

ORBOST & DISTRICT HISTORICAL SOCIETY Inc.

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NEWSLETTER

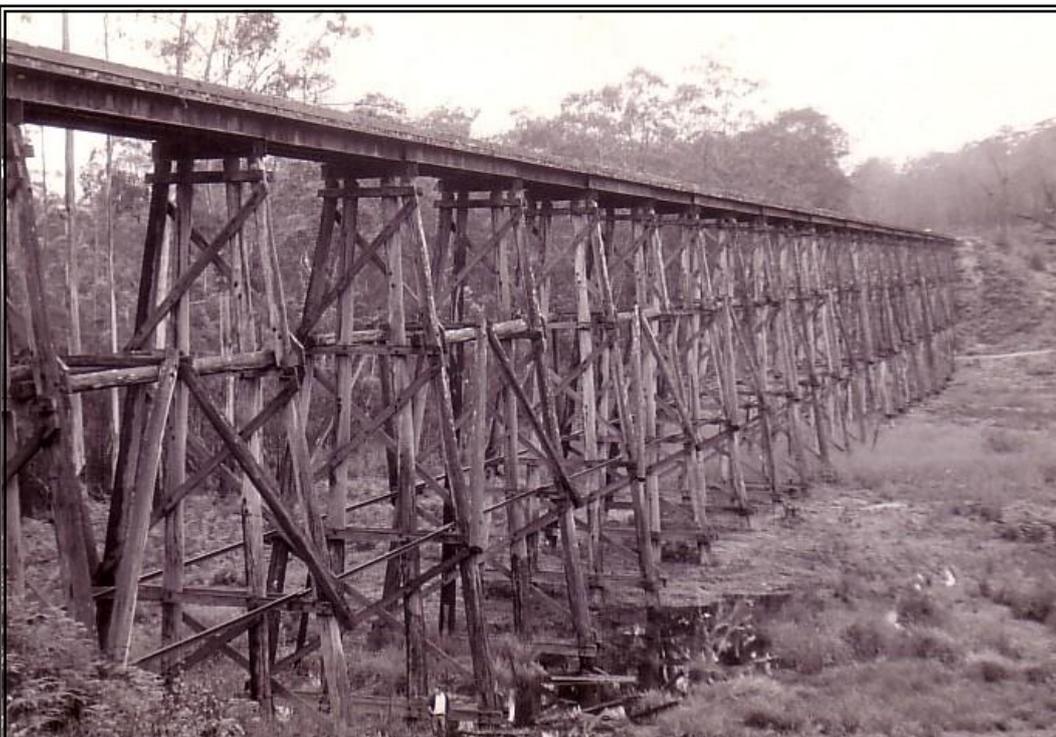
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This Newsletter features the Stony Creek railway bridge, near Nowa Nowa. In the first part Mr Jim Hardwidge, of Bairnsdale, recounts his time working on the construction of the line, while the second item covers a major derailment which occurred at the bridge in June 1964.

'THE NEWS', Friday, May 26, 1978:

TRESTLE BRIDGE IS ON NATIONAL ESTATE LIST

Located near the Old Colquhoun Road, about four miles west of Nowa Nowa, on the Bairnsdale-Orbost railway line, the Stony Creek trestle bridge has been listed in the register of the National Estate.



Built during the period 1914-16, of Gippsland Grey Box and Red Ironbark, it is a fine example of early engineering skill, being constructed without the aid of any of the modern machinery available today.

It is the highest railway bridge of single trestle construction still in use in Victoria (a higher one in South Gippsland having been burnt in bush fires).

The usual method was to bolt one shorter pole onto another.

The bridge stands in an attractive forest setting with abundant bird life; koalas can be seen sometimes in the tree-tops. Nearby there are waterlilies growing in a small pool which is fringed with Paperbarks.

The bridge has been a tourist attraction for many years and has become increasingly popular in the last three years due to additional publicity.

It is visited on some of the "Forestours" run by the Forests Commission during holiday periods.



The Stony Creek Railway Bridge during construction.

Bairnsdale resident, Mr James Hardwidge, worked on the construction of the line, and he tells the story of construction work on the track in these words:

It was in the year 1915, when I went to work for the late Mr George Larkins, of Tambo Upper, which is where I also lived with my parents.

George Larkins was a "government ganger", who was working around Nowa Nowa at the time.

Between the big Stony Creek railway bridge and Nowa Nowa, there is a decent sized hillock, which had to be cut through before the permanent railway tracks could be laid.

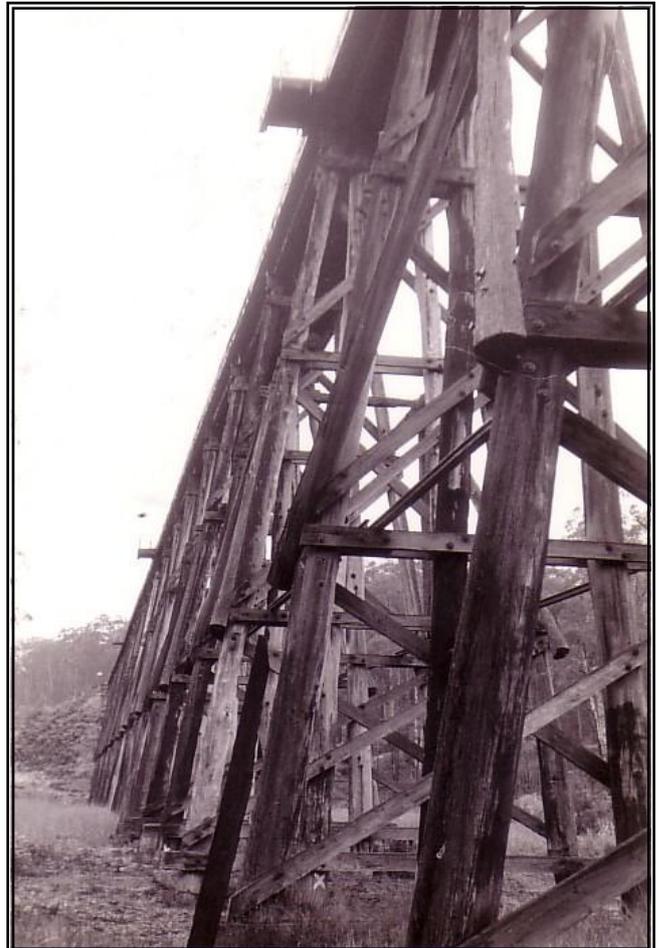


When I arrived on the scene, my first job was to help take up a somewhat miniature railway line.

This had been put down to remove the earth taken from the cutting made in this hillock. The temporary line extended from end to end of the cutting.

As far as I can remember, it took eight men to carry these rails out — four men on each side of the rail, with a screw hand grip.

We dumped the rails well up the line on the Nowa Nowa end of the cutting.



They had two short trucks with railway wheels and flair sides, which were called "Tommy Bents", after Victoria's Premier, the old time cabbage grower.

You will understand at this stage, the removal of dirt was just about to start, and the line we had just carried out now had to be put down level, bit by bit until the line came out the other end.

The flair-sided trucks had to follow this line, one in one out, taking away the dirt, until they broke through the other end. How they got the dirt into those trucks is anyone's guess, as the top of the cutting was a lot wider than the trucks.

It was left up to the men on the job to work out the minor problems which arose, and there were plenty of them.



One of the problems on the job was the fact that any dirt below the height of the flair-sided trucks would have to be shovelled up over the top of the trucks, which were about eight feet high.

At the stage where we had all the rails carried out, old Duncan McDermott turned up. Old Duncan had a broken-winded bay horse in a dray.

It was hard to tell which roared the most, old Duncan or the horse.

Duncan was there to shift a certain amount of dirt that was left in the cutting.

A young fellow about my own size and weight, and myself, were told to stand on the south side of the cutting and shovel some of the soil back in to the cutting. The cutting was about 50 feet deep.

In the Nowa Nowa area, a new bridge had already been put across the line to serve the old Red Knob Road, and tar was dripping from the bridge when we arrived to work underneath it.

There were two battermen working on the road, by the names of Bob Ball and Dick Croft.

My mate from the big cutting was still with me and we were told to pick up the big stones that were left in the cutting. Our job was to pick these stones and throw them behind us. The layer of stones was about 18 inches in depth and extended for about a chain along the cutting.

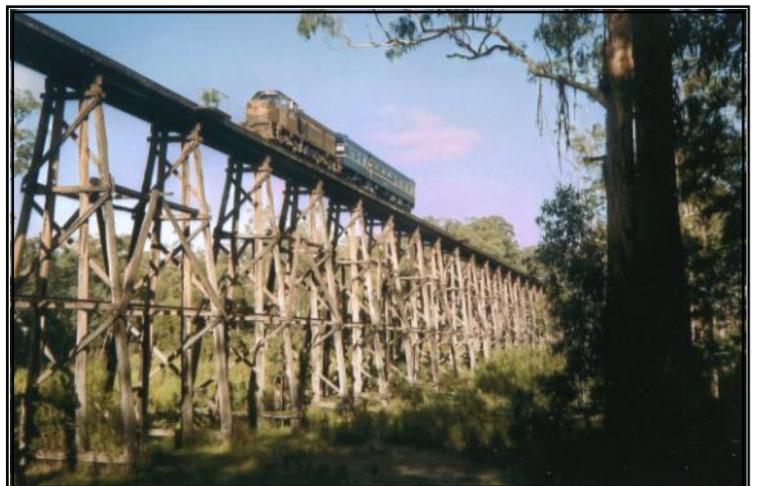
The stones were big and round — some were about nine inches thick. The road plough must have been unable to plough the stones in the first place.

In the ballast pit, men were filling drays using short-handled shovels. After about two weeks use, one of these “Wheel” brand shovels was considered to be worn out. The boss would tell the men, “better put that shovel on the bank and get a new one”.

Some of the men were leaving at that time and walking across the hills to Tallangatta, where a new line was being put in to Cudgewa.

The wage in the ballast pit was 9/6d a day, and the men working there certainly earned it.

One six foot by eight foot tent cost 7/- and a “Wheel” brand shovel cost 4/6d.



A T406 crossing the Stony Creek bridge on a ministerial inspection train on 23-1-1986 — Bob Wilson, Photo

DERAILED TRAIN CRASHES INTO RAVINE

Eleven railway trucks and tons of timber lie in a gorge at Stony Creek, near Nowa Nowa, following a train derailment on Thursday night on a timber bridge which carries the line 62 feet above the creek bed.

In the derailment, three trucks from a goods train laden with timber plunged off the high bridge, eight other trucks were derailed, and track on the bridge was torn up.

However, the locomotive and rear portion of the train remained on the tracks, and neither the driver, Mr P. Leo, nor the guard, Mr G. Bray, of Orbost, was injured.

It was the second derailment on the Orbost line in eight days.

A special breakdown train, fitted with heavy equipment, was brought from Melbourne, and railway crews worked throughout the week-end at the derailment scene.

Three of the derailed trucks were teetering on the edge of the bridge and it was impossible to recover these; they, too, crashed to the creek bed.

Efforts were focused on getting the track open for traffic again as quickly as possible.

Although considerable damage had been done and working conditions on the narrow bridge were difficult, the line was fit for traffic at 5 p.m. on Sunday.

First train to use the line since the accident left Bairnsdale for Orbost at 4 o'clock this morning and arrived safely. Extra goods trains are being scheduled to shift the accumulation of goods.

Sawmillers are collecting timber from the creek bed, and it is expected that the railways will later recover the damaged trucks for repair.



'The Herald', Friday, June 19, 1964:

THIS WAS THE SCENE when Herald photographer Lester Howard flew today over Stony Creek, East Gippsland.

Several trucks of a derailed goods train were balanced precariously on the trestle bridge over the creek.

Railwaymen said it would take only a nudge to send the trucks toppling over.

At the bottom of the gorge, 62 ft. below, lay the wreckage of four trucks among 50 tons of shattered timber.

