



NEWSLETTER July 2021

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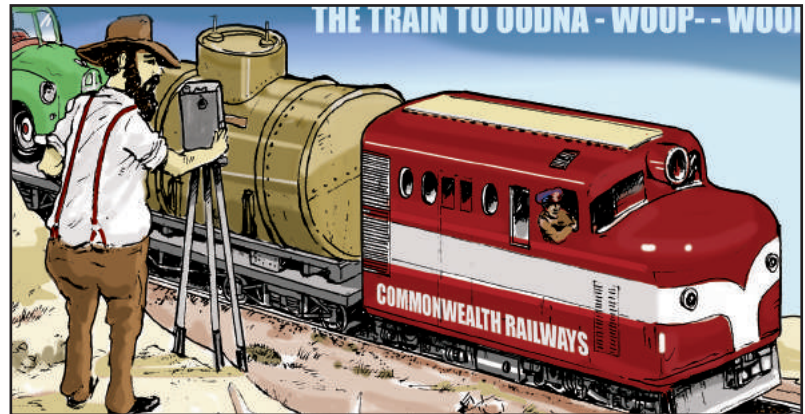
We are now nearly a year and a half into this COVID crisis. *The Overland* has been 'on and off' for six months. It has now not operated for some weeks. On 22 June, the *Indian Pacific* came back empty from Sydney. On the same day those passengers on *The Ghan* who had been in greater Sydney in the last two weeks were whisked off to quarantine hotels. *The Ghan* that was due to depart Adelaide on 27 June didn't. My new book is about *The Ghan*. Within the text I describe it as a 'scallywag of a train'. You may well ask if a serious social history can be compatible with the following title:

THE TRAIN TO OODNA-WOOP-WOOP

A social history of *The Afghan Express*

The introduction is a couple of pages entitled 'A Story of Many Smiths', and it was a fluke of history that so many Smiths have had a finger in the pie. Des Smith is a former Chief Civil Engineer with the Commonwealth Railways and lives in retirement in Adelaide.

I have spent considerable time with Des in recent months. He has an inventory of wisdom spanning all aspects of *The Ghan* and the operations of the Commonwealth Railways. He was the man on the ground who had charge of the construction of the Tarcoola to Alice Springs Railway. When that was done, he selected the route to Darwin and put in most of the centre pegs.



One of his pearls of wisdom was that *The Ghan* was the only train mentioned in the Bible. He then proceeded to quote 'things that slowly creepeth upon the face of the Earth'. Another observation was that in the old days, when *The Ghan* went via Oodnadatta, there was a bonus for travellers who bought a ticket. Des remarked that they stood a good chance of having a ride on an aeroplane, such was the likelihood of the train being stranded by floods. It seems now that if you buy a ticket on *The Ghan*, you have a good chance of spending a couple of weeks in a quarantine hotel, and not at a place of your choice.



The Afghan who rode the sleeping car of the Oodnadatta Express on 30 Aug 1923.. Art - Pencils by Glen Hadden.

The Ghan is Australia's oldest surviving named train and if it can hang in there for a couple more years, we can celebrate its Centenary in 2023.

So, here we have the latest book in the Sarlines Railway Books imprint, which is a social history of *The Ghan*, or more correctly, the *Afghan Express* as it was originally known. The book went to the printer on 24th June. As with previous books it will be of A4 format, hardcover and extensively illustrated with colour and 'jam-packed' full of information.

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Previous books in the Sarlines series have not had a Foreword but when I discovered that Mark Butler had a family connection with one of the many Smiths he was the logical person to write some introductory words. He will also officiate at the book launch at the National Railway Museum on 14 August.

I have kept the price of this book the same as previous publications the recommended retail price is \$78. The website is now open for pre-publication orders for \$65 for a closed period. I ask you to consider any friends or relatives who may also wish to purchase a copy or are deemed worthy recipients at Christmas or birthday. Further discounts are offered for multiple copies.

John Wilson www.sarlinesbooks.com.au



Artwork by Greg Judd, who also did the colour piece on the first page.

A SYNOPSIS

- 3 **Foreword by Mark Butler MP Federal Member for Hindmarsh.** Mark has connections with railways, both past, present and future.
- 4 **The view from the brakevan** - where we've been and where we're going.
- 9 **The Train to Oodna-woop-woop** On 16 November 1922, Chief Commissioner W A Webb arrived in Adelaide on the Melbourne Express. He was an American who had been engaged by the Barwell Government to overhaul a run-down South Australian Railways. He asked 'where is the end of the system?' 'Oodnadatta' was the reply. 'Well', said Webb, 'we leave on the next train to Oodnadatta'.
- 12 **A story of many Smiths** For more than half a century people have been fed a manufactured history about the origin of the name of *The Ghan*.
- 14 **A G (George) Williams** The Quorn engineman who was on duty on the night of 30 August 1923.
- 15 **Whither *The Ghan*?** The research and writing of this story has been conducted in the middle of a global pandemic.
- 18 **Finding Ernie Smith** The Afghans and their camels provided transport beyond the railways. But the Commonwealth Railways banned them from some trains. When a sleeping car was provided for the fortnightly Oodnadatta express in 1923 there was only one Afghan aboard. Ernie Smith was the Quorn engineman who quipped 'We'll have to call it the Afghan express'. This chapter examines the evidence and tells how Pam McAllister found the family of Ernie Smith.
- 31 **The railway gauge** The Oodnadatta line was extended to Alice Springs. To get there from Adelaide involved one break-of-gauge (at Terowie). In 1957 they added another break-of-gauge (Marree). There are six pages of selected newspaper items from 1845 to 1867 that shed light on how this gauge muddle in Australia came about.
- 45 **The Comical Railway** South Australia, in the 19th century, was deluded in thinking it had a birthright to the Northern Territory. It was also deluded in the belief that it could build and operate a railway from Adelaide to Port Darwin. It was a railway that should never have been attempted. It was a comedy of errors.
- 56 **The steam locomotive is a curious beast** Efficient operation of a steam locomotive calls for good coal and good water. The line to Oodnadatta/Alice Springs had neither.
- 61 **Bob (the railway dog)** Bob lived from about 1884 to 1895. He was a compulsive train traveller in SA, Vic and NSW. The railway to Hergott Springs (now Marree) was his favorite haunt. There have been other railway dogs in the world but Bob and his recorded adventures are without peer.
- 64 **1901 and all that** With Federation came the opportunity for South Australia to offload the Northern Territory (and the two lame-duck railways that were the failed attempt to build the Transcontinental railway). There is a year-by-year listing, from 1901 to 1939, of the negotiations and attempts to get that railway built.
- 72 **Puggaree Jack** The opening of the railway to Alice Springs. This railway was all about saving lives. But it was two weeks too late for Puggaree Jack.

- 74 **The Ghost Train** If the Darwin railway had been built in the age of steam it would have been a dismal failure. Coal and water would have to be carried great distances. It is postulated that a train from Port Augusta could probably get to Barrow Creek, where it would find neither coal nor water and could not return.
- 80 **Dining à la Ghan** The dining car was an essential part of *The Ghan*.
- 87 **Harold Clapp's 'Reso' Train** Victoria's Harold Clapp spearheaded Central Australia's tourism in July 1927.
- 93 **The direct railway to Port Augusta** The Commonwealth and the State of South Australia were at loggerheads for more than 20 years.
- 100 **The Maluka** The train that never was.
- 102 **Going Legless** Historically, the railways provided a social service but increasingly came under pressure to contain expenditure. There was an unwritten edict within Australian National that it did not see a future in carrying anything with legs - livestock, passengers and tables & chairs.
- 105 **Floods** The Finke and the Alberga caused the greatest havoc. The floods of 1967 and 1974 dictated that a new line be built to the west to avoid the worst of the floods.
- 108 **The changing face of *The Ghan*** Different carriages and locomotives showing *The Ghan* at different times of its evolution. The photo captions tell the story.
- 114 **Marree** The spiritual home of *The Ghan*. Half of the town's population at one stage was of Afghan descent. The town had an Afghan mosque and the adjacent quarter was called Ghan Town.

APPENDICES

- 120 **A Chronology** of major events.
- 129 **B Timetables** 18 pages that itemise the changes to the schedules and the reasons for those changes.
- 148 **C Place Names** and other locality information.
- 157 **D Linear map** Port Augusta to Oodnadatta.
- 158 **E The COVID (-19) diary.** On page 15, I outlined the damage done to interstate travel by the COVID-19 pandemic. This is a weekly diary from 1 November that records the ups and downs of the pandemic and its effects on interstate travel.
- 164 **F A 1942 Journey** on *The Ghan* that arrived on time but two days late.
- 166 **G Water resources** on the Central Australia Railway.
- 167 **H George Williams statement.** Typed on the clunky old typewriter. George tells his version of the naming of *The Ghan*.
- 169 **I Ted Smith's 1954 article** in *The News* about the last steam hauled *Ghan*.
- 171 **J George Williams** Notes about narrow gauge steam.
- 172 **K Incidents and accidents**
- 173 **Bibliography**