

THE GEELONG STORY

There's a special place in Geelong's history for the story of the railways. Trains were the iron workhorses of the Geelong region. They could carry almost anything, and they did. They transported wool, grain, gravel, the timber of the Otways, potatoes and other crops. They were the lifeline of settlement, hauling passengers and every conceivable item required by people living in a regional community.

Geelong to Melbourne

On 25 June 1857 the Geelong community turned out in force to celebrate the departure of the first ever train from Geelong to Melbourne. It was an event of great importance for Geelong, a town of significance in the new colony of Victoria.

Gazetted as a town in 1838, Geelong grew quickly from a collection of small huts into a bustling settlement. For Geelong's city fathers, railways meant progress, power and excitement. The Geelong to Melbourne line was the first country railway in Victoria. Soon there were to be connections with Ballarat, Colac and Queenscliff and a provincial network that stretched into the hinterland.

It was the Geelong and Melbourne Railway Company that gave railways a start in Geelong. The Company was bought by the Government in 1860 and from that time the building of railways in the Geelong region was a state responsibility.

Triumph and tragedy

There was much excitement when the Geelong to Melbourne line was completed. In a day packed with activity, celebrations included a parade through the City, a reception, a banquet and a gala ball. Sadly, the day was marred by a tragic accident that occurred just after the train left the Geelong station.

Henry Walter, the Railway's engineer, was fatally injured when he was knocked from the train as it passed under the bridge at Cowie's Creek. Leaning out of the train to wave at passengers in the rear carriages, Henry struck his head on an overhanging girder and was killed. He was one of Brunel's famous Great Western Railway engineers, and with his wife and children he had come out from England to work on the Geelong railway.

Geelong to Ballarat

With the Geelong to Melbourne connection completed, the next task facing the railway builders was the link between Geelong and Ballarat. During the 1850's gold rush, Ballarat had grown enormously but a journey from Geelong, the nearest port, could take nine hours by coach.

Work started on the Geelong - Ballarat railway in 1858 and it was officially opened on 10 April 1862. As at Geelong the line opening was a gala occasion with much festive spirit including a procession, flags, bunting, speeches.

Construction of the railway to Ballarat was straightforward, apart from the challenge of crossing the Moorabool River valley. The solution, the Moorabool viaduct, was a striking feat of engineering with its 1450 feet (442 metres) span and ten arches.

Provincial network

By 1874 it was possible to travel by rail from Geelong to Colac. Just three years later, there was a railway to Queenscliff, a fashionable holiday resort. In less accessible areas, narrow-gauge lines were introduced with smaller locomotives and rolling stock. In 1896, Beech Forest was chosen as one of the first to get a new narrow-gauge line.

The list of trunk, branch, local and spur railways built in the Geelong region is a tribute to the optimism of the times.

Geelong railway opening dates

June 1857	Geelong – Melbourne	38.5 miles
Apr 1862	Geelong – Ballarat	54.1 miles
Nov 1876	Geelong – Winchelsea	25.6 miles
Mar 1877	Winchelsea – Birregurra	12.7 miles
July 1877	Birregurra – Colac	11.8 miles
Feb 1878	Geelong Racecourse spur	1.9 miles
May 1879	Geelong – Queenscliff	20.7 miles
July 1883	Colac – Camperdown	28.1 miles
Apr 1887	Camperdown – Terang	13.8 miles
Aug 1889	Irrewarra - Beeac	
Feb 1890	Terang – Mortlake	12.1 miles
Feb 1890	Terang – Port Fairy	49.2 miles
Mar 1890	Moriac – Wensleydale	10.9 miles
June 1891	Birregurra – Forrest	19.8 miles
Mar 1902	Colac – Beech Forest	29.6 miles
Dec 1903	North Geelong loop line	0.22 miles
Dec 1910	Beeac -Cressy	19.6 miles
June 1911	Beech Forest – Crowes	14 miles
Sept 1918	North Geelong – Fyansford	2.9 miles

June 1923 Colac – Alvie

9.6 miles

Geelong railway closures

1909 Geelong Racecourse spur

1948 Moriac – Wensleydale

1953 Irrewarra - Cressy

1954 Colac – Alvie

1954 Weeaprounah - Crowes

1957 Birregurra – Forrest

1962 Colac – Beech Forest

1962 Beech Forest – Weeaprounah

1976 Geelong - Queenscliff

Into the future

By the turn of the twentieth century, railways were well established in country areas and Geelong had its own provincial network most of which endured until the 1950s. Geelong's place in the Victorian railway network was confirmed with the return of the *Overland* service in 1995, running between Melbourne and Adelaide via North Shore, Geelong.