



SteamRanger's Heritage - an insight into our past

BACKGROUND

This lengthy article published in 1954 to mark the centenary of the horsetram line between Goolwa and Port Elliot is somewhat mistitled in that it includes much detail on the later extensions to both Victor Harbor and Strathalbyn

As well as describing construction the article discusses operational issues in some detail including timetabling, accidents, rolling stock and income statistics

THE CENTENARY OF THE GOOLWA - PORT ELLIOT LINE - The History of its Construction and Development

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*An early passenger truck at Goolwa in the 1850s
with the telegraph office-cum-station in the background*

The Goolwa -Port Elliot line, which formed the nucleus of the Strathalbyn, Goolwa and Victor Harbor Tramway, was constructed in the early 1850's as a portion of an ambitious public works scheme for the South Coast of South Australia.

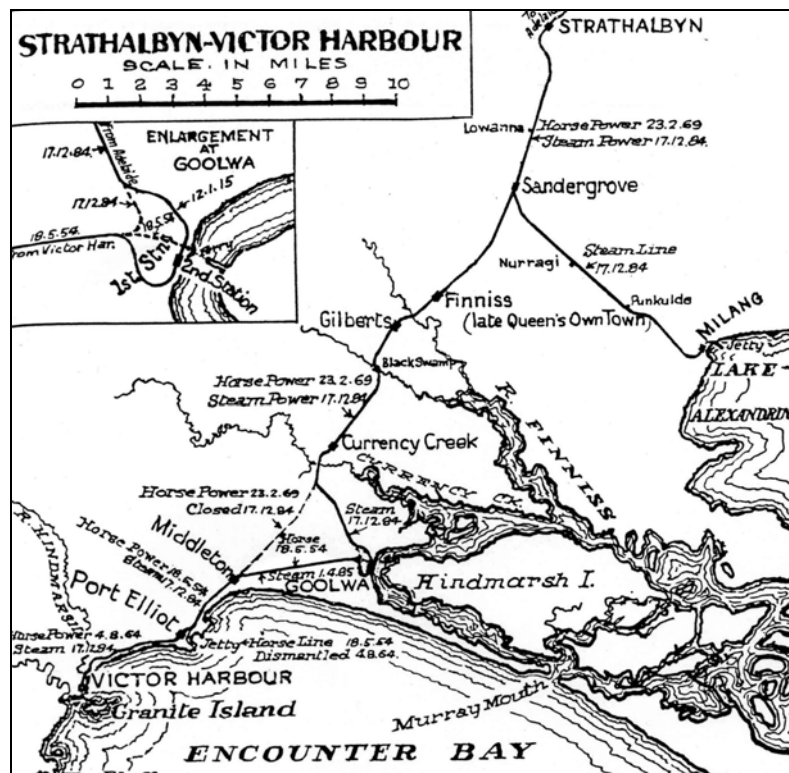
The then Governor of the province, Sir H.E.F. Young, had visited the Murray and the area around its mouth and decided that it would be advantageous to South Australian prosperity if a railway were built connecting the Murray to the sea coast. Acting on the advice of R.T. Hill (a civil engineer) and Captain Douglas (Harbourmaster), Port Elliot on Encounter Bay was chosen as the ocean terminal of the railway and Goolwa, near the mouth of the Murray, as the river terminal. This scheme, the Governor hoped, would divert to South Australia the whole of the traffic of the interior.

The proposal was received with mixed feelings by the public and the Governor received petitions for and against the scheme. At this Period in the colony's history, the Legislature was composed partly of nominee members and partly of members elected by the people, but the Governor controlled the purse strings as far as public works were concerned. He had control of the moiety of the Land Fund, applicable to the construction of such works, and the power of spending it as he thought best for the interests of the province, subject to the approval of the Home authorities. The Governor reminded the antagonists of the proposed scheme of this fact and wrote to the Secretary of State for Colonies (Lord Grey) requesting approval for the expenditure of £20,000 for the scheme. The antagonists, not to be silenced, petitioned the Queen to withhold her assent. Acting on the advice of Lord Grey, the Royal assent was granted and approval given for the expenditure of £20,000 as requested.

The scheme, as proposed by Hill, included the provision of jetties, 60' long, at both Goolwa and Port Elliot and also a stone breakwater to be constructed at the latter place, the two ports to be connected by 7 miles of railway of 5' 3" gauge.

In 1851, work was commenced at Port Elliot under William Rogers as Superintendent. By the end of the year, a portion of the jetty had been constructed and a large amount of preliminary blasting for a railway had also been done. Work was then suspended for a period and commenced again in 1852 under Thomas Jones, as Superintendent of Works. The jetty was soon finished. A start was then made on the earthworks for the railway. It had been intended originally that the line would be worked by steam traction, but on the ground of economy, horse traction was substituted. The original ruling gradient of 1 in 100 was increased to 1 in 60, to save construction costs and "as being well suited to animal traction."

Jones made several amendments to the original design which were approved by Hays, the Colonial Architect. Work proceeded steadily and by the middle of December 1853, six miles of track were reported as being laid ready for traffic. The great stumbling block to the successful completion of the line was the cutting leading to the foreshore at Port Elliot. The cutting was by far the largest on the line, being 370 yards long and having a maximum depth of 23 feet. The only other cutting of any consequence was at Goolwa, being 170 yards long with a maximum depth of 15 feet and was completed in 1852



Captain Cadell, in the paddle steamer "Lady Augusta", had gone up the Murray to bring down the inland cargoes and the Governor was therefore very anxious that the line should be completed in time for these cargoes to be transhipped to Port Elliot via the new railway. With this end in view, he suggested the laying of a temporary track at Port Elliot which would bypass the cutting in question. This scheme was abandoned in favour of hiring drays to transport the cargoes, the Government getting the revenue therefrom to the exclusion of the private carters.

The Goolwa-Port Elliot railway does not appear to have been opened with any public ceremony. From the evidence available, it would appear that the line was used as soon as it was fit for traffic, possibly in December 1853. The portion then unconstructed being bridged by the use of bullock drays. The accounts for the line commenced on the 1st May 1854 and the Governor travelled over the line in June 1854. The date quoted by the South Australian Railways in all reports is the 18th May 1854, but research has so far failed to reveal the reason for this date being chosen. A dinner was tendered to Jones in 1855 to celebrate "the completion of the railway". The significance of this function is not clear, because during the course of the dinner, Jones himself quoted the returns of operation dating from May of the previous year.

The line, as constructed, led from the jetty at Goolwa and travelled in a South-westerly direction to Port Elliot. Curves were few, the most direct line being followed to the foreshore at Port Elliot, where the rails ran on to the jetty. By contrast, the jetty at Goolwa was laid at right angles to the main track and access was made by means of turntables. Two passing sidings were provided, one of which was at Middleton.

The rails (imported from England) were 40 lbs. T-section, laid on cross-sleepers, 8' long and 10" x 5" (if split) and 6" x 6" (if round) placed at 2' centres. The rails were screwed to the sleeper by Iky 4 1/2" x 1/2" screws. The original intention had been to use sawn longitudinal timbers and transoms in accordance with the then normal railway practice but as experienced woodmen were scarce and labour costs prohibitive, the use of longitudinal timbers was therefore restricted to a few chains at either terminus, where greater wear and tear was expected. For the main line, native eucalypts were used, unhewn and stripped of their bark, and local material was used for ballast, the depth of which varied from 6" to 9".

B.T. Laurie was appointed Superintendent of the railway on 1st January 1854, but was succeeded five months later by Thomas Jones, who retained the position until the line was leased in 1870.

The Port Elliot-Victor Harbour Extension

The mistake in choosing Port Elliot as a harbour soon became apparent. The lack of shelter to shipping and the shallow anchorage combined to make conditions dangerous to even the smallest coastal cutters. An alternative had to be found. Victor Harbour, some miles to the West, was chosen and estimates were prepared in 1861 for the extension of the line to this Port.

The two major structures on the Port Elliot -Victor Harbour line were both built by private contractors. The Alexandra Bridge, which carried both rail and road traffic over the River Hindmarsh, was built by Gouge and opened by Mrs. Newland in 1863. Gouge also had the contract for the construction of the pier and jetty head at Victor Harbour, but declared himself insolvent before completing them. His guarantors had to carry on and complete them. The other structure, the Watson's Gap Bridge, was built by Redman and completed at the end of 1863.

The Alexandra Bridge had a span of 190', a width of 30' and the decking was 13' above water level. It was constructed of timber and rested on piles, 21' to 27' long. It was built in four bays of 30' span, the two approaches having a combined length of 70'.

The Watson's Gap Bridge was considered to have "beauty of design, great strength and gracefulness of appearance." It had a span of 290', supported by eight main and four abutment piers, trussed in the main bays and braced in the abutments. The height above the "common roadway" was 27'. The structure rested on piles, which were iron shod, driven to depths varying from 15' to 17'. 45,000 lineal feet of hardwood were used in its construction.

When the Goolwa-Port Elliot section was constructed, few local contractors were available and the Government had to act as its own contractor. Eleven years later, when tenders were called for the construction of the Victor Harbour extension, contractors were available. Redman was the successful tenderer, signing the contract on 4th February 1863. The new line deviated from the original line just North of the large cutting at Port Elliot, and ran into the town of Port Elliot (where a new station was built), thence down to the sea coast which it followed to the boundary of the Government Reserve at Police Point, Victor Harbour. The length of the extension was 4 miles 30 chains and the line was constructed with 35 lbs. rails, laid on sleepers, 8' long by 9" by 4", laid at 3' centres.

The Port Elliot-Victor Harbour line was opened for goods traffic on 1st April 1864 and four months later, on 4th August, the line was officially opened by Mr. Dodson, Chairman of the District Council of Encounter Bay. Superintendent Jones provided special trains from Goolwa and Port Elliot for the occasion and at the latter place, a ceremonial arch had been erected at the commencement of the new line. Four hundred persons were transported from Port Elliot in five trucks, the journey occupying 30 minutes. At 3 o'clock, the opening ceremony was conducted at the jetty, when the line was declared open and the jetty was named the Victoria Pier.

The pier was entirely a wooden structure, the chief portion of the timber used in its construction being colonial gum. It consisted of 89 bays of 20' each, making a total length of 1780 feet. Each bay was supported by a tier of three piles at each end, with the exception of the jetty head, which for seven bays had five piles and for three bays, seven piles in each tier. The outside piles were about 20' long, 12" x 12", and the centre ones were the same length, but 14" x 14". The pier took nearly two years to build and cost £8,800. On the jetty head, a weatherboard shed was erected, measuring 60' by 24'.

With the establishment of Victor Harbour as an overseas and local port, Port Elliot's foreshore facilities were abandoned, with the exception of the three-storied masonry store, which remained until 1896 before it was dismantled.

The Strathalbyn Line

For many years, the people of Strathalbyn and the surrounding country had been agitating for a rail connection to the seaboard. Petitions had been sent to the Government, reports on suggested routes had been forwarded by various engineers, and a Select Committee had, in 1859, recommended the construction of a line from Strathalbyn to connect with the existing line at Goolwa. Seven years later, the Government in all its wisdom ignored the report of this Select Committee and passed an Act authorising the construction of a line from Strathalbyn to connect with the existing line at Middleton. This move caused much dismay but the Government was unperturbed.

The first sod of the new line was turned on the 1st August 1866, the Governor, Sir Dominick Daly, driving down from Adelaide for the occasion. After the usual speeches and declarations of loyalty, preparations were made for the ceremony of turning the sod. A contemporary account of the ceremony says "His Excellency then dug three or four shovels full of earth and placing them on a barrow, wheeled them along the plank and shot, them out at a short distance. His Excellency then wished prosperity to the tramway and hearty cheers were given for the Queen, Sir Dominick Daly and the Commissioner of Public Works."



A view of the foreshore at Pt Elliot (circa 1854 - 1864) showing tramway tracks, trucks, jetty and Government store

The earthworks on this line were much more extensive than on the other two lines. In addition, there were three large structures to be erected. The first was over the Currency Creek; the second, over the Black Swamp and the third, over the Finnis River. The foundation stone of the Currency Creek Viaduct was laid in December 1866, with great ceremony, by Mrs. Higgins, the wife of the Colonel of the local cavalry. The foundation stone of the Finnis River Bridge was laid by the Commissioner of Public Works, with full Masonic honours, four months later. The Black Swamp Viaduct was erected without any pomp or ceremony. Unfortunately for posterity, the foundation stone of the Finnis Bridge was swept away in a flood six months after it had been laid with so much fuss and bother.

At the time of its construction, the Currency Creek Viaduct was the first of its kind in the province. It was composed of six piers and two abutments, all constructed of rubble masonry, quarried locally, with brick quoins. The two central piers were 76' in height, having a foundation of 18' 10" by 17' 6", and a gradual taper to the top where they measured 14' by 5'. The length of 280' was spanned by four iron girders, each of which was tested to carry a weight of 35 tons. Of the seven spans, five were of 39' and the other two were 29'. The two central piers had to be pulled down and reconstructed "in consequence of their failure through insufficient bond and inferior workmanship."

The Black Swamp Viaduct was constructed of iron girders resting on timber piers, the whole being supported on red gum piles, due to the swampy nature of the ground. As originally built, the viaduct consisted of five 40' spans but in an endeavour to arrest the gradual settlement in the South abutment, an additional span was erected in 1871. A portion of the approach embankment was subsequently removed, thus relieving some of the earth pressure on the abutment. This pressure, believed to be causing the settlement of the abutment, was due to the gradual sliding of the whole surface of the ground under the embankment down towards the centre of the swamp,

The Finnis Bridge was originally designed to consist of three brick arches, each with a span of 26 feet. The bricks intended for the arches were condemned as being too soft for the purpose and wrought iron girders were substituted. Local freestone was used to build the piers and abutments which were over 40' in height.

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A start was made with the laying of the permanent way in October 1868. Some delay was experienced, due to the late arrival of materials. When materials were readily to hand, a rate of two miles per week was realised. The first 10 1/2 miles from Middleton were opened for traffic by the end of the year and the last rail was laid at Strathalbyn early in the new year. A cask of ale and a quantity of bread and cheese were laid on for the workmen "who gave three hearty cheers for the donors and three more for the contractor".

The first shipment of wheat was forwarded in February of that year, and after inspection of H.C. Mais (Engineer-in-Chief), the line was opened by the Governor (Sir James Fergusson) on 23rd April 1869. He had driven down from Adelaide on the previous day and had spent the night at Strathalbyn. Early the next morning, his suite and official guests boarded three new passenger trucks for the inaugural trip to Middleton. During the trip, he was met at various places along the route by groups of people who presented addresses of loyalty, and after spending a short time at Middleton, the party proceeded to Victor Harbour, where luncheon had been provided in the goods shed. Following the banquet and the usual speeches, the party returned to Strathalbyn where the Governor, "standing between the rails, declared the line well and truly opened."

The junction with the existing line was immediately at the back of the then Middleton Hotel (near the Mill) and the existing hollow on the line was raised two feet in order to ease the gradient. The cutting through the hill at Middleton had a maximum depth of 6' and from that point to Currency Creek, the line was almost level. At the creek, the deepest cutting on the South side was 12' and the highest embankment up to the bridge was 26'. On the North side, the highest embankment was 29' and the deepest cutting was 14'. The steepest incline was 1 in 64 for a short distance at Middleton. There were further extensive earthworks at the Black Swamp, where the maximum cut was 27' and the maximum fill was 35'. A maximum cut of 18' and a 40' embankment were necessary at the Finnis. The only other cutting of any consequence was one of 17' near Strathalbyn. Apart from the initial steep grade at Middleton and grades of 1 in 66 and 1 in 70 at the Finnis, the remainder of the line was relatively easy.

The Leasing of the System

Just prior to the completion of the Strathalbyn-Middleton line, the Government announced its intention to lease the whole of the Southern Railway system, consisting of the Goolwa - Victor Harbour and the Strathalbyn - Middleton Tramways. A suggestion to lease the Goolwa - Port Elliot tramway had been made as early as 1856, but no action was taken. The same line was advertised for lease in 1859, but the only tender received was unsatisfactory and therefore "not entertained". When another attempt to obtain a lessee was made in 1870, the Government discovered that no provision for leasing had been made in the original Acts under which the tramways were constructed, and therefore legally, the tramways could not be leased. This state of affairs was amended in February 1870, by the passing of an Act making it legal to lease the tramways and tenders were accordingly called for "leasing the Working of the Traffic, the Maintenance of Rolling Stock, Way, Works and buildings of the Railway between Strathalbyn and Middleton, and Port Victor and Goolwa". The successful tenderer was James MacGeorge, an Adelaide architect, who offered to pay the Government an annual rent of £1,000 for the lease of the tramway, MacGeorge had been the contractor for the platelaying of the Strathalbyn line and he took control of the tramway on 1st April 1870.

He soon became unpopular with the local residents, due to the policy which he adopted in working the system. He decreased the number of trains per day, increased the fares and was allegedly the cause of delay in the delivery of mails. Indignation meetings were held and representations were made to the Commissioner of Public Works, who was also Railways Commissioner at that time.

MacGeorge was called upon to explain his actions to the Commissioner. Although some of his explanations seemed reasonable, the Government served six months notice of termination of the lease as provided for in the contract. The result was that the tramway, which originally was leased for five years, came under Government control again after thirteen months of the lease had expired. The official explanation given was that "conduct of traffic on the Strathalbyn and Victor Harbour Tramway being considered unsatisfactory, six months' notice to terminate the lease was served on Mr. James MacGeorge in October and the Government proposes to take the working of the line into their own hands from 1st May 1871."

On resuming control, the Government had a considerable amount of rehabilitation work to undertake. All the horses were in poor condition, the track was unsafe and needed re-ballasting and relaying, while all the rolling stock needed repairs and some of it was off the line and abandoned in swamps. After two years, the line and rolling stock were finally put into working condition again.

Struthalbyn Township Extension

With the extension of the railway to Strathalbyn, the coaches from Adelaide terminated at the Terminus Hotel, the passengers then transferring to the railway. For some years, the passengers had to walk a short distance down Rankine Street from the hotel to the railway station. The Government later acceded to a request that the line be extended from the station to the Terminus Hotel. The extension was opened on 11th September 1874 but two years later, the Council complained about the nuisance caused by passengers and their luggage in the street and threatened action to prevent the deposition of merchandise in the street. No action appears to have been taken and the extension continued to be used "to the great convenience of passengers".

Another Public Works Scheme

For some considerable time, navigation of the mouth of the Murray River had been an accomplished fact, river steamers regularly passing through the mouth, thus removing one of the reasons for the construction of the original portions of the line. In an endeavour to improve the traffic on the system, Boucaut (the then Premier of South Australia), in 1878, initiated another great public works scheme aimed at improving the facilities at Victor Harbour as an overseas port. The scheme included the extension of the original Victoria Pier to connect Granite Island with the mainland, construction of two jetties on the island and the construction of a breakwater. Unfortunately, the expected gains were nullified to some extent by the extension of the Kapunda railway to the North-west Bend (Morgan), which enabled the goods to be transhipped at this port and railed direct to Port Adelaide. The Murray had earlier been tapped at Echuca by the Victorian Government and the Darling at Bourke by the New South Wales Government and thus the trade which Young had so fondly anticipated coming to Goolwa was effectively diverted through other more economical channels, and Victor Harbour had to rely more on local products for its existence.

The Introduction of Steam Traction

The original advocates for a line from Strathalbyn to Goolwa, instead of the constructed line to Middleton, resumed their agitation. With steam railways being constructed in all parts of the State, these people urged the construction of the line with a view to using steam traction instead of the humble horse. They considered rightly that steam was much faster, therefore more goods could be carried in less time and more revenue could be obtained. The usual round of meetings and deputations to the Government followed and eventually, in 1883, a Bill was passed authorising the construction of a loop line from Currency Creek to Goolwa and the conversion of the horse line from Strathalbyn to Currency Creek and from Goolwa to Victor Harbour into a locomotive line. The horse line from Currency Creek to Middleton was to be abandoned. A branch locomotive line was constructed from Mount Barker Junction, on the Intercolonial line, to Strathalbyn. It was opened in two stages, reaching Strathalbyn on 15th September 1884.

From now on, the days of "Fidget", "Bob", "Baldy" and their kind were numbered. On the 17th December 1884, the "loop line" was opened for traffic and steam trains were then able to work to Goolwa, horses still being used from the latter station to Victor Harbour, the passengers transferring at Goolwa.

With the use of steam traction between Goolwa and Victor Harbour from 1st April 1885 the thirty years' life of the Strathalbyn, Goolwa and Victor Harbour Tramway came to an end. As someone wrote in farewell - "When locomotive whistles raise the seagulls' envy, and spacious railroad carriages rattle in through salt winds and gleaming sands, a hundred persons will enjoy our marine refuges to one who can do so at present. None the less, thousands will gratefully remember how much, after all, that was convenient, valuable and interesting, clung about the Southern Tramway."



*An improved passenger truck, introduced in 1866 showing the 1st class compartment in the centre.
Photograph taken at Goolwa Station 1872-1884*

Rolling Stock

The rolling stock on the tramway system increased from one passenger truck and 11 goods trucks in 1854 to 13 passenger trucks and 104 goods trucks in 1879, decreasing to 12 passenger trucks and 93 goods trucks at the conversion of the traction to steam in 1884.

From photographs available, it would appear that the first passenger truck in use was nothing more elaborate than a converted goods truck. Cross seats were apparently installed, four stanchions erected and a canvas hood stretched between them. Side steps were provided to permit loading.

The first reference to a truck built specifically for passenger traffic appears in 1859, when on the Queen's birthday a number of "young folk took a ride in the new tramway carriage which the worthy Superintendent brought out, inaugurating its first appearance to the public by a gratuitous ride to Port Elliot and back to Goolwa." Special mention is made of the carriage being "cozy and comfortable, resting on springs and free from the jolting of other trucks." It is surmised that the passenger carriage was built in the Locomotive Works at Adelaide.

Two more passenger carriages were provided in 1866. These were both built at the Bowden Railway Workshops. They introduced an improvement in travelling comfort, in that a first-class compartment was provided, "being nicely fitted up with polished cedar, yew and pine, with silver plated mountings." The springs were of indiarubber on the ram and cylinder principle. A "neat top rail" was provided "for the protection of goods outside."

These early trucks were very heavy and cumbersome and were far too heavy for one horse to pull, although that was the usual practice. In an endeavour to overcome this defect, a very light vehicle was built in the following year for the transport of mails which always travelled at night. The only descriptive construction feature of this vehicle, which has survived, is that the wheels were made of wood with "a flange bolted on to keep them on the rail".

Three new passenger trucks were provided for the Strathalbyn line when it opened in 1869. These were constructed at the Adelaide Workshops and were very much lighter than any of their predecessors, weighing only 17 cwt. They had accommodation for 30 passengers. The seats of pine were placed transversely, being separated by partitions carried up to roof height. The frames were of blackwood with cedar panelling. The sides were open, protection from the weather being provided by leather blinds which could be raised or lowered as required. The contemporary press was pleased to say, "for carriages such as the plainest of these the third-class passengers of the Port (Adelaide) line would give him (the Engineer-in-Chief) a benediction every time they travelled on them."

Thomas Cottrell, an Adelaide carriage builder, was the first private contractor to build rolling stock for the tramway. He signed a contract in 1869 for the construction of two passenger carriages at a cost of £164 each, to be supplied by February of the next year. The carriages had three compartments, with an overall length (over frames) of 16' 4". The seats in the end compartments were hinged, so that they could be folded out of the way to make room for luggage when required. Weather cloths were provided as in previous carriages.

Quite obviously, the use of leather blinds as weather protection had definite disadvantages. They were dispensed with in 1871, when the carriages were "transformed into conveyances, which are the picture of ease and comfort." The leather blinds were replaced by sliding glass windows and swing doors, the upper portions of which were also of glass. To further improve the passengers' comfort, the carriages were "supplied with a brilliant roof lamp," and the seats were cushioned. The improvements were so marked that the contemporary press went so far as to say that the carriages were "as good as first-class carriages on the Adelaide and Port Railway." The carriages had accommodation for 18 inside and 9 outside passengers.

Imported carriages were used for the first time in 1879. One carriage was built by the American firm of Stephenson and two others were built by the British firm of Brown Marshall. They were entirely different from any previous types in use on the system. They were double-deckers, with longitudinal seating, and were very similar to those in use on the street tramways of Adelaide. First and second-class compartments were provided.

In general, the goods trucks were built either at the Middleton carpenters' shop or at the Adelaide Locomotive Works. Some of the wheels and axles were imported from England, while others were made at the Goolwa Iron-Works. The trucks were all flat trucks, with the exception of three open box trucks, which were placed in service during 1879. The average tare weight of the goods trucks was quoted in 1873 as 1 ton 9 1/2 cwt., with a loaded weight of 5 tons. With one exception, all rolling stock was of the four-wheeled variety. The exception was an eight-wheeled bogie truck, weighing 3 tons. It was specially constructed for the wool traffic and carried 50-60 bales of loose wool, being drawn by a team of three horses. Two horse-boxes were introduced in 1875, but no description of them, has as yet been discovered.

Accidents

There is something very morbid in the nature of human beings that makes them take great interest in accidents, but no history of any railway would be complete without reference to the accidents on that railway

During Jones' term of office as Superintendent of the Tramway he was always able to conclude his report by saying that "there has been no accident to hurt or injure passengers on the line during the year". Towards the end of his regime, two attempts were made to derail trucks by placing logs and stones across the line. One dark night in 1869, the mail truck was thrown off the line "in consequence of the development of some scoundrel's mischievous propensity in this particular way, and several of the passengers were shaken." Two days later, while making an inspection of the line on a permanent way trolley, the Resident Engineer saw a "perfect cairn of stones built on the line". A reward was offered "for the apprehension of the offender and it is to be hoped that the villainous perpetrator of these dangerous tricks will meet with the punishment he richly deserves". No record exists of the discovery of the "perpetrator".

A passenger truck was derailed during the same year at Finniss due to the lack of "safe working" protection. "The points had been shifted for the truck running down to Middleton and had not been replaced so that on its nearing the station, the Middleton to Strathalbyn truck was turned off its course into the soft ground. With the assistance of the passengers, it was soon got on the line again and proceeded to Strathalbyn".

During the lease of the line, the maintenance of permanent way and rolling stock was not very good and derailments were quite common, but no passengers seem to have been injured. One employee, Giles Hebert, was injured while shunting at night at Middleton. A truck wheel ran over his left foot and crushed the toes.

By some strange freak, accidents increased after the Government reassumed control of the lines, although admittedly none of the accidents was caused as a direct result of negligence on the part of the authorities. Mr F. Draper of Goolwa was kicked by a jibbing horse at Middleton, Draper being unfortunate enough to be sitting on the front seat of the 2am truck. Nearly a year later, Mr. Born of Port Elliot fell off the truck one Saturday evening while "proceeding from the front to the back of the truck". As he fell his arm was wedged between the wheel and the step and in this position he was dragged some distance before the truck could be stopped. Another accident to a passenger occurred when Mr. Allen of Goolwa "while riding down the line on a truck fell from off a bale of wool on which he was riding fracturing his ankle bone." No reason was given for this unusual method of passenger transportation.

In 1872 at Goolwa, Jamieson, permanent way foreman, suffered severe bruises as a result of a young horse taking fright and bolting. Jamieson was driving a permanent way trolley along the line on his way to the goods shed and stopping to open a switch, he let the reins fall around the horse's feet. This action frightened the horse and it "tore madly away with Jamieson, having hurriedly "got up behind", making vain endeavours to quieten the runaway and also apply the "brake". The horse dragging the trolley, attempted to pass between a passenger truck and the verandah of the Telegraph Office. In doing so, the trolley "struck the truck with immense force, smashing several parts of both vehicles." Jamieson was thrown flat on his back and so escaped more serious injury, "and the harness also being broken, the trolley was stopped by the truck, or he could scarcely have been expected to have been picked up alive."

Another accident involving a tramway employee occurred in 1877 when George Henderson's arm was shattered by the accidental discharge of a loaded gun, which he was removing from under a tarpaulin. His arm was amputated at the elbow by the local doctor and, according to local legend, the arm was buried in Henderson's garden.

Mr. Evan Evans of Sandergrrove was the only accident victim to succumb to his injuries. While returning from working at Currency Creek, one evening in 1872, Evans attempted to apply the brake of the truck, which he had hired to transport his men between that place and Strathalbyn. In so doing, he overbalanced and fell under the wheels. "The concussion was so great that it threw the two front -wheels off the line." The accident happened just near Sandergrrove station where a passenger truck was waiting to cross the 'special'. One of the passenger truck horses was taken out and harnessed to the re-railed luggage truck and Evans was transported to Strathalbyn and placed under the care of the doctor. Unfortunately, he died eleven days later.

A young lad, Richard Trenouth of Strathalbyn, while attempting to "beat" a luggage truck being pushed along the line, was knocked down by the truck. His head was cut very badly, but he "fast recovered from his accident".

One Friday night in November 1877, the driver of the truck thought he saw a man lying across the track. He pulled up as quickly as possible, but not quickly enough to avoid the wheels passing the man and "in the clouded moonlight he just saw something roll off the line under the truck." All the passengers were too nervous to get down and see what had happened, so the driver was forced to do so. "He was agreeably surprised to find that it was only the man's hat and not his head that had been thus severed from his body. The stupid man lay drunk by the line." The driver "roused and lifted him away to the side of the road, for which he received a little abuse, and a threat from the unthankful disciple of Bacchus that he'd be even with him for lifting him about like that."

Timetables and Method of Working

The earliest reference with regard to the service provided shows that in 1855 trucks ran twice daily between Goolwa and Port Elliot, leaving Goolwa at 9 a.m. and 2 p.m. and returning from Port Elliot at 11 a.m. and 4 pm.

With the opening of the extension to Victor Harbour, three daily Passenger carriages were run from Goolwa and Victor Harbour, meeting at Port Elliot but the times of departure are not known. A second morning passenger carriage ran from Victor Harbour during 1866 and another ran for the conveyance of the midnight mails. Sunday trains were discontinued in 1869 because the traffic was too small to pay expenses.

After the opening of the Strathalbyn-Middleton line, one day and one night passenger carriage were run on that line, in addition to the three daily carriages provided between Goolwa and Victor Harbour.

From evidence available, the train service during the period of the leasing of the line was reduced to one day train and one night train in 24 hours, leaving Strathalbyn at 6.45 a.m. and 2.15 p.m. respectively. Down trains left Victor Harbour at 8.30 a.m. and 4.00 p.m.

Traffic had fallen off to such an extent during the time that the lessee had control of the line, that when the Government regained control, the traffic during the winter months only justified running one truck a day. Towards the close of 1871, a fresh timetable was issued "and the travelling public now have the advantage of daily communication twice each way, over the whole length of the line, with an additional truck on Monday morning from Victor Harbour and Goolwa to Strathalbyn." This Monday morning truck ran during the summer months only and left Victor Harbour in the "wee small hours" at 2.00 a.m. and thus enabled "week-enders" to catch the Adelaide coach at Strathalbyn and be in Adelaide on Monday morning about 11 o'clock.

With traffic improving, the number of trains on the Goolwa-Victor Harbour section was increased to four, two of which were through connections to Strathalbyn. The times of departure varied over the years, but in general there was one train in the morning, two in the afternoon and one at night in both directions. Through connections to Strathalbyn were by the Up morning and afternoon trains and by the Down afternoon and evening trains. Goods trains were scheduled to run on both lines on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays. The first afternoon train on the Goolwa-Victor Harbour section was permitted to carry goods as well as passengers. The trains were advertised to "leave punctually at the times stated." On the other hand, the times of arrival "were approximate. The tramway authorities do not bind themselves to the exact time."

It is not proposed to give details of all timetables that were issued but some details of the times taken to cover the various sections of the line may prove of interest. The 9 1/2 miles between Strathalbyn and Finnis were covered in one hour on the Down trip and in 1 hour 10 minutes on the Up trip. The next 6 miles to Currency Creek were covered in 40 minutes on the Down trip, the Up trip taking 5 minutes longer. The remaining 5 1/2 miles to Middleton took 35 minutes in both directions. The 2 1/2 miles from Middleton to Port Elliot occupied 15 minutes in both directions and the scenic 4 1/2 miles along the sea coast to Victor Harbour took another 30 minutes. The other 4 1/2 miles from Middleton to the river at Goolwa also took 30 minutes in both directions. From these figures, it can be seen that the average speed varied from 8 1/2 to 9 1/2 m.p.h. Goods traffic was considerably slower, travelling at from 3 to 4 m.p.h.

The passenger service on the Goolwa-Victor Harbour line was provided by single trucks drawn by one horse. Occasionally, during holiday periods, two horses were used. Middleton was the main crossing station, although other sidings were provided along the single track.

The passenger service on the Strathalbyn line was provided by single trucks drawn by relays of two horses, Finnis being the staging point. Occasionally, during holiday periods, two trucks were coupled together and were drawn still by only two horses. Such maltreatment of horseflesh caused numerous letters of protest to the press. Incidents have been recorded when horses had dropped dead in harness, due to overwork. Sandergrove was used as the main crossing station. Sidings both "blind" and "through" were provided along the line, which was single throughout.

Passengers travelling from Strathalbyn to Goolwa had to change trains at Middleton. The truck from Strathalbyn ran on to Victor Harbour after changing horses and drivers. The local service between Goolwa and Victor Harbour did not require a change of horses, although drivers were changed at Middleton.

The goods service on both lines was worked by teams of three or more horses in charge of a teamster. Three or four trucks, each with an attendant brakesman, made up a train, and 15 to 20 tons of goods at a time could be drawn in this way. At one period in the history of the line, there was not enough horses to handle the goods traffic and bullocks were employed, working only at night. Six bullocks could take 20 tons at a speed of 3 m.p.h. The ballast was well blinded and the horses and bullocks were therefore enabled to run in the centre of the track.

Platforms were not originally provided, but when the line was extended to Victor Harbour, a masonry platform was erected there and also at Port Elliot, with the usual railway offices, booking office, etc. Masonry platforms with weatherboard shelter sheds and ticket offices were provided on the Strathalbyn line at Strathalbyn, Finnis and Middleton. A masonry platform and station building were not provided at Goolwa until 1872. Prior to this date, the Telegraph Office verandah served as a station. In addition to the stations provided on the Strathalbyn line, timber landing stages were constructed at Sandergrove, Deep Creek, Currency Creek and "Gilsthorp's". The platforms were 2' 6" above rail level, the masonry ones were 60 feet long with ramps at both ends, while the timber stages were 16 feet long, except the one at Sandergrove, which was 20 feet long.

Stables of masonry and timber were constructed at Strathalbyn, Finnis and Middleton. The Goolwa stables were built of masonry. Research has failed to reveal the materials used in the construction of the stables at Port Elliot and Victor Harbour. Timber and iron running sheds were provided at Strathalbyn and Middleton. Goods sheds of masonry with iron roofs were built at Strathalbyn, Goolwa, Port Elliot and Victor Harbour.

Statistics

During the thirty years of its existence, the Strathalbyn, Goolwa and Victor Harbour Tramway carried a total of 639,140 passengers, and transported 253,156 tons of goods. The gross earnings were £110,708/11/11 and the gross working expenses exceeded this amount by the sum of £28,696/4/7. The years during which the line operated at a profit were 1856-58, 1860-63, 1867, 1869 and 1872-73. The main cause for the losses incurred on the line was the fact that the Murray mouth was found to be navigable, the "Corio" passing through as early as 1857. Other causes, included a disastrous bushfire in 1859 which destroyed many cereal crops in the district, the low river in 1865-66 prevented the shipment of inland cargoes and the failure of the crops in 1863.

The extension of the Kapunda line to Morgan did not immediately cause a great difference in the amount of goods handled by the tramway but rather served to secure for South Australia some traffic which did not previously pass through that State. Undoubtedly, the Morgan line did in the long run have some effect on the amount of traffic passing over the tramway. An old resident of Morgan, in answer to the query "What happened to the Murray trade?" is reported to have replied "The Murray trade died a natural death, and the railways killed it."

Evidence of the System Remaining in 1954.

The old stables at Strathalbyn, now converted to barracks for train crews, are all that remains at this terminus of the system. The only station building surviving in use today is the one at Finniss, although a Train Control office has since been added to the original building and the platform built up and lengthened. The station building at Port Elliot is used today as a lamp room, but the little ticket window with its sliding shutter is still extant. The goods sheds at Goolwa and Victor Harbour were built for the tramway service, although the site of the former has been altered to conform with the later steam traction station yard. Of the original bridges constructed, those at Currency Creek and at Finniss have been strengthened and are still in use, while those at the Black Swamp, Watson's Gap and the Hindmarsh have been demolished and replaced by stronger structures. The Station-master's cottage at Middleton is still inhabited and so are the Superintendent's cottage and Manager's cottage at Goolwa.

Portions of the abandoned right-of-way between Currency Creek and Middleton can be easily picked out when travelling along adjacent roads, while the old cutting at Port Elliot is being filled in gradually as part of a programme for improving the foreshore. The original blacksmith's shop at the same locality is now in use as a shed on a farm not far distant from Port Elliot, having been dismantled and re-erected with a new roof. A long derelict wharf with two iron turntables are all that remains to remind the present generation of the glory that was Goolwa's. The causeway connecting Granite Island to the mainland at Victor Harbour and the stone breakwater remain as mute testimony of Boucat's dream of 1878.

The historical photographs accompanying this article are reproduced by courtesy of the South Australian Archives.

Additional Photographs:

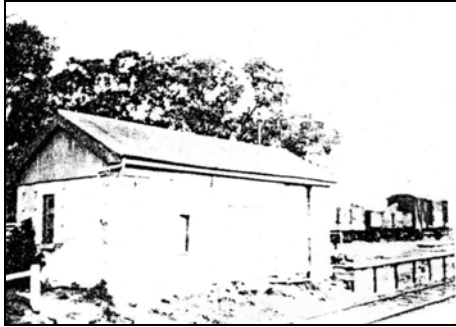
The following photos were included in but poorly reproduced on the printed copy. They are included here for completeness



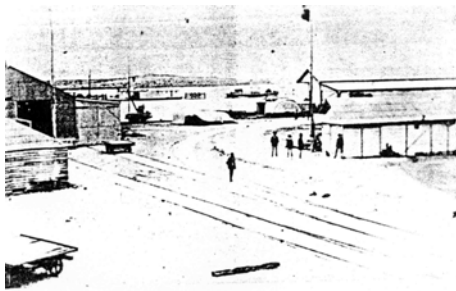
Old tramway stables at Strathalbyn, now used as barracks for locomotive crews



The tramway station building at Finniss, erected in 1869 is still in use as a steam station



The old tramway station at Pt Elliott. Erected in 1867 it is now used as a lamp room



View of Goolwa in the 1870's, showing tramway sheds,

View of Goolwa in the 1870s showing tramway sheds, trucks and river steamers

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