

Beyond Finnis the line leaves the main roads and heads off northerly, with only slight curves and no intersecting roads. The thick **Finniss scrub** extends on both sides of the line, populated with unique and rare flora. Kangaroos and other wildlife can often be seen leaping along in company with the train.

Sandergrove -all change for Milang!

Sandergrove station was the junction for the now closed branch leading to Milang on Lake Alexandrina. At one stage there was a small turntable here to turn locos working to Milang and an island platform to allow passengers to transfer from the branch train to Victor Harbor trains, and a goods siding. The Milang line was closed in June 1970 and Sandergrove station in July 1973. At Milang a volunteer group has restored the station and preserved some rolling stock.

On to Strathalbyn

The line continues to track well to the east of the main Strathalbyn to Goolwa road across gently undulating country which slopes gently down towards Lake Alexandrina to the east. The old **Racecourse platform** is passed on the right a couple of kilometers further on. In steam days, regular "race trains" were operated from as far afield as Adelaide.

Strathalbyn

A picturesque country town on the Angas River. The town was first settled in 1839 by the Rankine families who had emigrated from Scotland. The name is a combination of *Strath* - a Scottish word meaning a small river valley; and *Albyn* - a corruption of the word *Albion* which had been a name for Scotland in ancient times. It is believed that Dr John Rankine also held an interest in the Albion Iron and Steel Works in Glasgow, which could have also given meaning to the name! The railway arrived in 1884 and at first, passengers going further south then transferred to a horse tram!



Today Strathalbyn is a district centre for the surrounding wheat farming and pastoral districts and while the amount of urbanisation is on a smaller scale than Mount Barker, this has enabled it to keep a lot of its historic charm which is reflected in buildings such as the distinctive Presbyterian Church. The Strathalbyn station has in recent years been lovingly restored to almost new condition. The front area has been continually beautified with garden plots since Thomas Adams came to the town as Station Master in 1871 and commenced planting four years later! Though some of his original work had to be compromised when the existing building was built, much of the garden remains to this day and has now been named in his honour.

The **stone goods shed**, used by SteamRanger's track maintenance team, was built in 1884 while until 1964, two tracks south of the station platform served a locomotive shed. A siding adjacent to these still provides access to the turntable which was recently restored and is used to turn smaller SteamRanger locomotives. Prior to November 1968 this small table was used to turn the Model 75 railcar which ran between Strathalbyn and Milang on the shores of Lake Alexandrina. A small galvanised iron gang shed at the turntable houses SteamRanger track maintenance vehicles. The large water tank is no longer in use, and locos are topped up these days from the town supply.

Like to know more? - ask your friendly Car Attendant

Acknowledgements: This brochure has been compiled with reference to publications of various SA railway authors including the late Kim Bird, John Ramsey, Roger Sallis and Dean Harvey. Bridge photo: Roger Currie

StrathLink

Victor Harbor to Strathalbyn

Welcome Aboard!

A passenger's guide
to travelling on SteamRanger's
"StrathLink" service
from Victor Harbor to Strathalbyn



South Australia's first railway venture was the opening of the Goolwa to Port Elliot railway line in 1854. As well as being the first line in the colony the section was also the first public line laid with iron rails in Australia.

The line was constructed to provide an outlet for the River Murray trade of the 19th Century, although this role diminished following the extension of the more direct line from Adelaide through Kapunda to Morgan

The horse drawn railway was extended northwards to Strathalbyn in 1869 via a 34km line through Currency Creek branching from the Victor / Goolwa line at Middleton and thus bypassing Goolwa. Records show that the railway operated 29 horses, travelling 7000 miles a month. A typical working life was 14 years!

By 1884 the branchline to Adelaide had reached Strathalbyn and through travel was possible to the Capital by changing from horse to steam hauled train.. The next step, completed in 1886 was to rebuild the horse tram line from Strathalbyn to Currency Creek to steam railway standards and extend the track from there into Goolwa, completing the steam railway line we are travelling on today.

Passenger services operated by Australian National on the line ceased in April 1984 and the line was closed to all trains in 1989. With widespread community support SteamRanger subsequently took over the line to operate it as a heritage railway.

Leaving Victor Harbor

Passing along the foreshore, the line crosses over the Hindmarsh River on a five span concrete bridge built in 1907. This replaced the combined road/rail crossing known as the "Alexandra Bridge" originally opened in 1863. A recent addition on the northern side is a walking / cycle bridge which forms part of a pathway stretching along the foreshore from The Bluff to Middleton.

The line then skirts the Southern Ocean for over 3km before reaching Port Elliot. Surfing beaches at Dump Beach, Chiton Rocks and Boomer Beach are all within 100 metres of the line. This section arguably offers one of the most scenic vistas from a train carriage window in Australia.

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A slight deviation away from the coast at **Watson's Gap** takes the train over an arched reinforced concrete bridge. The Hindmarsh River and Watson's Gap bridges mark important milestones in Australia's civil engineering history; the Watson's Gap bridge was the first of its kind in the State and the Hindmarsh River bridge was the first to be built on the "beam and slab" principle in Australia.

Pt Elliot

The line climbs to the top of the sandhills and winds through the centre of the township. The present Port Elliot station office was built in 1911 to replace a smaller galvanised iron structure of the 1870's. The station is maintained by local National Trust volunteers who have set up an interesting local history museum.

As the train leaves Pt Elliot for Goolwa, the line veers sharply to the left and joins the original horse drawn railway route which came up on the right from the old wharf at Horseshoe Bay. From here to Goolwa there are sweeping vistas of the Southern Ocean on the right side of the train. Look out for the **Obelisk** on the shoreline at Freemans Knob which was used as a guide to shipping in the early days of settlement.

From the outskirts of the township the rail line parallels the main Victor to Goolwa road and to seawards you might see a "bow string" girder bridge at the entrance to the caravan park. This was transported down from Adelaide where it carried Grand Junction Road across the Adelaide to Port Adelaide rail line. More surfing beaches at Fishermans Bay and Basham Beach and across the bay can be seen the beaches at the Murray Mouth with the Coorong stretching southwards in the distance.

Middleton

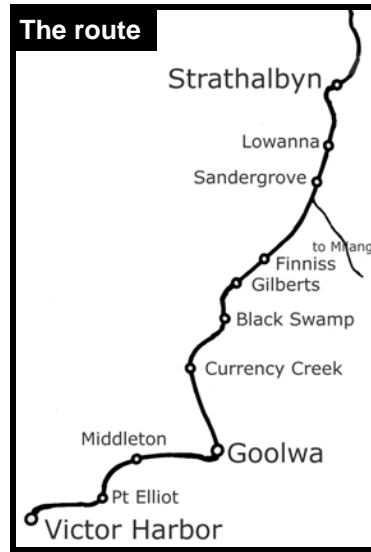
The present Middleton siding was established in 1926 adjacent to the historic double storied "Mindacowie" guesthouse located on the northern side of the main road. The modern Middleton Tavern has recently been built closer to the track. During the 1950's large quantities of sheep were railed from the local sheep sales and Middleton was second only to Strathalbyn for its volume of traffic on the line.

The original station, dating from the horse tram period, was located further towards Goolwa near the large "Bowmans" stone mill. From here, one line travelled the 6km across the plains to Goolwa and the other northwards to Strathalbyn. If you look carefully, a cutting for the old horse tram route from Strathalbyn can be traced on the left side of the line near the main road level crossing. This route was closed and removed in 1885.

Goolwa

Prior to 1915 the main Strathalbyn to Victor line skirted the main township and trains were shunted back into a station near the Corio Hotel and then on to the wharf area. The present line curves sharply right near the original junction and emerges parallel with the river at historic Goolwa Wharf. The large recently restored goods shed and wharf opposite the station bear testimony to a bygone era of hectic activity associated with the transfer of produce from paddle steamers to the railway for transshipment to Victor Harbor. The present station is maintained by SteamRanger, whilst a more recent addition is a sympathetically constructed shop for the Goolwa Arts and Crafts Society.

Goolwa, an aboriginal word for "elbow", was once a bustling river port and is noted for its historic buildings. Links with the past are clearly evident in the reappearance of steam driven river boats.



Departing from our Goolwa station, the line to Strathalbyn curves under the new Hindmarsh Island bridge and then winds its way through the back streets of the town in a 180 degree curve. **SteamRanger's Goolwa Depot** is passed on the eastern side. The Depot is used to service rolling stock used on the local "Cockle Train" service and as a base for volunteers living on the south coast.

Currency Creek Bridge

As built in 1866, the viaduct consisted of six brick piers and two abutments joined by seven spans varying in length from 27m to 36m. Over subsequent years various steps were taken to strengthen the construction, but this was not adequate for Commissioner Webb's "large steam" locomotives introduced in the 1920s and in 1926 the piers and abutments were repaired and five 11.9m and two 8.8m spans replaced the original spans.



On the right as the train crosses the bridge can be seen the little settlement of **Currency Creek**, 23m below the track level. Currency Creek was named after the "Currency Lass" a whaleboat used to explore the Murray in the 1850s. The "Currency Creek Inn" and a flour mill were built in the river valley. The Inn has recently been restored as a private residence, but the mill is no more. The main road to Strathalbyn is crossed at the well known "**Canoe Tree**" Crossing with its flashing warning lights.

Black Swamp Bridge

The next major bridge on the line, locally referred to as the "**Black Swamp**" bridge, crosses **Tookayerta Creek**, a major stream running into the Finnis and on into the Murray. Today's bridge is the second to take the rail line over the creek. The first bridge consisted of wrought iron girders resting on timber piers, supported on red gum piles, but this soon began to subside into the swampy ground. Today's bridge, built to the east of the first, has two 61ft spans on concrete piers. In 1884, a windmill, overhead tank and water column were built immediately to the south of the bridge to provide good quality water to locomotives. The line then passes through **Gilberts** station, now reduced to just a short platform, and then crosses the **Finniss River**.

Finniss Bridge

The wrought iron bridge across the Finniss River was built for the horse drawn tramway and subsequently strengthened in 1904 and 1926. It was originally designed with 8 metre brick arches which were quickly replaced with a 27m steel span. Unfortunately no foundation stone remains to record the original construction. Today's construction is interesting in that the two central piers, remnants of the original bridge, play no part in supporting the span!

Finniss

Finniss station, down a side road just off the main Strathalbyn to Goolwa road, was named after Col. B.T. Finniss, the assistant surveyor to Colonel Light. The station still has a platform and crossing loop. Half a dozen or so houses form a small settlement at the crossroads. Finniss was a significant "accounting" station in the early SAR period, with a Stationmaster until 1927, an electric staff machine from 1912 and train order signals from 1926, both now removed.

Finniss was one of the original 1867 tramway stations and horse stables were located on the eastern side of the track. The station still possessed the original shelter shed into the 1970s. One of Finniss's claims to fame is that **William Bowmans**, a local farmer, invented an innovative combine harvester which marked a milestone in agricultural machinery development.