



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

BACKGROUND

*In 1992 the SteamRanger Management Committee(SMC) established a Standardisation Working Group (SWG) to examine and report on the options available to enable SteamRanger to continue its operations , arising from the Federal Government's "One Nation" policy, which required the standardisation of the Adelaide to Melbourne rail line.*

*The conclusion was that SteamRanger should establish a new depot at Mt Barker in the Adelaide Hills*

*The following two articles written by the then President (Malcolm Thompson) and Locomotive Manager (Ian Johnston) give an insight into the lengthy and complicated negotiations involved from two different viewpoints and the subsequent physical relocation of equipment and rolling stopck from Dry Creek to Mt Barker.*

### A TIME TO MOVE

Malcolm Thompson

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The Standardisation Working Group (Chair, Graham Bull) reported on the options available to the SteamRanger Management Committee (SMC) but it made no recommendation concerning the preferred option to be adopted. Subsequently, the concern of the SMC was communicated to the State Government in so far as the effect on SteamRanger operations was concerned. Following upon this approach, the SMC was advised that contact should be made directly with the Transport Development Portfolio Coordinator, Mr R.J. Payze.

Graham Bull wrote to Mr Payze regarding the concerns on SteamRanger operations. The letter expressed the opinion that provision of the third rail between Belair and Mt Barker Junction was the best option for SteamRanger as it would enable the tourist rail service to continue with a minimum of disruption. The fact that the third rail between those two locations was not being provided as part of the standardisation project was considered to be short-sighted particularly from the tourist aspect and the disruption it would cause to our operations. Alternatively, if the third rail was not incorporated, a standard gauge (SG) train would operate from Keswick to Mt Barker where passengers would transfer onto the broad gauge (BG) train to continue the journey to Victor Harbor.

To provide for this operation, it would be necessary to:

- install a SG turnout at Mt Barker Jctn to allow access to Mt Barker
- convert the railway track between Mt Barker Jctn and Mt Barker from broad to standard gauge
- provide a dual gauge turntable at Mt Barker, along with a SG run-around track and a dead end siding behind the existing platform which will terminate at the station buildings
- convert some of SteamRanger's existing steel carriage fleet and the provision of storage facilities in the Adelaide area.

Irrespective of whether or not SG trains operate from Keswick, BG trains would operate between Mt Barker and Victor Harbor and, as a consequence, it would be necessary to:

- undertake significant upgrading of station facilities at Mt Barker including toilet facilities, shop/souvenir area, ticket office and car/bus parking
- relocate the rolling stock, equipment stores and associated facilities then at Dry Creek to Mt Barker. This cost was known to be in excess of \$1m.

Mr Payze was advised that the transfer of SteamRanger BG activities was a very large and complex project and adequate recompense must be provided. The SWG indicated it was prepared for SteamRanger representatives to meet Mr Payze and discuss the matter further before making a detailed submission.

Meanwhile, both Graham Bull and Ian Johnston met with senior staff of the District Council of Mt Barker concerning the relocation of the depot to Mt Barker. The positive reaction expressed at the meeting was most encouraging and subsequently, further meetings were held with Council regarding details of the proposed Depot. After meeting with the Mt Barker Council, a letter was sent to Council to ascertain the nature of its involvement in the refurbishment of the Mt Barker Station building and environs. Further meetings took place between the Mt Barker Council and SteamRanger until an agreement was reached over the restoration of the local station and provision of land for a turntable for a period of ten years. The Council used the LEAP Scheme to teach trade skills to students.

In response to the approach by the SWG, Mr Payze sought further information which would assist the State Government in its consideration of the request from SteamRanger for financial recompense in relocating the Depot from Dry Creek to Mt Barker and this information was provided. Later, representatives of the SWG met with Mr Payze on 31 August 1993. Concern was expressed at the slow progress of negotiations and the need for early finalisation to enable facilities to be completed before the standardisation work commenced. This would enable the shifting of equipment etc. to commence at the earliest opportunity. Mr Payze stated that although progress might appear slow, it was thorough.

He had a review undertaken of the Legal issues, Financial issues and Engineering requirements.

This review was necessary to ensure that the State Government could determine its position in regard to the possible expenditure of public money. He indicated that the attitude of the National Rail Corporation was not sympathetic towards the cost of relocation. It was likely that the matter of funding the cost of any relocation would involve the State or Federal Governments or both. The State Minister for Transport had advised the Federal counterpart that the additional expenditure was a probable necessity.

In November, representatives held a further meeting with Mr Payze concerning Steam-Ranger submissions. It was agreed that the principle of like for like would be at cost to the Government with SteamRanger providing the cost of enhancements above the like for like facility. This was on the basis that SteamRanger was being forced to move and not of its own choosing and that a turntable would be provided to replace the Dry Creek triangle.

Mr Payze indicated he was aware that time was critical as the Depot and move had to be completed prior to standardisation in April/ May 1995. Consulting Engineer Mr J. Adams was engaged to form a cost basis of the relocation project with particular emphasis on upgrading construction and transport costs for Mr Payze. Mr Adams prepared a program of the activities involved in the relocation which was based on the transfer being completed prior to April 1995 standardisation. On the basis of this program, surveyors were engaged to plot and survey the Mt Barker station yard so that detailed design and layout could commence. A further meeting between SteamRanger representatives and Mr Payze was held on 23 February 1994 following which an additional financial contribution for under-cover storage space and for SG link into Mt Barker was sought. The latter arose from a review of the cost and methodology of the conversion of the 5km line from The Junction.

The SteamRanger submission had sought \$2.365M for the relocation from Dry Creek to Mt Barker, provision of additional under cover storage as proposed by the History Trust and track conversion. Representatives met with the State Minister for Transport on 26 July 1994 and were informed that State Cabinet had decided that it was not prepared to fund the overall project because it was a Federal Government matter as it was standardising the Adelaide - Melbourne line.

Both Governments did not want to provide money. The State Government then proposed it would contribute \$600,000 if the Federal Government matched that sum.

A statement made in the Legislative Council on 6 September 1994 indicated costs had to be reduced with SA providing \$600,000 and matched by the Federal Government with "in kind" assistance worth \$400,000: that the land upon which the storage sheds at Dry Creek are built be retained as the Government were keen to provide an opportunity for SteamRanger or another party to operate a regular BG rail service to Angaston; that ARHS may be required to cull its rollingstock to only that necessary to operate services between Mt Barker and Victor Harbor.

SteamRanger met the State Minister for Transport next day and was told to reduce costs from \$2.165M to \$1.2M. The State Government contribution would be \$600,000 from sale of Dry Creek land to Commissioner of Highways, plus "in kind" service by Correctional Services with CSO people. It was unlikely that further State funding would be provided and the Federal Government did not appear interested. Federal Government refusal meant that the State Government was left with the sole responsibility to fund the relocation. Cabinet held the view that it was not a State responsibility. The State had no means to make full restitution on a like-for-like basis.

Mr J. Adams was asked to review options and SMC decided to stop all work until further notice which included earth and drainage work plus design. The completion date of February 1995 would not be met and there would be delays to the transfer of rolling stock and locomotives.

Negotiations with the State Government continued and a revised cost of \$1.35M was approved by the State Minister for Transport and was supported by Mr Payze on the 12 October 1994. That week, the Federal Government promised \$250,000 and no more from unspent funds on the Outer Harbour rail improvements. Total cash provided was \$850,000 and the State Government felt it had contributed half of the original \$2.1M when the "in kind" \$400,000 was added, a cash shortfall of \$1.25M on the original project. The cost of relocating and cash provided left a shortfall of \$500,000.

A further review of the project resulted in the consulting engineer preparing a staged development for the project, the first stage costing \$1M and would be funded by the grants from both Governments. \$850,000, a public appeal and SteamRanger funds. The \$1M was the absolute bare minimum required to maintain the operation but less than satisfactory because of the lack of undercover storage for the carriages.

Arrangements for the public appeal were finalised with 5DN, Channel 9, The Advertiser, ANZ Bank and BP. The co-operation afforded to SteamRanger by these organisations was greatly appreciated. The appeal started on 29 January 1995 and raised \$30,000.

Negotiations between ARHS, Crown Law Dept. and Dept. of Transport proceeded for the payment of \$607,000 by:

- Deed of Surrender of Dry Creek lease with Trans Adelaide.
- Relocation Deed — payment of monies from State Government
- Annual Licence from Dept. of Environment and Natural resources for Depot site at Mt Barker.

The agreements were considered by ARHS Council on 23 January 1995 and accepted enabling work to proceed and the Government to pay completed work.

In summary, the negotiations were undertaken in an even-handed responsible manner. It involved office bearers of ARHS in considerable time and significant effort to achieve the result. All sectors of the media were supportive of SteamRanger, as were the public.

Both Federal and State Governments had originally rejected any responsibility for funding the cost of relocation. As a consequence of representations from SteamRanger, public organisations and the general public, both Governments reconsidered their respective positions and made funds available. However, the outcome of the negotiations was disappointing from the financial aspect and left a heavy burden with SteamRanger.

## THE PHYSICAL ASPECTS OF THE RELOCATION OF STEAMRANGER FROM DRY CREEK TO MT BARKER

Ian Johnston

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During the early 1990s, plans were being made at the Dry Creek Depot to erect an annex to the main building to provide a dedicated machine shop and to construct a locomotive pit. Many items of equipment and machinery had been acquired during the ten years of operations at Dry Creek but the Depot building with its many internal columns did not lend itself to the setting up of an efficient workshop let alone a machine shop, and these together with a pit, had become very necessary *for* the continued and more~~complex maintenance being undertaken on all of SteamRanger's rollingstock. However rumours about plans to standardise the main south line through the Adelaide Hills were becoming more persistent. If this was to happen, SteamRanger would be isolated from the then Victor Harbor Tourist Railway which it had fought for so hard and long to establish and to which so many resources had been committed. At that stage the thought of having to relocate the Dry Creek Depot to somewhere on the VHTR filled everyone with horror as it was considered to be a monumental task.

As time went by and the standardisation project gained momentum and support from most quarters, there was nothing put forward to suggest anything but a relocation would eventually occur. Many possible scenarios for SteamRanger's future were put forward and considered, one of the most popular being that some or all of SteamRanger's assets be retained at Dry Creek to operate trains on the only broad gauge tracks remaining; the metropolitan area and the Barossa line. A number of factors, including high projected costs but no guaranteed income to support the costs and the possible requirement to have two Depots (one at Dry Creek and the other being possibly at Mt Barker) discounted this option. Other options were to provide a third rail from Belair to Mt Barker Junction or to standardise the line from Mt Barker Junction to Mt Barker but the reported costs of both were considered to be prohibitive to both Governments and to SteamRanger. When all scenarios had been fully considered, the decision had been virtually made for SteamRanger, the only option was to relocate all operations to the VHTR. Next came the decision where on the VHTR would be the best site to relocate the Dry Creek Depot with the only choices really being the Mt Barker area. Strathalbyn or Goolwa. The latter two were vetoed by Adelaide based volunteers not wanting to travel long distances. Consequently a number of potential sites were investigated in and around Mt Barker and Littlehampton with the Mt Barker station site finally being selected based on a relatively large area of railway land being available, a railway infrastructure already existed there and no finance would be required for any purchase of land.

In November 1993, ex-Australian National civil engineer. John Adams, was engaged to assist in the preparation of plans to set up a new Depot at Mt Barker and to have the Depot operational by April 1995 when the proposed standardisation was due to be complete. An enormous amount of planning, costing, approvals and work had to be undertaken to convert an unattractive and uneven site to that suitable for a Depot and the best part of one year was spent on this work. Tasks included a survey of the whole area, removal of many trees including some extremely large specimens and extensive earthworks. During 1994 it became apparent that support from both the State and Federal Governments was not going to be sufficient to provide a "like-for-like" relocation as was initially indicated. This led to many meetings and valuable time was lost in trying to gain as much finance as possible to fund the many costly aspects of the relocation. A public appeal was launched with good initial sympathy and support from the media. Meanwhile SteamRanger was having meaningful discussions with the District Council of Mt Barker on the ramifications of SteamRanger relocating to the town with particular emphasis on how could the Council assist. It was soon agreed that the refurbishment of the railway station building and environs by the Council could be a worthwhile project.

During the latter half of 1994 much planning commenced on how best to move so much rollingstock and equipment from Dry Creek. New homes were found for most of the derelict items of rollingstock to either kindred organisations or private buyers and as these items departed, the track so released was cut as necessary to form panels nominally 12 metres long and stacked. The funding shortfalls were now having a most deleterious effect on progress, particularly in deciding how large the loco and carriage sheds at the new Depot could be and the letting of contracts for major works which included the design and erection of the main Depot building. One piece of good news at this time was the commitment of the DCMB to the refurbishment of the station building, platform and car park. The Rotary Club of Mt Barker contributed by erecting a new picket fence along the entire length of the platform.

In December 1994 the first trip was operated to transfer freight rollingstock to the VHTR and a second transfer followed in February 1995 with most vehicles being taken to either Strathalbyn, Finnis or Currency Creek. Locomotives and carriages and newly acquired railcar 412 were transferred during March and April with all locomotives, railcar 412 and some carriages being taken to Goolwa Depot which ended up with virtually no spare track.

With eight carriages still needing somewhere to go with good security from possible vandalism, the old Bugle Ranges siding was selected and the carriages were parked on the main line where they remained for almost a year until the Mt Barker Depot could be used. As previously mentioned it had been planned to have the new Depot operational by April 1995 but the continued problems in securing the necessary finance meant the Depot was not ready until April 1996, exactly one year late. Diesel electric loco 958 was put to very good use in hauling all rollingstock from Dry Creek to the VHTR on many maximum load trips.

Also in early 1995, funding was eventually made available for major work to proceed at Mt Barker and as a consequence a contract was signed for the design of the main Depot based on sketches provided by SteamRanger. However the undercover area was much less than what had been available at Dry Creek which meant a number of carriages were going to be stored in the open. No amount of pleading with the authorities would alter this situation with each Government blaming the other for not providing more assistance. The DCMB agreed to provide a small parcel of land at peppercorn rental for the Bridgewater turntable to be relocated to a site north of the station. The Army had been engaged, as an exercise, to undertake extensive earthworks required for the turntable pit and these were completed in April 1995. However heavy rains almost immediately converted the site to a duck pond and it remained that way until late in the year.

In May many of the track panels and points recovered from Dry-Creek were relaid in the Depot yard with a connection being made to the main line where the DOWN water column had been located. In August 1995 work started on the Bridgewater turntable by jacking it approx 1.5 metres so as the centre bearing assembly could be removed for refurbishment. At the same time the badly corroded bottom edges of the table were sandblasted and painted. When the new turntable site had dried sufficiently, surveying and planning was undertaken to pinpoint the exact site and work commenced on digging a massive hole to support the centre bearing and provide footings for the ring rail.

In the same month a major milestone was reached when tenders were sought for the building of the Depot. A contract to erect the Depot was signed with Collaroy Constructions in October 1995. Overall costs for the Depot were reduced by shedding of a number of planned facilities, including the locomotive pit and by volunteers undertaking the reticulation of all electrical and compressed air services.

Meanwhile at Dry Creek steam locomotive F251 and four carriages had not been transferred prior to the broad gauge connection being severed for the purpose of operating weekly steam trains to Blackwood, Noarlunga and Gawler so as to generate some sort of income during 1995. Work at Dry Creek centred around the rebuilding of a set of bogies, maintenance work on the four carriages and the sorting and packing into crates, located in the main shed, of the thousands of stores items. When the store shed was finally empty it was dismantled with the generous assistance of volunteers from the Pichi Richi Railway. At much the same time the truck shed was also dismantled for future use at Mt Barker. Almost all track work outside of the shed had been lifted and converted into panels except for one short section which was built into a ramp for the loading of F251 and the carriages onto low loaders later in 1995 for transfer to Strathalbyn and hence Goolwa Depot for the summer Cockle Trains.

By December 1995 the new Depot shed had been erected, work was progressing well on the station building, car park and preparations for the turntable site. Track work inside the Depot shed was laid and a large concrete boiler washout pad poured. In March 1996 an impromptu "turning on the lights" ceremony was held at Mt Barker Depot to celebrate another important milestone, the reticulation of electrical services. Shortly after the massive concrete base and ring rail footings were poured at the turntable site. A month later yet another milestone was reached with some rollingstock, including locomotives, being transferred to Mt Barker and being housed for the first time in the new Depot building. Much time was spent by volunteers filling, compacting and levelling the floor area in the shed with the main working areas being bituminised. The next two months were extremely busy as it all started to come together. All benches, cupboards, racks, equipment and tools for both locomotive and carriage maintenance work were transferred from Dry Creek and new homes were soon found for all items. This was the stage at which all work ceased at Dry Creek and began in earnest at Mt Barker.

One of the most major single tasks of the whole relocation project was the transfer and installation of the Bridgewater turntable to its new site at Mt Barker. Much planning was required between SteamRanger and Brambles to ensure the exercise was completed with a minimum of fuss. The turntable was extricated from its pit at Bridgewater by two 140 tonne cranes and loaded onto a low loader, with a good proportion not fitting because of the turntable's huge proportions. What no-one planned for was a deluge of rain that night which made the area surrounding the new site very muddy. Only luck and skilful work by Brambles saw the turntable installed, notwithstanding the mud, in mid-April of 1996.

By May 1996 Mt Barker was pretty well operational as a Depot with a working turntable. In late 1996 work started on re-erecting the store shed. However a large amount of stores and the larger machines and items of equipment were still stranded at Dry Creek, again due to protracted discussions with Government agencies for them to fulfil an initial promise to transport all such material to Mt Barker. Unbelievably it was not until March 1998 that resources were made available for all items to be transferred and another very busy period followed which finally saw the store shed utilised, a dedicated fully equipped machine shop being established and nothing left at Dry Creek.

As time and resources permitted the air compressor shed from Dry Creek was re-erected in May 1998 and in July 1998 the concrete blocks from the Dry Creek coal bunker were positioned around a new concrete slab to form the Mt Barker coal bunker. The truck shed was not re-erected until mid 2000.

It is no understatement to say the relocation of SteamRanger's Depot from Dry Creek to Mt Barker was a massive exercise even when spread over five years.

Many volunteers spent a lot of extra time on tasks which at the time did not generate a lot of interest and almost seemed a waste of time with very little light at the end of the proverbial tunnel. However the relocation did produce some positives in SteamRanger now having far better laid out and equipped workshop and machine shop facilities but unfortunately still without a dedicated carriage restoration area and a locomotive inspection pit. Additionally the much reduced undercover area for rollingstock was a far from ideal situation.