
Tarwin River East Branch Railway Bridge



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Location

Beside South Gippsland Highway, near Tarwin,, TARWIN VIC 3956 - Property No B6952

Municipality

SOUTH GIPPSLAND SHIRE

Level of significance

State

Heritage Listing

National Trust

Statement of Significance

Last updated on - February 15, 2008

Built for the Great Southern Railway in 1892, the Tarwin River East Branch Bridge is scientifically, historically and aesthetically significant at State level.

It has the peculiar distinction of being, at 210 metres, the longest surviving timber railway bridge entirely built to the standard Victorian Railways 20-foot timber-beam-span design. This twenty feet (6.1 metre) span length was the longest used for Victorian Railways bridges built after 1880, and very few big timber river bridges having all their spans built to this length, now survive. The only comparable extant example of a river bridge built entirely to this design is the tall and spectacular Curdies River Bridge on the Camperdown-Timboon Railway (183 metres). Being among the most expensive engineering works on the then-uneconomic stretch of railway between Leongatha and Alberton, the Tarwin River railway bridges contributed significantly to the late-nineteenth-century reputation of the great Southern Line as a prime example of 'crazy' boom-era railway construction, and the supreme symbol of 'Octopus Acts' extravagance. The Tarwin River East Branch Bridge was the most expensive to construct of these allegedly 'extravagant' structures. Allegations of Great Southern Railway 'waste and

extravagance' gained notoriety through David Syme's Age Newspaper, which became embroiled in a legal and press vendetta with Victorian Railways Commissioners and used this railway in particular to ridicule Victoria's boom-era railway-construction policies.

Despite that early notoriety, the Tarwin Valley railway bridges served South East Gippsland very effectively for a century. Without the existence of these bridges, and the largest of them near Tarwin in particular, the agricultural development of fertile forest lands in South Gippsland would have been greatly retarded. They were of particular value to the ever expanding Victorian Railways system, because the line of which they were an essential component carried huge tonnages of superior rail-sleepers and timber-bridge materials from the extensive yellow stringy bark and bluegum forests of South Gippsland, for use across the State. The construction of this unusual series of timber bridges, and the line which they served, also meant the end of a long era of dependence on coastal shipping for the historic Port Albert-Alberton region of South Gippsland.

Aesthetically, the largest of Victoria's surviving twenty feet timber-beam-span rail bridges has a very impressive profile, and it is more easily viewed in its entirety from adjacent public roadway than are most other big railway bridges in this State.

The Tarwin River East Branch Bridge has only been out of regular use since 1992, which means that it is in better condition than others of its general type scattered around Victoria. Visually, it is the most spectacular individual surviving engineering relic from the historic Great Southern Railway, which did so much to convert great stretches of South Gippsland from trackless forest wilderness into fertile farm lands. It is also unusually accessible to the public, from the adjacent South Gippsland Highway. It is the largest and most impressive timber bridge to be found anywhere along the Great Southern Line.

Classified: 10/11/1998

Hermes Number 69628

Property Number

This place/object may be included in the Victorian Heritage Register pursuant to the Heritage Act 2017. Check the Victorian Heritage Database, selecting 'Heritage Victoria' as the place source.

For further details about Heritage Overlay places, contact the relevant local council or go to Planning Schemes Online <http://planningschemes.dpcd.vic.gov.au/>