miners that re-worked the area.

9. White Range Cemetery: visitors are rewarded with excellent views of the surrounding country on the way to this site. The cemetery is a stark reminder of the harsh conditions endured by Arltunga's early residents. Here lies Joseph Hale who first found gold in the area in 1887, Henry Luce who discovered the reef gold of White Range in 1897 and other prominent miners and citizens. A short walk to the hill behind the cemetery will reveal the extensive White Range Open-cut Mine, commissioned in 1990. This mine closed in 1991. Waste dumps are currently being reprocessed.

