Bairnsdale to Orbost railway - 100 years in 2016 since the line opened; let's celebrate!

A unique railway in that it was a ‘development line’ built to encourage and support economic and settlement growth in East Gippsland, the former line, now the rail trail route, will be recognised with a celebration planned for October next year, centred on the Stoney Creek Bridge just west of Nowa Nowa. The Shire has offered to assist and work is now needed to plan the event. It is hoped that V/Line, local businesses, railway enthusiasts and anyone interested in local history including the building of the many unique bridges, will take an interest.

Efforts are also under way to seek a heritage classification for the whole of the former railway route, including all the bridges. Information about developments will be posted on the web site.
The Great East Rail Trail Ride

The “Great East Rail Trail Ride”, now in its second year, is a cycle event set to cater for “…new cyclists, old cyclists, and those for whom cycling simply fills the intervals between eating and drinking…”

As well as enjoying the gorgeous rolling hills and forests of East Gippsland, participants have plenty of time to explore the little towns along the way, eating at local pubs and getting to meet the locals.

Providing a challenge for keen riders not content with the daily 30-40 km, are the ‘extra sweat’ options on each day’s ride.

Camping after a day’s ride

On Day 2 the ride goes through Colquhoun State Forest, with the 200 metres long Stony Creek Trestle Bridge a highlight. With the day’s ride ending at lunch time in Nowa Nowa, there is plenty to do in the afternoon, from yoga, bike maintenance and mountain bike skills sessions, a tour of a local organic farm, or just taking a quiet stroll around the lake.

Day three takes riders through a mix of forest and farmland right through to fertile Snowy River Floodplain, crossed by a 1 km long timber viaduct built to withstand the frequent floods of the river. At the ride’s end, riders and bikes are transported back to the starting point.

Time for a chat along the way

Starting at the western end of the Rail Trail on the Friday morning, riders stop for lunch at the beautiful Nicholson River Winery, before finishing the day’s ride at Bruthen, a cute little town on the Tambo River.

The Great East Rail Trail Ride is on from Friday October 2nd to Sunday October 4th. More information and bookings are available on the website: greateast.com.au
Why Did the Line Close?
The Bairnsdale-Orbost railway was opened in 1916 to serve the agricultural and timber industry. Because of the decline in traffic and heavy operating costs, the line was finally closed in August 1987 and the track infrastructure removed in 1994. Back in 1935, commencing on Monday, April 29th, rail services for passengers were discontinued between Bairnsdale and Orbost. Freight continued to be carried.

Cr Lynn pointed out that people had not been using the railway because they could probably get to Bairnsdale more cheaply by road but if they were given a better service they’d prefer the train. Cr Cumming raised an objection to road transport in that passengers are detained about an hour and a half or two hours in Bairnsdale. He declared that he preferred train travel himself but the time table was unsatisfactory. The motion to ask the Railway Commission to resume passenger services was carried.

At a later meeting Cr Foley moved a motion that the Railway Commissioner be asked to visit Orbost. This visit duly took place and was reported in the Snowy River Mail. Witnesses at this meeting attested to the fact that costs on this line were often prohibitive because if freight was brought or sent to Melbourne the charge would not be a cheaper through rate but a two part charge – Melbourne to Bairnsdale plus Bairnsdale to Orbost. This was unfair. It was also noted that the maize industry relied heavily on the rail service and if costs were not so high and the service faster more would use the rail.

“If the choice is to be between the old slow train and a fast motor service, then there is no argument.”

Thus spoke Mr. Phillips, Chairman of the Transport Board at the end of a conversational discussion held at the Shire Hall on Friday last.
Green Army Activity Since April This Year

The first of five Green Army crews assigned to the trail into late 2016 has tackled a variety of jobs at different locations, including removal of noxious weeds such as the invasive Box Thorn, removing vegetation from drains and culverts, and planting out a selection of grasses, trees and understory. One significant effort has been on the steep eastern embankment of the Nicholson River bridge, which also required removal of invading vegetation. Opening up that area is aimed at protecting the 100 year bridge timbers (openness to sunlight and reducing fire risk).

Left: Green Army supervisor and team members planting our the steep eastern embankment of the Nicholson River bridge

Bruthen Station Platform Transformation

Thanks for a wonderful effort by the Bruthen Landcare Group the former railway platform which was becoming a ‘forgotten’ structure has now been transformed into what will be a ‘gateway’ feature west of the town. It is now fenced off from the adjacent paddock, has been stripped of debris, a gravel path installed and the rest covered in grey weed mat and planted with dozens of grasses and ground cover vegetation. The decayed timber platform edging has been replaced and in time there might be a seat and even a small shelter added for visitors. Plans also include adding an interpretation board to record the site’s history as an important railway station. Very timely given the 100 year centenary due in 2016. A great effort by dedicated volunteers. And worth a visit.

Below: Bruthen former railway station platform - gravel path and extensive planting; looking towards the town.

Another has been extensive work in collaboration with Snowy West Landcare at the Burn Road area.

The crew will have a final gathering and farewell at the Bairnsdale entrance shelter mid-morning on Thursday September 17th.

Michael Oxer
Southern Ark Project
Lends the Rail Committee a Trailer

A lockup works trailer has been made available to the management committee on a long term loan, to assist when work is being done on the trail by volunteers such as Landcare groups, Green Army crews, and volunteers from the Friends Group. We are now on the lookout for any tools such as spades, mattocks, and even a wheel barrow, which might be ‘surplus to need’ and resting in sheds or garages which owners are happy to donate to the trail enterprise. Thanks to various small grants over recent years there are some items on hand to add to this trailer.

Grateful thanks to Southern Ark.

This Rail Trail - A walker’s delight.

Left: Walking the trail is catching on; members of a SA group but many walking visitors are now solo, apart from the many who have made the trail a regular exercise destination, or just out walking the dog(s).

Observations over recent months indicate a surprisingly high incidence of walkers using the trail and not just local folk walking the dog or taking a child for a ‘pusher’ outing. As single or even small groups there are many visitors who have found it a pleasant route to walk and even for long distances. Others head out and cover a few kilometres on their favourite local section. The addition of more seats at strategic points adds to the attraction, apart of course from the variety of local wild life. And the less obvious plants such as orchids. These are the things usually missed by bicycle and horse riders.

Water drink point addition at Nicholson

Thanks to a very generous contribution of a water drink stand by East Gippsland Water, a contribution by the management committee and volunteers effort to prepare a site, visitors passing through Nicholson will be able to replenish water bottles or give their dog a drink.

An area between Sarsfield Road and the bridge is being prepared for this installation. A high pressure water main which passes under the pathway at that point has been tapped so that a meter could be fitted as the first step. Landscaping is under way and plans include developing the site also with a memorial seat in memory of the late Andrea Brumley, immediate past President of the Nicholson River Landcare Group. The Group will add plants and other details to enhance the area as a tribute to Andrea’s contribution to revegetation efforts along the trail.
New Trail Gates Get Road Crossing Names

Several new farm style gates donated by the RT Friends Association and fitted to the Bairnsdale - Nicholson section now have smart new cross road name signs. These are a generous donation from the Rotary Club of Mitchell River, and fixed in place by a member of the rail trail committee.

The intention is to add this style of very easily seen cross road name plates at other gates and road crossing points to assist visitors who might need to identify a particular location. They also serve as an emergency safety feature.

A storyboard which was recently installed on the rail trail at Now has been dedicated to Len and Dawn Jackson. The Jacksons, who spent their retirement years in the area, had a passionate interest in Australian native birds and appropriately the board is about lyrebirds – “Mimics of the Bush”.

LEFT: Friends’ President, Janice Preston, with the new storyboard dedicated to her parents.

MEETINGS AND ACTIVITIES

Next Meeting – NOTE CHANGE OF DATE

BBQ provided

Monday October 12th 2015
• Meet at Nicholson Jetty
• 3pm for bike ride ~ 14k along trail
• 6pm for BBQ
• 7pm start of meeting

BBQ and soft drink diet coke and lemonade will be provided. BYO alcoholic

A rarely seen view of the Orbost viaduct taken during an inspection by the Shire, Rail Trail C.O.M., and Snowy West Landcare Group.