

Off The Beaten Track

Lesser known but interesting narrow gauge railways

With John Dennis

Hello Folks. This time we are visiting another tramway which lasted until the 1960s, doing the job for which it was designed and retaining steam power until the end: the **North Mount Farrell Tramway** on Tasmania's mineral-rich West Coast. This little 2' gauge line connected the mine (and associated township) at Tullah with the 3'6" Emu Bay Railway, a distance of about 6 miles (10 km). Until the Murchison Highway was opened in 1962 it was the only means of access to the isolated town. The line also tended to be known variously as the **Farrell Tramway**, **Mount Farrell Tramway**, or the **Tullah Tramway**.

Galena, the most important lead ore mineral and a frequent source of silver, was discovered in the district in 1892, and the North Mount Farrell mine first shipped out ore by pack horse in 1899. The township which formed around the mine was known as Tullah, but in very rugged country without any roads, getting the ore to market was very difficult.

A tramway was proposed northwards to Boco Siding on the EBR, a distance of eight miles. Originally to be laid with iron rails, it was eventually opened in 1902 with timber rails, and with horses providing the motive power. The tramway reduced the cost of transportation significantly but as output from the mine increased, was unable to handle the traffic. The Company surveyed a shorter route to the railway, running on the north side of the Pieman River, the steel-railed steam tramway opening in 1909.

Tom Murray arranged a tour to Tullah on 11th June 1961 on a beautiful sunny winter's day, and the train paused a number of times for photographs. This scene was taken at Farm Creek, junction for a timber tram that followed the formation of the original wooden railed tram towards Boco for about one mile..

The junction with the EBR was named Farrell Siding, and was located on a continuous 1:40 grade as that railway dropped down to the Pieman River bridge. As a result there were some quite significant works needed to provide transshipment facilities. The grade also meant that many photographs were able to be taken of the little tramway from the EBR, looking down on the lower level sidings.

The line was constructed by Dunkley Brothers, who were well known in Tasmania for their activities in the timber industry. To assist in the work, "baby" Krauss 2640 of 1892 was utilised, after serving initially on the Zeehan Tramway Company. After construction was completed, Dunkley Brothers operated the tramway under lease, probably until 1921 or so with the Krauss. The loco's high-pitched bark resulted in it being bestowed with the nickname of "Puppy".

In 1924 the North Mount Farrell Company took delivery of a new locomotive: a small 0-4-0WT from J Fowler and Company, builder's number 16203 of 1924 (some sources state 1921 as the year). The little loco arrived carrying the name "Wee Georgie Wood", and was obviously a great success. A sister loco, 17732/1928 arrived in 1928, was named "Wee Mary Wood", and the two engines then worked the tramway together. Dunkleys' Krauss was transferred to their sawmill at Trowutta, sold to Australian Carbide Company (Ida Bay) in 1934 to fill a short-term need, and finally scrapped in 1938.



The mine closed in 1932 owing to a world-wide drop in the price of metal making it uneconomic to operate. Luckily a new source of galena was found nearby, and the North Farrell Mine was able to reopen two years later.

It appears as though Georgie and Mary were worked hard, as it was reported that the newer loco was out of service and that parts had been used to keep her older brother running. Consequently, in about 1949 the Company acquired a larger 10-ton Krauss (5988/1908) from the Australian Carbide Company. Originally new to Mt Lyell as their Number 9, it had arrived in at Ida Bay just one year previously where it proved to be too heavy for the track. Carrying its Mt Lyell number, North Mount Farrell Company operated this loco alongside Wee Georgie Wood until closure in 1964.

The tramway was the community's only link to the outside world until 1962, and in case of emergency a rail ambulance served the line. If not conveying a stretcher, this unit could seat ten passengers and travel the six miles from Tullah to Farrell Siding in 20 minutes, compared to the steam train's hour. It was known simply as "the ambulance". There was also a rail-mounted T-model Ford at one time.

For many years the tram ran with a "compo-brakevan", a car which was divided into three compartments - a rudimentary passenger compartment seating six at one end; a semi-open brake platform at the other, with a larger goods compartment between the two. Headroom in the passenger and goods compartments was restricted, being about 5' (1500mm) while the brake compartment's roof was raised to a height of perhaps 5'9".

After the Murchison Highway was opened as far as Tullah in 1962 the line to Farrell Siding was immediately closed, but Wee Georgie Wood continued to work the half-mile between the mine and the flotation plant until late 1964. There are two very nice photographs, taken by Eric Marsh, of the loco hauling three ore trucks in issue 16 of *Narrow Gauge Downunder*.

Although the formation of line is now mostly lost under hydro works, fortunately after the line closed the locos were retained. Wee Georgie Wood Steam Railway Inc. now operates a tourist railway on about 1.6km track at the town, with the little Fowler in use and the bigger Krauss under restoration. Wee Georgie Wood will require a new boiler in the next few years, so the organisation is faced with raising substantial funds to keep the tram running.

Most of the information has been derived from Lou Ræ's "A History of Railways and Tramways on Tasmania's West Coast". The April 1960 ARHS Bulletin contains a highly entertaining description of a trip on the line made in January 1958 by L.B.Manny. The trip travelled behind Krauss number 9 which failed on the day he was there, the next day's service being run (and photographed at Farrell Siding) by "the ambulance".

This column was prompted when I attended a recent Signalling Record Society of Victoria meeting. The entertainment item was a showing of a selection of Tom Murray's slides, taken during tours he help arrange to Tasmania in the early 1960s. Tom has very generously allowed me to use his slides here, and I would like to thank David Langley of the SRSV for his work in scanning them. Jim Baine's lovely photograph of Wee Georgie Wood at the Tullah mine was used on the cover of the Association of Railway Enthusiasts' December 2003 magazine. I would like to thank John Robin and the ARE for permission to republish this photograph, the original slide having gone missing.



TOP: The tram photographed crossing the Mackintosh River en route to Farrell Siding. The "compo-brakevan" is obvious, nearest the camera, while based on the underframe and bogies, the leading flat wagon ran originally on the North East Dundas Tramway.

ABOVE: On the morning of June 11 the tour boarded the tram at Tullah for a return trip to Farrell Siding. The tram is seen in Tullah township awaiting departure.

BELOW: The following day, June 12, the group left Tullah for the last time, riding the tramway to their connection at the Emu Bay Railway. This atmospheric shot shows Wee Georgie Wood in more typical West Coast weather, under the gantry crane in town.

All photographs on this page by kind permission of Tom Murray.



Farrell Trams



ABOVE: The Ambulance seen outside the shed at Tullah. The engine was located above the bogie, with radiator and fan behind the opening below the windscreen, and drove on the rear axle.

LEFT: Ten-ton Krauss No. 9, showing its Mt Lyell running number clearly, was dragged out of the loco shed at Tullah so the group could take a portrait photo.

BELOW LEFT: The tram was the town's only link to the outside world until 1962, and so carried everything going in or out. Here a visiting football team is seen while the loco took water along the way.

BELOW: On a good day Wee Georgie Wood only had to take water twice on the six mile journey! Here is the second occurrence on the trip towards Farrell Siding, the driver filling the well tank from a tank at the 1½ mile post.



Way Album

Except as noted, colour photographs on these two pages are by Tom Murray, and the historical B&W photos are courtesy of the Tullah Heritage Collection, with thanks to Greg Blake

RIGHT: A delightful scene showing Wee Georgie Wood standing at the North Mount Farrell Mine loading bins. This photo was taken in 1964, by which time operations were restricted to a half-mile of track between the mine and the flotation plant. Photo: late Jim Baines, courtesy Association of Railway Enthusiasts.



ABOVE: This well-known scene shows Wee Georgie Wood photographed at what I believe to be Boco Creek.

RIGHT: A beautiful shot of Wee Georgie Wood standing at Tullah, with driver Bill Winskill proudly looking out of the cab.

