

DUCK REACH POWER SCHEME

Location: On the South Esk River above the Launceston Gorge.

Owner: Launceston City Council.

The plaque is located just inside the station entrance.

The scheme

The scheme consisted of low weirs across the South Esk River diverting the flow into a tunnel half a mile in length, and then into a five foot diameter wrought iron penstock leading down to the power station perched above the river bank. The head was about 110 feet (34 m).

The original equipment consisted of five 12 kW DC machines and three 100 kW AC machines.

Transmission lines conveyed the power to a distribution station in the city. The arrival of electricity in 1895 ended 40 years of gas lighting.

Charles St John David (1855-1922) was born in Wales. He arrived in Brisbane in 1880, worked for the Queensland Railways and in private practice, before being appointed Launceston City Engineer in 1892. He advised that a tunnel was a better option than pipelines following the large bend in the river, and showed that it could be excavated for the same price despite the hardness of dolerite rock.

Kynaston Murray (died 1916) was born in Tasmania. Moving to Melbourne, he was in charge of the electrical branch of the Victorian Railways for 20 years. It was after his retirement in 1894 that he

undertook the electrical design and purchase of the equipment for the Duck Reach scheme.

William Corin was appointed City electrician after Murray departed. He supervised a major expansion of the scheme including a second penstock, four 300 kW machines and the conversion to three-phase AC.

The street leading to the station is named after him, as is one of Canberra's water supply dams.



Duck Reach Hydro-Electric Power Station c. 1905

HISTORIC ENGINEERING MARKER

Duck Reach Power Scheme

Electrical Engineer Kynaston Murray and City Engineer Charles David designed this scheme for Launceston City Council. It was the first commercial hydro-electric scheme in Australia, built in 1895 to light the city streets, initially supplying direct current for arc lamps and alternating current for incandescent lamps and motors. Between 1905 and 1921 the Council converted the station to three-phase AC power and expanded its capacity to 2000 kW. After record floods destroyed the building in 1929, the station was rebuilt and ran continuously until 1956.

The Institution of Engineers, Australia
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