



SteamRanger's Heritage - an insight into our past

BACKGROUND

An overview of SteamRanger catering activities over four decades dating from 1970 to 2010

A slightly edited version of an article included in the ARHS 50th Anniversary book
"50 Years of the ARHS" compiled by Ivan Marchant in 2002

This material was initially contributed by Bob Green and Margaret Blake who managed the activities
from 1970 to 1990 and from 1991 to 2011 respectively

The final paragraphs were not included in the published book
and are included to bring the record up to date in 2011

ARHS Catering and Trading Services 1970-2010

Contributed by Bob Green and Margaret Blake

Included in "50 Years of the ARHS (SA Division)" Compiled by Ivan Marchant 2002

ISBN: 09581036 0 7

EARLY DAYS — 1960s AND EARLY 70s

During this period trains were chartered from the SAR and used rolling stock that was stabled at Mile End and Adelaide Yard and used for both regular SAR traffic and ARHS charters. We had virtually no access to cars prior to their arrival in the platform, just prior to passengers loading, and therefore it was not possible to set up any form of permanent buffet facilities on-train - everything had to be loaded on board from the platform as the passengers were entraining! Sales were made from whatever brakevan was attached, with the drinks in bins underneath the traditional fold down shelves and the till and sweets on top.

Prior to the mid 70s sales were limited to softdrink and beer purchased from SAR Catering and Trading Services, sweets purchased in the main from supermarkets and often made up into little "kiddies" bags of mixed sweets and (on certain excursions) ice cream bars. Collecting the ice-creams in their trademark canvas covered dry-ice cooled containers was an early morning task carried out for many years by Kim Bird, a great aficionado of the contents! The drinks were laboriously trolleyed up in the goods lift from the bowels of Adelaide Station, accompanied by massive blocks of ice and two or three galvanised bath tubs to keep the products icy cold during the day. At the end of the day, everything had to be returned where it came from, with loose items taken home for safekeeping by one of the team. Where the excess ice-creams went we were never sure!

A small range of souvenirs was also sold on-train; postcards, books and other items produced by the Publications Committee and other railway items. During this period the team included Dean, Loryse, Kym, and David Harvey and Kath and Moira O'Donnell. By Bob Green and Margaret Blake

THE MID AND LATE 70s

During this period the ARHS increasingly took over responsibility for rolling stock, but without a secure Depot it was still a period in which everything was loaded on and off-board for each trip. More extended country trips were run with larger passenger numbers. Bob Green was recruited as a dedicated Trading and Catering Manager to work with the Tour Organiser and transportable counters and display cabinets were built which could be fitted into whatever brakevan was attached. By clever design these facilities could be collapsed to allow them to be taken home between excursions!

The "Festival of Steam" at Adelaide Station in 1978 was a major milestone accompanied by the design and manufacture of an extensive range of new souvenirs; T-shirts, caps, records, posters, books etc. After the Festival it was intended to sell these on an ongoing basis on-train. An innovative transporting solution to having volunteers transport them from home each week was to hire an unused telephone box on the concourse for some four years - in true SAR style a formal contract document was produced! With a floor plan of about three square metres but a height of some six metres, some ingenuity was required to load in the transportable counters, cupboards, refresh and souvenir stock, and the well loved ice containers.

On-train the refresh service was significantly expanded to include hot tea and coffee, sandwiches, cakes and spirits. Unfortunately the ice cream service had to be terminated. A number of long distance trips to locations such as Mt Gambier and Peterborough stretched resources to near the limit, with both on and off-train catering involved.

DRY CREEK DEPOT DAYS — THE 80s

With the opening of Dry Creek Depot life suddenly ever so easier — no more loading and unloading at Adelaide! Freezers and fridges at the depot meant the end of buying ice and transporting stock home each night. A liquor license was applied for and granted after time consuming documentation was prepared.

Centenary Baggage 81 was identified as a permanent buffet car and internal modifications carried out by the T&C Manager to install a longitudinal counter with integral ice bins, segregated food preparation area, roof mounted water tanks, integral battery charger, and a gas operated water heater and cooktop/ griller, together with lockable storage areas. Passengers were offered an extended range of products; hotdogs, on-board prepared pavlovas, fresh sandwiches and so on. Hot chicken packs were collected and distributed to passengers en-route on the *Southern Encounter*. Volunteers were recruited on an ad-hoc basis to staff the buffet, with Bob Green and Cathie Sargent working as supervisors on a high proportion of movements. Others involved were Barbara Smythe, Ross and Doreen Houston.

In this period, and into the early 1990s, there were often maximum length Southern Encounter trains and on-board buffet takings frequently exceeded \$1,500 per trip. To provide an "up-market" catering facility steel car 602 was later extensively modified internally and renamed "Bowmans" under Frank McDonnell's leadership. Four passenger compartments were removed and an open lounge area created. A gas operated fridge and oven were installed. The car was subsequently used extensively with steel car consists; especially on charters and long distance movements.

Towards the end of the 80s access was gained to both Goolwa and Victor Harbor stations and shop/refresh facilities setup. Fridges, freezers and extensive souvenir display facilities were installed. Ice-cream sales were commenced. Local identity Pat Reynolds provided invaluable shop support as well as working on many "Southern Encounter" trains.

Souvenirs were eagerly sourced from many suppliers by Rosey Currie and the late Merridee Thompson who worked tirelessly for fundraising efforts together with Barrie Hawes and John Whittle.

A CATERING COMMITTEE — THE 90s

In 1991 a major reorganisation of functions separated souvenir sales from catering and refresh and separate sub-committees of volunteers were formed. Margaret Blake was elected as the inaugural Chair of the Catering Sub Committee and continued in that role for two decades until 2011. On-train sales of souvenirs were terminated as the shops became well stocked and on-train refresh income declined significantly once services from Adelaide were replaced by the shorter running time from Mt Barker. The days of taking \$ 1,500 per movement were well over!

To compensate, the functions of the catering team significantly expanded to include off-train catering (particularly at the annual "Steam Up" season opening at Mt Barker), to service an increasing number of charters, and to provide both on and off-train catering on longer country and interstate excursions, including a milestone "all-inclusive" service on the final 621 hauled broad-gauge movement to Victoria in 1994.

Centenary baggage 83 was internally upgraded by a professional cabinetmaker in 1990 to duplicate the layout in car 81 and provide a backup buffet for wooden consist consists for many years. Car 81 was refurbished to a improved standard in 1996 whilst it was released from regular traffic. It was reinstated to regular service in 2000 when car 83 developed body problems.

Experienced volunteers have been externally trained in food handling procedures and each train from Mt Barker now has a nominated Buffet Supervisor in charge. Bob Green has continued as Refreshments Supervisor, purchasing and managing stock on-train and at Goolwa and Victor Harbor and providing facilities management. Other active catering volunteers in latter years have been Ross Woolman, Anne and Bill Simpson, Gill and Trevor Blight, Bev Sawyer, Laurel and Grahame Turnbull.

While still based at Dry Creek, the catering team provided various barbecues for Mystery trips, catering for up to 450 passengers. On the 621 trip to Victoria, catering was kept busy making sandwiches and packing lunches and the guys cooked a barbecue en route in the brake van.

Then came the South Coast Starlighters - a weekend trip from Adelaide to Victor and return, using the ex Overland sleepers we had at the time. This was one of the biggest challenges for the team, providing a first class service to approximately sixty guests. Breakfasts and a cooked lunch were provided for the guests.

From Dry Creek we also had several charter trips, where drinks and nibbles were served. On one trip to Victor Harbor we served drinks to approximately sixty guests and then gave them Devonshire morning teas en route. After our move to Mt Barker, we catered for several progressive dinners from Goolwa to Strathalbyn and also Mt Barker to Strathalbyn. These were very popular.

We then expanded our expertise and catered for an engagement party off train, and also catered for a number of weddings using our Tavern Car, Bowmans and also on the platform at Strathalbyn Station.

Morning Teas have been served to the Premier and parliamentary members and other important guests from time to time.

*** THE NEW CENTURY**

With the transfer of train operations to SteamRanger's new depot at Mt Barker and truncation of south coast services to run only from there rather than from Adelaide, the requirement for elaborate on-train catering on the "Highlander" and the "Southern Encounter" reduced significantly.

Instead of arriving at Keswick a little after 8.00am after a quick breakfast, passengers boarded our train at 10.00am or 10.30am and were mainly now looking for a cup of tea or coffee and a biscuit or scone during their 2 hour journey down to Victor, rather than something more elaborate. And on the return, passengers leaving the train at around 6.00pm eliminated the need for an onboard evening meal as we offered in the past.

In addition, new food handling and liquor licensing regulations limited what we could offer on board and we soon discontinued our onboard liquor service, but continued to bring on board very popular scones and cakes prepared by rostered volunteers the night before.

A number of unfortunate circumstances involving periods of steam loco withdrawal and track closures later in the decade resulted in substitution of diesel locomotives for lengthy periods and cancellation of various trains and resulted in significantly smaller numbers of refreshment customers on regular services and consequent financial returns.

Commercial venues were engaged to cater for some evening dinner trains.

Major "Steam Up" activities were staged at Mt Barker station and depot as opportunities offered with catering volunteers providing BBQs and refreshment sales outlets, with some supporting food outlets outsourced to other community bodies.

Looking forward beyond 2011, we hope to have a revitalised steam hauled schedule of longer distance trains between Mt Barker and Victor Harbor and intervening stations with a revamped refreshment service operating on most trains as in the past.

** Note: Above paragraphs added to update original 2002 article*