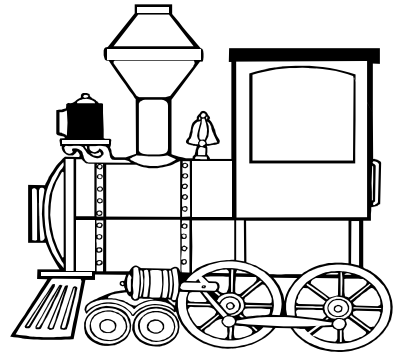


**Friends of the
North Australian Railway
at Adelaide River
May 2003 Newsletter**



Welcome to our third newsletter for 2003. Contributions to this newsletter will be welcome.

Caretaker Ron Neiss returns: Some people have a charmed life and a relaxing retirement. Ron reckons he has just about cracked the optimum. Ron hails from Narooma on the far south coast of NSW. He does the “odd spot” of Bass fishing in the mountain streams during the summer. Then in April he packs up and heads for Adelaide River. We are always glad to see him, as we were when he arrived just after ANZAC day. Ron does a great job at keeping the station clean and tidy, welcoming visitors and dispensing tourist information. If you are passing by, please drop in and say Giddyay to Ron. If you can stay for a few hours to give Ron a break that will be very welcome. Phone 8976 7101 to speak to Ron at the station.

Progress on NSU63 locomotive. It is rumoured that the locals have dubbed our beloved locomotive NSU Eyesore. Hopefully they will view it differently in a few weeks time. In the past month Project Director Mick Kent has made good progress with the NSU, (largely by himself). Mick has managed to remove all of the windows in preparation for the forthcoming blast and paint. He has also designed and fabricated panels to fill the large gaps in the body following cannibalism of parts over the years. Porky’s Pickups has carried 7 tonnes of garnet to site from Territory Transport Refinishers. Vic Martin is gearing up for the big job of blasting and painting.

Ministerial Visit. Tourism and Heritage Minister, The Honourable Chris Burns and his family visited the railway heritage precinct on Easter Monday afternoon 21 April. The Minister showed a lot of interest in our work and walked all over the precinct (including the NSU) and then drove out along the route to Snake Creek. He has subsequently sent us a letter commenting on the visit and commending the work that is being done in consultation with the Director of Heritage.

Mention in Parliament. On 1 May 2003, Minister Burns was making a statement in the House regarding the review of the Heritage Act. Our local member (Tim Baldwin, member for Daly) raised the matter of the Ministers visit and encouraged him to look kindly on Adelaide River when grants were being considered. Independent member for Nelson (Gerry Wood) put in a plug for the Larrimah Birdum section of the NAR which is the longest

remaining segment (7km) and is right at the end of the Never Never line. Our thanks to both members for keeping these issues before the Minister.

Undergrounding services. The undergrounding of the telephone circuit is now complete (as of 22 May). The power is progressing well but has a couple of bureaucratic steps to go through. ADrail is pressing for the job to be completed so that the large poles can be removed.

Recognition of the Engineering Heritage of the BIG bridge. The Institution of Engineers, Australia has a program of recognising national engineering landmarks. Our Friend, Owen Peake, has just about finished the extensive documentation on the bridge that is required to submit its nomination to Canberra for national assessment. During the research it has been found that:-

- The first survey to determine a route for the railway was in 1878 (just 6 years after the Overland Telegraph went through)
- The site of the railway through Adelaide River and the railway bridge was surveyed in 1894. Design of the bridge was commenced then and completed on 1 August 1885 when the drawings were signed by Engineer-in-Chief HC Mais.
- The SAR contract for the construction of the railway (including the bridge) was signed on 11 May 1886 with Charles and Edwin Millar.
- The components of the 1888 bridge were manufactured by James Martin Engineering works in Gawler SA under a subcontract from Charles Millar. James Martin was the brother of John Martin (stores)
- James Martin also fabricated the sister bridge at Algebuckina near Oodnadatta in 1891
- These bridges were built right at the end of the lattice girder bridge era and are probably classic examples. Cheaper plate girder bridges and American Pratt trusses were on the way (as per Fergusson and Katherine River bridges).
- The bridge was erected by Charles Millar (the railway contractor) using "coolie" labour.
- Charles Millar was a colourful character who cruised around Australia in his two-masted 70 ton schooner *Red Gauntlet* with an armed crew, visiting his many family investments and contracts. He stayed in the Top End from April to November 1887 supervising construction after the job had a slow start in 1886.
- Construction of the bridge was behind schedule in 1888 and a temporary wooden crossing had to be erected for the construction trains. After a big push, the permanent bridge was completed on 3 December 1888 (just before the Wet) when a steam train crossed it for the first time.
- The Adelaide River bridge was structurally upgraded in about 1952 (along lines similar to the 1891 Algebuckina bridge which suggests that flexing of the girders was observed or acknowledged as a possibility in 1889). The reason for the upgrading could have been the ordering of diesel-electric locomotives in 1954 (NSU63 and NSU 64 arrived in 1956). These 61 ton locomotives were 20% heavier than the 50 ton steam locomotives.

Thanks go to Owen, Janice Lake and Fiona Hofmeyer for this major work. Installation of a brass plaque recording the engineering and social significance of this bridge is expected before the end of the year.

Grant Applications. In April we lodged an application with the Regional Museums Grants Support Program (Sue Harlow). We are currently working on an application for the Heritage Grants Program (Steve Sutton). Preparation of grant applications is time consuming and needs to be well done. Offers of assistance in this area will be welcome. Soft copies of much material is available to ease the effort.

Invitation to become a Friend. If you have not joined yet, could we invite you to consider it now. Not only are the modest subscription fees useful in helping to meet our administrative costs, the evidence of a significant number of Friends (committed enough to fill in the form and send money), is very helpful as supporting documentation in our funding submissions. Naturally we do not divulge individual details, just global numbers. A membership form is attached at the bottom of this newsletter.

Annual General meeting (Inaugural) In view of the commitment of many of our Friends to the Adelaide River Show on Queens Birthday weekend and the Adelaide River Races on 21 June we will have our AGM in July when they have recovered.

Call for donations of excess equipment. People often ask us “why didn’t you tell me you needed a xxyyzz? I’ve got one laying in the shed that you could have had”. We wouldn’t like that to happen, so here is a small list of equipment that we could put to good use:-

1. Hot water system for shower/ablutions block
2. Facsimile for the station
3. Vacuum cleaner for the station
4. Small Whipper-Snipper

All donations will be gratefully received and credited appropriately.

Meeting with Jim Harvey – researcher and author of the Never Never Line

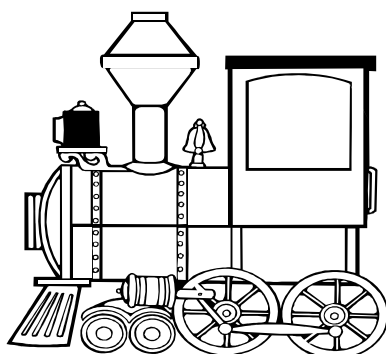
A special pleasure in early May was a meeting with Jim Harvey in Melbourne. Jim spent over 40 years researching the book commencing during military service in the Top End (67.5 mile camp) in 1943. Jim is now a dignified octogenarian living comfortably in Melbourne with his wife. The book is an encyclopaedia of the North Australia Railway and probably makes the NAR one of the best-documented railways in Australia. Jim has subsequently written "Australia's Forgotten Volunteers" which records how the NAR was kept running at an incredible rate during the war using existing railway staff supplemented by Army personnel and “volunteers” from other state railways. More recently Jim has written “Mercy Trains” which includes reference to the Ambulance train at Adelaide River. Jim enjoys our news snippets and hearing of our efforts. Jim and his wife should get an invite to travel on the New Ghan in our view although Jim is not sure that his health is up to it.

Volunteers to Open the Museum. We need more volunteers to make the roster less onerous on the few. Tourists are starting to appear in larger numbers. We would appreciate any time that you can give, whether it is a full day, half day or just a few hours now and then. Local residents of Adelaide River will be especially welcome. Our caretaker, Ron will co-ordinate the roster and the telephone number at the station is 8976 7101. Our existing volunteers (including retirees) report that the experience at the station is rewarding and appreciated by the travellers that drop in. So, come on folks and lend a hand to this worthwhile community project.

Old items return to the Station. It always a pleasure to report when heritage items are returned to the station. Last week Jock Gilmartin kindly gifted to the Museum the **telephone switchboard** that had been used in Adelaide River from the 1960's until automatic exchanges took over in the 1980's. Its one of those patch chord switchboards with a wooden case and about 12 manually selected lines. It comes complete with the operator's headset. Another visitor last weekend thinks that he may know where the **cast iron oven** is that used to be in the fireplace. And we have removed a large piece of forged steel from the NSU which is a **re-railing aid**. It would have been useful to haul derailed wagons back on to the tracks. The one we have is right handed, so if you have a left handed one in your shed..... Vic Martin has done an excellent job in restoring the **90 litre SIMPLEX fire extinguisher** that had been looking fairly neglected.

Railway Picnic Day. 4 August 2003 Back in the 1920's an annual railway picnic was held in Adelaide River. The whole railway closed down for the day and went to "The River". There are three photos on the NTLIS website (www.ntlib.gov.au) showing a decorated train setting out for Adelaide River and stopping at Darwin River for water. There are other photos of teams playing tug-o-war etc underneath the old railway bridge. This year we are planning to re-establish the RAILWAY PICNIC and to do it on Picnic Day, 4 August. Peter Bate and Tony Suttor, our highly praised musical duo from our Open Day in 2002 have offered their services. A small task force is being established to manage this event and if you are interested could you please make contact with Ron (8976 7101) or Trevor (0417 838 578).

E-mail addresses. We are finding that e-mail is a most expedient way to keep in touch. If you receive this newsletter by snail mail or fax, please let us know your e-mail address if you now have e-mail.



Please indicate your support for this work by becoming a Friend of Adelaide River. You can do this by filling in your contact details below.

MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION:

Name:

Mail Address:
.....

Telephone:

Fax:

E-mail:

Donations of \$25 will be most welcome and will cover the costs of postage etc.

Our mailing address is PO Box 3504, Darwin NT 0801.

Phone (08) 8924 7093 or mobile 0417 838 578