
BEECHY RAIL TRAIL FIVE SPAN BRIDGE

Location

CHARLEYS CREEK ROAD GELLIBRAND, COLAC OTWAY SHIRE

Municipality

COLAC OTWAY SHIRE

Level of significance

Heritage Inventory Site

Heritage Inventory (HI) Number

H7621-0030

Heritage Listing

Victorian Heritage Inventory

Interpretation of Site

Fifteen bridges were constructed along the entire length of the Colac-Beech Forest-Crowes line. Houghton notes that earth filled embankments were preferred on economic and maintenance grounds, with timber bridges being only used in wet areas and over the more 'substantial watercourses and very steep gullies' (Houghlon 2012:14). The bridges were built to a standard VR narrow gauge design and were constructed from Northern Victorian and Gippsland timber. Although originally built from local timber, this was eventually found to be too soft and other timber was employed. The use of timber bridges was confined to the wettest areas, the steepest gullies and more substantial watercourses where earth fill was a liability.

Archaeological Significance

Medium potential to contain archaeological deposits.

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| Historical Significance | The timber bridge is of historic importance through its association with the Colac-Beech Forest- Crowes railway line that contributed to the settlement of the Otway region. |
| Hermes Number | 194687 |
| Property Number | |

History

Promoting settlement in the Otway Ranges

A series of land acts were passed in the 1860s in an attempt to create small farm holdings, whilst at the same time recognising the pioneering efforts of the squatters. Under the first land act, the 1860 Land Sales Act, three million acres were surveyed into allotments of between 80 to 640 acres. No person could select more than 640 acres annually, and the land had to be paid for outright, or half paid and half leased. Subsequently more land was made available for selection under the Land Act (J 862) and the 1865 Amendment Act. Then in 1869, most land - including unsurveyed land - became available for selection under the Land Act. (Sheehan, 2003: 19)

The Otway Ranges, in south west Victoria, were first opened to agricultural selection in 1884, under the *Land Act* 1884, when allotments were selected from pre survey maps prepared by the Lands Department (Minchinton 2011: 2). Within ten years more than 200 allotments had been taken up (Houghton 2005: 1). Yet it wasn't until the arrival of the railway, during the 1870s, that Victoria's isolated south western region was considered penetrable. Until this time, the Otway Ranges were virtually impassable and as such, were of little economic value. The introduction of the railway provided the first all weather, fast and reliable transport service into the area, which as Houghton noted was 'characterised by dense timber and high rainfall' (Houghton 2003: 5).

Narrow gauge railways

The role of the Colonial government in surveying the area in 1884 and 1889 was instrumental in the change from the design of a broad gauge to a narrow gauge railway, with the resulting decrease in cost. Although initially against the policy of the Victorian Railways, narrow gauge railways were eventually recommended for sparsely settled districts including Beech Forest (1902), Gembrook (1900) and Whitfield (1899) and Walhalla (1910), were eventually built as narrow gauge lines. The fourth line, initially recommended as narrow gauge was built as a broad gauge line at Warburton. The Beech Forest line, is therefore not the earliest nor the latest, but constructed at the peak of construction in the sparsely settled areas.

During the 1890s pressure rose to find the means to construct cheap railways to the underdeveloped parts of Victoria, as the government realised that the cost of providing communications to the outlying communities by means of railways was excessive for the small populations served. In 1894 the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Railways considered the use of narrow gauge railways. The idea was

opposed by the Victorian Railways (VR) in that it would introduce a non-standard operating regime, which would without doubt incur extra costs, especially when stock had to be transferred between the two gauges.

In 1895 the Committee recommended that narrow gauge lines be only introduced in sparsely settled areas. The first of the four narrow gauge lines, between Wangaratta and Whitfield opened in March 1899. It was followed by the Upper Ferntree Gully to Gembrook line in December 1900, the Colac to Beech Forest line in March 1902 and the Moe to Walhalla in May 1910. The Colac to Beech Forest line was extended to Crowes in June 1911 (see Houghton 2003:6 and Thompson 2004:2).

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/>