



SteamRanger's Heritage - an insight into our past

BACKGROUND

*A report by the then ARHS Tours Manager, Mr Dean Harvey,
of the first of two major commemorations of the building of the Goolwa to Port Elliot rail line.*

*This 1954 commemoration was of the 100th anniversary
and featured the running of a special SAR train with steam loco S131*

*A later commemoration was staged in 1975 to mark the 121st anniversary,
when SteamRanger ran a train headed by steam loco "520".*

PILGRIMAGE TO GOOLWA

Dean .L. Harvey

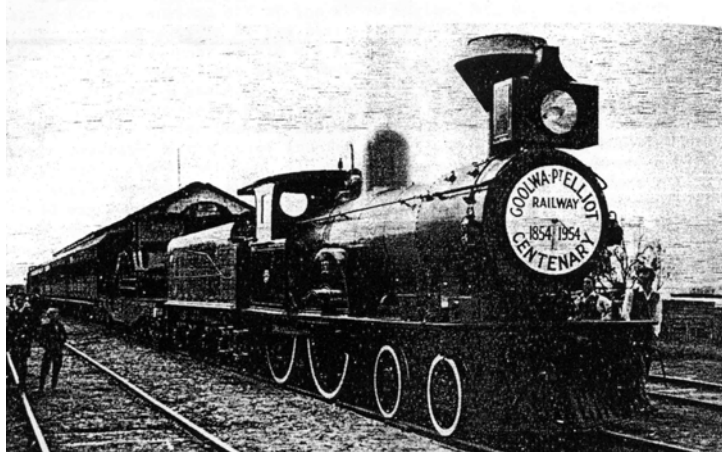
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South Australian members celebrated the centenary of the Goolwa-Port Elliot line in great style on Saturday, 8th May last. The South Australian Railways observed the occasion by running a train, consisting of seven all-steel coaches, a brake van and "Murray" (the Commissioner's car), from Adelaide to Goolwa, leaving Adelaide at 9.45 a.m. The train was hauled by two D/E's, Nos. 905 and 907. One coach was reserved for Society members.

The D/E's made light work of the heavy 1 in 45 grades and 46 minutes later we ran through a very rain-soaked Mount Lofty. One could not help admiring the beautiful Autumn tints of the golden ash, silver birch and other lovely trees, which are characteristic of Mount Lofty. The rain continued steadily and we reached Mount Barker, four minutes ahead of time, at 11.07 a.m. After a seven-minute stop, we were on our way again and it seemed no time at all before we were over the top of the Bugle Ranges and descending the bare hills towards picturesque Strathalbyn. In the distance, we could see the faint outline of Lake Alexandrina, near which stands Goolwa, our destination.

A five-minute stop was made at Strathalbyn and then a fast run across the plain brought us to Goolwa, at 12.18 p.m., two minutes ahead, where a great crowd greeted our train, many being dressed in period costumes. Some were genuine pioneers, such as 79-year old Captain D. Ritchie, who we'll remember travelling on the old horse-drawn carriages of so many years ago. Others were "young bloods", who had donned top hats, twine whiskers, etc, for the occasion.

S-class locomotive, No. 131, was waiting on an adjoining track and next to the engine, mounted on a flat wagon, was one of the horse-drawn carriages (minus the horse) used on the Goolwa-Port Elliot railway. Behind this much-honoured vehicle on the flat wagon, were four "dog boxes" (Nos. 15, 1, 1101 and 3) and finally brake van No. 50.



The Goolwa-Port Elliot Centenary celebrations at Goolwa on the 8th May last, showing "rebuilt" S-class No. 131 standing at Goolwa • station and the old horse-drawn carriage mounted on the flat waggon. (Photo: Adelaide Advertiser)

No. 131 was indeed resplendent; The boiler and tender were painted an attractive golden orange colour, the smokebox and cab were Royal blue and the cowcatcher, vermilion. Those sections painted blue were lined out in and the gold sections lined out in blue - altogether a startling, yet attractive, colour combination. An old-style kerosene light housing was fitted around the electric headlight and a Yankee-type diamond stack really made No. 131 reminiscent of the best the 80's could produce.

At about 12.45 p.m., this spectacular train pulled slowly out of Goolwa and half an hour later, after a relatively uneventful trip, came to a stop at Victor Harbour (11 miles from Goolwa). The return trip was quite a gay journey and male ARHS members (and, indeed one female member) rode on the flat waggon. This proved to be quite a thrill and one had to brace one's self carefully when the train shot into the curves between Victor Harbour and Port Elliot, otherwise the Society would have been minus a few members.

Port Elliot station was packed and so was the train when it left. No. 131 really got down to business and some members estimated that we reached 50 mph in places - not bad for an engine built 60 years ago and running on light track - although it must be pointed out that in their heyday, S-class engines, with their 6'6" drivers, were capable of 70 mph.

The train drew into a specially constructed step-down platform at Goolwa Oval at 2.45 p.m. Alan Stremmel gave a talk on the history of the line and later, the Commissioner for Railways addressed the gathering.

Most of the shop windows in the town displayed photographs of the early railway days at Goolwa and of the different types of steam locomotives used over the years since steam locomotion was introduced on the line. Landmarks, such as the old station, the horse stables, the home of the first resident superintendent of the line and the formation of the old railway line were clearly indicated by placards erected by the energetic local Council.

The time eventually came when we had to board our Adelaide-bound train and leave historic old Goolwa to its memories. By 8.45 p.m. we were back in Adelaide and a great day in the railway history of this State had ended. It was a red letter day for South Australians and there is no doubt that it was the most interesting trip we have made as a Society branch, since its formation here some years ago.