

## INTRODUCTION

# FERRY'S WILD RIDE

September 1884

Hello, my name is William Seth Ferry, known to my friends as Seth or just Ferry. I am a special guard with the South Australian Railways and based at Petersburg, which is about 150 miles north of Adelaide. It is a busy junction. There is the line from Adelaide. West from Petersburg there is a line that goes to Port Pirie. But most interesting of all is the line that goes north from Petersburg, all the way to Hergott Springs, a distance of 400 miles from Adelaide. This is the line that will eventually reach Port Darwin. And along that line is the junction of Quorn from whence a railway line runs to Port Augusta, through a tight ravine called Pichi Richi Pass.

My job at Petersburg involves shunting wagons in the station yard and attending to paperwork in the goods office. A lot of my time is spent on the telegraph. If there is a special train movement then I get to travel on that train.

This morning I am at the Adelaide Railway Station. I don't get to Adelaide very often. This is a very special train movement. It is Monday and the first rays of the sun are peeking over Mount Lofty. The Railways Department had put me up in a hotel opposite the railway station, but I had to be up at sparrow fart and report to the stationmaster at the Adelaide Railway Station.

The special train will be on the North line, its destination Carrieton.

The train consist is two sheep vans, a couple of goods vans, a second class carriage and a brake van. After walking down to the livestock loading end of the station, I meet the rest of the crew. The guard for this train is Wally, and in the engine, the driver Matthew Eyes, and Alfie the fireman. Normally this crew works the Terowie express.

Conversation is difficult for within the two sheep vans is an interesting consignment. Dogs. 200 of them, rounded up on the streets of Adelaide and about to be put into service with the Vermin Board which has been charged with the responsibility of rabbit eradication in the northern districts. Amongst the loading in the freight vans is a consignment of cotton waste and drums of carbon disulphide.

The train is additional to the usual express on the North line. Aboard the carriage are about 30 men who have been provided with swags and will make camp north of Carrieton. Their job is to manage the dogs which will chase the rabbits soaked in carbon disulphide will be stuffed down the hole.

We are awaiting the loading of the last consignment into the brake van. There are several tubs containing bones from Conrad's meat works in Hindley Street. The dogs are obviously getting the sniff of the bones, hence the noise.

My job on this train will be to look after the dogs and make sure they are well fed and watered during the journey and check on the condition of the dogs at each station.

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PORT AUGUSTA. *The Picturesque Atlas of Australasia.*

I can also travel in the engine or the brake van as I desire. I must admit that I find it an exhilarating experience when travelling on the North line out of Adelaide to be in the engine. It gives me an opportunity to make acquaintance with Matt and Alfie. I will be able to relax back in the brake van with Wally after we pass Riverton.

Gawler is our first stop and while the crew are taking water for the engine, I check the dogs. I must say they are a miserable assortment, the dregs of canine society. But there is one dog that seems a cut above the rest. Poking his snout through the railings of the sheep van he gives a mournful whine. I stroke his snout.

At Riverton the engine takes water. And waiting for us is Mrs Potter from the railway refreshment rooms with a pot of coffee. Bless you, Mrs Potter! It is a good thing that this train is running during the day because if it had been a night movement, the dogs would have woken all of Riverton.

There is still this one dog that pokes its snout out again. I wonder what is behind those golden staring eyes. I say to him "what are you doing mixed up with this rabble of mutts?" It's a funny thing but I have a feeling he knows what I am saying.

Back in the brakevan with Wally I think about dogs. I previously had dogs and had got to understand them. I talk a while with Wally about this dog in the sheep van. As dogs go, he is a youngster, maybe a poodle cross or a collie.

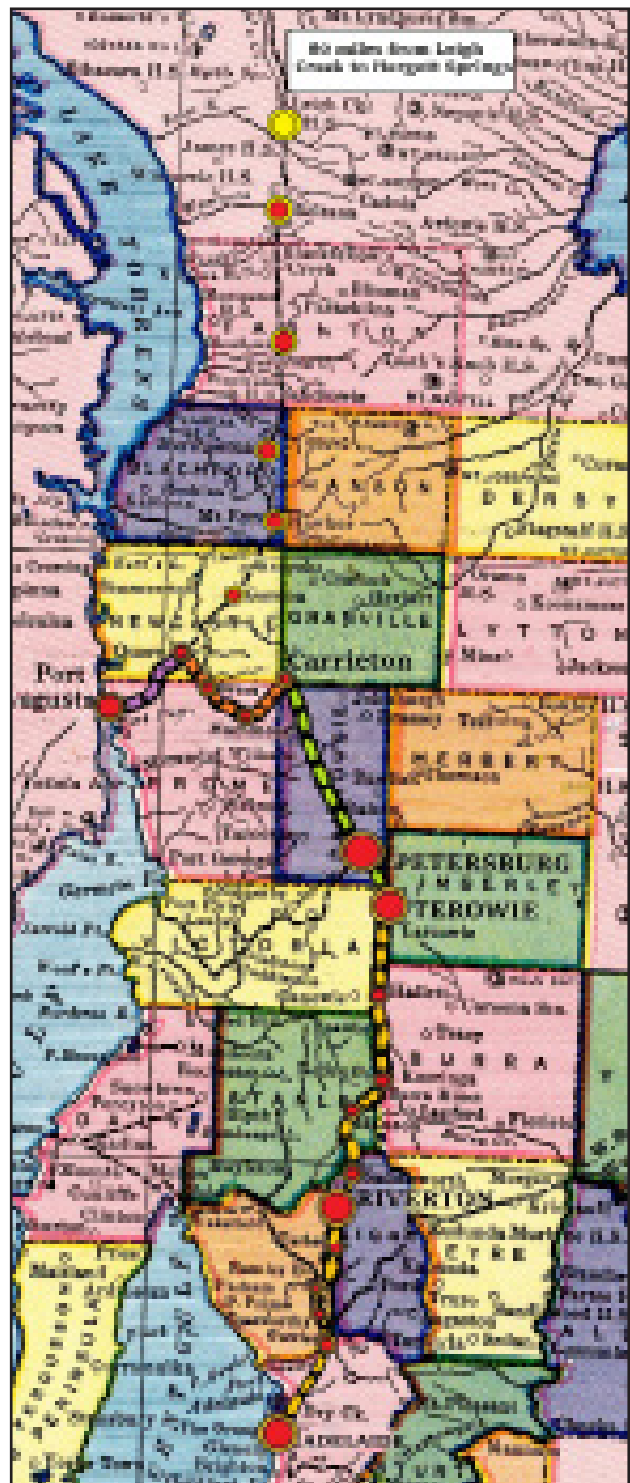
Wally says the normal practice with the Vermin Board, once the rabbits have been cleaned out, the dogs, being no longer needed, will be disposed of.

My skin prickles and I feel my heart reach out to the dog with the staring eyes and the mournful whine. I realise that I am forming an attachment.

At Carrieton we are greeted by a man from the Vermin Board and I immediately ask if I can buy the dog. Definitely not. It would upset the records that had to go back to Adelaide. He is sympathetic to my pleas but assures me his job would be on the line if the records were not in order.

Just when my heart is sinking into my boots, he comes up with a suggestion. Find another dog and he will do a swap. At first, I have that feeling of elation that comes with the realisation of a successful bid, however immediately a problem, a very large problem, comes to my realisation. All the dogs and the materials going north to the camp will soon be on the move. I have 24 hours to find a dog.

Port Augusta seems the best place to find a dog. The express to Port Augusta is only an hour behind our train. I will be in Port Augusta before dark. The Port Augusta stationmaster had initiated enquires in advance of my arrival. There was a problem dog in the town.



**THE PORT AUGUSTA RAILWAY.** From *The Picturesque Atlas of Australasia 1888*. Detail has been digitally applied to the map to show Ferry's journey. Adelaide to Terowie (broad gauge) yellow: Terowie to Carrieton (narrow gauge) lime green: Quorn to Carrieton, orange: Port Augusta to Quorn: lilac.

The publican at the Hannahville Hotel would have it manageable with some madeira, and the police would get it to the station in the morning.

The express out of Port Augusta is scheduled to depart at 5.48 am. If the dog couldn't be delivered to the station by then, a goods train departing at 6:15 am follows the express through Pichi Richi Pass.

The express will put me into Carrieton about 9.30 am. If I ride the goods train it would be a bit slower but would still have me into Carrieton before noon.

By 5:45 am, no police and no dog. The stationmaster is ringing the three-minute bell, so I am resigned to my fate that the police will honour their word and have the dog there by 6.15 am. Come 6.05 and no dog. I am getting a bit nervy.

But then the clip clop of the police van. The stuporose dog is loaded into the dog box in the brake van and we are away on schedule.

It is a Yankee engine and has six trucks to pull, which is not an onerous load for a Yankee. The Yankee engines have generally given good service since they were introduced in 1881.

This one is performing well as it tackles the grade through Saltia and Woolshed Flat. I know the engine crew well and they are happy to have me ride in the cab. It is a chilly morning and I am pleased to stand by the firebox and take in some of the heat.

As we approach the Summit, I notice the boiler pressure starting to drop and the Yankee getting slower. I know we are in trouble when the fireman starts swearing. The driver looks at me and shakes his head.

We come to a stop and the fireman shovels in more coal. My eyes are fixed on the pressure gauge and I can see the pressure building up. At the red line on the gauge, the fireman yells "hoorah". The engineman opens the throttle and we are away.

However, half a mile onwards the boiler pressure falls again. Stopping to allow more pressure build up, we have another go.

I reckon we are 3 miles short of the Summit. And so we stop and start and do it again and eventually we get to the top of the hill. From the Summit is an easy run downhill into Quorn. We are quite a bit behind time but I reckon that we still have a hope of getting to Carrieton if Quorn can give us a good engine.

It is usual for Quorn to have a pilot engine in steam most times, just to cater for this sort of situation.

We have come to a halt opposite the station building and the stationmaster walks out and shakes his head. A forlorn expression on his face predicates bad news. He walks over to our engine and says "I'm sorry Seth. We had some vans with perishables and they couldn't wait. We had to send the pilot engine out with them."

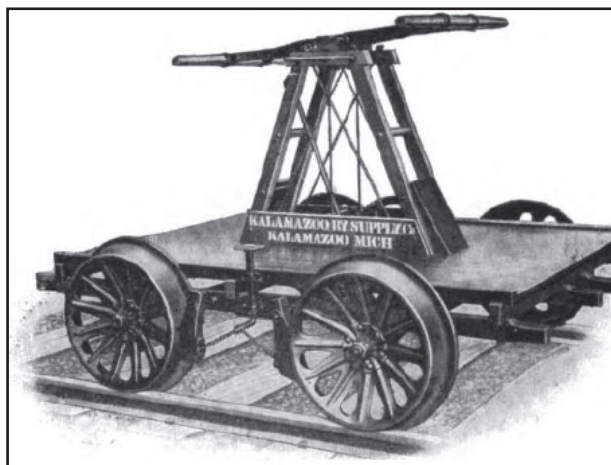
By this time most of the railway employees from Port Augusta down to Terowie knew that there was a race against the clock to arrive at Carrieton and get the dog.

They are even taking bets and running a book in the Railway Hotel and it seems that the odds they are wagering fluctuate by the hour.

The stationmaster points to a small four-wheel trolley down the track. "We have only had this Kalamazoo a couple of weeks. Came from America." I stare. Would the stationmaster risk it? "Seth, there is your only chance. It is 36 miles to Carrieton and most of it uphill. The running time for the express on that section is two hours. But I have to tell you that the general view of the railway workers here in Quorn is that it will take you four or five hours."

If I can do it in four hours I will get the dog, but if it takes five, I will lose the deal.

**THE KALAMAZOO** is the popular expression to describe a hand car or pump car. These trolleys were also known as 'Casey Jones' trolleys but that expression only became popular after Jones' death at the throttle of the *Cannonball Express* in 1900. The Kalamazoo Railway Supply Company was established in 1883. They were not the first or only manufacturer of these hand cars but the name seems to have caught on. One of the more memorable journeys by a Kalamazoo was the 'Hand Ghan' that travelled from Marree to Alice Springs in 1980, immediately after the last narrow gauge *Ghan*.



## Kalamazoo Hand Cars

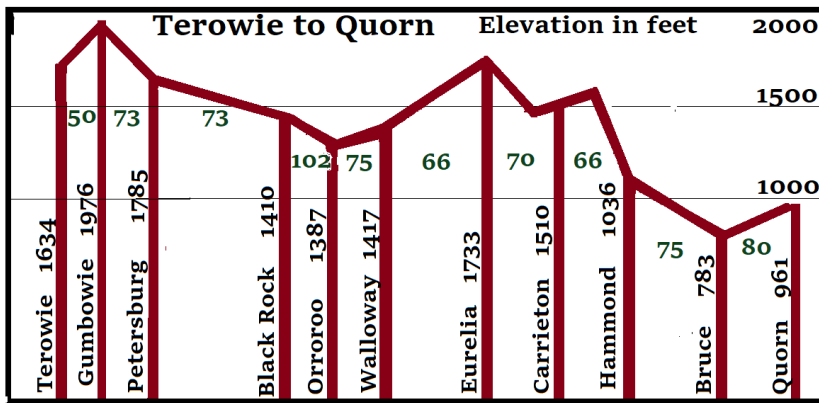
are equipped with the Kalamazoo Improved Reinforced Pressed Steel Wheel, giving 50 to 100 per cent greater wear than any other wheel of similar design or weight on the market. The car has stout gallews frame, thoroughly trussed, has taper wheel and pinion fits on axles, machine cut gears, flexible steady box and double acting brake.

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Supplies on Request

**Kalamazoo Railway Supply Co.**  
Kalamazoo, Mich.

Western Representative: Universal Railway Supply Co., Chicago





**GRADIENT DIAGRAM TEROWIE TO QUORN.**

The green numerals indicate the ruling gradient for each section. E.g. 66 refers to a gradient of 1 in 66. Note that the section from Terowie to Gumbowie is the steepest gradient 1 in 50. The highest elevation on the South Australian Railways was Belalie North (between Petersburg and Jamestown) 2024 feet. To put that in perspective the summit of the Hills Railway at Mount Lofty is 1613 feet. Ferry's climb from Bruce to Carrieton was comparable to the climb from Adelaide to Blackwood.

"Seth, every rail worker in Quorn and their families are barracking for you. I'm sending Mickey here with you. Mickey is one of the boilermakers and is also Quorn's star footballer. He's one hell of a muscle man and has volunteered to go with you. He reckons it won't be long before there are Kalamazoo races and he's keen to give it a go."

The refreshment room at Quorn loads a tucker box with some pies and flagons of water. They also throw in a few bones to keep the dog quiet. Mickey throws in a few of his personal effects. They also give us a small tarpaulin just in case.

After a mighty cheer from the entire Quorn railway workshops we set out - up down - up down - up down - up down.

We make good time on the downgrade from Quorn to Bruce. Here the stationmaster has set the points for us to take the main line. We give a wave to his hearty cheer as we highball through.

After Bruce the run to Carrieton is uphill. It is a 1 in 75 gradient. This is high country in South Australia's Mid North. Carrieton is 1510 feet above sea level. Quorn is 961. We had actually descended into Bruce which is 783 feet. It is a solid uphill climb until about 3 miles before Carrieton

As we head towards Hammond, we have a bit of good luck. A breeze had blown up that morning and we now have a tailwind. After we hook the tarpaulin as a sort of sail we get a bit of hurry up.

I am feeling as if I am in with a fighting chance. However, my optimism falls apart in the station yard at Hammond. The stationmaster greets us with the news that there is a problem giving us the 'line clear' to Carrieton.

"Seth, the down express from Adelaide is due into Carrieton at 4.40 pm. There is a group on board, a Parliamentary Select Committee, that is investigating the timetable and late running of the Port Augusta train. Now, the pickle before us is that I can give you a clear line to Carrieton but if the express from Adelaide gets there and you are still occupying the section, I can't give them the 'all clear' until you arrive at Carrieton."

"And if the express gets delayed those members of Parliament will have plenty to grumble about because they've been put behind because of a trolley and a dog."

This is not looking good. Not looking good at all. In fact, it is looking extremely bad. There is still quite a stretch of uphill and we have another 15 miles to go.

Whether it is my forlorn look or Mickey's painful moan, but quite suddenly the stationmaster changes his tune. "Seth, we're railway folk and railway family look after their kin. I'm going to give you the 'line clear' but you'll have to go like the clappers to make sure you get into Carrieton before the express is due to depart."

By this time I am starting to get a little bit weary, given all the 'up and down' effort climbing up the grade and the fact that I have been sleep deprived for the last couple of nights. Even the super athletic Mickey is puffing at times. The breeze has dropped so the tarpaulin is no use to us.

But still we push on to Carrieton, up down - up down - up down - but not as fast as we had been travelling when we had flown out of Quorn.

As we pass the 205 milepost we have another problem to deal with. The mutt is starting to get restless. He must have a hell of a headache after all that madeira. The last thing we want now is for him to jump overboard. Resourceful Mickey, who had put bits and pieces in the tucker box, pulls out a hip flask and pours some whiskey down the dog's throat.

When I glance at my watch I realise we still have a couple of miles to go before arriving at the top of the hill from where it would be down hill into Carrieton. I look at Mickey "We are not going to make it."

"We've got two problems to deal with now. There is the dog and there is the Parliamentary Select Committee. We've got no alternative. We have to push on," Mickey says.

To add to the sense of failure and misery as we approach Carrieton I visualise the scene of us rounding the last curve into Carrieton and looking straight at the face of the down express and its contingent of writhing parliamentarians.



And to add to my woes the wagons and the dog could be half way out to the camp.

But when we round that last curve and look at Carrieton - no express!

It suddenly dawns on me that the man from the Vermin Board had set the deadline to the time the express was due. Aboard that express would be his boss, the Chairman of the Vermin Board who had come north to inspect the camp. The last wagon to the camp could not depart Carrieton until the Chairman had arrived on the express.

I report to the stationmaster at Carrieton and declare "line now clear."

"We knew you could do it," the stationmaster says, with a huge smile. "But I'll let you into a little secret. The whole of the railway family at every station up from to Terowie had set a procession of little delays that held up the express this afternoon. That bought you just enough time to get in ahead of it."

Just then I hear an engine whistle. The express.

My weary legs and arms have just enough energy for me to rush back to the trolley. The man from the Vermin Board approaches, his hand circling a length of rope around the neck of the dog with the staring eyes. I give him the half-stuporose dog, then he unties the rope. I feel emotionally overwhelmed when my dog rushes towards me and licks my hand.

"I will call you Bob."

**SALTIA** at the entrance to Pichi Richi Pass. A hand coloured steel engraving image c1880 that had been originally published in the *Australasian Sketcher*. **STATE LIBRARY OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA B-71458**



VIEWS ON THE PORT AUGUSTA AND GOVERNMENT GUMS RAILWAY, SOUTH AUSTRALIA: No. 1, SALTIA TOWNSHIP.