



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

BACKGROUND

Promoted as "Steam into Victoria" this was to be the last interstate excursion to be operated by SteamRanger before the interstate Adelaide – Melbourne track was regauged to standard gauge.

Highlights of the excursion were:

Friday 13th	Travel behind loco 621 to Wolseley to meet Victorian loco R761 Overnight at Nhill
Saturday 14th	Double heading to Ballarat with 621 and R761
Sunday 15th	Double heading to Bacchus Marsh with 621 and R761 With R761 via Ballarat, Maryborough, Avoca to Ararat (621 and K183 used by Victorians to travel to Ararat directly)
Monday 16th	A full day's steaming back to Adelaide with 621

This file contains the full text of the article, but omits a number of photographs

### THE DUKE HEADS EAST

*Catchpoint July 1994 pages 20 to 33*

*Reported by Bob Sampson*



Friday 13th to  
Monday 16th May, 1994  
Adelaide Cup Weekend



STEAM into VICTORIA

A four day excursion to Ballarat and beyond  
with SteamRanger's "621"  
and Victorian "R" and "K" class engines!

It was indeed most enjoyable to be one of the 160 SA passengers who took the opportunity to ride behind SteamRanger's steam loco No.621 **Duke of Edinburgh**, when it made its first historic run from Adelaide to Bacchus Marsh during the May long weekend. After many months of negotiations between SteamRanger, Steamrail, PTC of Victoria and AN, the stage was set for the operation of, for the first and possibly last time, an SA broad gauge steam loco, well into Victoria. Not only would 621 get close to Melbourne, but much of the main broad gauge line between Adelaide and Melbourne, over which 621 would travel, would be standardised for the National Rail Corp by mid-1995.

And, in addition Steamrail would meet our train at Wolseley with that famous and impressive Hudson loco R 761. Double headed running would follow for much of the journey, plus 621 would meet that other classic ex VR steam loco, the blue K 183, at Bacchus Marsh for a double headed run back to Ballarat, and onto Ararat. Meanwhile R 761 would the SA consist all the way from Bacchus Marsh back to Ballarat, then onto Maryborough, and through to Ararat via Avoca. It was also planned that 621 would single handedly run from Ararat to Great Western and return, with 8 carriages - well over 300t! R761/K183 would then return from Ararat to Melbourne hauling their long and heavy train. And to end it all, 621 would make a solo trip in one day from Ararat, barking up through the hills in darkness to arrive in Adelaide.

And, with such good planning, that's basically what happened! About 600 passengers rode on all three separate trains over the weekend, and I imagine about 200 railfans chose to chase some of the trains - but they missed out on that onboard atmosphere, the characters, and the friendly co-operation that existed with the many volunteers involved. I got ribbed quite frequently for wearing a Geelong football jumper into Victoria!

Our own little group of six, all remarked on the good will and spirit which existed amongst all involved. Sure there were some things that weren't to everyone's liking, however they were few, and were easily forgotten due to the obvious pleasure of the whole event. Enormous credit must go to the main organiser Brian Busch, and to what seemed like 'hundreds' of SteamRanger volunteers who took part in all of the associated activities - attending to the locomotive, rollingstock, catering and passengers' needs, refreshments and souvenirs (with pink badges), and lots of general TLC and cleaning. Take a big bow!

### **Friday 13th May**

After a 40 minute late departure from Keswick at 0755hrs on Friday 13 May, 621 made easy work with its 4 steels and a CGP brakevan. A quick water stop at Blackwood was to no avail as 20 minutes was spent at Belair waiting to cross No.5MA7 Melbourne to Adelaide goods with BL33/702. An express run to Monarto South saw us arrive about 20 minutes late, where we crossed No.5MA3 goods from Melbourne with C508/845/BL30/haul BL35 up front.

Following a water stop in Tailem Bend yard, with assistance from the local CFS, 621 headed for the border only 15 minutes down, and was on time passing through Coonalpyn, finally arriving at Tintinara 74 minutes later - a record breaking 92km non stop run. The "Duke" hadn't been for such a sprint since under SteamRanger's control decades ago. At Tintinara, 621 took water and left 20 minutes later, arriving at Keith 10 minutes early, for coaling. Using the local Pivot Fertilizer coal grab, the "Duke" was topped up and ready to roll on time for Bordertown.

After another water stop at Bordertown, and an on time departure, Wolseley was reached 3 early, where Steamrail's R 761 was in the loop on a 6 car train, with about 100 passengers onboard. Good conversation was struck up with the Vic's, on the platform and in the Wolseley Hotel, while 621 and the R marshalled their combined train ready for the late afternoon run to Nhill. It was dark by the time we reached Nhill, and hundreds of passengers scattered into the darkness to find their pre-arranged accommodation, only to meet later for a great welcome and hearty meal at the Little Desert Lodge. A couple of our group ate and drank enough for an army. I wonder who they were?

### **Saturday 14th May**

Early next morning, Saturday, R 761 proceeded to prime over most of the SA passengers, funny about that. Red and black, and West Adelaide won that day too? The R and 621 made up their train, ready for an on time departure from Nhill, heading for Ballarat. A magnificent photo-stop was held in early sunlight at Gerang Gerung, as the two locos, tender to tender, pulled past with their 11 car train. Arrival at Dimboola saw R 761 turn on the table, as water was taken by 621, and finally the train left with both engines 'funnel first'. Due to platform clearances of the 'big' SAR loco, 621 was routed via No.2 road at some locations, such as at Horsham and at Murtoa.

On arrival at Stawell, SteamRanger volunteers had organised and executed a tasty BBQ, feeding about 150 SA people in record breaking time. Then we blasted up the famous Stawell Bank, laying a dense smoke and cinder trail behind us, as we rushed on towards Ararat. Ararat was like a living museum, complete with its old timber signal box, rods and wires, somersault signals, and electric staff. We had more time there on the return trip.



Storming away from Ararat complete with historic somersault lower quadrant signals are 621 and R761 heading for Ballarat

Photo: Geoff Doecke

Leaving Ararat, a little late, a dash was to be made for Ballarat non-stop, however a very poor cross was made at Trawalla with No.7MA2 goods bound for Adelaide with locos BL33/BL28/G513 hauling 40/2550t. But it gave us time to mingle - which was good.

During this 45 minute wait, the 'Woody Allen' look-a-like from Victoria, Roderick B. Smith from the 'Smithsonian Institute of Train Brains' was busy selling issues of his latest 'Rail News' magazine. It was good to see him, and other railfans again. Arrival in Ballarat at nearly 1700hrs and on sunset, saw the departure of our talkative V/Line Conductor, who had been onboard from Nhill, complete with his forest of biros, keys, radios, schedules, papers and almost certainly, a hidden spare set of teeth - because he must have worn out one pair.



Trawalla loop where the steam special waited for 45mins to cross an Adelaide bound goods Photo: Daniel Doecke

However the sight of 621 and R 761 standing at the Melbourne end of the 1862 built heritage station, with sunrays reflecting off the side of the two locos will be long remembered. The air had got very cold, and the bus trip to our various hotels and motels was a warm event. Regrouping occurred in the local football clubrooms near the old stone goods sheds in Ballarat - and what a meal!

Unfortunately some passengers couldn't find the venue, or they said so, and chose to dine 'up-market' at Craigs Hotel, while some went bopping along to nearby disco's. Mind you a couple of beers at the North Star Hotel didn't go astray, nor did some wine and beers with about 20 other 'Crows' back at Lord Kitchener's favourite Ballarat hotel, Craigs, later that night!

### Sunday 15th May

By about 0630hrs Sunday morning we were back at Ballarat station, ready for a cold start up Warrenheip Bank with R 761 leading 621. With plenty of smoke and steam blanketing suburban Ballarat, we raced up the hill with little effort, thanks to good loco crews.

A long day was ahead of us, and a speedy run saw us arrive at Bacchus Marsh, where chaos reigned for almost an hour. About 1,000 people were scattered around the station yard, as R 761 went to turn, and 621 commenced shunting the consist. Bacchus Marsh is one of only a few remaining real Victorian stations, with its cabin, signals, turntable and old buildings.



SteamRanger's cream and green cars behind Hudson R761 over the classic girder bridge on the Ingliston bank, heading for Ararat via Ballarat and Maryborough Photo: Geoff Doecke

The "Duke" didn't get any closer to Melbourne, but it wasn't only 621 that was left behind at Bacchus Marsh. R 761 stormed away from Bacchus 5 early, heading back to Ballarat, leaving about 6 passengers, including Mike Searle and Kirn Bird, somewhat dazed! V/Line came to the rescue, providing transport in the form of A79 on the Ararat passenger service, to deliver them to Ballarat, still in time to rejoin the R for Maryborough, Avoca and Ararat

Following our arrival at Ballarat, R 761 was turned again and watered, while A 79 trundled through on the Ararat service. After more clattering and banging of gates at Lydiard Street, the R stormed away from Ballarat, running tender first to Maryborough.

On this day our V/Line Conductor(ess) presented a major visual improvement, wasn't she Buschy! The R also performed very well, and despite the grades and tender first running, arrival at Maryborough was made in quick time. Two V/Line X class locos, stabled in the yard represented the only form of 'excitement'. Meanwhile 621/K 183 doubled headed their 12 car train from Bacchus Marsh, up Ingliston Bank, and on towards Ballarat.

Photo stops were made leaving the historic and heritage listed Maryborough station, at Avoca, and also again on the branch, before reaching Ararat once more. The post standardisation future of this cross country broad gauge branch is certainly unclear.



Racing along near Beaufort on Sunday afternoon - 621 and K183 with their special bound for Ararat  
Photo: Bob Grant

Unfortunately, due to some degree of poor organising and bad luck on the Victorian front, the proposed line up of three steam locos at Ararat didn't occur. Loco 621 was still up the track, achieving terrific results at the head of its 8 car train, while K 183 was being turned, coaled and serviced.

R 761 also shuffled about, shunting the Adelaide train and going to the old depot to turn. Finally 621 arrived back in Ararat, where it was shunted to one of the sidings, while the R and K combined on their own train, and prepared for departure back to Melbourne. I must admit, observing all this activity from the prehistoric Ararat Box, with bells ringing, levers crashing, telephones going mad and people scattering everywhere around the yard was a sheer delight! At about 1730hrs, and in a cloud of smoke and steam, locos R761/K183 eased their long and heavy train away from Ararat, and disappeared into the dark eastern hills.

It had certainly been a long day, and during a mediocre evening meal at the Turf Hotel, We sang Happy Birthday to Dave Flanagan (but it wasn't), and did a few other things. It was the friendly company that made the night. A couple of hours was spent later, 'helping' the signalman back in his box, before retiring.

## Monday 16th May

Once again we were up early on Monday morning for a 0730hrs departure away from Ararat heading home with 621 up front. After waiting for about 25 minutes to cross a very long Adelaide to Melbourne goods, we were off on a 87km, 70 minute, steaming experience to Murtoa. Truly top stuff. In perfect light a photo run was made at the western end of Murtoa, then it was sit back for another fast and long run to Dimboola, where 621 was watered. Arrival at Serviceton around midday, saw a large photo-line develop for the obvious historic shot. However about 100 paying passengers off the train had the 'line' moved for the last, and somewhat sad, Victorian photographic opportunity.

Back onboard, and within a few minutes, we were at Wolseley. The AN crew took over from the last of the Victorian crew and a final farewell was made between them, and the SteamRanger volunteers. 621 then made a bee-line for Bordertown, and what a welcome. A superb lunch had been arranged by a local community group, and was enjoyed as 621 took water. An almost on time arrival at Keith saw 621 detached and positioned for coaling, followed by a 25 minute late departure for Tintinara. However, some of this time was recovered, and after more water, we left only 15 down.

The 92kms to Tailem Bend was covered non stop in 75 minutes, with arrival on time, and once again water was taken by the engine, while many took the opportunity for a walkabout and a few drinks. Another crew change saw us blasting away from the 'Bend about 16 early, and arrival at Monarto South 25 early. Here we crossed No 2AM5 goods to Melbourne with C501/C503, and 2AM6 goods with locos BL30/852 up front. On the move again, it was a delight to listen to 621 working very hard up the grades, through Warla and Petwood and Nairne, before arriving for water at Balhannah.

70 minutes of pure steaming enjoyment, for the passengers! 2AM7 goods to Melbourne, with C509/702 rumbled through, the CFS (with Pichi Richi volunteers) finished their watering, and we were off again. After some more barking, we arrived at Bridgewater, for a perfect cross with N471 on the Overland to Melbourne, then on again with more stack-talk to Mount Lofty. No.2745 goods to Tailem Bend crawled into the yard, headed by locos BL29/874/GM42.

It seemed sad in some way as we drifted downgrade from Lofty. Not only was there silence from the "Duke" but there was a sense of it's all over. A quick stop was made at Blackwood, for the benefit of many local passengers, then down hill again, heading for Keswick Terminal, where we arrived 15 minutes early at 2140hrs. What a trip - four full days of enjoyment.

As passengers left the train at Keswick, and SteamRanger volunteers sorted out who did what next, a feeling of 'well done' crept over many people I'm sure. Brian Busch tells me that a large number of phone calls and letters of thanks and genuine appreciation have since been received by SteamRanger - and, do they all deserve it!

It's twenty years since I've made such a tour - and although it may well be the last of its kind, it will always be remembered by those who chose to support SteamRanger, and bought a "ticket to ride".

Brian Busch said: "The appreciation shown by many of the passengers, reflects the total effort and dedication of every SteamRanger volunteer, and staff member, who had input to the planning, preparation, running, catering and cleaning of the locomotive and the train consist." And he was one for sure!



Key SteamRanger catering volunteers with Buffet Car "Bowmans"  
and  
SteamRanger's loco team for the tour photographed at Dimboola

(both photos: Roger Currie)