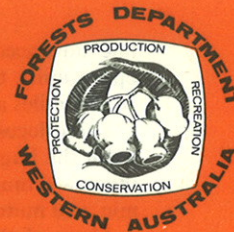


INFORMATION SHEET



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STEAM LOCOMOTIVES IN THE FORESTS

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M. SOUTHCOMBE

When the first settlers arrived in the State they found huge areas of forests. Sawmilling on a small scale was begun immediately, but as the logs had to be hauled to the mill by horses or bullocks this severely restricted the area in which they could operate.

Two men who operated a small mill near Busselton, John Ditchburn and another known as "Money Malloy" conceived the idea of a locomotive to haul timber. During 1870 they placed an order with James Hunt of Ballarat, Victoria, to construct a loco for the cost of £800 (\$1600). The loco was completed in March 1871 and tested in the foundry. Then, as there were no railways or roads to the west in those days, they dismantled the engine and packed it in cases and shipped it to W.A. aboard the barque *Nightingale*. The loco made its first run in either August or September of that year and was pronounced a great success. It was christened "Ballarat".

This pioneer which created railway history in this State was followed soon after by another at Jarrahdale and was called the "Governor Weld" after the then Governor of the State.

These first locos ran on wooden rails, but the wear was so great it was not long before they were replaced by steel ones. So successful were these early engines, it was not long before a large fleet of locos was operating in the

timber industry. This was, of course, long before the government railways started to operate.

By the beginning of this century it was estimated that a total of seventy locos were working on the various timber lines of the State.

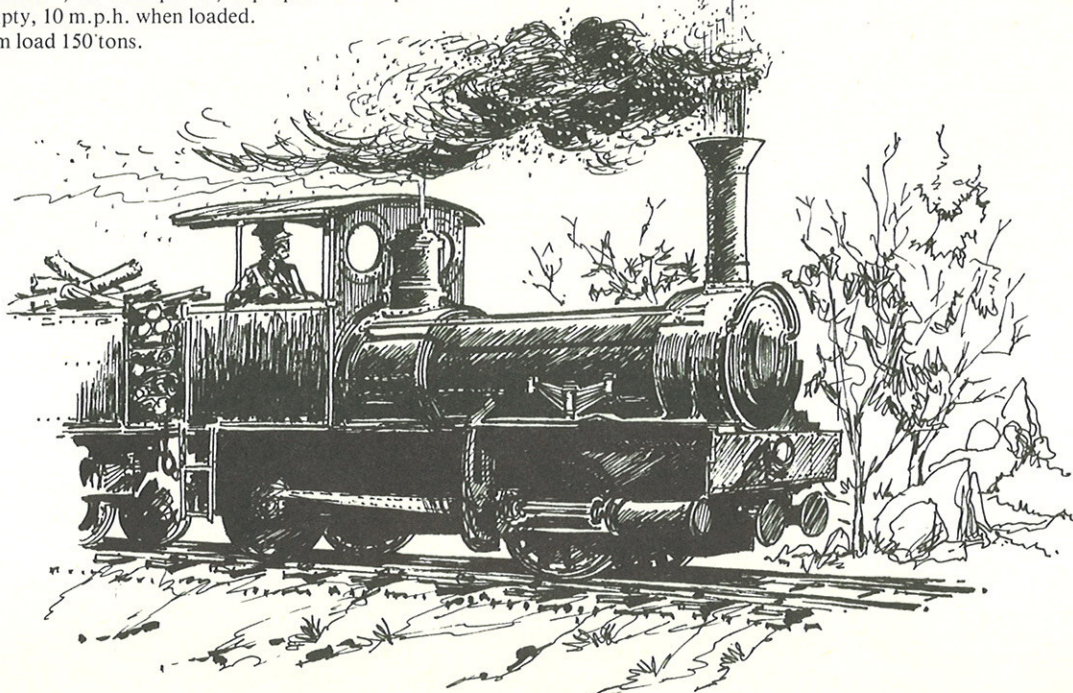
Normally the first line to be built was the one to convey all the sawn timber from the mill to the nearest shipping point. Then lines were constructed leading to the bush to enable logs to be hauled to the mill.

Naturally, these engines were fired with wood from the mill, and as there was an abundance of water in the forest streams, they provided a cheap means of transport.

All the formations for the line were constructed by hand and many men were employed doing nothing else but laying line and pulling it up again after the timber had been cut in that area. No one knows how much line was laid in this manner, but during the life of a mill lines were laid to all sections of its concession.

These lines usually followed the valleys between the hills so as to acquire an easy grade. Life was not easy for these men who built the lines. Long hours of heartbreaking toil were their lot. Their homes were small huts built in such a manner they could be lifted bodily on to a railway wagon and moved to a new position as the

The "Ballarat", 16 horsepower, top speed 15 m.p.h. when empty, 10 m.p.h. when loaded.
Maximum load 150 tons.



line advanced. Only at weekends did they have the opportunity to visit the mill perhaps some fifteen or twenty miles away.

These locos remained in service until the mid-1930s when the huge cost of pulling up and re-laying lines in the now thinned out bush made their operation uneconomic, and motor transport started to take their place.

Many of the old railway formations and bridges are now used by the Forests Department as fire-breaks and for rapid means of transport to the scene of bush fires, etc. One bridge of fourteen spans and 40 metres long with a width of 4 metres, which was built over the Wonnerup Estuary for the first loco, the "Ballarat", is still standing and is as solid as when it was built 100 years ago.

Many of these locos are now preserved in museums in various parts of the State. The pioneer loco "Ballarat" is in Victoria Square, Busselton, and a plaque near Wonnerup siding marks the position of the line along

which it ran. The "Katie" which was used at Karridale is preserved on the banks of the Margaret River near the town of that name.

The last steam loco to operate on timber mill lines is the old No. 71 which for over eighty years had served its masters, Millars Ltd., faithfully and well. In 1973 it found its last resting place near the government railway line in Yarloop, where it will fire the imaginations of future generations with all the glamour of its romantic past.

Several of the old engines are preserved in the Australian Railways Historical Museum at Bassendean, where one is coupled to a rake of log-wagons giving a good idea of what the old log trains were like.

Undoubtedly, without these engines the timber industry in this State could never have achieved the efficiency which it did, and the development of the State would have been delayed for many years.