

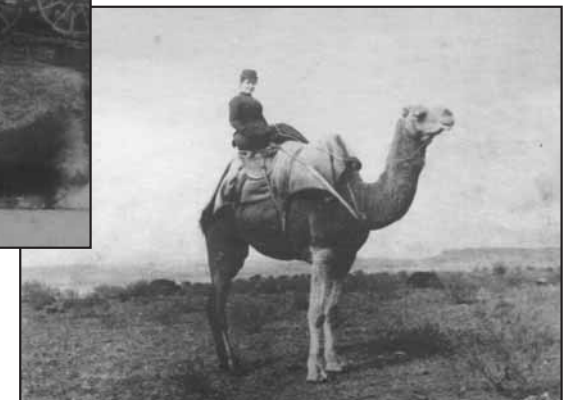
Afghan Well and the Cameleers

The earliest record of camels arriving in Australia is in Tasmania in 1840. In 1846 John Horrocks purchased one camel to be used for exploring. In 1860 John McDouall Stuart used camels in his exploration of the centre of Australia. Also in 1860 Thomas Elder and Samuel Stuckey were riding horses in the Lake Hope area, contemplating pastoral settlement when they observed explorer John McKinlay using four camels brought over from Victoria. In 1862, Samuel Stuckey travelled to Karachi to investigate buying camels and in 1865, Thomas Elder chartered the steamer "Blackwall" to bring a consignment of camels to Port Augusta. 109 camels were taken first to Umberatana in 1866 and then to Beltana station where the Afghan drivers set up their head-quarters on the bank of the Warrioota creek. This site and the existing well became known as "Afghan". Nathaniel Phillipson had recently begun work at Beltana and he set himself to learn the Afghan language.

Thomas Elder had camels carefully selected - the 'Mekraua' for fast riding, the 'Scinde' camel, a hill camel and a beast of burden and the 'Kandahar' camel which was a very heavy animal for heavy work. A breeding programme was set up at Beltana station with these animals. The advent of camels posed threats to the horse, bullock and donkey teamsters. Horses were terrified at the sight and smell of camels and they often bolted. Bullockies considered it cruel that so much load should be put on a camel. When those proud and seemingly arrogant cameleers and their equally proud camels overtook a bullock team, each pretended not to see the other. The Afghan cameleers hold the 'teamsters record' for being able to deliver cargoes of wines, spirit and ales without "breakages". Of all animals, camels were the most able to endure harsh arid conditions and were known to travel 25 miles per day for nine successive days without water. The camel and the Afghan driver were a great asset to the development of inland Australia, being of greatest use in times of most severe drought. Although isolated from their homeland the drivers loyally maintained their Mohammedan faith.



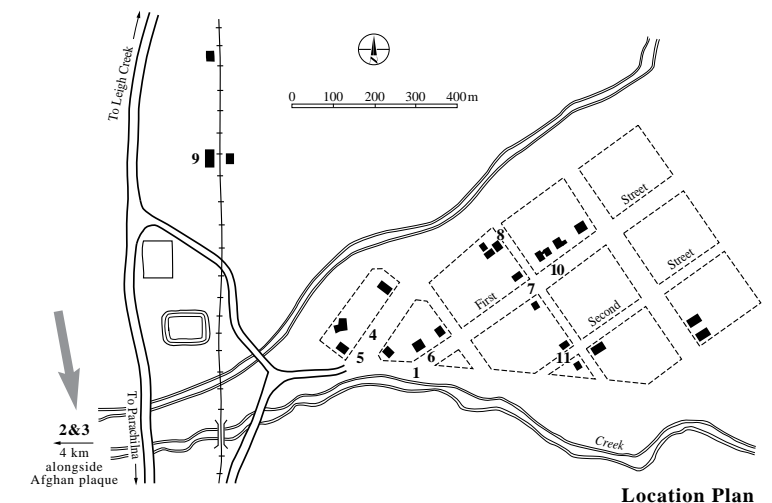
Camel teams



Mrs Phillipson



Afghan camp



Location Plan

