



NEWSLETTER OCTOBER 2020

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THE OVERLAND – A SOCIAL HISTORY - SOLD OUT.

We printed 600 copies. They have all sold. I am contemplating a reprint but in these uncertain times it is difficult to put a figure on the quantity to print. About 40% of the books had gone to Victoria, and we are waiting for the trading situation in Melbourne to recover.

BOB THE RAILWAY DOG – THE MOVIE

We believe that Bob's story would make a great movie, and there have been many who have read **BOB'S RAILWAY**, who have voiced a similar opinion. It would make a good clean family entertainment. It could promote South Australia and its heritage railways. Bob's story is without equal in the whole world, and would be a great magnet for tourism.

We have been told that BOB'S story "ticks all the boxes".

We have been talking to some people in the film industry, and the wheels are moving slowly.

FEDERATION'S GREAT FAILURE.

This book is about the failure by the Fathers of Federation to achieve a national railway network. It goes a long way to explaining the present gauge predicament, but there have been other problems that have left us with inefficiencies. I had aimed to release this book in the Spring of 2021. I have done considerable work on this book, but it has required considerable time in libraries, which have been closed. I am now aiming to release this book in Spring 2022.

The sunrise stop at Marla





ALICE SPRINGS

THE GRAND OLD LADY OF THE WEST

It had originally been intended for this book to be a collection of stories about *The Overland*, drawn from a diversity of sources including engine crews and passengers. Effectively a folklore. When I published *The Overland – A Social History* in May, the intention was that it would serve as the definitive history of the Express, but there have been some significant subsequent events that demand attention. I had anticipated having this book released in the Spring of 2021 but it was going to require some trips to Victoria to interview people and access libraries and collections. The extended border restrictions have put that plan in the “slow lane”. I expect that *The Grand Old Lady of the West* will happen in about 2 or 3 years as a second edition of the present *Overland* book.

THE SERVICETON SUMMIT

The “Serviceton Summit” was an on-line (virtual) conference on 19 June at which I presented historical material in support of saving *The Overland*. The “Summit” had its origins in a radio interview that I did with Deb Tribe of ABC 891, regarding release of the book on *The Overland*. The interview then touched on the matter of the future of *The Overland* and the hypothetical question of what I would do if I were the “Minister of Railways”. My response was that I would convene a gathering of both States, and both major political parties to meet at the border station, Serviceton, and draw a chalk line across the floor of the large dining hall, thus creating a border, keeping the Victorians on their side, and the South Australians on the other. And we would thrash it out. There were four of us who put this together: Mark Radford, Mayor of Horsham; Margaret Millington of Nhill, who has been working long and hard to save *The Overland*, and Councillor Mat O’Brien of Murray Bridge, who has long held the view that there is unrealised potential for developing tourism activities. It didn’t quite happen as I had initially imagined. Mark Radford had the right connections to move forward with an online virtual Serviceton Summit, complete with a virtual chalk line. Considering what has happened since, I suggest having a look at it if you have not already done so. Google “Serviceton Summit” – the video is 55 minutes.

Funding for *The Overland* (by the Victorian Government) was due to expire on 30 June, and the absence of any statement as we neared that date was unsettling. The outcome of the “Serviceton Summit” had been to seek an extension of funding for 6 months, during which time there would be a serious appraisal of the future of the service. We agreed that we had given it our “best go”. With only days to go there was a shuffle of portfolios in the Victorian Government

On the morning of 30 June, The Victorian Government announced that it had reached agreement with Journey Beyond to fund *The Overland* for three years.

On 2 July, Mark Radford set up the FACEBOOK page THE FRIENDS OF THE OVERLAND. Apart from a Facebook page this “group” has no existence. It is not a “lobby group” but an informal think-tank of ideas to support *The Overland*. I invite you to have a look at the page and join if you wish.

There had been some feedback from sources within the Victorian Government that the “Serviceton Summit” and the timely publication of *The Overland- A Social History* were significant factors in the decision to provide funding. In mid-September, Mark Radford received a letter from Minister Ben Carroll, who appears to have been the one who made that decision about *The Overland*, only days after he took office. I quote from that letter:

I appreciate the advocacy of the local community for the continuation of the Overland service and thank you for your support. The information that you provided from the Serviceton Summit of 19 June 2020 highlighted the importance of the issue.

It proves that politicians really do listen to what the people say, but to really make it work, the message needs to be well presented.

Within days we were to face the reality that Victoria had entered the dreaded “second wave” of COVID-19 pandemic.

Throughout all of this, Journey Beyond, the operator of *The Overland* has been fairly silent. They are a company that has invested heavily in tourism enterprises, which have been shut down since late March. Back in July, they announced the resumption of *The Overland* on 14 September, but that has proved to have been premature. Their website presently mentions 2 November, but I fear that is optimistic. Meanwhile Journey Beyond have taken advantage of the NT and SA border being open, and scheduled a resumption of *The Ghan* from 30 August. If we want to save *The Overland*, we also have to save Journey Beyond. Historically *The Ghan* and the *Indian Pacific* have had significant international patronage. That will be out for at least a year. It will be months before there will be significant numbers of Victorians aboard *The Ghan*.

Accordingly, we felt that to show our support for *The Overland*, we needed to support Journey Beyond, and booked ourselves on *The Ghan* to Darwin and back.

The present situation regarding *The Overland* is that it must await the re-opening of the border. A resumption of the service may not occur until the new year. I intend to be aboard the first journey and will be working hard to encourage others to use it. We have to get more people using *The Overland*

THE GHAN POEM

The Ghan which departed Adelaide 30 August was a fairly historic occasion, which we felt needed something special and accordingly were poetically inspired. The poem is entitled *The Grand Old Lady the North*, and acknowledges *The Grand Old Lady of the West*, *The Overland*, as a respected sibling. It is the other PDF file attached to this e-mail.

It has been a source of ongoing annoyance that the how, when, why, where, and who associated with the origin of *The Ghan* name has been subject to some official obliteration that dates back to the Commonwealth Railways in the 1960s, and the masses have been fed the simple story that the name is derived from the Afghans and their camels that once provided the transport in the outback. That is true, but the story of how it came about is even more fascinating. I am digging into this and have accumulated quite a lot of supporting evidence. The important issue is that it happened on 30/31 August 1923, which means that *The Ghan*, as a name, is approaching its centenary, and deserves some celebration.

The outcome is a book about *The Ghan*, to be released in the Spring of 2021, which will be a social history, similar to *The Overland* book. There have been many books that have been written about *The Ghan*, and readers may well ask why we need another. I am in no doubt.

NATIONAL RAILWAY MUSEUM

On 29 August I attended a small social gathering at the invite of the Board of the National Railway Museum and was honoured and somewhat humbled to be awarded Life Membership.



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT. Arrival of *The Ghan* at Darwin. The “Queen Adelaide” dining car. At Manguri, *The Ghan* stops for a few hours while passengers head off for a tour of Coober Pedy and the Breakaways. This presents an opportunity to photograph the train. Tegan looked after us in the dining car. The COVID arrangements have a limit of 14 persons in the car at any time.

AMY’S QUEST

Patricia (Pat), has been chipping away at her own book for a few years - well before I embarked on the Sarlines series. It is mystery fiction for the early teenage reader. It is now printed

We will be distributing these books through the Sarlines Books website. The website will be upgraded in the next few weeks to accommodate the change. *Amy’s Quest* is the story of a thirteen-year old girl from a dysfunctional family, for whom life is a succession of dramas. But the biggest drama unfolds when she travelled from Melbourne to Adelaide on *The Overland* (when it was a night train).

We are eager to send out some complimentary copies to established customers, who have children/ grandchildren/neighbours in the 10-13 age group, who may be coaxed into writing a page or thereabouts, which we could put on the website. Please reply by e-mail with a delivery address. Obviously, there is a limit on the number of these complimentary copies, so be quick.

John (and Patricia) Wilson

