

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 necessary fuel & vehicle maintenance.

The best route

Engineers spent months exploring if a route justified the terrain demands with the planned 100km long Mt Lyell Abt Railway. The route was chosen as it was the most direct route to the coast, taking account of the steepness of the terrain and the availability of water.

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

The railway for the 100km distance was built in two stages, depending on the weather and the terrain working conditions.

Engineer E. C. De Pater was engaged to oversee the entire project and was in charge of the construction and operation of the railway. The railway was built in two stages, depending on the weather and the terrain working conditions.

The design stage for the first stage, Stage 1, was completed in 1884 and the construction of the railway began in 1884.

RESTORING THE RAILWAY

The railway was abandoned in 1988 when the Mt Lyell Abt Railway was closed. The railway was restored in 2002 and is now open to the public. The railway was restored in 2002 and is now open to the public. The railway was restored in 2002 and is now open to the public.



Steam train on the Mt Lyell Abt Railway. The train was restored from the original 1988 and is now open to the public. The railway was restored in 2002 and is now open to the public.

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 together with the locomotive's side motion using the drive of the pistons to the wheels.



Abt No. 1 locomotive (left) and Abt No. 2 locomotive (right) on the Mt Lyell Abt Railway.



Abt No. 2 locomotive (left) and Abt No. 1 locomotive (right) on the Mt Lyell Abt Railway.

IRON BRIDGE AT TEEPOOKANA

The bridge is the only remaining bridge of the original construction. The bridge is a 40m long iron bridge manufactured in London, and was used to cross the gorge in Teepeekana. The bridge is now used as a walkway across the gorge.



Looking at the iron bridge from Teepeekana side of the gorge.



View of Teepeekana from Teepeekana side.

Due to the bridge being in a poor state of repair, the restoration of the original bridge.

IMPORTANT ENGINEERS



Dr. Carl Sumner (1839-1930)

British mechanical engineer. In 1881 he designed and patented a vertical engine that was cheaper to manufacture and easier to maintain than other designs. The engine was revolutionary and led to a decade of other Mount Lyell designs to use it.



Robert Carl FitzGibbon (1864-1942)

An American multi-talented engineering engineer, was engaged by the Mt Lyell in 1895. He introduced the Company to the first winding which he patented. He held the position of General Manager for 27 years.



Frederick Alfred Cullen (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 (1865-1942)

Was 27 years old when engaged to coordinate the railway construction. He worked with the Company for 30 years, being its General Manager for 10 years. He was the Engineer-in-Chief for the Company.

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

Engineering Heritage Trust, 1000 Centre Street, 3101, West Coast Wilderness Railway, West Coast Wilderness Railway



Map showing Mt Lyell Abt Railway and stations along the route from Teepeekana to the coast.