SOUTH AUSTRALIAN RAILWAYS.
GOOLWA & VICTOR HARBOUR.

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The first section of the lines comprising the South Australian Railways was actually a horse tramway of 5 feet 3 inch gauge with iron rails, which was opened for traffic on 18th May 1854, to connect the Murray River settlement of Goolwa with Port Elliot, a tiny bay on the south coast. Goods and passengers were thereby conveyed between the river boats and vessels plying to Adelaide, this being a more practical route than that over the steep and indifferent roads across the Mount Lofty Ranges.

This line commenced at a station at right angles to the river bank at Goolwa, being connected at its terminal end to wharf sidings by turntables, the platform being situated where the present bowling green is now established, and then ran on its own right-of-way some 7 miles to Port Elliot, the line being, with the exception of half-a-mile at each end, on its present day location. At Port Elliot. the original route left the present railway about half-a-mile on the Goolwa side of the existing station, and passing through a low cutting, ran round the bay to a terminus at a small wharf under the cliff where there was protection of some sort from the seas. A visit today reveals the earthwork of this port line, portion being in use as a roadway, but the shelter is used only by a few fishing boats.

Owing to the generally unsatisfactory and unsafe condition of the port in rough weather, a new shipping shelter was urgently required, resulting In the development of Port Victor, four miles further west along the beach, where Granite Island and adjacent reefs provided the necessary shelter for vessels in all weathers, and the tramway was extended to Port Victor, being opened for traffic on 4th August 1864.
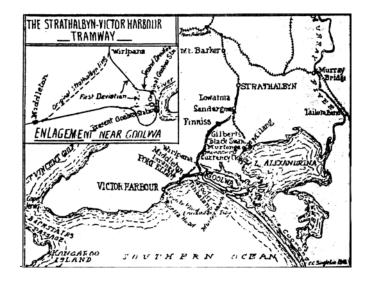
 Strathalbyn, by now a thriving centre of a rich district, had no outlet for its produce beyond the indifferent roads over the the Mt Lofty Ranges, so a branch tramway 21 1/2 miles in length was constructed between that town and and Middleton on the original tramway, two miles west of Port Elliot, and opened for traffic on 23rd February 1869. The formation of this branch may still be seen joining the existing main line 1/4 mile east of the present Middleton station, and the remains of the old platform are near the old mill at the Junction.

On 15th September 1884 Strathalbyn was connected to Adelaide by rail direct, and the question of providing a steam operated service to Victor was raised, and in April 1885 three steam combined double decked tramcars were substituted for horses, these being bogie vehicles with vertical boilers, the makers being Societe Anonyne Franco Belge. They were however found unsuitable for the heavy work required and in the following year were transferred to the Largs service. In 1885 a deviation was opened between the present site of Wirlpana halt to Goolwa Junction, half- a- mile west of Goolwa, and the original line from Wirlpana to Middleton was abandoned. All through trains could thus call at Goolwa by propelling the half-mile to or from the Junction, which incidentally was simply controlled by a cheese-knob lever and no signalling of any sort. This primitive arrangement survived till 12th January 1915, when a second deviation was opened consisting of a loop line 1 3/4 miles in length with a new station on the river bank which gave direct access to Goolwa without any reversing movements. The portion of line leading to the old Goolwa Junction, about 1/4 mile in length was then abandoned, as well; as the original line from the wharf to Goolwa Junction.

Owing to the difficulties experienced by vessels in the navigation of the Murray River mouth, the government of the day decided to construct a large port for ocean going steamers at Port Victor, and large sums were expended on this scheme. A viaduct was erected to Granite Island and two wharves built at the terminus of a rail siding which had been extended beyond the original dead-end to the Island. This extension is still worked by horse trams In the tourist season, these being the sole specimens remaining in South Australia today.

Owing to confusion of its name with Port Victoria on Spencer's Gulf the name of this port was changed to Victor Harbour, but although quite safe, the shipping has left the port. Its decline being influenced by the development of the through railway over the hills to Adelaide, which diverted the river trade In 1878 by. Morgan to the rail route. Victor Harbour however was saved from extinction by the growth of tourist traffic and its situation as a seaside resort with pleasing local scenery, and heavy passenger traffic was worked in the season for many years. The advent of the motor and good roads brought Adelaide within an hour's run of Victor Harbour, as against the three hours of the fastest trains over the indirect route over heavy grades, and the passenger traffic has fallen to such a small amount that it can be handled with rail motors running twice a day.

Motors have also killed the Murray river-boat traffic, so that Goolwa has lost almost all its business and is dwindling away, the temporary spurt caused by the barrage works of the Murray mouth has ceased with the completion of the work, and the future is anything but bright, as the district is poor.

As the home of the railway in South Australia the local lines of the Encounter Bay district are well worth a visit, as the trip can be made from Adelaide and back in the day, and the working to those from other states is most interesting, the train order board giving several of the stations a most American appearance, and the absence of the safe working appliances of the railways of the parts of Australia is most striking.

There is only one other railway in the district dealt with, and that is the Sandergrove to Milang line, the latter village being on Lake Alexandrina, opened 17th December 1884, but it is of little interest and has but little traffic of any sort.

It is interesting to record that the Goolwa to Port Elliot line was the first public and government owned tramway or railway to be opened in Australia, the only previously constructed lines being a few colliery tramways owned by the Australian Agricultural Company and and others in the Newcastle district

The article cannot be concluded without a mention being made of the two small 0-0-0 tank engines known as Kitson Motors which were used on tho Strathalbyn to Victor line after the withdrawal of the self contained steam trams In 1885.   These motors carried the S.A.R nos 97 and 98 and builder's nos 142 and 143.