



## SteamRanger's Heritage - an insight into our past

BACKGROUND

*An accompanying archive article on this website describes the introduction and operation of the Victor Harbor - Granite Island horsetram until it was abandoned in 1972*

*This article was written to record the reintroduction of the tram service in 1986*

*It now operates daily year round.*

### VICTOR HARBOR HORSE TRAMS RETURN

Kim Bird

ARHS Bulletin Vol 37 No 587 September 1968 pages 207 to 211

On Saturday 14 June 1986, one of South Australia's best loved attractions of yesteryear returned - the horse drawn tramcar service linking Granite Island with Victor Harbor.

The original service was inaugurated in 1895 by the South Australian Railways using tramcar No. 7 which had been built by Brown Marshall of England in 1879. This car was one of several used on the Strathalbyn-Goolwa-Victor Harbor Tramway. No. 7 was later used in the Kadina-Moonta area from 1887 to 1891 when it returned to Islington only to be forwarded back to Victor Harbor in 1894, where it remained until 1931, when it was scrapped.

The growing popularity of Victor Harbor as a tourist resort resulted in an ex Metropolitan Tramways Trust, No. 25 being converted from 1435 mm to 1600 mm gauge in 1910. No. 25 shared the Granite Island traffic with No. 7 until condemned in 1929.

Following the cessation of the Moonta-Moonta Bay service in 1931, cars No. 5 and 6 built by Duncan and Fraser in 1883, were hauled to Victor Harbor by the elderly "Saurer" Railcar to replace No. 7. Trams were operated by the Honeyman family under a lease arrangement with the SAR. Services, usually with one car, operated from about September, over the Christmas, New Year and Easter periods, to May. When demand was heavy, two trams were used. This popular service was discontinued in 1954 when the causeway was renovated as it was not considered an economic proposition to relay the railway line.

One car (No. 5) was preserved on the Island, but soon fell victim to the weather and vandals and was scrapped. No. 6 was displayed outside a road house at Auburn in the mid north, but in May 1971 was shipped to the United States. Every two years these cars made a novel sight as they were hauled to Islington for repair, by a '55' or '75' model passenger motor.

For some years prior to 1915, cars 7 and 25 also worked between Victor Harbor Station and the Hindmarsh River Bridge. Appropriate instructions were issued to all concerned to ensure that no conflict occurred between the horse trams and the steam trains.

The proposal to restore the service as part of South Australia's 150th Birthday Celebrations was made in 1983, and presented to the Recreation and Festivals Committee of the Jubilee 150 organisation as an excellent way to mark the event. In the first instance finding an organiser to take on the construction and operation of the proposed service was extremely difficult. After spending time searching for somebody to initiate the project, the District Council of Victor Harbor agreed to support a study of the tramway's potential for commercial operation. Subsequently, the Council decided to proceed with the construction of trams and laying of track and to take sole responsibility for the system.

A grant of \$50,000 was allocated by the Jubilee 150 Board to begin the project and considerable effort was put into a C.E.P. proposal to use unemployed persons to construct the trams and lay the tracks. A C.E.P. grant of more than \$200,000 was obtained for this purpose.

The Department of Marine and Harbours concurrently surveyed the condition of the timber Causeway between the foreshore and Granite Island and spent more than \$170,000 in upgrading it to take an axle load of at least 3 tonnes.

The Victor Harbor Council allocated a considerable amount of money, to bring the total cost of the project to more than \$500,000. Australian National agreed to provide a ganger from its Murray Bridge Division to supervise the unskilled labour employed for laying of the track on the Causeway and on Granite Island. The Metal Industries Association also cooperated by allowing the construction of trams to take place in the workshop used for the Jubilee Ship "Failie". The facilities were found to be ideal for the purpose. Fortunately, the "Failie" was finished just as the Horse Tram project was programmed to begin.

Clydesdale horses pull the trams and four horses have been hired from Doug Bunker formerly of Hahndorf but now of Victor Harbor. He will be employed full time by the Council to drive and look after the Clydesdales at Victor Harbor. Doug Bunker is also builder of a horse drawn "bus".

The initial operation commenced on 14 June, 1986, with two horse trams and subsequently a further two trams will be introduced to service the expected demand. In peak summer operations it will be possible for two trams to cross on Granite Island where provision has been made in the track for a passing loop. The switches at either end of the loop are interesting in that there are no moveable blades.

Trams are of modern, steel welded construction, with roller bearings to make them easier for the horses to pull. Body sides are clad with plywood and timber battens. Wheel sets and brake rigging for the cars are of railway origin. To reduce weight, former narrow gauge wheels have been fitted with hollow axles made to the broad-gauge length. The large bells at each end of the cars were formerly used on State Transport Authority railcars when working over sections of the suburban lines which traversed streets. (Henley Beach, Semaphore). Some of these bells started their long lives on suburban tank engines (P and F class). Although tram cars 5 and 6 were painted the standard S.A.R. "green and cream" the new cars, which are numbered 1-4, are clad in green except for the wooden areas surrounding the windows which are varnished. The interior, with longitudinal seating is also varnished. Design drawings of the original vehicles were found in South Australian Railways and M.T.T. records and were used to recreate, as far as possible, the appearance of Victorian-era trams.

The trams have been designed to seat 50 passengers. As in the early days of operation, there will be no roofcovering upstairs because of the high winds which often blow over the Causeway. A traditional canvas roof would act as a sail, which could possibly help to capsize the vehicle.

The trams are stored in the Victor Harbor Railway Station goods shed and serviced and maintained on the site. Whenever major work needs to be done, the trams can easily be loaded onto four-wheel road trailers and towed by truck to the Council workshops near the Inman River.

Timetables have been prepared for a number of operating options and it is likely that in the peak of summer, a 20 minute service will operate over the Causeway. It is proposed, at this stage, that passengers will board the trams near Flinders Parade, Victor Harbor and travel to the kiosk on Granite Island, a distance of approximately 1.8 kilometres. The journey is estimated to take 15 minutes. The trams will cross at a point near the junction of the Causeway and the Island, about 700 metres from the kiosk.

The Council has agreed to operate the trams every day of the year in order to make them a viable tourist attraction for coach operators and the Department of Tourism in Adelaide.

Saturday, 14 June, 1986 dawned a glorious blue skied day on the South Coast. About 4,000 people attended the opening ceremony and listened to addresses by the District Clerk, Robert Barry, the Mayor, Eric Ashby, the Chairman of the S.A. Jubilee Board, Kirn Bonython and the Minister for Tourism, Barbara Weise, who declared the service open. Australia Post arranged for a special mail bag to be despatched on the first trip. First day covers were also available.

Ms. Barbara Weise paid a special tribute to John Drennan, the State Transport Authority's Public Relations Officer, who was responsible for getting the project "off the ground" and over the last three years, has coordinated the various activities involved.

My thanks to John for permission to use extracts from an article in the State Transport Authority's magazine "Among Ourselves" on the project.

Thanks are also due to Ken McCarthy for diagrams of the horse trams used on the Granite Island service in S.A.R. days. A full description of the tram services operated by the S.A.R. appeared in "Trolleywire", October 1980, December 1982.



Horsetram on Granite Island causeway 2007