



ADELAIDE PARKLANDS TERMINAL. NR75 & NR74 with 23 cars, 30 August 2020.

SOME EXPLANATORY NOTES:

31 August was the date in 1923, when one legend has it that the name of *THE GHAN* began. If we are to accept that, the arrival of *THE GHAN* on 31 August 2020 was on her 97th birthday.

MALUKA – about 2003, when the Darwin railway neared completion, the NT Administration sought input from the community, regarding the name of the train to Darwin. The *Maluka* was a character from Jeannie Gunn’s classic *We of the Never Never*.

MOUNT REMARKABLE – in the Southern Flinders Ranges – The schedule had the *THE GHAN* occupy the crossing loop at Mambray Creek for about 50 minutes, where we waited for the sun to peek over the mountain.

THANKYOU

JOHN WILSON

6 SEPTEMBER 2020

**THE EPIC OF
*THE RETURN OF THE GRAND
OLD LADY OF THE NORTH***

Written aboard the journey of *THE GHAN* that departed Adelaide on 30 August 2020. This was the first journey for *THE GHAN* after being “grounded” for about five months due to the pandemic. Some assistance with these verses was provided by other passengers. Crew and passengers became sounding boards.

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Much of the inspiration for the verses came from looking out the windows.

The origin of the title recognizes “THE GRAND OLD LADY OF THE WEST” which could be regarded as *THE GHAN*’s older sibling, “THE OVERLAND”. It was a nickname coined by the Ararat crews about the 1940s and 1950s.

The poem was initially intended to be a 5 or 6 verse opus, but has ended as a 19 verse epic.

On the morning of 5 September, a singing version was produced in the Outback Explorer lounge car when approaching Adelaide, somewhere between Snowtown and Mallala, using verses 1, 2, 3, and 19, to the tune of the *RABBIT TRAPPER*.



Layla



Gold Class Lounge car.

VERSE 1

There's a tough old outback hero
 That the COVID tried to claim;
 Short years shy of her century
 Virus thought her easy game,
 But years of desert hardening
 Had forged her nerves of steel
 And made her out of sterner stuff
 Than any germ could keel.

2.
 More ninety years of floods and drought
 Never stopped her in her tracks.
 When war arrived, she stood her post
 For the soldiers and their packs.
 Her minders in the states down south
 Declared their borders closed.
 Some said it was the end for her,
 The risk pandemic posed.

3.
 Staring down a bloody microbe
 That thought it had its prize;
 No midget micro-organism
 Could wreck a force her size.
 From gloomy south she sallied forth,
 And whistling all the way,
 She headed north in earnest
 Where it's sunshine every day.

4.
 'Twas sunrise out at Marla
 On a rugged gibber plain;
 Said the fearless early-risers,
 As she neared NT again
 Passing ochre-coloured ranges
 And stunted ghostly trees.
 For quids they'd not have missed it,
 Despite the desert freeze.

5.
 On the day of August 31
 She neared old Alice town.
 The folk were there to greet her,
 Too long they'd been worn down.
 Five months they were a yearning
 And saved up their hooray.
 Her arrival at the Centre
 Would be her special day.

Sophie





Marla before sunrise, 31 August.

6.

Trekking past unlabelled gullies
Strewn with boulders from eons past;
Two mighty horses, strong and red
Through ancient landscape blast.
When darkness soon descended
And stole away the light.
The moon was full that evening
And mystified the night.

7.

'Twas a vista full of emptiness
Which stirred up many dreams
The stars they gave her energy
There was magic in their beams.
Her thoughts were with the dreamtime,
Desert folklore, myths, and rhyme.
Of coloured birds and eagles,
Aloft on wings sublime.

8.

She recalled the quest of Stuart
Twice failed, then victory grand,
Of Todd who had a vision
Of a single iron strand.
Then Jeannie's "Never Never"
And her legendary boss;
The celebrated one, Maluka,
The train that never was.

9.

Half hidden in the haze next morn,
Were eerie alien shapes,
When at last their forms came clear
Like gnomes with flowing capes,
Were stumpy little termite mounds.
Then moving northward on the plan,
Those little gnomes got bigger
And were taller than a man.

10.

Rows and rows of mango trees
Approaching Katherine town,
A place of many contrasts.
A Gorge of world renown,
With cathedrals on cliff faces
Carved by serpents long ago,
Of stunning paint-box colours
Putting on a splendid show.

Pat Wilson





The Breakaways near Coober Pedy.

11.

Thoughts of people down in cites
 Within borders down the south,
 Buying rolls and rolls of paper
 And masks that hide their mouth.
 Did the COVID have a conscience?
 Maybe too, it had a heart?
 It left alone this special land,
 The ancient sacred part.

12.

Their arrival at the top end
 Was greeted with joy and cheers.
 It was almost if she'd been away
 For years and years and years.
 Some feasted at the waterfront
 On seafood, wine, and beer,
 And texts were sent to those at home
 "Truly wishing you could be here".

13.

Her mission was to journey on,
 With the speed of Journey Beyond.
 The jolly troupe she had in tow
 Had purposes to respond.
 Some to go back south with her,
 Others destined for east or west.
 She was focused on the task and foe
 And giving it her best.

14

On the second night from Darwin
 Al fresco at Todd's HQ,
 A short way out from Alice,
 Where they turned on quite a do.
 Above them were a million stars. ,
 Planets, zodiacs to define.
 Below, the merriment and song
 Dancing, music, and flowing wine.

15

Her return to South Australia
 Did colonial memories evoke
 Of gangs of pick and shovel men,
 Railway-building folk.
 It filled her head with history,
 Our famous grand old dame.
 At the railhead, Oodnadatta,
 Legend said she got her name.

Al Fresco at the Telegraph Station 3 September



16

Red sand and flat horizon
Greeted them next morn
But of the land that was ahead
Was no hint, nor did not warn
Of beauty not above the ground
But hidden well below
Vivid colours to reveal
From ancient rocks did glow.

17

Homeward Ho! The final dash!
With emotions blithe and sad
And bursting into rhyme and song,
All on board were really glad.
The sunrise over the Mount that day
Remarkable – joy beholding
Shadows over ancient rocks
Convolutd and unfolding.

18

The engine crew that came along
Were deft at revs and brakes
And all the other front-end skills
That smoother running takes.
The minders of the ones behind,
Exemplary in their task
With food and drink and service
Responding to any ask.

19

Of the one we sing the praises
And longevity we hail
A gleaming streak of silver steel,
The Madame of the rail
Is known by all who love her,
Pioneer through special land
Her future that we all revere,
THE GHAN, enduring and so grand.



“THE GHAN SINGERS”
(nearest camera) Pat
Wilson (Percussion)
and Andrew Geddes
(Vocal) on 5 September.