

WEST COAST WILDERNESS RAILWAY

Location: Between Strahan and Queenstown in Tasmania

Owner: State Government.

Markers and interpretation panels are located at the stations at each end of the railway: Queenstown and Regatta Point, Strahan.

The Railway

Originally built by the Mt Lyell Mining and Railway Company in 1896, it enabled the Company to transport copper metal to the Port of Strahan, import coal and coke for its smelters, bring in supplies for the residents of Queenstown and carry passengers in both directions.



Train on rack rail

While the chosen route followed the King and Queen rivers, the King River Gorge had to be by-passed by climbing up and over the Rinadeena Saddle on grades too steep for normal locomotives to travel using adhesion alone. The Company adopted the Dr Roman Abt rack rail system only 10 years after it was invented. A locomotive built by Dubs in Scotland was proved satisfactory on a trial rack rail track beside the King River before the rack rail was laid on the inclines as steep as 1 in 16. A second pair of steam cylinders drives the pinion which engages with a rack rail.

The railway closed in 1963 after 67 years of service. Intense lobbying in 1998 led to its restoration as a tourist and heritage railway. Three of the original Abt locomotives were restored to modern safety standards without changing their external appearance.

Heritage Significance

- It solved the challenging problem of how best to transport the Mt Lyell copper to the port of Strahan.
- It adopted the latest technology to overcome the steep grades up and over Rinadeena Saddle.
- It provided the only link between the Queenstown community and the rest of the world until the Lyell Highway was built in the 1930s.
- Its resurrection in 2002 as the **West Coast Wilderness Railway** has been a wonderful achievement of great benefit to tourism and the local community.

Note:

Interpretation panel on next page



Quarter Mile Bridge across King River before 1963



Interpretation Panel

WEST COAST WILDERNESS RAILWAY formerly Mount Lyell Abt Railway

ENGINEERING THE RAILWAY

Why build a railway?

Transporting a variety of goods was a huge task to do using only horse teams and pack animals over the 100km distance down to the coast, including the 10km long & 1000m high ascent.

The best route

Engineers spent 18 months in a gutter searching for the best route with the steepest and the longest climb. The route was chosen for its ability to cross gorges and the formation of a bridge. The route was chosen for its ability to cross gorges and the formation of a bridge. The route was chosen for its ability to cross gorges and the formation of a bridge.

Construction - Stage 1 (1884-1886) Stage 2 (1896-1898)

The railway for the 100km distance was built in two stages. The first stage was the 100km distance from the mine to the coast.

Engineer E. C. De Pater was engaged to oversee the project and was in charge of the construction of the railway. He was in charge of the construction of the railway. He was in charge of the construction of the railway. He was in charge of the construction of the railway.

RESTORING THE RAILWAY

The railway was closed in 1988 after 104 years of service. It was closed because of the high cost of maintaining the railway. It was closed because of the high cost of maintaining the railway. It was closed because of the high cost of maintaining the railway.



Steam train on the tracks of the Mt Lyell. The train was used to transport goods and passengers from the mine to the coast.

THE ABT LOCOMOTIVES

The first Abt locomotives had two sets of steam cylinders, one for horizontal motion for the vertical tank rail. On the other side, the cylinders were also connected to the locomotive's side, working along the sides of the vertical tank rail. The locomotives were built in 1884 and 1886.



Abt locomotive operating on the Mt Lyell. The locomotive was used to transport goods and passengers from the mine to the coast.



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IRON BRIDGE AT TEEPOOKANA

The bridge is the only remaining bridge of the original construction. The bridge was built in 1884 and is made of iron. It was built by the engineer E. C. De Pater.

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IMPORTANT ENGINEERS



Dr. Carl Sumner (1859-1938)
A British mechanical engineer who worked in Australia. He designed and patented a vertical engine that was cheaper to manufacture and easier to maintain than other designs. The engine was used on the Mt Lyell and was the first of its kind.



Robert Carl Fitzgibbon (1864-1942)
An American metallurgist and mining engineer, was engaged by the Mt Lyell in 1895. He introduced the Company to the first modern method of mining which he patented. He held the position of General Manager for 27 years.



Frederick Alfred Cutten (1864-1942)
A New Zealand engineer and the country's first and longest-serving Chief Engineer for the railway. He was the Engineer-in-Chief for the Company.



Edward Curran (1865-1940)
Was 27 years old when engaged to complete the railway construction. He worked with the Company for 30 years, being its General Manager for the last 10 years.



To find out more information about this project please scan this QR Code.

www.westcoastrailway.org.au/engineering-heritage-westcoast

Take a look at the bridge you see in the photo, and see how it was built.



The railway route from the mine to the coast, showing the route of the railway and the location of the bridge.

