

Origins of the railway line.

The railways in the State of Victoria, prior to 1883 had all been privately owned. The State Government then established the vertically integrated Victorian Railways Department in 1883. In 1884 the Victorian State Parliament passed The Railway Construction Act, which authorised fifty-nine new lines to almost every corner of the state, and thus became known as the *Octopus Act*.

The railway line discussed here was originally to be known as the Wandong, Heathcote, Sandhurst Railway line, and later called the Heathcote Junction to Bendigo railway or the Wallan to Bendigo service. It was to be a cross country line, and was constructed between 1887 and 1890.

The route for this cross country line would begin at a site now known as Heathcote Junction, on the now Victorian Melbourne – Wodonga railway line. The planned route would to pass through the community districts and towns of Bylands, Kilmore, Willowmarvin, Moranding, High Camp, Pyalong, Tooborac, Heathcote South (Argyle), Heathcote, Derrinal (Wild Duck), Knowsley, Axedale, Axe Creek (Longlea), Strathfieldsaye, Junortoun, and end at Sandhurst (North Bendigo).

The builders

This railway route would have its beginnings when survey planning in 1886 finally selected the location of the former 'Summit' railway siding, as the branch point from the main North East railway line (Melbourne to Wodonga). This branch point and its station would be known as Kilmore Junction and then later named Heathcote Junction (1922).

There were three principle contractors to the Victorian Railways for the building of this branch line. Contractor G.Buckley and Co. was awarded a contract for the sum of £91,996, being for the first distance of nine miles and forty chains (15.2Kms) from the North East line to a new Kilmore station, on 10 January 1887. McDermott & Sons would later win what must have been a re-advertised contract, to build a 29 miles 72 chains (48kms) section between Kilmore and Heathcote East, for £115,024 88-16-5 on 18 June 1888. Previously on 10 January 1887, the 27.9096 miles (45Kms) section from Heathcote to Sandhurst had been awarded to Andrew O'Keefe of Bamadown, for the contracted sum of £88,409-16-0.

The O'Keefe contract stated that construction was to be fully completed by 30/04/1888. Various sections of the whole line would be completed between 1888 and 1890. When all the various contracts and works were completed, the line would be 60lb single gauge line with a total length of 68 miles and at a total cost of £389,887. Where this cross country line connected with the Melbourne-Murray River (Echuca) railway line at Sandhurst, the rail distance to this junction point from Melbourne was 100 miles, 74 chains & 34 links (approx. 164.96 kms) via Heathcote Junction.

