



NEWSLETTER JUNE

2020

THE OVERLAND – A SOCIAL HISTORY

I am keeping the pre-publication price open for a few days beyond the 30 June cut-off, subject to the books not selling out. Price is \$65 plus postage (as applicable).

The book is selling well, and I expect it to sell out soon. There will be a reprint, with minor additions.

\$60 each IF ORDERING TWO BOOKS. There have been some customers who have wanted books in greater quantity. A further discount is provided for quantities – which will be quoted individually

www.sarlinesbooks.com.au



THE WESTBOUND OVERLAND PASSING THROUGH SERVICETON (AT SPEED), 11 FEBRUARY 2020.

When I embarked upon the Overland project late in 2018 the intention was to produce a social history. But as I delved into the past of the great train it became clear that various governments and commercial interests had contributed to the fall of the Express. I found myself adopting an advocate role for the retention of the train and a revitalisation of the service. Initially, the case for retaining the service

was not strong. The argument in its favour was largely one of fuel efficiency and the potential for a fast (130 kph) train that might offer an 8 hour journey time. SA Premier, Steven Marshall made clear that his Government would no longer provide a financial subsidy, and made the point that Journey Beyond was a profitable tourism business, and therefore his Government would not subsidise the Overland because it was a tourism operation.

In a way the Premier was right. South Australia had transferred its non-metropolitan lines and services to the Commonwealth in the mid-1970s. Unfortunately, the Commonwealth has let down South Australia. The Premier could rightly claim that the long-standing matter of the financial support had become a Federal issue. But Premier Marshall has wiped his hands of any involvement in the Overland service and cut off channels of communication, and that is where he has let South Australians down.

There is general agreement that the post-Covid-19 Australia is going to look a lot different.

I have become increasingly concerned about mixed messages coming from governments relating to the need for social distancing to halt the spread of coronavirus, and statements in support of public transport where social distancing was neither practical nor economical. What about interstate public transport? We were now being told by the national airline carrier that it is OK to cram 170 passengers into a 737.

My local member (for Newland) Richard Harvey has responded to my communications regarding the Overland and on 29 May, gave me a hearing of about 25 minutes. I sensed that he could understand the issues and was in general agreement. I presented him with a copy of the Overland book, of which I have a statutory obligation to lodge with the Parliamentary library. I indicated to him that I would like him to read it or (the relevant parts) and that the book then be shown to the Premier.

THE SERVICETON SUMMIT and the “FORCIBLE FOURSOME”



READING MY ADDRESS TO THE (VIRTUAL) MEETING AT THE (VIRTUAL) BORDER. IT WAS ACTUALLY TAKEN AT WOLSELEY, 6 KM FROM THE BORDER. IT HAS BEEN HEAVILY EDITED. WE DROVE FROM ADELAIDE JUST TO TAKE THE PICTURE OF THE SIGNPOST. DIDN'T SEE ANY TRAINS ON THE WHOLE TRIP, BUT FLUKED NR55 JUST AT THE RIGHT TIME.

We did a quick book launch on 23 May with Deb Tribe of ABC Adelaide radio, 891. Near the end of the session Deb asked me what I would do regarding the Overland if was Minister of Railways.

My reply was that I would gather up the various members of Parliament Vic/SA, Liberal/Labor, State and Federal, portfolios of health, transport and tourism. I then proceeded to explain that I would hold a forum at the Serviceton railway station, in the great dining hall, and a chalk line drawn across the floor would separate the two States.

On 19 June it happened although not quite as I imagined.

In the meantime, I had been fortunate enough to join forces with three like-minded movers. On the morning of the Summit I had a phone call from an ABC reporter. In discussion I stated, quite spontaneously, that we had become a “forcible foursome”. The journalist evidently liked that!

The others were:

Mark Radford, Mayor of the Rural City of Horsham.

Margaret Millington OAM of Nhill,

Councillor Mat O'Brien of Murray Bridge

This became known as the Serviceton Summit and was an online meeting, conducted on Friday 19 June. The proceedings are in the form of a video. The link is embedded in the e-mail.

A few comments about the Summit.

The video clip is 55 minutes.

It was assembled by Mayor Mark Radford of the Rural City of Horsham.

The message to emerge from the Summit was that there are four parties have some ownership of the Overland problem:-Victoria, South Australia, The Commonwealth, and Journey Beyond. It has urged those who are concerned to contact their local Member of Parliament but to do so in a constructive and civilised manner.

The present state of the parties is.

SOUTH AUSTRALIA: will not contribute financially, and appears to have severed the relevant channels of communication with Victoria and Journey Beyond. Presently the border with Victoria is closed and whilst its re-opening has been tentatively scheduled for 20 July, this is not certain as there has been an apparent second spike of infections.

VICTORIA: up to now has provided financial subsidy but for closed periods. The uncertainty of the short term arrangements and the inability to plan journeys well in advance has impacted negatively. When Great Southern Railway purchased the Overland in 1997 the service was operating 7 days per week in both directions. It is now doing two per week. The train has not operated since 24 March when the border was closed. Victoria has provided funding to keep the service “running” to 30 June. It is believed that Journey Beyond has considerable fixed costs, such

as leasing, storage, rent, insurance etc. even if the train is not running. The Victorian Government is presently in a crisis, and

JOURNEY BEYOND: Have not promoted the train to the same degree as the Indian Pacific or the Ghan. They have a Public Relations division, but will not communicate. They would have us book on The Ghan and Indian Pacific but do not encourage us to do business with them.

THE COMMONWEALTH; No sooner than the “ink was dry” the situation was overtaken by a crisis in the Andrews Government and a spike in the new cases of COVID-19.

FEDERATION’S GREAT FAILURE

I had previously advised that the next book will be about Australia’s muddled railway gauges. In fact, it will be more than that. My initial thinking was that the title would be FEDERATION’S FAILURE, but as I have done been doing more research it has changed to FEDERATION’S GREAT FAILURE. The fathers of Federation could not agree on the federation of the State railway systems. Looking back more than 100 years the failure to bring all non-metropolitan railways under one administration

AND A COMPANION VOLUME TO *THE OVERLAND* – A SOCIAL HISTORY

It will be a book of folklore and anecdotes about the great express as told by engine crews, train staff, station masters, passengers, and anyone who has a tale to tell. I shall weave into these stories, items of documented history and facts. I have set out a number of chapters already.

The Serviceton collision. I had been led to believe that the Victorian Railways Board of Inquiry report had been destroyed. It is very much alive, and I shall be looking at it.

There will be a chapter that deals with the period from late 2018 to 2020 (and mercifully not beyond that) during which *The Overland* has been subject to an uncertain fate.

And another chapter that looks at the effect that had on the communities of western Victoria, that were subject to high hopes, only to have them dashed, and then more high hopes, and again and again.

There must be a chapter about the coronavirus.

The botched standard gauge conversion of 1995.

I will be looking for contributions, both anecdotes and photographs. And the title of this book? I have had a delightful letter from Michael Hinch, who was a driver and instructor for V/Line for many years, who advised that the express was often known amongst railway folk as “**The Grand Old Lady Of The West**”. That will be the title of the next Overland book.



GLEN HADDEN’S IMPRESSION OF THE OVERLAND OF THE FUTURE AT SERVICETON

THANKYOU JOHN WILSON

