



SteamRanger's Heritage - an insight into our past

BACKGROUND

Steamranger has operated a number of overnight trains using sleeping cars over the years.

A major initiative in 1991 was the promotion of a weekend excursion from Adelaide to Victor Harbor using the Society's three preserved sleeping cars and a Tavern Car.

The train stopped overnight at the old Philcox Hill siding on the crest of the Mt Lofty Ranges and the next night on the beach front between Pt Elliot and Victor Harbor

The train was operated on a number of dates in 1991, 1992 and 1993 as both the "South Coast Explorer" (with a steam loco) and the "South Coast Starlighter" (with a diesel loco) for around \$250 all inclusive

SOUTH COAST EXPLORER

ARHS Recorder November 1991 pages 220, 221

Contributed by Brian Busch

The weekend of 25-27 October 1991 saw the running of the first "South Coast Explorer"

The train consisted of sleeping cars 'Finniss', 'Inman', 'Coliban', tavern car 'Bowmans' and DC783 (crew car) and departed from Keswick at 2010 hrs behind steam engine 520. Some time was lost on the schedule running to Blackwood due to speed restrictions on the line. This did not deter the passengers on the train who were being treated to champagne and supper, other drinks etc. being on sale from 'Bowmans'.

The upgrade assault to Mount Barker Junction must have stirred many memories as the engine beat echoed back through the still cool night air. Onto the branch line and down to Mount Barker for water and a crew change, arriving there four minutes late. The climb to Philcox Hill then commenced in earnest for the 235 tonne train and on arrival we came to a stand for the night. Steps for the use of the passengers and a barbeque for the morning breakfast were unloaded from the tender while the train was secured against movement for the night. A small campfire was established and some of the passengers came out to enjoy the outdoors life.

At 0500 hrs the next morning some of the staff were stirring in 783. Breakfast was set up outside next to the train, a serve yourself fruit juice, cereals and barbequed sausages, bacon and eggs situation. Toast was also supplied from the barbeque. About 0640 hrs a very wet mournful whistle echoed over the hills as "wake up" was called. By 0800 hrs breakfast was over and the cleaning up commenced. Perhaps the biggest task was tackling the pile of dishes which had accumulated with only a small sink in the kitchen of 783.

Every thing loaded and disposed of the consist was pushed back for a photo against the freshly painted Philcox Hill station nameboard before departing just after 0840 hrs. A photo-stop was held at the 72.10 km point around a large sweeping curve then onto Strathalbyn for a half-hour stop. On time at 1100 hrs 520 steamed out of Strathalbyn heading for Goolwa. A stop to look at wild flowers was held at 94 km before arriving "on time" at Goolwa where the passengers transferred to PS 'Mundoo' for a luncheon cruise. Car 502 was placed on the goods siding and coupled to car 71 while the remainder of the consist returned to Goolwa Depot. Engine 520 turned and stabled while diesel 507 was started up and shunted the three sleepers onto Road 3 for attention to the batteries and DC783 onto Road 4 for showering. The shower car was "stoked up" ready.

At 1515 hrs engine 507 proceeded light to Goolwa and picked up 602 and 71 with the passengers then at 1600 hrs returned to Goolwa Depot. Most passengers showered at the Depot although some were ferried into Goolwa to use the facilities at the Hotel. By 1730 hrs washing was complete and passengers returned to 602 for a quiet drink. At 1800 hrs 507 hauled car 71 back to Goolwa with the passengers who then went to the Hotel for their evening meal. In the meantime 507 ran back light engine to Goolwa and remarshalled the consist with 783 leading 602 then the three sleepers for a 2100 hrs departure to the 129 km post.

Supper was partaken on the platform at Port Elliot before stabling for the night just 3 km short of Victor Harbor. Next morning a continental breakfast in bed was the order of the day then at 1000 hrs the train departed for the short run into Victor Harbor. While passengers strolled up the street 'Chef Bob' was hard at it preparing yet another great meal. The cars were watered and just before the arrival of the 'Southern Encounter' the consist was pulled up into the holding road. On the cross 507 ran light engine to Goolwa Depot while 621 turned and pushed the two consists together for the 1400 hrs 'Cockle Train'.

With the 421 tonne load on the draw-bar 621 made light work of the climb into Port Elliot and the run over to Goolwa where the 'Cockle Train' cars were detached. A short haul out to the Depot where 621 cut off and turned for its return to Victor and 520 came back onto the train. A photostop was held at Currency Creek viaduct and a stop at Strathalbyn to speak to Control. Nearly on-time into Mount Barker but no AN crew in sight. They duly arrived by taxi and, after a quick change-over, we departed attempting to make Belair for the run down the hill ahead of the suburban railcar.

Reporting clearance to STA Control in Adelaide by means of the on-board cellular telephone after clearing the Junction advice was received that there was a block failure in the Bridgewater - Mt. Lofty section. A short delay occurred at Bridgewater while a train order was obtained for the section ahead. By Belair the railcar was well ahead as we continued our steady descent of the hills hampered by almost continuous speed restrictions for an arrival at the Terminal at 1820 hrs some 28 minutes late.

This didn't seem to worry any of the 50 plus passengers on-board, all of whom expressed their total satisfaction with the whole weekend. One person was heard to comment "The only complaint is I've been too well fed".

The weekend had been a "trial" to see if it was acceptable to the public and to see if it could be handled. Generally this proved correct but only with a lot of hard work in a team effort by all concerned. One important aspect to the success of the weekend no doubt was the weather and it can only be hoped that the weather shines kindly on the next 'South Coast Explorer' in early November.

SOUTH COAST EXPLORER



Supplement to the February, 1992 Recorder.

Friday, 3rd April - Sunday, 5th April
 Friday, 11th Sept. - Sunday, 13th Sept.
 Friday, 16th October - Sunday, 18th October
 Friday, 30th October - Sunday, 1st November

A weekend exploring the best of the South in an "olde worlde" sleeping car express complete with luxurious tavern car.

ADVENTURE UNLIMITED!

Journey begins Fridays 8.15 p.m.
 and ends Sundays at 6.00 p.m.

Leave the city and weekday worries on Friday evening and get set for a unique rail experience spanning 3 days. Your home will be in one of the venerable old sleeping cars which used to tread the track nightly to Melbourne from the turn of the century to the early 50's on the Overland Express. Beautifully restored, these cars are the pride of the SteamRanger fleet of fabulous vintage carriages. We will explore the South in a relaxed but fascinating way that is only possible with our hotel on wheels.

FARES: All meals, sleeper accommodation with full conductor service, paddlesteamer cruise and lots more.
\$260.00

FRIDAY: Join the train at 8.00 p.m. for an 8.15 p.m. departure from AN Keswick Terminal. Enjoy a lovely supper and fully licensed tavern car service as our diesel locomotive tackles the heavy grades of the Mount Lofty Ranges. After a pleasant pause at Mount Barker the train climbs up the Bugle Ranges to Phalcox Hill. Near here we stop for the night in a beautiful secluded spot where no roads go by. Retire when you feel like it to your comfortable sleeping berth. Log fire weather permitting.

A DIESEL HAULED VINTAGE TRAIN

AN UNFORGETTABLE WEEKEND.
 SUPERB HOSPITALITY - EXCITEMENT
 FRIDAY 22/10/93 8.15 pm to SUNDAY 24/10/93 5.30 pm
 OPERATED BY THE AUSTRALIAN RAILWAY HISTORICAL SOCIETY