Field Reports

Welcome to the newly revived Field Reports section of *Light Railways*. With winter now behind us I hope many of you will be getting back out exploring the light railways in the bush or industrial setting you have been reading about during the wetter months.

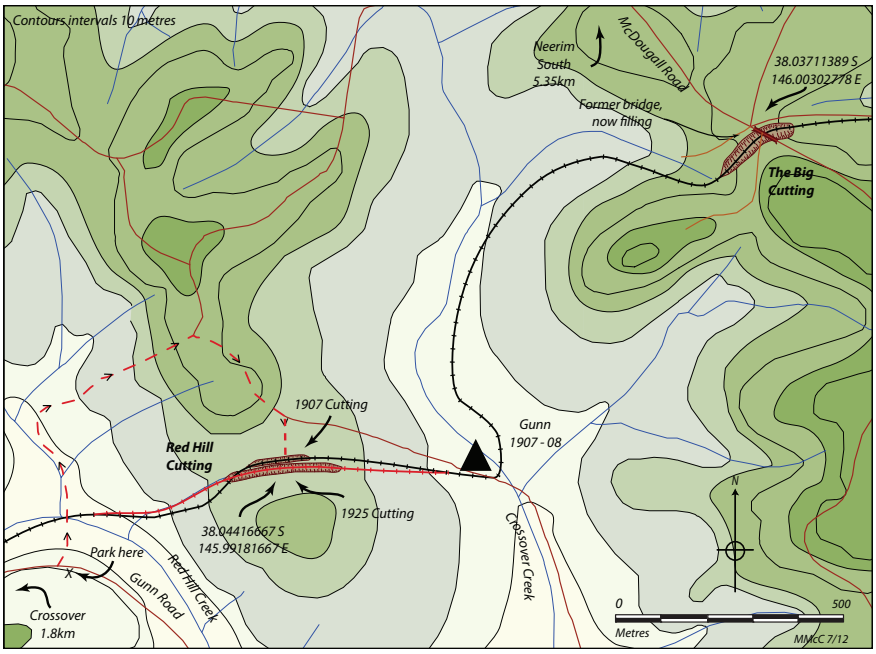
Please send any contributions, large or small, to fieldreports@lrrsa.org.au or to P.O. Box 21, Surrey Hills, Vic 3127. I look forward to hearing from you.

Scott Gould

Gunn's Shady Creek Tramway, Red Hill and Big Cuttings, Crossover, Vic.

Crossover is 108 kms east of Melbourne on the route of the former Warragul to Noojee railway which closed in 1958. Inspired by a recent visit to the area by the Local Land Care Group (which unfortunately I was unable to join), I made a long delayed return visit after a gap of 34 years to William W. Gunn's two magnificent cuttings that once contained his 3ft 6in gauge tramway through which Gunn operated his converted Bendigo steam tram. I had last visited the Red Hill cutting in June 1978. It was one of the toughest days in the bush I have ever had after following the tramway alignment up from Red Hill Creek through thick undergrowth and ferns. That day I found my way home again by following the ridgeline above the cutting. A much more sensible way to go except for the fact that the ridge was completely bereft of tramways to follow!

Gunn's Red Hill cutting. Photo: Mike McCarthy



The Red Hill site actually consists of two cuttings; the original excavated in 1907 and the latter which was excavated in 1925 when Gunn sought to reduce the heavy grades leading up to it. The original cutting was about two metres deep whereas its replacement cut into the saddle by around seven metres. Interestingly the deeper cutting sliced through the alignment of the original tramway. The more recent line followed a direct route down the gully while the original followed the south side until the two merged.

The location is not difficult to find provided you make good use of GPS co-ordinates. The co-ordinates for the Red Hill Cutting are 38.04416667 S 145.99181667 E. The best way to get there is to follow Gunn Road from where it leaves Bloomfield Rd for 1.8 kilometres to a track and clearing on the left. You park your car here and follow the track to the north. You will cross Red Hill Creek on a recently made foot bridge and then follow the trail to the left. After about 230 metres a track branches to the right and climbs the hill. Follow this for around 640 metres to the top of the hill. The cutting is 130 metres down the hill to the right. It cuts through a saddle, so if you find yourself in a gully you are in the wrong location. It's not difficult to get in except in very wet weather when the ground will be both muddy and marshy in places. Having said that I suggest not going in there alone, and make sure you have a GPS unit to guide you.

Gunn's 'Big Cutting' was also visited. This is found 1.4 kilometres further along the tramway but extremely difficult to get to by following the formation. However it is easily accessed through Neerim South by following McDougall Road for 5.35 km. This road originally bridged the cutting (a rarity for Victorian timber tramways) but the bridge was replaced with fill in around 1940. The GPS co-ordinates for the bridge site are 38.03711389 S 146.00302778 E. A walk track on the west side takes you down to the base of the cutting now occupied by ferns and fallen debris. When in operation it was 200 metres long, 7.5 metres deep at its centre and 12 metres across at the top. It's a slog pushing through all the growth but well worth it to gain an understanding of just how massive it was.

Mike McCarthy 9 June 2012

Longworths Timber Tramway, Kendall, NSW (LR 112, 131, 133, 203, 218)

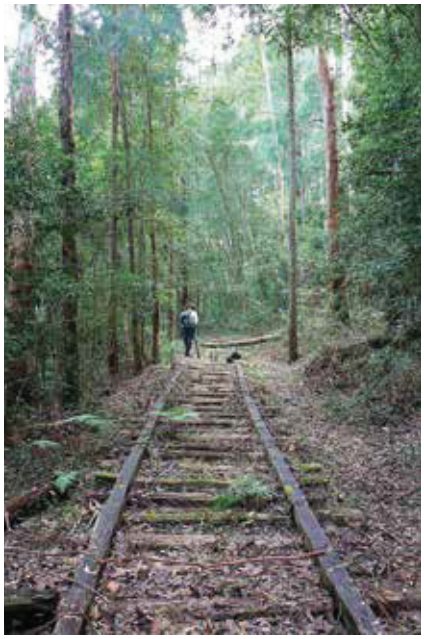
The remains of this standard gauge timber tramway were inspected in May 2012. The field trip benefited from the assistance and guidance of local historian Bill Boyd, the driving force behind the establishment of the tramway heritage trail and its replica length of wooden tramway.

From Kendall the 16km tramway headed west up the valley of Upsalls Creek. Most of this area is private property which has been extensively settled and cleared for agriculture over the years. Together with the region's high rainfall this has meant that the formation has all but disappeared in these areas. Even when standing on known stretches of the tramway it needed the eye of the believer to be convinced. Google Earth satellite photography appears to show some tramway traces in open paddocks but follow-up field investigation was inconclusive.

Fortunately an outer section of the tramway formation is better preserved where it traverses some two kilometres of North Branch State Forest.

Field Reports

The Kendall Historical Society has built a short length of replica wooden-railed tramway and marked out a tramway heritage trail here. Directions: drive 4km west from Kendall along Lorne Road; turn right into Black Creek Road; after 200 metres turn left into Upsalls Creek Road, follow this for 10km to the Heritage Trail sign on LHS.



The section of replica wooden railed tramway, built by the Kendall Historical Society.
Photo: Ian McNeil

The tramway formation can be walked for some 2 km back east towards Kendall before it loses itself in grassy paddocks on private property. This section of the tramway was lightly-engineered on a moderate falling grade – with the load – towards Kendall. Earthworks are minimal; there is only one short box cutting of any consequence plus a section of excavated ledge beside the rushing waters of Upsalls Creek. Remnants of ground-level log cribwork and girders plus some bridge timbers are evident along the way. The Historical Society has installed a few interpretative notices along the way, but it was felt more could be done here.

West of the replica tramway the formation crosses more private property as it leaves Upsalls Creek and follows Cascade Creek upstream for 2km to the forest terminus. There were large bridges and long sections of bedlogs and girders along here - one section of which survives in forest country near the end of the line. The extensive use of timber work to support the track has meant that once this was destroyed by bushfires little or nothing remains of the formation. This was evident near the end of the line, where the only traces found were an occasional bridge timber preserved in creek beds. Longworth's B-class Climax (1375 of 1916) was scrapped at the forest terminus in the mid-1930s. Rusted steel relics of the loco are said to be still on the ground there, but nothing was found in the thick forest regrowth covering the site. The heavily-corroded boiler and smokebox are on display in the open in a small fenced enclosure at Kendall, where the main street crosses over the North Coast Railway.

Ian McNeil

The Simsville Timber Tramway, Stroud, NSW (LR 113)

The photo below shows part of an impressive tramway ledge on the 1924 Winns Hill line, about 1km short of its 400m above sea level terminus, looking downhill towards the Jarrah Mill some 12km away to the south-west. The rock wall on the side cut is 10 metres high in places; on the left the hill side plunges steeply down to Harriotts Creek 200 metres below. The formation is on a steady 1:25 grade with the load. There are bays cut into the hillside every kilometre or so where the steam hauler was positioned to pull logs up out of the valley below. This section was choked with rampant lantana and undergrowth when first mapped back in the 1980's, but has since been cleared by NSW Forests for access purposes. It is within easy walking distance from the nearby Jarrah Forest Road.

This section was revisted as part of a GPS re-mapping survey of the Simsville Timber Tramway system that has been underway during the past two winter seasons. The original pace-and-compass mapping back in the mid-1980's left a lot to be desired. It was a difficult challenge back then, trying to maintain constant-length paces in rugged forest country and thick undergrowth, and the resulting field maps usually disagreed to a greater or lesser extent with local topographic maps.

The advent of affordable GPS units has brought a degree of accuracy to field mapping that could only be dreamed of 25 years ago. In the case of the Simsville tramway mapping exercise, GPS surveying has highlighted topographic map errors regarding the location of creeks and trails, sometimes even vindicating the early pace-and-compass efforts!

Ian McNeil June 2012

Victoria Coal Company, Cape Paterson (LR 197)

On a recent visit to Cape Paterson, Chris Wurr photographed four lengths of Barlow rail emerging from the sand on First Surf Beach adjacent to the lifeguard shed. Originally laid in 1863 to 5ft 3in gauge, the rails were already second hand, having originally been used on the Melbourne to Geelong railway. Purchased by Nathaniel Levi's Victoria Coal Company to connect their mines to a pier, which was never constructed, the tramway never saw use and was eventually covered in sand, occasionally being exposed by storms. Mike McCarthy estimates it has been 15 years since the rails were last exposed, and are now more than a metre lower than when he saw them last. There is also a considerable amount of recently exposed rail against the sandbank which has previously been removed to keep the beach safe for swimmers.

Chris Wurr

OCEAN SALT Co Ltd. Port Augusta SA (LR115)

A field inspection was made of the former Ocean Salt Company's tramway at Port Augusta.

The tramway was apparently abandoned around 1937 according to the *Light Railways* article in Issue 115 of January 1992.

Alongside the Trans-Australian Railway just north of the City of Port Augusta, the site of the Commonwealth Railways standard gauge siding for the Ocean Salt Company was found. It seems that this siding had been disconnected by the Commonwealth Railways in 1937.

An impressive tramway ledge on the 1924 Winns Hill line of the Simsville timber tramway, about one kilometre short of the former terminus. *Photo: Ian McNeil*

Recently exposed Barlow rails, once used by the Victoria Coal Company for its 5ft 3in gauge railway, on the beach at Cape Paterson. Photo: Chris Wurr

On the west side of the line is a raised area where bagged salt was transhipped from the company's tramway, into Commonwealth Railways' wagons for on-shipment. A short length of tramway-weight rail was found pointing almost vertically out of the loading bank, but apart from earthworks, there is no sign at all of tramway permanent way.

The low swampy ground of the head of Spencer Gulf, adjoins the loading area immediately on its west side. The tramway to the salt works can be easily seen, as it runs firstly south, then curves south-westerly away from the standard gauge line to head towards the works. Because of the swampy and tidal area between the transhipping bank and the headwaters of the Gulf, the line has been carried on a substantial earth embankment varying in height up to two metres.

Closer to the water and mangroves, the top layer of soil on the embankment has been washed away by high tides. This reveals the core of the embankment, which would appear to be chunks of solidified mud containing seashells. It looks for all the world like a very cheap concrete mix using shells instead of cement. At a guess, it may be what has been dredged from the seabed in perhaps the vicinity of the Port Augusta wharf, but this is only speculation.

The eroded embankment continues until meeting a wall of mangroves which grow along the edge of the watercourse which Spencer Gulf has become at this point. Here the abutments for the decidedly curious wooden bridge are located – each supporting 'trestle' consists of a single T-shaped structure. On the remains of the embankment are some lengths of 60lb rail and, like the embankment – badly eroded. From this eastern side of the Gulf, further access is impossible.

To gain the western side of the tramway requires a long circuitous drive via Port Augusta. The T-bridge can be better accessed from the western side, although it does require some intrepid slopping around in thick mud at low tide. Reference is made in *Light Railways* 112, that this bridge was inspected by Commonwealth Railways engineers (a specific year was not cited in the article) and declared unsafe for heavy loads. Even when the bridge was in good order, it would have been a daunting trip of about 200 metres across the head of the Gulf!

While venturing into the mangroves and mud jungle, the remains of some sort of wooden barge were seen. Buried in mud up to the waterline and with the upper part of the hull completely rotted away, the only tangible component of the vessel is the rudder and its post.

Westwards of the point where the T-bridge struck land, drifting sand has completely obliterated the tramway formation. According to the Light Railways article, this sand drift problem had been going on since at least 1930.

A reinforced concrete tank and a screenhouse are the only structures still standing.

West of these the layout of the saltpans can be seen, but again there is no evidence of the tramway formation.

Chris Wurr April 2010

Erith Colliery Bundanoon NSW (LR 130)

Dear Sir

It may be of interest to give a small update to Jim Longworth's very interesting article in *Light Railways* October 1995 on the tramways of Ringwood and Erith collieries at Bundanoon in the NSW Southern Highlands.

Because one of my grandsons is doing a school project on national parks I thought it might be opportune (before my knees and hips deteriorate much more) to take him on an excursion, which included a visit to Erith's old mine site, which is part of the pretty Morton National Park. Although the walking track is well defined it gets pretty rugged in parts, and the light for photography at the mine site where three openings are visible, is quite tricky (very dark).

I have visited the site many times since the 1960s, but much to my surprise we stumbled across a length of light rail beside the track near the furthest-most mine opening. A tree's roots have completely encircled portion of the rail, with one end of it disappearing into the earth.

The accompanying photo (below) might be of interest, and it also shows two mine openings in the background.

Leon Oberg,
Goulburn, NSW

A short length of rail exposed near the mine opening of the former Erith colliery. Photo: Leon Oberg