



SteamRanger's Heritage - an insight into our past

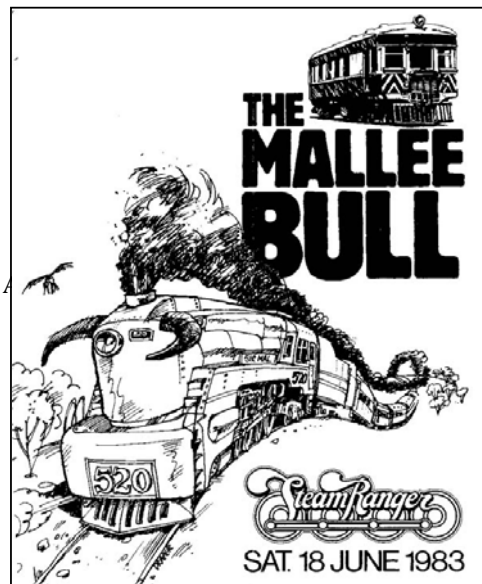
BACKGROUND

The 1980s was one of the busiest decades for SteamRanger excursion trains

Railway enthusiasts welcomed two Victorian locos, one NSW loco and the "Flying Scotsman" to the State as well as being able to travel behind our own massive "520" – Sir Malcolm Barclay Harvey on a range of long distance intrastate tours.

This tour, headed by loco 520, ventures off into the SA Mallee and its destination at Karoonda

As was the practice in those days the SteamRanger catering team were in full flight with morning and afternoon teas, wine tasting and fiureburgers from the loco firebox.



Saturday 18 June 1983, cold and frosty with the sun about to burst over the top of the Adelaide hills sees 520 trundling back to Adelaide from Dry Creek for the longest day trip of the year - and near enough to the shortest day of the year. 8.40 am and it's all aboard for Karoonda as engine 520 with its load of 1/500, 4/700 and 1/CD for 246 tonne moves majestically out of Adelaide station and under the Morphett St. Bridge.

It's not long before the big engine gets down to the business of lifting its heavy load up the Lofties, exhaust beat echoing around the cold frosty valleys as she struggles into Blackwood for water and a need to investigate coupling problems between car 503 and car 710. Somehow, somewhere the concertina of car 503 has been bucked causing stress and strain on it each time the train rounds a curve. It is decided to proceed under the watchful eye of the Loco Inspector.

Mt. Lofty and car 503 is still causing concern so a quick decision is made to place it behind the CD to trail to Karoonda however by this time the Victor Harbor Blue bird was right on our tail so it's off quick smart to Aldgate to perform the shunt after allowing the Victor and an S.T.A. red to pass.

748 late ex Aldgate and off once more with morning tea being served to passengers in car 503 and a hopeful chance of picking up some of that lost time, however more delays ahead. Petwood to cross 7338 goods (later derailed near Pinera) and a delay due to the malfunction of the home signal to allow us entry to the siding. Once through Petwood 520 showed what she was designed for as we raced up the Warla Bank - hardly knew it was there - and down the straight to Monarto.

Murray Bridge and locals and lunch to pick up before off once more up past the pig farm at Rabilla and into fog before racing into Tailem Bend 30 minutes late.

Off with 520 which was quickly dispatched to loco for coal and water whilst the local shunt engine went about adding 2/600 cars sent forward on 905 passenger the previous Thursday and a CGP plus transferring the CD up next to the engine to allow for a saving of time at Karoonda.

About 15 minutes after the advertised time of departure at 1.40 pm 520 once more attempts to pick up its load but with great difficulty - brakes dragging on the CGP - the problem rectified after a delay of some 5 minutes and its away up the Naturi bank with the wheel wound down and throttle wide open the exhaust beat of the 520 racing across the top of the Mallee. A photo stop at the 130 km and a further one at 147 before slipping into Karoonda 15 minutes late. Engine around the triangle - by the sounds coming from the engine it would appear that it was not designed for such a long loco.

Once back on the train a queue for passengers soon formed around the cab of the loco as Engineman Ray Bolt and Fireman Bob Hudson took on the task of cooking fire-burgers in the firebox of the loco - yes the shovels had been especially cleaned by Ian Johnston before hand - or that's his story anyway and he's sticking to it. A real production line of burgers accrued as trays of burgers on bread and butter appeared out of the cab to be quickly purchased. Some 160 burgers later (and with a loss of only one in the firebox) it was time to stoke up 520 for the express run back to Tailem Bend.

30 minutes late away with passengers hunger dispensed with and wine tasting in full swing 520 really showed what a pace she could put up to run into Tailem Bend 20 minutes late. A further delay of 10 minutes in detaching the CGP and 2/600s before it was off the Murray Bridge for tea and a drink for the engine.

A fresh crew on board - having changed over by taxi - and 30 minutes in the red 520 once more points its nose in the direction of Mt. Lofty with the engineman determined to reduce the lost time to a credit - what a run up the hills - the noise of the loco echoing around the cold frosty air and the timetable being slashed to pieces to run through Nairne near enough - but not for long - a delivery hose for left hand injector burst approaching Balhannah causing a delay whilst attempts were made to replace it - the spare turned out to be too short - with the Overland through Balhannah it's off once more only just on time to storm up into Mt. Lofty ahead of it.

Belair and more delays - 7338 goods had become derailed between Belair and Pinera resulting in considerable track damage and the consequent need to run single line to Blackwood. After checking on the train order and picking up the Pilotman it was off cautiously down the hill past the still derailed brakevan of 7338 and an army of workmen trying to sort out where to start - what a mess. No hope of ontime arrival as we stop at Blackwood for passengers and the pilotman to alight however a very spirited run down the hills saw the train arrive in Adelaide only 5 minutes late a very fitting end to a most fantastic day.



520 in the Hills

Photo: Roger Currie