



Goolwa (114) was once a bustling river port and is noted for its historic buildings. Links with the past are clearly evident in the reappearance of steam driven river boats and the Signal Point River Murray Interpretive Centre. The wharf precinct is in the process of a major redevelopment aimed at providing visitors with an insight into its historic role.

The goods shed and wharf opposite the station bear testimony to a bygone era of hectic activity with the transfer of produce from paddle steamers to the railway for transshipment to Victor Harbor.

The original **Middleton** station, 6km across flat farmland, dated from the horse tram period and was located near the large "Bowmans" stone mill, seen on the right as the train enters the township. Prior to 1880s the original horse tram line from Strathalbyn came in from the north and joined the Goolwa line here. This route was closed and removed in 1885. During the 1950's large quantities of sheep were railed from the local sheep sales and Middleton was second only to Strathalbyn for its volume of traffic on the line. Today's station is a little further on towards Pt Elliot.

Closer to the coast now, and the surfing beaches at Fishermans Bay and Basham Beach can be glimpsed across the sandhills. Whales and their calves are often seen here in the winter. Back to the rear of the train and across the bay are the beaches at the Murray Mouth with the Coorong stretching southwards in the distance.

Just before **Port Elliot** the line swings to the right and leaves the route of the original horse drawn railway route which ran away down on the left to the old wharf at Horseshoe Bay. The present Port Elliot station office was built in 1911 to replace a smaller galvanised iron structure of the 1870's. Port Elliot National Trust members maintain the station and have an excellent historical display.

Leaving the station, the line runs along the cliff tops towards Victor Harbor in the distance. At Watson's Cap the train crosses over an arched reinforced concrete bridge built in 1906 to replace the original timber bridge constructed in 1863. The line skirts the Southern Ocean for over 3km after leaving Port Elliot. Surfing beaches at Boomer Beach, Chiton Rocks and Dump Beach are all within 100 metres of the line. This section arguably offers one of the most scenic vistas from a train carriage window in Australia.

Entering the outskirts of **Victor Harbor**, the line crosses over the Hindmarsh River on a five span concrete bridge. As the train slows to enter the station yard look out for the the authentic semaphore signal on the left, the restored electric turntable on the right and the historic stone walled railway crew resthouse on the left opposite the bowling green. The imposing brick station building, built in 1926, is the only example of its kind in South Australia. This station is the third building on the site since the days of the horse tram. The Coral Street hand operated road gates are the last remaining examples of rail/road crossing gates in the State and are an important link with our early history.

Granite Island, across the causeway, is one of the most popular attractions in the Victor region and a popular excursion is to ride the restored horse tram across the causeway, grab a snack at the café, visit the penguin interpretive centre and then walk around the rugged ocean side of the island and back to the mainland. Other easily reached attractions in Victor are the Whale Museum in the restored stone goods shed and National Trust Museum in the old Station Masters house.



For local tourist information call into the **Victor Tourist Information Centre** just before the causeway to **Granite Island**.

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Bookings and Timetable Enquiries

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The Southern Encounter

Mt
Barker
to
Victor
Harbor

Welcome Aboard!

A passenger's guide
to travelling on SteamRanger's
"The Southern Encounter" train
from Mt Barker to Victor Harbor



The first section of our line to Strathalbyn, was opened in 1884 with substantial stone buildings at major stations and sidings and passenger platforms at a number of other locations. Many of these were still in place into the 1970s.

The next section from Strathalbyn to Goolwa through Currency Creek initially tracked to Middleton where there was a junction with a line built earlier from Victor Harbor to Goolwa. Until 1884 trains south of Strathalbyn were hauled by horse power, but by 1885 the section to Currency Creek had been rebuilt to steam railway standards with a new section constructed directly from Currency Creek to Goolwa.

The line from Goolwa to Pt Elliot, mentioned above, had been opened in 1854 as SA's first railway venture. It was the first public line laid with iron rails in Australia. It was built to provide an outlet for the River Murray river trade, bypassing the dangerous Murray mouth. Unfortunately, it soon became apparent that Port Elliot was a bad choice as a harbour. Seven ships were wrecked in the ten years from 1853, and the rail line clearly needed to be extended to the better harbor at Victor Harbor. This extension was opened for traffic in April 1864.

Passenger services operated by Australian National on the line ceased in April 1984 and the line was closed to all trains in 1989. With widespread community support SteamRanger subsequently took over the line to operate it as a tourist railway.

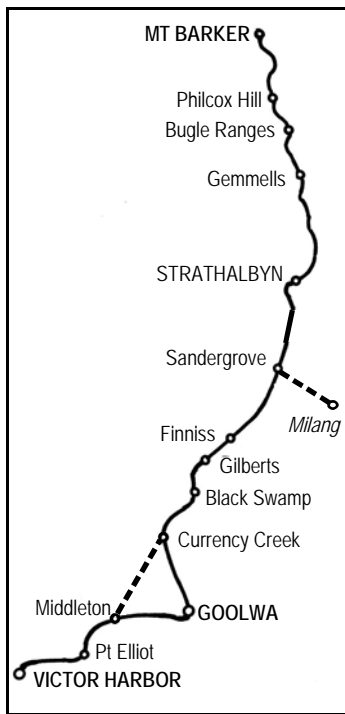
Mt Barker (55É) The station building was constructed from Aldgate freestone during 1883. Next to it, on the Adelaide side, were once refreshment rooms of timber construction which were used up until 1963, with tables and chairs with white linen laid out under the adjacent poplar trees. The District Council of Mt. Barker restored the historic Railway Station building to coincide with the transfer of SteamRanger from Adelaide in 1996. **SteamRanger's loco depot**, just south of the station building, has been operating since May 1996.

Heading southwards, the line winds past the loco depot and to the left of the train, across flat country, can be seen Mount Barker summit in the distance. The mount was named after Captain Collett Barker who first sited it from the Murray Mouth in the 1830s thinking it was Mount Lofty. Realising it was not, Captain Sturt named it in Barker's honour.

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É Figures following each station name show the distance from Adelaide - look for the kilometre posts alongside the line



The climb up the ranges commences just past the 58 km post, and reaches the summit at the abandoned Philcox Hill station site. Situated in a opening in the trees on level ground, the station site is the highest point on the line (1,304 feet or nearly 398 metres above sea-level) In years gone by the goods siding featured loading bins for stone that was brought down from a local quarry by means of a one-kilometre long horse tramway to the east of the line.

Beyond Philcox Hill (61) the line begins to fall on a 1 in 45 gradient towards Bugle Ranges, and views of the fertile farming countryside, the lower Murray and the Coorong start to open up.

The former Bugle Ranges station (64) is approached across a curving embankment. Though in the past there were quite a number of residents living in the area, the station was provided mainly to cater for Macclesfield people as compensation for the Government not being able to take the line through their town. The rather extravagant signal cabin which was built here was removed to Long Gully on the Main South line after less than two years use!

Gemmells (71) After passing through a number of substantial cuttings the line then again crosses the main Mt Barker to Strathalbyn road and a few more tight curves brings it into Gemmells siding, named after an adjacent land owner, Thomas Gemmell. Stone from the nearby Quarry Hill was also loaded at this point for transport to Adelaide and other destinations. The line then curves around the base of Stirling Hill and across an impressive horseshoe curve embankment, beyond which passengers

can again see across the lakes and to Strathalbyn. A cutting is followed by the highest (and most photographed) embankment on the whole line. Descending the ranges, the line then flattens out and the long straight section into Strathalbyn was always a favourite with S.A.R. enginemen in the past who were willing to give their trains a quick burst of speed.

The **Angas River bridge**, just before the station, consists of two steel deck spans which replaced the original iron ones installed in 1884. The central pier is now concrete which encases the iron columns, but the two abutments were able to keep their original stonework when the bridge was rebuilt. In October 1926 when the girders were being exchanged, the first slipped while an attempt was being made to position it, just as it had during construction in 1884! History repeating itself!

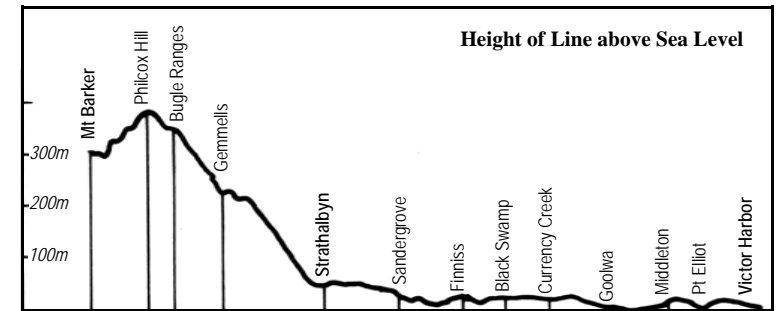
Strathalbyn (82) is a picturesque country town sited on the Angas River. The town was first settled in 1839 by the Rankine families who had emigrated from Scotland. The name is a combination of *Strath* - a Scottish word meaning a small river valley; and *Albyn* - a corruption of the word *Albion* which had been a name for Scotland in ancient times. The railway arrived in 1884 and at first, passengers going further south then transferred to a horse tram!

Strathalbyn station has in recent years been lovingly restored to almost new condition. The front area has been continually beautified with garden plots since Thomas Adams came to the town as Station Master in 1871 and commenced planting four years later! The stone goods shed, used by SteamRanger's track maintenance team, was built in 1884 while until 1964, two tracks south of the station platform served a locomotive shed.

A siding adjacent to these still provides access to a turntable used to turn smaller SteamRanger locomotives. Prior to November 1968 this small table was used to turn the Model 75 railcar which ran between Strathalbyn and Milang on the shores of Lake Alexandrina.



Shortly after leaving Strathalbyn the line passes the old Racecourse platform, and then travels away from main roads across gently undulating country which slopes gently down towards Lake Alexandrina



Sandergrove (90)

was the junction for the now closed branch leading to Milang on Lake Alexandrina. At one stage there was a small turntable here to turn locos working to Milang but through most of its later life the branchline was operated with Brill railcars. The Milang line was closed in June 1970 and Sandergrove station in July 1973. At Milang a volunteer group has restored the station and preserved some rolling stock. The thick Finniss scrub is visible on both sides of the line, with its unique and rare flora. Kangaroos can often be seen leaping along in company with the train.

At **Finniss (97)**, where there is still a platform and passing siding, the line returns to "civilisation" just off the main Strathalbyn to Goolwa road. Finniss was one of the original 1867 tramway stations and horse stables were located on the eastern side of the track. There was a station master here until 1927. One of Finniss's claims to fame is that William Bowmans, a local farmer, invented an innovative combine harvester which marked a milestone in agricultural machinery development.

The line crosses three significant bridges in the new ten kilometres. The wrought iron bridge across the **Finniss River** has a 27m span originally built for the horse drawn tramway and subsequently strengthened. It is a single span, interesting in that the two central piers, remnants of the original bridge, play no part in supporting the span! Come back and look carefully one day - there is a 150cm clearance!

After passing **Gilberts Siding (99)** the line crosses Tookayerta Creek by the **Black Swamp viaduct**, originally built as wrought iron girders supported on red gum piles. Due to settlement the bridge was rebuilt in 1926 on concrete piers. Steam trains were frequently scheduled to stop here to take on water from a water column and overhead tank, the foundations of which are still visible. The water was often mentioned as the best on the line. Flashing road crossing signals herald the crossing of the main Strathalbyn to Goolwa road at 104km, just beyond the well known Canoe Tree.

Currency Creek (107) is named after the small whale boat "*Currency Lass*" used in early exploratory work on the River Murray in the 1830s. By 1858 the settlement boasted the "*Currency Creek Inn*" (now being restored as a private residence) and a flour mill, but now little else remains but a spartan platform amongst the cow paddocks. The creek itself is crossed just beyond the platform. At 23m above the creek bed it is the highest structure on the line and consists of six brick piers and two abutments joined by seven spans up to 12m in length. Built in 1866 the structure was strengthened in 1926 and the spans renewed.

SteamRanger's **Goolwa Depot (112)** on the left about 5km further on, was built in 1987 to provide secure storage for rollingstock used to operate the local "*Cockle Train*" service and to house a small running maintenance workshop. The line then wends its way through the back streets of Goolwa township to reach Goolwa Station located in the historic wharf precinct alongside the River Murray. Across the river from the station is **Hindmarsh Island** which stretches across to the Murray Mouth and the entrance to the Coorong.

Acknowledgements: This brochure has been compiled with reference to publications of various SA railway authors including the late Kim Bird, John Ramsey, Roger Sallis and Dean Harvey. We thank them sincerely