



SteamRanger's Heritage - an insight into our past

BACKGROUND

In the mid 1990s the main line between Melbourne and Adelaide was converted to standard gauge and the possibility for Victorian broad gauge steam visiting SA would be no more

Anticipating this situation a number of Victorian rail groups promoted a visit to Adelaide by R766 in June 1991.

The train came westwards via Bordertown and after operating a busy series of trips around Adelaide using a mix of Victorian and SteamRanger locos and rolling stock headed home via Mt Gambier.

R766 IN SOUTH AUSTRALIA

ARHS Recorder July 1991 pages 152 to 158
Brian Busch, SteamRanger Operations Manager

Plan A

Back in September 1990 approaches were made to SteamRanger in respect of the running of an R and a J class to Adelaide over the Queen's Birthday long week-end this year. The date of the proposed trip clashed with a trip being planned by SteamRanger to Mt.Gambier and after further discussions it was decided to opt for a return double-header with 621 and R 766 to Mt.Gambier with J 515 returning to Melbourne via Dimboola and 621 to Adelaide.

Work requirements for both Ian Johnston and myself saw us both in Melbourne on the same night and consequently an opportunity was taken to meet with the Victorians and discuss the proposals. Eventually advance notices were sent out to members to gauge the likely support for such a large and costly tour. Our responses showed that we would be likely to get support for a Mt.Gambier trip but not one to Ararat.

A revamp of our initial plans was undertaken and a small committee set up to look at all the logistics of the exercise. Rosemary and Roger Currie toured to Mt.Gambier looking for photostops and suitable points from which meals could be purchased. Costs were obtained and a brochure prepared.

Unfortunately the number of passengers was insufficient to warrant the running of 621 to Mt.Gambier whilst the Victorians were also having difficulty in filling sufficient seats to guarantee their train, but eventually they made the grade to cover the cost of one engine and suggested that as an alternative to the 621 trip the S.A. fans might like to run to Mt.Gambier or Ballarat behind the R and return to Adelaide by rail bus or 'Overland'. - out went the alternative offer to those who had booked on the Mt.Gambier trip and back came the results - the majority took the Ballarat option. In the meantime things changed in Victoria - they had gone from being short of bookings to having too many.



Plan B

In the meantime back in Adelaide the problem of what to do since J 515 wasn't coming and R 766 having a higher axle load than R 761, which came last time, was too heavy for the Victor Harbor line.

Two options became available for one trip - Riverton or Nuriootpa. The first was ruled out for two reasons - firstly the amount of work needed on the triangle at Riverton to make it trafficable and the second the amount of work to cut back the trees. Nuriootpa also came into doubt after one A.N. Engineman reported the state of the trees on the line, but this was rectified by Bob Haebich gathering a small group and doing some pruning with the assistance of A.N. Due to the amount of growth the time allowed was insufficient and so a plea went out at the May General meeting for assistance - none was forthcoming. Bob finished up going on his own and this meant that Peter Charlson had to go back later in the week prior to the train running to try and finish it off.

Bookings for the local trips rolled in and the trains filled up - Victoria sought a guarantee that 520 would double-head to the Valley with R 766 and this was arranged simply because of the public demand.

Many other logistics had to be worked through. Crews for the operation of steam, suitable water for the engine, coaling facilities and placement of coal in advance and the list goes on.

A WEEKEND



WITH R766

VICTORIA'S BIG POWER "R" CLASS STEAM ENGINE
VISITS SOUTH AUSTRALIA

JUNE HOLIDAY WEEKEND - FRIDAY 7TH to SUNDAY 9TH

Friday <small>June 7th</small>	Adelaide - Tailem Bend - Adelaide Double Heading with SA Loco "621"
Saturday <small>June 8th</small>	R766 to the Barossa Valley BBQ Lunch at Nuriootpa
Sunday <small>June 9th</small>	R766 with the Southern Encounter to Mount Barker, then SA's "520" takes over to Victor Harbor.
Sunday <small>June 9th</small>	After lunch: R766 hauls a family excursion to Bridgewater & return.

Friday June 7th

R766 arrives from Victoria

Then on Thursday 6 June, after nearly two weeks of frantic calls to and from Victoria sorting out the last details and booking requirements it was time to join the 'Overland' for Wolseley. Overnight at the Wolseley Hotel and after breakfast the next morning over to the station to find out where the train was. The Station Supervisor reported that it had been running late but various incoming telephone calls indicated that it was now almost on time - then just before "on time" it appeared over the hill and rolling down into Wolseley with the "river boat" whistle heralding its approach 2 minutes late arrival.

Time only for a crew change with the oncoming crew not having been on steam for many years. Nearly on time from Wolseley and across to Bordertown the crew quickly "picking up the ropes". At Bordertown the R was detached and after some interesting movements finished up coupled to SteamRanger's AOGF of coal for the tender to be topped up courtesy of the local super contractor using the super grab which had been made servicable especially for the occasion. A road tanker of rain water was also on hand to top the tender and once more the efforts of the locals in making special arrangements for the running of steam were greatly appreciated.

Back on the train and "on time" R 766 picked its load up from Bordertown and made the first run-past photo of the day, the passengers having walked out onto the overway bridge to record this historic scene. Some smart running soon saw Keith approaching at 1230 hours. This time it was the passengers who wanted "coal" whilst the local CFS supplied more water for the engine. With another "false start" photostop the train departed Keith on time at 1300.

A lengthy speed restriction saw Tintinara arrival several minutes late for a walk forward photostop then by the time Culburra came on the horizon the train was a few minutes early but the signal indication was showing red over yellow - into the loop to cross an extra grain empty. This train, hauled by an 830 class literally screamed though the yard. I was later told that a wheel on the train fractured causing a delay in the Keith - Wirrega section.

Another walk forward photograph at Coonalpyn before a brisk run to Tailem Bend where arrival once more was 2 minutes late. It had been hoped to see 621 and its consist sitting on the Pinnaroo main to parallel the R into Tailem Bend but this was not so - in fact there was no sign of 621 or its train anywhere - it was down the yard at being shunted due to an almost total dismantling of the station area at Tailem Bend.

621 and SteamRanger's train meets the "R" at Tailem Bend

621 and consist of 18BE and baggage 81 had left Keswick Terminal at 1145 hours for Tailem Bend. Whilst some smart running was the order of the day with the light load the time gained was absorbed by crossing some unscheduled services and at Mt.Lofty waiting for an express goods hauled by a BL and an 830 class to enter the yard. The BL had apparently failed on the grades and the plucky 830 was singly inching the train into the yard. Just as the train approached the crest the fault in the BL apparently rectified itself and the train literally "shot off".

R 766 was cut off and went out to the Karoonda road crossing on the Barmera main to take water courtesy of the CFS. Whilst sitting there being watered the local fire siren sounded - "oh 'ell". Down came three of the CFS members from the engine and into a four wheel drive for the fire station to attend the alarm, back they came for the keys to the station and off once more to be told by the caller that there was "lots of black smoke and no doubt a fire near the Karoonda road crossing." I'm was not privy to their comments.

In the meantime 621 was still being watered in the yard and the shunting, which should have commenced on arrival of the R, hadn't started. A delay was looming. R 766 came back from watering and immediately commenced the shunt by hauling the consist into the yard. After some time a 500 class appeared and cut out shower car 'Carey' then attached BE 18 and Baggage 81 from the consist ex Adelaide. 621 was put "top on" and back came the train to the station.

Some 42 minutes late - away we went to the photo line near old Wurtun platform. A quick stop for passengers to join and it was off once more with a number of concerns over arrival time in Adelaide and what to do about the evening meal being prepared.



621 and R766 bthunder out of Taillem Bend in darkening skies on 7th June heading for the grades of the Adelaide Hills Photo: P. Wood

The combined train heads for Adelaide

Would we make Balhannah for the goods or not?. What a sight the train made from baggage 81 as it steamed along in the fading light to Murray Bridge and across the Murray. A quick stop to cross a short ballast train with twin 830's and pick up a passenger and we were on our way - still 40 late.

By this time darkness had set in as the two engines barked up the grades, through Monarto South and over Warla, the good run anticipated down to Callington not taking place due to speed restrictions then all of a sudden the burst of power as the two engines once more started the climb up the ranges, through Callington and surprise, surprise through Petwood - the goods must be late. A slow run down to Balhannah caused by a signal check where we were to take the loop to allow the train to split but on stopping we found ourselves on the main instead of the loop.

Due to a goods being "on" from Bridgewater nothing could be done until that ran through when 621 quickly cut off and proceeded to the goods siding for water, once more courtesy of the local CFS. The consist was pulled up and split with R 766 taking Goulbourn, CW (van), BW car and 3 non air-conditioned sleepers, leaving 2 air-conditioned sleepers, BE 18 and baggage 81 for 621.

1910 though Ambleside and not much of a chance to make Mt.Lofty for the 'Overland' but coming into Bridgewater all signals were on the green, through we went and onto Mt.Lofty. A green coming up the last pinch indicated that the 'Overland' was there and just as the last car of our train cleared the switches R 766 lost its feet and spun to a halt.

After a number of attempts to lift the train we finally made it to the crest and away down hill not knowing where the Tailem Bend crew were to change over with another Jet. Belair? Nothing there and on we went then nearing Clapham on came the brakes and as we came to a halt the scream of a BL stopping could be heard. After changing the crew we dropped down the last few kilometres to Keswick Terminal to arrive about 30 minutes late.

At about the same time down came the rain and 621 arrived with its consist. R 766 pulled ahead and split its consist once more. 'Goulbourn', CW and BW going to Dry Creek the rest remaining for 621 to shunt to the old goods yard for stabling with the sleepers from 621 's train and 'Inman' brought in from Dry Creek earlier in the day on the Tailem Bend train.

Out at Dry Creek some "interesting" shunting took place as the various cars from Friday's train were cut into the right place for the Nuriootpa trip on Saturday. Not much sleep for some that night as we were involved the next morning in the final shunting and servicing of the engines for Nuriootpa.

Saturday June 8th R766 and 520 to the Barossa Valley



520 and R766 pass Salisbury enroute to the Barossa Valley on 8th June
Photo: R. Platt

14 cars were hauled from the depot by 350 and placed on the "western siding" for R 766 to attach to. No problems found for the train examiner and away went R 766 onto the Northfield line then to Keswick

. As we came in the 'Pokie' special was at the northern end of platform 1 with the 'Overland' just coming in. R 766 was cut off and went to run round where it was held until the car carrier from the 'Overland' was placed - once more late away. A quick run down the Port line, over Commercial Road to Birkenhead. R 766 changed ends and back once more to Port 'A' before heading across the loop to Dry Creek.

The home was at stop on arrival at Dry Creek and a further delay took place whilst an STA 'Red' went to Gawler and the 'Westliner' headed off. Our turn eventually, and into Dry Creek to attach to 520.

Crew change and air test completed we pushed back to clear the signal then away we went. Which engine is the best? Competition at its best as both engines picked up the load and barked along. 40 late from Dry Creek and the Gawler photostop cancelled but this didn't overcome a delay waiting for the 'Red' to come back from Gawler Central. Over to Gawler Central and a Guard change before tacking the rising grades to Sandy Creek. Not too many closed windows on the train and a lot of motorcadars on the road as the two engines showed their breed.

Through Lyndoch and up the horse-shoe curve for a photostop. What a sight and sound as the two engines barked up the grades and curves past the photo-line. Eventually through Tanunda and only about 12 late as the Nuriootpa station called on the radio for "whereabouts"



Rt66 leads 520 near Nutiootpa on 8th June Photo: G. Doecke

As the train pulled into Nuriootpa the smell of cooking food wafted across the vineyards. A small team of SteamRanger workers were hard at it. Soup, snags, rissoles all on the go. Sweets to follow with tea and coffee. Many compliments from the passengers followed. The engines were turned and then water by the CFS as the water to the overhead tank has been disconnected. With R at the lead the train departed on time at 1450, but towards Angaston then running forward to the photoline to pick up passengers just as the rain started.

A further photorun was held near Barossa Junction this time with the rain set in before a quick run to Gawler Central. Signal checks saw "ontime" became 12 late as we ran around to Gawler for a stationery photo in fading light. Arriving at Dry Creek just as the rain started to pour down. R 766 was detached and sent to the island platform to allow 520 to take the entire consist into Keswick.

As we had turned the train consist going to Birkenhead it had to go around the triangle on return, but problems arose in getting into the depot necessitating the train running over to the platform then coming back for another go. More complex shunting to put the cars in the right place for the Sunday's service.

Sunday June 10th R766 to Mt Barker and 520 on to Victor Harbor

Sunday saw R 766 haul two consists and the BW into Keswick. The lead consist for Victor Harbor and the trailing one for Bridgewater. In the meantime 520 with an FB of second hand sleepers in tow headed for Mt.Barker via the STA tracks.

For the morning Mt.Barker became an attended station. 520 and flat arrived at 1022 and contact was made with STA control to allow a train order clearance for the R. After 520 took water it ran ahead and the R was signalled into the yard. It stopped at the platform and the consist was cut off to allow it to run onto the goods siding. 520 attached to the train and performed a "false start" photo run before departing for Victor Harbor at 1112.

R766 left at 1116 for Bridgewater to turn before continuing back to Keswick. Wet weather and a slipping turntable with no sand for grip made the turning hard. Eventually some "hard grunt" was called for to get the table around. R 766 stormed off to Mt.Lofty and Keswick. Into the Diesel Depot to turn then back onto the next consist for Bridgewater

R766 to Bridgewater

About 5 late R 766 headed once more for Bridgewater. A good sprint up the hills to Blackwood for water then onto the summit and down to Bridgewater. Sanding of the turntable ring rail assisted in a smart turn of the engine and an ontime departure at 1600 for Keswick where it was found that platform 2 was blocked by the Victorian consist with entry only available to platform 3. Whilst this consist had no 50 class cars in it the 'Southern Encounter' did and therefore A.M. had to shunt the cars to platform 3 for that movement.

Monday June 11th R766 to Mt Gambier

Monday morning and a few hardy soles gathered to see R 766 with 'Goulbourn' and CW van from Dry Creek attach to the 3 non air conditioned sleepers and head for Taillem Bend. The crew on this movement changing at Murray Bridge with a crew travelling passenger on the 'Overland' to return back to Adelaide. At 5.50am the 'second division' hauled by an 830 class with the BW, 2 air conditioned sleepers and 'Inman' departed for Taillem Bend. The 830 worked to "full capacity", slipping occasionally as it assaulted the grades to Mt.Lofty then onto Petwood for a cross and crew change with the 'Overland'. Arrival at Taillem Bend was some 12 minutes late.

About 15 minutes late R 766 made a move from Taillem Bend heading east to its home state, in fine sunny conditions. The weather was not to last however as it was soon raining and continued to do so for most of the day. A stop was made at Keith for water and a walk forward photostop - the goods shed provided shelter for those hardy soles who ventured out. Lunch aboard departure from Keith was about 20 late.

A quick run to Bordertown and once more coal and water. Carriage watering also took place and a Mt.Gambler crew relieved the Taillem Bend crew. Across to Wolseley and then new territory for an R class steam engine. A photostop was held at the junction of the two lines in very wet conditions. Still 20 odd late we steamed off towards Naracoorte. Despite the very wet and slippery conditions on the road track against the rail line it didn't stop a cavalcade of motorcadgers speeding along completely ignorant of safety.

The next photostop was at Hynam where the train pushed back then ran forward for a "double take". Due to the very wet conditions the next photostop was abandoned. Into Naracoorte but not through the platform as this track was disconnected along with the whole of the yard to the north of the crossing loop. Access to loco is also no longer available therefore the resident shunter (520) was to be seen sitting in the open on the south side of the main line.

Slow progress was made to Penola due to severe speed restrictions and a call went out the Hotel to hold back on the evening meal. More water from the CFS, this time in the dark. The scheduled listening stop at Wandillo was held in drizzling rain before we steamed into Mt.Gambier about 10 minutes late.

Tuesday July 12th From Mt Gambier back to Melbourne

Tuesday morning and breakfast on the platform. R 766 sitting at the head of the train waiting for departure. What time departure? "0800 our time" said someone, "0830 civilized S.A. time" (shades of the comments which once rang out between Ararat and Murray Bridge Train Controllers.

At 0830 CST we departed for the Border leaving 'Inman' behind to return to Dry Creek on the first freight. A photostop was held at Glenburnie, before we entered Victoria (time to alter the watches) and onto Dartmoor. While the old timber trestle bridge was impressive it was only its replacement which allowed the R class to run over this line and two impressive photoruns were made over the bridge before passengers rejoined for a push back once more onto the bridge to allow the crew to assault the grades off the bridge.

Nearly to the top of Greenwald bank a further photostop was held with the train pushing back close to 1 km. A magnificent start was made on the tight grades leaving this stop. Surprisingly the rain had now cleared. Heywood at 1135-5 minutes early and the home signal was at stop. Some whistling and calling of the Station Master on the radio saw the signal clear for a 2 minutes early arrival - the train ran through the platform to the Bowling Club where passengers alighted for lunch, the engine water and run round and allowed G 538 to attach for the run to Ararat.

Unfortunately no photostops were held with the power combination which was due to the fact that R 766 was running tender first. An "on time arrival" of 1620 to Ararat was achieved. R 761 was on hand still being coaled on our arrival and photos were the order of the day in fading light. R 766 detached and also coaled and watered before the two engines with the coal truck were attached to the train.

1730 departure (near enough) away from Ararat and soon we were travelling at "express speeds" as the two R's showed what they were built for. 10 minutes early through Linton Jet and into Ballarat platform 2 still ahead of time. Time for the S.A. group to leave the train so that they could return to Adelaide on the 'Overland' that night.

Following a meal at the hotel across the road we returned to the station for a "tour of inspection" of Steam Rail Ballarat Division's restored carriages. A real credit to the small band of hardy workers who have them looking magnificent. Ballarat 'A' Box (signal cabin) is shortly to be replaced by a modern signal panel in the station building. Being the largest box outside the Melbourne Metro area with 118 levers an opportunity was taken to inspect it. Whilst it is the largest box it controls only about 3/4 km of main line track. Our special thanks to Allan from SteamRail for filling in the time waiting for the 'Overland' which had been delayed by a Jet on the Iglishton Bank. About 35 late away on the 'Overland' with a single N and not much thought of being able to pick up time, but surprise next morning "near enough" back to ARPT reaching the end of a fantastic trip and weekend.

Thanks!

May I record my appreciation to the Victorian groups who made this tour possible, ARE, SteamRail, ARHS Victoria, and the Seymour group along with the willing band of volunteers with whom we were able to work together in a harmonious manner. Also to all the SteamRanger workers from tree cutters, carriage and engine cleaners, lighter-uppers, loco service crews, barbeque crew and on-train staff and any one else I've missed - thank you for making the entire venture the success that it was and showing every one that Rail Fans can work together to show the public that we mean business - Thanks one and all.