

HERITAGE PLACE

NAME OF PLACE: RAILWAY BRIDGE (FORMER)

ADDRESS/LOCATION OF PLACE: Brung Brungle Road WANNON

STUDY NUMBER: 431

HERITAGE OVERLAY NUMBER:

PRECINCT: outside

LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA: Southern Grampians Shire

PARISH: PARISH OF REDRUTH

ACCESS DESCRIPTION:

CFA 431C; VicRoads 72 F4; located on the south-east side of Brung Brungle Road mostly on the west bank of the Wannon River 2.0kms from the centre of the township of Wannon.

SIGNIFICANCE RATING: State



Railway Trestle Bridge, over the Wannon from the east

Image Date:

EXTENT OF LISTING:

To the extent of: 1. All of the superstructure and abutments of the bridge and its approaches including the small culvert near its western end and a strip of land 10.0ms to either side.

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PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION:

The timber bridge is constructed with a series of trestles, comprising two uprights, two angled braces and two diagonal ties. There are abutments at either end. The floor of the bridge is timber now covered and overgrown with soil and weeds. There is a small timber culvert about 400.0m from the western end of the bridge and close to the Brung Brungle Road.

HISTORY:

The advent of railways in the Western District was much anticipated and created a strong political activism. The location of the lines, stations and sidings could make or break the viability of a community of whatever scale. The small settlement at Wannon, for example, had a station, which was important for the tourist trade visiting the nearby Wannon and Nigretta Falls. The main business of the railways, however, was transportation of passengers and primary produce. Hamilton was particularly concerned that it should become a railway hub on the main line to South Australia and Adelaide.

In 1870 Thomas Higinbotham, Engineer in Chief of Victorian Railways released details of the proposed railway line between Hamilton and Warrnambool which would pass through the township of Penshurst. The announcement was the beginning of a twenty-year long wait for construction to begin. It was a period of prolonged and vigorous campaigning because it was hoped that the line would continue on to Adelaide, confirming Hamilton as the capital of the Western District (Garden, 92-7). The first rail link was the early Melbourne-Ballarat line, soon extended to Ararat. From Ararat, the line could head north-west to Horsham and through the Wimmera to South Australia, or head south-west through Hamilton to the pastoral regions of south-eastern South Australia including Coleraine and Casterton. There was also a push for a link from Portland through Branxholme to Hamilton, which could extend further into the Wimmera-Mallee, thereby capturing the growing wheat trade.

In 1873 a Bill was passed giving the go-ahead for the construction of the line from Ararat to Hamilton, with a link from Hamilton to Portland. The Hamilton-Ballarat line was surveyed in 1875 and finally reached Hamilton, via Glenthompson on 26th October 1877 (Garden, 1984, 97). A number of trunk routes were also opened in the late 1880s, including the Hamilton to Koroit (via Penshurst) line (in August 1890) and the Penshurst to Dunkeld link although these proved to be uneconomic and so closures soon began (Garden, 137). By the 1920s and 1930s, rail services were in general decline as road traffic deprived the railways of a large part of their revenue. Each of the lines feeding Hamilton suffered (Garden, 138).

The Coleraine Railway League was formed in 1879 along with other railway leagues to establish rail services in the district. In December 1884 a railway extension from Hamilton to Coleraine was announced, with work commencing in 1887. The bridge across the Wannon River, immediately north-east of the Township of Redruth, now Wannon, was one of fifteen bridges and three major works required for the line. It stands on land on the west side of the Wannon River, allotment 10 of section 14 of the Parish of Redruth, which was purchased by J B Hughes in May 1862. The land on the east side of the river, allotment B of Section 1 of the Parish of Bochara, was purchased by Angus Cameron of Violet Creek and Arrandoovong. "Bloomfield Brothers of Ascot Vale won the contract at [almost] 65,000 pounds which was estimated at being less than 3,000 pounds per mile and most reasonable" (History of Wannon, 40).

The line was opened on 20 November 1888. In 1895, the export of rabbits in ice packed railway trucks from the Coleraine railway station commenced, giving a boost to the local economy, which had been affected by the depression. But it was a mixed blessing for pastoralists whose land could catch fire in the summer from sparks from the engines.

Transport between Hamilton and Coleraine was provided by the Bloomfield's own private engine, the "Adelaide". It had been used to build the line. Two trains ran daily and the engine took forty-six minutes to

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make the journey. "In the first seven months of operation seven thousand two hundred and thirty-one people travelled on the line. In the first wool season four thousand and twenty four bales were dispatched from Coleraine station" (History of Wannon, 40-1). But the train also meant the decline if not the demise of other forms of transport such as stagecoaches. "In 1884 the railways won the mail contract to Casterton so the coach service from Coleraine to Casterton closed down, and in September, 1888 the last coach set out for Hamilton from Coleraine, this run having been killed by Bloomfield's private engine "Adelaide" on the Coleraine-Hamilton railway" (History of Wannon, 40).

The small Bochara railway station was located about 6.0kms south-east of the trestle bridge over the Wannon. On 8th September 1910, according to a detailed two-page report in the Hamilton Spectator, there was a 'sensational railway disaster' when the Coleraine to Hamilton train fell off the bridge across McKinnon's Creek immediately north of the Bochara school site. In fact only two people were seriously injured, an elderly lady, Mrs. Gallagher of Wannon and Mr. Maurice Bolan of Nareen. The line was closed on 9th September 1977.

THEMATIC CONTEXT:

3 Developing local, regional and national economies
3.8.6 Building and maintaining railways

CONDITION:

The bridge is in fair condition.

INTEGRITY:

The rails have been removed.

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE:

What is Significant?

The timber trestle Railway Bridge over the Wannon River was constructed in 1884 for the extension of the Melbourne-Ballarat-Ararat-Hamilton railway line through to places further west. It was hoped at the time that the line would continue through to Adelaide, and, with branch lines north and south, make Hamilton an important railway junction. The bridge used conventional trestle construction and is not of particular structural significance, although it was perhaps the major work on the Hamilton-Coleraine section. In 1910 there was an accident nearby at Bochara, but it was not caused by any failure in the bridge. With the advent and improvement of motor transport, the passenger and goods trade went into decline and the line closed in 1977. The bridge has been partially dismantled with the rails now removed. It remains in fair condition and is used as a walking track.

How is it Significant?

The trestle Railway Bridge over the Wannon River at Wannon is of historical significance to the Southern Grampians Shire.

Why is it Significant?

The trestle Railway Bridge over the Wannon River at Wannon is of historical significance as a reminder of the critically important rail link between Melbourne and places west of Hamilton of which the bridge was a critical element. It has further historical significance for its association with the Bochara train accident in 1910.

COMPARISON:

291 Hamilton-Penshurst Railway Bridge, Spring Creek, Tabor
381 Railway Bridge (Former), off Scott Street extension, Cavendish

ASSESSED BY: tfh & mgt

ASSESSMENT DATE:

05-Jan-02

EXISTING LISTINGS:

HERITAGE STUDY RECOMMENDATIONS:

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Include in VHR **Include in RNE** **Include in Local Planning Scheme**

No Recommendations for Inclusions

REFERENCES:

| Author | Title | Year | Page |
|-------------|--------------------------------------|------|------|
| Don Garden | Hamilton, a Western District History | 1984 | var. |
| G. McGaffin | History of the Shire of Wannon | 1972 | 40-1 |