

Summer 2016

## What's Inside?

Green Army Works at Bairnsdale

Straw Flowers

East Gippsland Water Donates New Water Points For Trail

Update on Saving Our Bridges

The Lonie Report



Thanks to support from the Shire and energetic work by East Gippsland Marketing staff, the trail now has a new brochure, which is designed to complement the other regional brochures promoting the region.

A notable feature is an emphasis on side trips from the trail and other nearby attractions, and a considerably enlarged presentation of the map.

Copies are available from all the East Gippsland Visitor Information Centres.

Any business interested in making use of the brochure should contact the Shire.

## We Have a New Brochure!

Michael Oxe



## Green Army Build a Barricade.

Roger Smith and his willing band of young Green Army members have been hard at work at the Bairnsdale entrance area building the first section of a retaining wall to begin reducing the erosion of an eroding embankment below Haddon St.

This job has involved learning a number of new skills including handling electric power tools (power on site thanks to the Friends recently purchased 1.5 KW generator), and other skills involved in making a solid wall which is square and plumb.

The team also recently cleared the track to O'Grady's Bridge, from the new shelter on the east side.

Say 'Hi' to the team in their bright orange kit if you are passing by.



**The new retaining wall work at Bairnsdale**

*Photo from Roger Smith, Green Army Supervisor.*



## No longer just a 'sleeper'.



At the January 2006 formal opening of the rail trail extension from Nowa Nowa to Orbost a long Red Gum railway sleeper was on display, routed on its gleaming timber surface the name of the rail trail.

For the last decade it has 'rested' at Nicholson but was recently cleaned up, sealed and painted, with the engraved letters highlighted in white.

The plan is to install it facing Princes Highway near the Bairnsdale entrance. Hopefully it will help guide visitors as they get started on a visit to the trail

*Michael Oxe*



## Looking Back

### From this



***Burn Road 2008***

With few resources and some hard work, a small group of volunteers completely changed the Orbest entrance to the Rail Trail. Over the years Friends, with the assistance of Snowy West Landcare, have created a small new haven of interest along the former railway line reserve, protecting and enhancing habitat where it was before stripped away.

### To this



***Burn Road 2014***

The East Gippsland Rail Trail has benefitted immensely from the efforts of volunteers who just “plug away” at revegetation projects, the building of new infrastructure and promotion of the trail.

It will be interesting to look back at other sites in future issues of The Trail Mail.

## Water Drink Point Will Add a New Feature to the Trail.



The water drink unit has been generously donated by East Gippsland Water.

It has been a long and at times complicated process getting the site set up with a water supply and installation of the concrete base for the drink unit. It is located about half way between Sarsfield Road and the Nicholson River bridge, and includes other work carried out by Nicholson River Landcare, comprising a timber fence (wide vertical boards) and a remembrance seat in honour of the late Andrea Brumley

Further work includes revegetation plantings (grasses and She Oaks), site levelling in preparation for laying a crushed rock surface, and repair of the swale drain.



## Straw Flower/ Golden Everlasting Flower

*Bracteantha bracteata* previously known as *Helichrysum bracteatum*

At this time of year, the Straw Flower can be seen on your journey along the East Gippsland Rail Trail.

*Bracteantha bracteata* is a most variable and widespread plant, found on the margins of dry rainforest in north Queensland, through to coastal areas of Western Australia, and seemingly every imaginable habitat in between except wet or heavily shaded areas.

As seen on the trail, plants may grow well in dappled shade, but, depending on available light, may grow taller and produce smaller or fewer flowers.

Standing up to 1 metre tall, it is usually covered with small hairs and has elongated leaves 5-40 mm long. Flowerheads are golden yellow and glossy, daisy like and papery. They are sometimes solitary and at other times a few together on separate stalks. Flowers range from 25-50 mm wide.



Many cultivated varieties are available in nurseries and can easily be grown in the garden. They are often used in dried flower arrangements.

### Bibliography

**Key Guide to Australian Wildflowers Leonard Cronin 1987, Reed Books**  
**Field guide to the flowers and plants of Victoria; Willis Fuhrer and Rotherham 1975**

**The golden Everlasting; John Knight: Australian Plants online - September 1996**  
**The Society for Growing Australian Plants**

Janice Preston

## O'Grady's Bridge and Orbost Viaduct Project

These are but two of the timber bridges on the East Gippsland Rail Trail and they need saving! This is the opinion of many who use the trail or appreciate the craft and beauty of these historical structures.

In early 2015 the Friends of East Gippsland Rail Trail, together with the Orbost Historical Society, Committee of Management and other interested individuals started the process.

The first step was to engage consultants who visited the bridges to make a preliminary engineering assessment and estimate of restoration to make the bridges suitable for pedestrian and cyclist use.

Contributions from East Gippsland Shire Council, Snowy River Cycling, Orbost Historical Society and Friends of East Gippsland Rail Trail funded the report from these railway experts.

The report concluded that O'Grady's Bridge would require dismantling and rebuilding using a mixture of new and reused materials. The estimated cost would be in the vicinity of \$3.8 million.



**O'Grady's Bridge under construction circa 1914**



**A view from Grandview – the last train crossing the Orbost flats on the viaduct**

The Orbost Viaduct was determined to be in a better condition requiring renewal/repair of 60 piles, about 20 beams and a new deck. Some termite control is also required.

The estimate for viaduct restoration is in the vicinity of \$2.6 million.

The report concluded that the Orbost Viaduct *“although appearing to be suffering collapse at a number of locations and in need of extensive renewals is in fact not in a bad condition. The renewals to the piles are not extensive and will not be difficult to carry out as the work is predominantly in the vicinity of ground level.”*

The estimate for viaduct restoration is in the vicinity of \$2.6 million.

These are daunting amounts and it was decided in the first instance to focus our efforts on Orbost Viaduct as this is highly visible from the Princes Highway, is a recognisable feature of Orbost area and would be an attractive destination for walkers and cyclists.

In August a group of bridge restoration enthusiasts and Landcare representatives met on site with EGSC officer to inspect the Old Coach Road and the west end of the viaduct to make these areas more accessible from Burn Rd.

Clearing vegetation around the bridge is a job that could be tackled by DEWLP.

One approach suggested was to get the whole railway corridor from Bairnsdale to Orbost a classification on the State Heritage Register as this was a developmental railway built to

encourage settlement and economic activity in the Eastern part of Victoria. A classification would provide eligibility to apply for funds available for classified historical structures. This project has been taken on by a group of students from Victoria University, guided by an engineering historian, and they spent 3 days in January doing a survey of the railway line. The viaduct is 100 years old in 2016 and we are looking for opportunities to restore the viaduct.

## Friends of East Gippsland Rail Trail

**will continue to pursue this goal.**



*Sue Peirce*



### MEETINGS AND ACTIVITIES

#### The meeting dates for 2016 are:

**Monday Feb 8th** : Nowa Nowa Community Centre at 6pm for BBQ and 7pm for meeting

**Saturday July 9th** : Bruthen AGM and Ordinary meeting Lunch at 12 followed by meeting(s) at 1pm

**Monday Oct 11th**: at Orbost time and place time and venue T.B.A.

**Please join us.**

## A Thank You to One of Our Hard-Working Volunteers

Eddie Slatter has been keeping The Orbost end of the trail clear for as long as the trail has been open.

Whenever a tree topples onto the trail Eddie is out with trailer and chain saw tidying up. While out there doing regular maintenance Eddie also keeps an eye out for any other problems which can be sorted. Thanks Eddie.





## The Orbost-Bairnsdale line passenger services were terminated in April 1935.

On Wednesday, 24<sup>th</sup> December 1930 in the **VOTES AND PROCEEDINGS OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY– Bairnsdale to Orbost Non-Paying Railway Line** the Parliamentary Standing Committee noted that :

**“...the average annual loss for the period since 1918 has been £15,978....”**

Attempts had been made to prolong the passenger service. A mixed train service had commenced on Jan 15 1930 resulting in some financial savings. Again during 1931 two alterations were made in the mixed train services, further reducing the debt. This was helped by the fall of the basic wage (from 14s 10d to 11s 8d) and a drop in the price of coal. In another attempt to cut costs, repair gangs had their work load increased when they were issued with motor cycles for track maintenance. However, the committee considered that the relatively light traffic on the line did not justify a heavier composite passenger carriage than that offered but eventually in 1935 the passenger service was wholly discontinued.

Freight would continue to be transported as this service was deemed to be beneficial to the Railway Commission mainly because of the supply of sleeper timber obtained from East Gippsland.

## So how did conditions change sufficiently to result in the complete closure of the line?

The **Lonie Report** was an extensive study of freight and passenger transport within the state of Victoria.

Retired General Motors executive W.M. Lonie headed a report which recommended sweeping cuts to public transport. The report was commissioned by the Liberal State Government of Sir Rupert Hamer.

**Next Issue: The Line Finally Closes in 1987**

## The Lonie Report

The study was set up on 13 June 1979 by the Parliament of Victoria, and the report was published on 26 September 1980. It aimed to: **“institute a study into all freight and passenger transport within Victoria, and to and from Victoria, in order to produce a co-ordinated transport system capable of meeting the needs of all residents of Victoria....”** The report was particularly concerned about operating losses caused by significant declines in patronage and large increases in car ownership. The report fundamentally argued that it would be much too expensive to upgrade the rail system to be competitive with the car, or even with buses. It recommended the abolition of all country services except that of the Geelong – Melbourne corridor.

The Lonie Report was severely criticised when it was first released particularly because it had been written by people with a vested interest in increasing road transport.

The Public Transport Users Association was founded in 1976 as the Train Travellers Association and became prominent after this controversial report recommended huge freeway expansion and the closure of many public passenger transport services in Melbourne.

In the newsletter of the Public Transport Users in September, 1987 (after its closure), a letter from R. Vowels suggested that **“The line (East Gipps) has been allowed to deteriorate, until at the time of closure there were 40 serious faults on the line which could derail trains. Some faults were on or near bridges. Some sections were restricted to 15 kph.”**

Had the line been deliberately neglected for its eventual closure?

In 1981, although several other country services were closed, the East Gippsland Line remained open to freight service. It had been recommended for closure in the Lonie Report which revealed operating costs of \$2.35 million and revenue of only \$1.92 million. Yet it was still in use while others had closed.

## ORBOST RAILWAY CENTENARY EXHIBITION

It is now 100 years since the opening of the railway line to Orbost in 1916. To be precise, it was at 6pm on January 11<sup>th</sup> 1916 that a special train of four carriages burst through a ribbon which had been stretched across the line at the terminus just over the Snowy River on the Newmerella side.

This special train was carrying about 150 politicians and distinguished visitors. All were special guests for the official opening of the Bairnsdale to Orbost line.

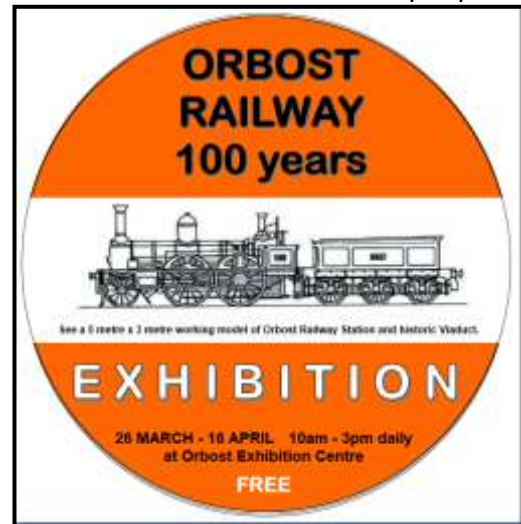
An exhibition to mark this important centenary is being planned for the Easter holidays in March-April this year and is being organised by the Orbost & District Historical Society.

“We are sending out an SOS for anyone with memories, photos, and any bits of information and memorabilia to come forward and help please,” said organiser May Leatch.

“Although the line closed in 1987 and is now a Rail Trail, there should still be lots of people who have memories of the line and the station, or who could have worked there. I ask these people to please give myself or any other member of the Orbost Historical Society a call.

“The most obvious and highly visible legacy is of course the historic railway viaduct which travels across the flats at Newmerella. This is the longest remaining viaduct in Victoria and possibly in Australia and has been a feature of the Orbost District for the past 100 years.

“Photos of the viaduct and the station will obviously feature in our Exhibition. Indeed, we are hoping to have a large working model of the Orbost Railway Station as part of our Exhibition,” Ms Leatch said.



***The first train for the official opening of the Bairnsdale-Orbost line in 1916 is passing over a trestle bridge. In the background are crops and farm buildings.***



Vogt, W. Stanley