

# The Trail Mail

## The Toll of 100 Years

The massive timbers from which our unique bridges are built have weathered the storms, heat, rain and intense sunlight for over 100 years, and for about 70 of those the heavy traffic of many trains. All of those left are showing signs of fatigue.

The only still standing and in use timber bridge, spanning the Nicholson River, is definitely looking creased. One of the diagonal bracing stays which was once a critical component protecting the structure from the shocks imposed when trains rolled onto it has broken off at the base several years ago, and recently it was noticed that another has split at the base where it was connected to the concrete plinth. Although not now needed for giving the bridge rigidity, this one will be adding stresses higher up under the deck area, and should be stabilised.

There is little money around to really look after this bridge, which is a critical link for the trail through the Nicholson area. The committee will seek some advice on what might be possible to stop this stay from causing problems in the future. Meanwhile the committee is controlling vegetation growth under the timber section by spraying and slashing, and clearing intrusive tree growth on the eastern abutment.



*Nicholson River bridge: Base of the south east bracing stay, with cattle grazing nearby, Princes Highway in the background*

*Michael Oxer*

### WHAT'S INSIDE?

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## Tracking Changes

Look in a mirror too often and you know what 'change' is all about! But taking account of positive things that are happening in our physical environment is easy to overlook. Change just happens and we forget, unless checking through old photos, how things looked a few years back, or even more recently.

Over the last decade there have been a lot of small endeavours aimed at improving the trail for visitors, and also as inherently valuable additions to our landscapes. These usually involve things that grow, plants of different species and sizes. Efforts by the Friends and several Landcare groups have been quite spectacular - such as at Burn Road, and the former station platform west of Bruthen. Here are a couple of examples, as 'before and after' pictorial demonstrations.

A 250 x 7 metres strip on the north boundary of the Nicholson station ground was last year fenced by a Green Army crew then sown with about 1600 indigenous plants which included trees, grasses and low level shrubs. Thanks to a good growing time later in 2016 there has been very encouraging growth especially of trees. At present there are also lots of 'weeds' which threaten to invade small plantings but there is progress. Some gardening is needed to de-weed. This development is to provide a narrow walking track from Sarsfield Road to the Nicholson River, and named the 'Station Ground Walk'.



*before*



*after*

The second example is the Bruthen station platform, a truly spectacular transformation in less than two years. Thanks, Bruthen Landcare, and Bruthen Lions.



*before*



*after*



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The third one is not (yet) a planting example, but construction of a very sturdy timber retaining wall complex on a degrading slope at the Bairnsdale entrance. This great effort in 2016 has been by two Green Army teams, with a third planning further work this year.

**Before: Severe erosion of the northern embankment of the trail close to the Bairnsdale entrance.**



After

Michael Oxer



## Snowy Floodplain Railway Bridge

Our small steering committee has been active with meetings. In late October we met with Council officers and DWELP. DWELP is supportive, however does not apply for grants but could auspice an application if successful. Council officers were less encouraging regarding direct support.

Then we met with a representative from Regional Development Victoria, the funding sources outlined, (State, Federal and Tourism. The importance of demonstrating that the project will create jobs was emphasised.

We need to obtain an Economic Impact Assessment and have estimates. This will cost around \$30,000.

Other actions include recognition of the bridge in Council Plan and contact with Destination Gippsland.

May attended workshops on Gippsland Future and Applying for the Better Regions funding.

Future actions include further representations to Councillors, searching for funding sources to commission an Economic Impact Assessment and making key individuals and local community aware of our ambitions to restore the Snowy Floodplain Railway bridge.

*Sue Peirce*

**TIM BULL**  
Member for Gippsland East

Proudly supporting  
**Friends of East Gippsland Rail Trail**

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Member of the Victorian Government (Liberal and Democratic Party)

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## Who Built the Bridges?

During the early 20th century the Railway Construction Branch pioneered new bridge designs, adopting innovative combinations of various materials from steel and timber to reinforced concrete. Several substantial bridges of this type were built for the Bairnsdale to Orbost Railway and other lines.

The Bairnsdale to Orbost rail line traversed difficult railway-building country with many rivers and creeks and some sections of rugged terrain. It was known from the beginning that bridge construction would be complicated.

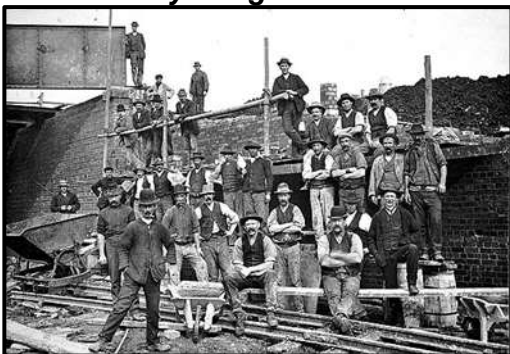
Plans were amended to minimise the cost of the project, but even so, many of the initial designs for the bridges had to be modified as a result of the actual conditions encountered.

Surveyors journeyed into remote Victoria, often staying in basic accommodation and travelling for weeks at a time. Their measurements and observations were brought back to the staff engineers who would design the bridges.

After the surveyors, draftsmen and engineers were employed there would be many labourers needed to do the construction work.

The amount of earthwork involved was estimated to be 2,000,000 cubic yards (1,529,110 cubic metres). In those days this work was carried out largely by hand with transport of materials around sites primarily by horse drawn vehicles. Teams of men did this back-breaking work without the assistance of today's heavy earth-moving machinery.

### **workers at the construction of the Bairnsdale railway bridge circa 1910**



Small armies comprising hundreds of pick and shovel wielding labourers known as 'navvies' were required to shift thousands of tons of rock and earth.

**Next Issue : Looking after the rolling stock**

This photo taken in 1914 shows workers constructing the Mitchell River railway bridge.

There is a portable steam engine on the right. A group of workers are lifting a rail to join a stack of others on the pier. The road bridge is on the left and a temporary rail bridge on the right. In the background there is a crane.



The photograph below shows workers at the Tambo River Bridge, Pier 4, in 1914.



Workers stand around the partially constructed pier. Concrete formwork, suspended by four threaded metal rods is being jacked up as the concreting progresses. A temporary bridge to the right, used for construction work is linked to the staging. In the foreground wooden cement casks appear to have been filled with dirt to form a barrier against stream flow.

### **Nicholson River bridge during construction and testing**



Two steam locomotives paused on a bridge across a river. Several men are standing on the line in front of the locomotives, and several more are on the locomotives themselves.



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## Yes, There Is a Rail Trail at Partellis Crossing!

Several years ago this big finger board sign was unearthed in a DELWP shed at Bairnsdale and then stayed wrapped up for want of a suitable location. With Partellis Crossing becoming an increasingly important reference point on the trail, and to promote the trail to the hordes of passing traffic on the M1 (Princes Highway), a road side pole just invited the addition of the RT sign. Now it is that much easier for visitors to locate the Crossing spot, which is significant for the amenities of a toilet building and the small shelter, plus a picnic table and seats set (which incidentally survived the Tostaree inferno).



*before*



*after*



## NEXT MEETING

**Nowa Nowa Tavern**

**Monday Feb 13 2017**

**Dinner at 6.00p.m**

**Meeting at 7.00p.m.**



**Agenda:**

1. Attendance and apologies
2. Report of Oct 2016 meeting in Orbost
3. Business arising
  - 3.1 Business members – Sue and Marlene to follow up
  - 3.2 Farm gates purchased –waiting for Green Army for installation
4. Treasurer's report
5. Website
6. Committee of Management report
7. Snowy Floodplain Railway Bridge report
8. Landcare groups on the trail
9. Other items
10. Meeting dates for 2017

## HISTORIC TRACK UPGRADED

The **OLD COACH TRAIL** which links the Rail Trail at Newmerella with Grandview Road and Lookout has received some attention in recent months, thanks to an initiative by the Snowy West Landcare Group and Council.

In December, a workgroup from Moogji in Orbost resurfaced this historic trail with material which was recommended by DELWP as being suitable for the site. This material came from Tostaree and contains many marine fossils (an added and purely unintentional addition to the Trail)! Bollards have been installed at either end and the Trail is now in use. Directional signs made by the Men's Shed in Orbost will soon be installed at both ends of the Trail, along with an interpretive sign (*below*).

Another interpretive sign is planned for Grandview Lookout. This one will be developed in association with Moogji and will deal with some of the Aboriginal people who lived on Newmerella Hill until the 1970s.

*Coach, telegraph line, maize in foreground*

*Hundreds of pigs from local farms were driven in 2000 trucks along this road a trip of five days. The pigs followed a wagon which distributed supplies of maize.*

### OLD COACH ROAD

This was the road which connected Orbost with Cunninghame (Lakes Entrance) from c.1886 - 1916. Travellers and new settlers came by boat to Cunninghame, then by coach, or wagon, or on horseback to Orbost.

After leaving Cunninghame, the coach travelled across the Lake Tyers sandbar, and through the forest to Jonson's Halfway House at Tostaree for lunch, and on to Orbost: it was a trip of seven hours. Finally, the track opened out on to the Snowy River flats (some of the richest maize growing land in Australia), over the river bridge (1893) and in to the remote town of Orbost.

*After the railway came in 1916, this old road up Newmerella Hill was no longer used. A new road was built under a railway bridge. This new road became the highway until 1946 when the present highway by-pass of Orbost was completed.*

**DISCOVERY**

From where you stand, you can see the old wooden of the railway line (1916-1957). On the ground is the rock ballast on which the railway line was laid. Also, you can see remnants of the large wooden railway bridge that was in this colour palette from the late 1940s.

*Ground orchids*

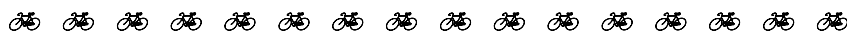
This historic trail passes through a significant vegetation site with rare plant species including the endangered Maiden's Wattle (*Acacia maidenii*).

You will also see an old gravel quarry, a rusting car body, and signs of timber cutting - all evidence of past uses. Amazingly, this bushland has survived.

Generations of children have used this old trail as their playground. Also, people living on Newmerella Hill and working on the farms below walked this trail to hand-pick maize and beans. Many of these people were from local Aboriginal families.

*In 2016, a project by Snowy West Landcare with funding from East Gippsland Shire Council saw this trail upgraded as a cycle-walking link between the Rail Trail and Grandview Lookout.*

May Leatch



## Valuing Our Business Friends

Nestled in the bush on the Princess Highway, **the Nowa Nowa Hotel** is an ideal destination for your Wedding function or group get together.

With a fully licensed Bar, Restaurant and Catering facilities available, it's the perfect base camp for exploring the East Gippsland Rail Trail.



### CONTACT DETAILS

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