

ORBOST & DISTRICT HISTORICAL SOCIETY INC.

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NEWSLETTER

RIVER - ROAD - RAILWAY

THE 3 R's OF ORBOST — 1880 - 1916

The third and final part of Di Weatherly's research project completed in 1986 while studying Year 12 Australian History at Orbost High School as a mature aged student.

THE RAILWAY

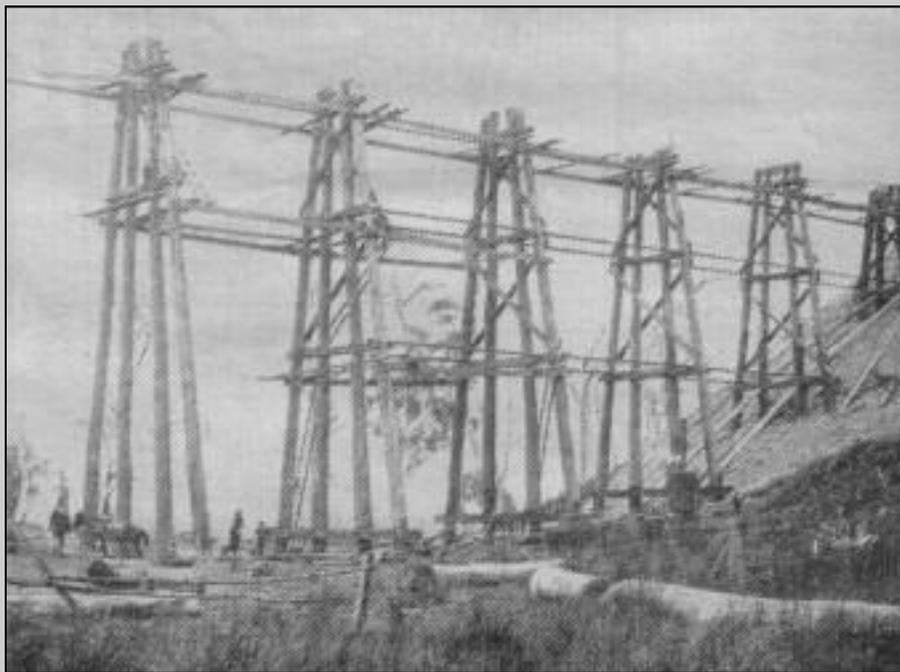
SNIPPETS OF GOVERNMENT WORDS OF WISDOM

"Mr Bilson, Minister for Railways: It is as well to bear in mind that we appear to be rapidly approaching the point when there will have to be certainly a slower rate of railway construction than at present.

Mr McLachlan: We cannot go much slower.

Mr Bilson: We shall have to go more slowly on account of the fact it will be difficult - I will not say impossible - for the Government to raise money to carry on these railways".

— circa 1909 Parliament.



This picture was taken in 1914, during work on the Bruthen-Orbost railway line. It shows one of the large bridges in a fairly advanced stage of construction.

THE RAILWAY

Two things stand out when researching the introduction of the railway into the Orbost area. Number one: It took 28 years after the line reached Bairnsdale for the railway to come to Orbost. Number two: The amount of wrangling in the parliament, between different towns, amongst the townfolk on routes, and finally the State to State feeling.

Why did it take so long? Firstly the government of the day couldn't decide where they were going to extend the railway lines. It became a matter of how much cost the government could bear (times haven't changed). A bill was passed in June 1891 which was called the Railways Bill but was known as the "Cock-Spur-Bill" or "the-Black-Stump-In-The-Bush Bill" because of the 43 lines provided for most were short and none was a major link. Then the lobbying of the different areas created a dilemma for the parliament finally the route was proposed to take the line from Bairnsdale to Swan Reach and up the Tambo Valley to Bruthen, which is its present day route, but as luck would have it this particular government lost the election before this could happen. The land boom was collapsing and the 1890's depression happened so nothing more was done for several years.

In Orbost the first meeting of the Railway

League was held in 1880 a long way off the eventual date the railway arrived. Another factor comes into the scene, will the railway cross the river, will it go into New South Wales, will the lobby of Omeo (who thought they should get the railway ahead of Orbost) have any bearing on the outcome of the push for a railway line to Orbost?. Taking the crossing of the river, it was thought that if the railway was to go on into New South Wales this was essential but perhaps some interstate rivalry prevented this happening but more likely lack of funds.

1908 Book on the Railway Extension goes into great detail on the different routes favoured past Orbost but at that stage the Line to Orbost was still in doubt, and it wasn't till 1909 that the Railways Standing Committee came to Orbost to take deputations and select the route. It then wasn't until 1912 that the first sods were turned on the Bairnsdale to Orbost railway line. In 1907 the Governor Sir Reginald Talbot visited the Orbost area and was impressed with "the fertility of the area" ⁽¹⁾ and hoped the Railway Commissioners would make a favourable decision for this area.

It was a peculiar set up in those days the Railways did not compensate the landowners for the land taken for the railway, it was considered

⁽¹⁾ ' Snowy River Mail', March 19th, 1907.



Nowa Nowa Railway Station under construction when the line was being put through from Bruthen to Orbost, about 1916.

to be an asset to have the railway come through. In the Orbost area a committee was formed called the Bairnsdale to Orbost Railway Trust. The business of the trust was to acquire the land necessary for the railway and levy a rate on the property owners. The other cost to the area wanting a railway was the guarantee



Work on a railway cutting at Bruthen was well under way when this picture was taken, about 1914. Robertson's butcher's shop is to the left of the corner building.

against loss in working expenses of the railway, the Orbost Shire had to provide up to £3000 per annum.

There were two petitions circulated about the route to be taken by the railway, the first one wanted the railway to go by Pumpkin Point and the second one wanted the route which eventually was taken. These petitions were used by the railways as an excuse for the delays in starting railway. Reply to Trust from railways - "You say that construction was authorised to start in January 1910 but you omit to mention money deposits required by the Act prior to commencement of construction were not made until 31st August, 1911" the letter continues in this vein stating that requests for deviations on the line have caused delays by having to look into them — The final statement "The responsibility rests locally" (a great piece of buck passing).⁽²⁾

Even when the railway was under construction delays were the norm. The complaint that workers were being taken away thus not giving enough work to the dray owners who promptly also moved to other areas.

Even as late as 1913 the railway was still expected to go through Orbost and beyond. At a Municipal Conference in Sale a motion was passed "That the Association urges the

government to construct a railway into East Gippsland beyond Orbost." All to no avail, the war coming in 1914 put paid to any further extension.

Eventually the Railway was officially opened by Sir Andrew Peacock in 1916 and would it be too extreme an irony if a namesake could be talked into performing the imminent closure.

SUMMATION

I have found this a very rewarding exercise, but I feel the subject I chose needed far more research and was greater than I expected. Dates varied from one account to another and if time had not been short perhaps these could have been verified from government sources in Melbourne — i.e. Shipping registers and the like.

Another source of frustration was the inability to get local books from the Orbost Library as a local organisation had them out on loan.

I researched the 'Snowy River Mail' from 1910 to 1912.

Records held in the Orbost Museum were of great value.

Read as much as possible as was written about the area. This I found was not a great deal and it is an area which should be explored more given plenty of time.

In all I think if I had just researched the paddle steamer "Curlip" or the Railways on their own it would have been sufficient.

I still have a lot of information which I did not use because of the time factor.

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⁽²⁾ 'Snowy River Mail', May 23rd, 1912.