



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

### BACKGROUND

This tour with two steam locos 620 and 520 was operated over the Adelaide Cup long weekend in May 1973. It attracted both South Australian and Victorian passengers, the latter being provided with connections to and from the "Overland" express in the Adelaide Hills

**Features of the excursion were:**

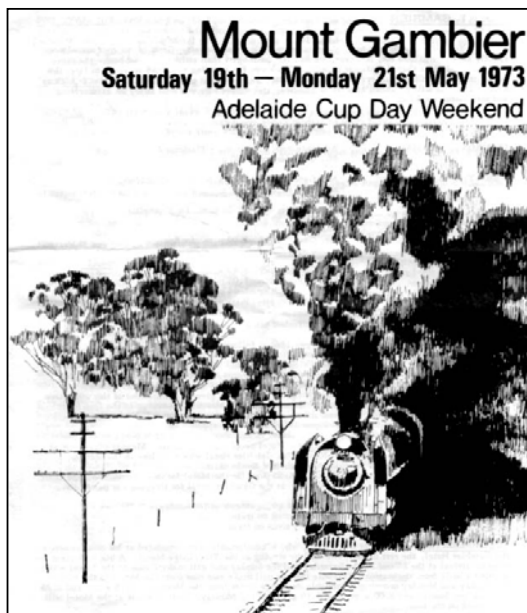
520 class power between Adelaide and Tailem Bend  
620 class power beyond Tailem Bend  
Two nights in Mt Gambier  
Steam running to Snuggery, Kalangaadoo and Kromelite with local passengers

This file contains the full text of the article.

### MOUNT GAMBIER TOUR

Saturday 19th May - Monday 21st May, 1973.

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*Promotional brochure front cover designed by Rodger McCormack*

### **Saturday 19th May**

One of our most successful long distance tours departed Adelaide Station at 7.20 a.m. on Saturday, 19th May 1973 bound for the South East. Standing in the platform shrouded by a mantle of steam in the crisp morning air was engine 520 and train comprising Pram Baggage 426-Sleeping Car "Tambo"-steel cars 715-781-503.

With driver Allan Neale at the helm, 520 marched through the hills in traditional style, leaving a trail of grey smoke to mark our progress. Water was taken at Blackwood and after crossing the Overland at Mount Lofty, a halt was made at Balhannah to allow the 8.00 a.m. South East with cars 258-105-251-250 to pass. This movement was scheduled to take place at Mount Barker Junction as well as cross the relief division of the Overland, however, the third road contained loading for the Victor Harbour line and to avoid delay, the Blue Bird passed at Balhannah.

While traversing the picturesque valleys between Bridgewater and Ambleside, the ground was still covered by a heavy layer of frost, in some places it looked more like a snow-fall. We followed the Blue Birds from Balhannah and crossed engines 904+902 on the relief division of the Express at Mount Barker Junction as well as stopping to collect some Victorian friends. The local Tailem Bend passenger was in the siding at Balyarta headed by 963 and at Callington we crossed 238 goods hauled by 965.

Although the 8.00 a.m. South East schedule is probably the fastest timetable ever between Adelaide and Tailem Bend (2 hours 33 minutes), our special was right behind the railcars practically all the way travelling on 45 minute signal indications. At times it was just possible to glimpse the Blue Birds speeding ahead.

We arrived at Tailem Bend at 10.37 a.m. and 520 was replaced by 621. This engine had worked down light overnight, leaving Mile End at 12.20 a.m. and arriving Tailem Bend at 3.35 a.m. With Tailem Bend Driver Harry Glover at the throttle, we were soon away and despite the entering block signal failing leaving Cookes Plains, we made it on time to Coombe to cross the Up South East with cars 252-101-253-257. The advantages of the newly introduced CTC working were evident as the cross only occupied about 3-4 minutes.

On arrival at Keith about 1.00 p.m., the local E.F.S. unit was standing by to supply water for 621's tender. This was efficiently accomplished and we were soon speeding on our way to Bordertown. The high standard achieved with the track rehabilitation scheme on the South Line was evident, even at consistent high speeds, the pram baggage swinging on the rear of our train rode very steadily.

Steam facilities have long been redundant in the South East, and although the local E.F.S. units are able to supply water at most of the larger towns, coaling presented a problem. Arrangements were made for a Y truck loaded with coal to be sent to Bordertown and Mount Gambier prior to the weekend, coal was then transferred to the tender by means of the hydraulic Super Grabs located at these centres. These grabs are used to transfer superphosphate from rail to road trucks and were found to be an efficient way to coal a steam engine in these diesel days. Water at Bordertown was pumped from a road tanker by members of the E.F.S.

After about 45 minutes, we were soon steaming towards Wolseley, the end of the CTC territory and junction for the line to Melbourne. We were due to cross the Up Mount Gambier goods at Bangham, imagine our amazement to find the platform packed with locals all keen to see their first steam train in years! All along the way, local people turned out in force to witness this unusual event. The evening meal on Saturday was provided by the Naracoorte Mill Museum ... committee, after a brief bus tour of the town and inspection of the Wx and V class engines in the local park.

The chill of evening was just creeping in as we left Naracoorte at 6.45pm for Mount Gambier. Engineman Harry Giddings had replaced Harry Glover at the regulator, and after two listening stops, we finally arrived at the Mount at 9.20 p.m. For the tours on Sunday, the sleeping car "Tambo" was detached and three steel cars ex the extra 8.50 p.m. Friday train from Adelaide were added.

### **Sunday 20th May**

Sunday, 20th, dawned bright and clear and after 621 had been turned, coaled and watered, the train left Mount Gambier at 9.00 a.m. for Kalangadoo with Baggage - 6 steel cars - 8300 class goods brake. The movement returned to Mount Gambier at 11.30 a.m. with 621 working tender first.

After taking water, the train then departed the Mount at 12.05 p.m. for Kromelite, the second siding from Mount Gambier on the V.R. line to Heywood. One of the locals drove up to a crossing in a steam traction engine and this provided much interest for those on the train. An old resident of Kromelite was heard to remark that it was the biggest crowd he had ever seen in the area!

By this time, word about 621 had really spread, and hundreds of Mount Gambier people flocked to the station to have a ride on the steam train to Snuggery on the Sunday afternoon. The train departed at 2.25 p.m. - 20 minutes later, when the last remaining steel car on a nearby siding was attached to the train to accommodate the crowd. Several spectacular photo stops were held on this run in the pine forests with the sharp exhaust of the engine rebounding back from the trees. After turning on the triangle at Snuggery, our steam train arrived back at the Mount with many happy passengers. Conventional telephone links on the Millicent line have been replaced by radio, and those irksome poles that plagued the photographer have been taken down. The driver on the Sunday jaunts was Bert Smith, with a V.R. crew acting as pilot for the run to Kromelite and return.

### **Monday 21st May**

As most people know, the South East is not particularly known for fine clear days during the winter, however, on Monday 21st the day again dawned clear, but cold. After a four car Blue Bird had left for Adelaide, our train, now back to 3 steel cars-Tambo-Baggage, departed at 8.11 a.m., with Harry Giddings again in the cab. Several photo stops were again well received by the passengers, the weather over the whole week-end was ideal for photography. The clear brisk air soon condenses any steam from the engine and the smoke hung back along the train in grey-white plumes - truly a magnificent sight.

At Naracoorte, it was decided to press on to Frances for water, four passengers, including some well known ARHS members, were left standing near the water column wondering when the train would be pushing back! Then followed an exhilarating dash to Hynam in a utility to catch up with the train. The down Blue Bird with cars 257-104-253 was crossed at Bordertown and 621 was again replenished with coai and water while the local baker saw to the needs of the passengers.

Harry Giddings was relieved at Naracoorte by Ray (Rusty) Bolt, renowned as one of the fastest men on the Division. Although the whole trip went like clockwork, I think that perhaps the most exciting part was Rusty Bolt's dash from Tintinara to Tailem Bend (56.75 miles) in 59 minutes! Tailem Bend was reached at 4.50 p.m. - some 22 minutes early - and 621 was replaced by engine 520 for the final stage home. After taking water, light engine 621 left Tailem Bend at 5.34 p.m. and arrived Mile End about 8.30 p.m. Many people in Adelaide were caught unaware by this light engine, when they heard the whistle, they dashed into Adelaide thinking that the train was early, then had to wait for 45 minutes for 520 and cars.

Engine 520, with Engineman Bastian, departed Tailem Bend at 5.50 p.m. with its 5 cars and worked nonstop to Petwood where we crossed 731 Express Goods, then on to Mount Barker Junction to meet the 6.15 p.m. Tailem Bend passenger. 520 marched up the grade from Balhannah to Bridgewater in only 12 minutes but we were delayed crossing the Overland for about ten minutes. This was a maximum length of eighteen cars and had to make three stops to pick up passengers. We then stormed up to Mount Lofty in traditional style, but further time was lost at Long Gully crossing a lengthy down goods.

The weekend came to a close when we arrived in Adelaide at 9.10 p.m. - only 4 minutes late.