

LAUNCESTON WATER SUPPLY

Location: From the St Patricks River near Nunamara to Launceston

Owner: Esk Water

The plaque is located at the fountain in Prince's Square, Launceston

The scheme

This economical gravity scheme brings water to the city from the St Patricks River about 18 km east of Launceston and is still operating.

The plaque describes the components of the scheme.

Mr W R Falconer, the Director of Public Works in Hobart, was appointed to design and superintend the construction of the scheme. **Mr William Huttley** was appointed by the Council to act as Resident Superintendent of Launceston Waterworks, to assist Mr Falconer.

The tunnel excavated through a saddle is some 154 metres long, with additional cut and cover sections taking the overall enclosed length to 210 metres. Construction of the tunnel was contracted to a Mr Henry Newman.

The 300 who attended the opening ceremony in 1857 witnessed a bottle of champagne broken against the dam wall, a 21 gun salute and the Mayor opening the sluice gates before sitting down to lunch.

The new scheme replaced sometimes brackish or muddy water delivered in barrels. The social benefits were enormous as it provided clean water, better hygiene, street flushing and public drinking fountains. A water-borne sewerage disposal scheme became possible.



Weir and Intake at St Patricks River

HISTORIC ENGINEERING MARKER

Launceston Water Supply

In 1857 Launceston's fledgling municipal council constructed its first reticulated water supply which still serves the city centre. Director of Public Works W R Falconer designed the gravity scheme, consisting of a weir, water race and tunnel diverting flow from the St Patricks River into a dam on Distillery Creek. Cast iron pipes delivered the water to brick reservoirs in the town. This fountain was erected to celebrate the opening. By 1860 the town had public drinking fountains, fire brigades and work on a sewerage scheme had begun.

The Institution of Engineers Australia
Launceston City Council & Esk Water 2007

Upgrades

As you would expect over such a long period, there has been some expansion and upgrading. Additional trunk mains to the city were installed. The diversion dam on the St Patricks River was replaced with a concrete gravity weir in 1888 and the tunnel was lined with concrete in 1912. A water treatment plant was installed in 1925. Then, after 110 years of service, the water race was rebuilt as a concrete-lined channel to increase its capacity.

The plaque was awarded on the 150th Anniversary of the scheme.