

How I rode the O'Keefe Rail Trail behind a Steam Locomotive

The year was 1953 National Service was in full swing and Sgt. Tom Luke as the Battalion Film Projectionist was in annual camp with the 38th Infantry Battalion at Site 17 just outside Seymour. After our two weeks of maneuvers saving Victoria from the "Fantasians" !!! The time to return to our homes in Bendigo started with a very early roll call and a march with full gear to what was known MOB siding a railway entry and exit point some 3 miles away.

At the railway pick up we were ordered to fill our water bottles and pick up a sandwich and enter the train. The sandwiches were either cheese or tomato sauce. Unfortunately mine was tomato sauce not very exciting.

The water and single sandwich was our only refreshments until we arrived in Bendigo some 6 hours away.

We travelled in a series of carriages behind an A2 steam engine down the mainline from Albury to Melbourne stopping at a siding named Heathcote Junction.

Here we changed to a much smaller engine and proceeded on a spur line which took us to Bylands then up to Kilmore through High Camp, Pyalong, via Tooborac Argyle and on to Heathcote.

From Heathcote we travelled to Derrinal and over a bridge which would in the future become part of the back waters of Eppalock Weir. On to Knowsley, Axedale, Longlea and through to Bendigo.



At this stage in its life the rail was becoming very bumpy and undoubtedly had a limited life span.

Many of us Northern Victorian National Servicemen travelled this way back to our homes.

Many comical events occurred during the transit of these various trains most are better left in the past and only a smile on the face of story teller.

If one could have seen the future and realize that this line was to become the O'Keefe Rail Trail and that I would live just 500 meters from it.

We are now in the twilight of our years, Eppalock has been long since built and the railway line is no more but thanks to foresight of many people the O'Keefe Rail trail will give pleasure and healthy exercise to many present and future generations

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