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.

Train on rack rail

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.

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