



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

### LAST TRAIN TO MILANG - 15TH JUNE, 1970

ARHS Recorder      June 1970      pages 10 – 12

Rx224, fresh from Islington Works and with new boiler tubes did not perform as expected. Right from the first stroke as she hauled four centenary cars and brake out of Platform 4 at 9.11 a.m., Rx224 just wasn't steaming correctly. We all wondered why. Crew, faulty repairs, sanding? No, the most important item to get things rolling, good, clean, black, coal! In the tender had been placed poor quality coal much of it little larger than cinders which as soon as shovelled into the firebox was drawn up out of the funnel and showered back over the train.

Mixed with the "coal" was clay and wood chips and it is believed that tender had been filled in the reclamation area at the back of Islington with salvage from the tenders of scrapped engines.

Time was lost on all sections except Bugle Ranges to Strathalbyn where actual time taken was 21 minutes compared with a schedule of 28 minutes. The Down Victor Harbour, hauled by diesel 933 and consisting of 6 steel cars and CGP Brake passed Rx224 in Blackwood at 10.10 a.m. Long Gully was crowded with five trains crossing. Rx224 arrived at 10.53 a.m. and took the main line. A Bridgewater local Red Hen set passed on the siding. The Down Tailem Bend rail car 41 and 203 arrived at 11.10 a.m. and was placed in the dead-end siding. The Up Tailem Bend rail car 46 crossed on the passing siding at 11.11 a.m. Bluebird 259 on the Up Victor Harbour also was crossed at 11.15 a.m. Rail car No. 41 with trailer 203 reversed on to the passing siding and crept out of Long Gully with the gear box still protesting.

Rx224 finally departed Long Gully at 11.21 a.m., almost stalling in the Upper Sturt Tunnel and making a last ditch effort into Mount Lofty at 11.39 a.m. It was non stop running to Mount Barker passing Bridgewater 11.49 a.m., Balhannah 12.02 p.m., Mount Barker Junction 12.12 p.m. and arriving Mount Barker 12.21 p.m., 1 hour 21 minutes late. After stopping here 27 minutes, Bugle Ranges was passed at 1.05 p.m., arriving Strathalbyn 1.26 p.m., 1 hour 20 minutes late.

End-loading car 4-34 which had been sent down to Strathalbyn on a goods during the week was attached to the train for local passengers making the journey to Milang. Rx224 was turned at Strathalbyn, as the locking-pin on the Milang turntable was inoperative. Departure was at 2.00 p.m., arrival Sandergrove 2.14 p.m. and departure 2.25 p.m. A photo stop of Rx224 running tender first was made before Nurragi (pass 2.54 p.m.) with arrival at Milang 3-09 p.m. After Rx224 was observed by the many sightseers, the last train to depart Milang left at 3.42 p.m. Two photo stops were made, one on the curve leaving Milang, and the other at Nurragi. An attempt was made at Sandergrove to burn old railway sleepers in an effort to raise the steam pressure. Our stay there was from 4.30 p.m. to 4.41 p.m., arriving Strathalbyn at 4.55 p.m.

Those departing Strathalbyn by road transport at 5.05 p.m. arrived back at the Adelaide Station on schedule at 6.12 p.m. However, Rx224 departed at 5.47 p.m. and after stopping three times to build up steam pressure, reached Bugle Ranges at 7.38 p.m. where Alco. 960 had come to the rescue from Mile End. The total time spent in waiting to raise steam in the Ranges was 37 minutes. Section time from Strathalbyn to Bugle Ranges is 35 minutes, but on this occasion, took 111 minutes. With 960 coupled to Rx224, the train departed Bugle Ranges at 8.05 p.m., stopping Mount Barker 8.15 p.m. to 8.25 p.m. and the "Junction" from 8.30 p.m. to 8.42 p.m., for crossing purposes then non stop to Belair, arriving 9.32 p.m. and Adelaide 10.03 p.m. The Up Victor Harbour consisting 6 steel cars and CGP Brakevan and hauled by 938 was delayed more than 90 minutes due to Rx224's problems, and was observed making an unscheduled stop at Torrens Park at 10.09 pm.

In addition to the cold weather being a discomfort to the passengers, energy in the batteries of cars 313, 374 and 261 diminished and the lights extinguished except when the train was moving sufficiently for the generator to cut in.

Special thanks must go to Kim Bird for the sacrifice of several weeks long service leave to be in Adelaide to handle bookings for this trip and in general assisting Dean Harvey with the unenviable responsibilities as Tour Organizer.

The actual closing date of the railway between Sandergrove and Milang was Wednesday, 17th June, 1970.