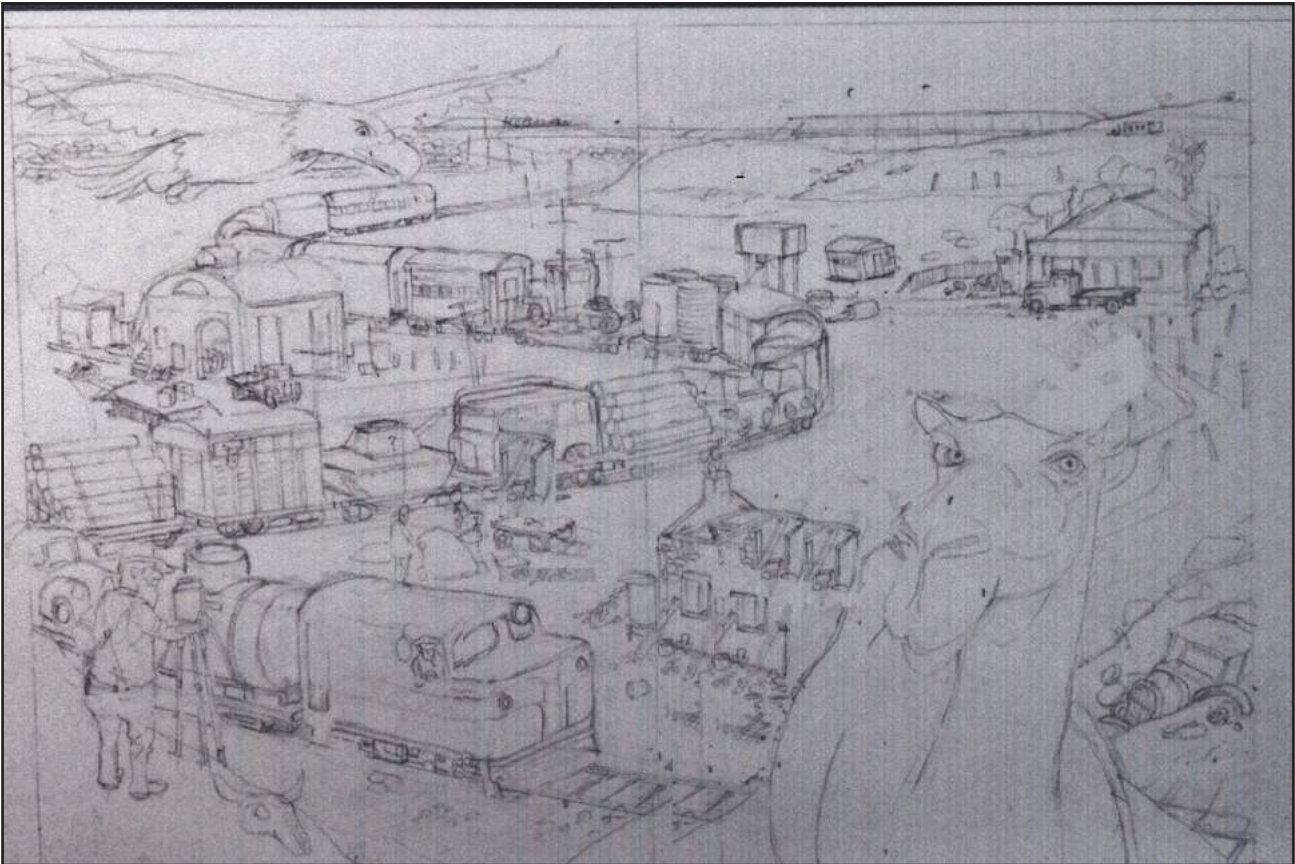


## A SYNOPSIS of a book that doesn't yet have a title.

My next book will be a social history of *The Ghan*. It will be of similar presentation to previous publications. A4 format, hard cover, about 200 pages extensively illustrated.



This synopsis is correct as at 25 March. It is probable that there will be some changes to the contents as we get closer to publication. The present plan is for the book to be released on 14 August at the National Railway Museum. There are two parts to this book. Part one is the story. It contains stories within the main story. Part two is a random assortment of items, almost like the consist of *The Ghan* itself.

The artwork for the front cover was done by Glen Hadden. Like the the content the book it is presently about 90% done.

It is a \*driver's view from the cab of the Y class engine of the "Oodnadatta Express" at Quorn. It is on the night of 30 August 1923. The express from Terowie has arrived and there have been passengers change into the carriages of the Oodnadatta train. But the special interest in this particular train is that for the first time it included a sleeping car. There is only one passenger for the sleeping car.

The gathering of railwaymen under the station verandah are observing from a distance. They don't know it, but they have just coined a name for a train that will endure for another hundred years or thereabouts, and will become one of the most famous trains in the world.

The front "end-paper" is a double page spread by Greg Judd. In any other railway book it would probably be anathema to resort to a cartoon, but not with *The Ghan*. The image presented here is Greg's preliminary "rough".

JOHN WILSON 30 March 2021.

**\* The driver's side in the Y class was the opposite to the usual SAR position.**



# PART ONE

**IN MY PREVIOUS BOOKS I HAVE HAD AN INTRODUCTION THAT I HAVE CALLED A “MISSION STATEMENT”**

**In this book I have replaced it with “THE STORY OF MANY SMITHS”.** – I describe *The Ghan* as a “delightful scallywag of a train”.

**FINDING ERNIE SMITH.** There has been controversy about the origin of the name of *The Ghan*, and how and when it happened. In fact, it was in 1923, and not 1929, as we have been used to hearing. That raises the question about the centenary, which is much closer than we had previously been taught. Ernie Smith was an engineman at Quorn who made a casual comment about calling the train the “Afghan express”. It would not be incorrect to say that in the 1920s the Afghan cameleers were treated as “second-class citizens” and Ernie’s derisory comment was made at a time when the Commonwealth Railways had banned the Afghans from travelling on some of their trains. I have made contact with Ernie’s family and together we are pooling resources to compile a short biography. Whether that biography appears in the book will be a decision that rests with Ernie’s family. There is an extensive listing of references that support the Ernie Smith version of history.

**WHITHER THE GHAN.** Examines the present economic and pandemic situation and poses the question of whether *The Ghan* will survive. This section is to be read in conjunction with an Appendix item which is effectively a weekly diary of the COVID-19 and its impact on travel from November 2020 into the first half of 2021.

**THE COMICAL RAILWAYS** One needed a sense of humour to ride *The Ghan*. Comparisons are made with Peter Sellers, St Trinians and the comic operas of G & S. This chapter also examines the parliamentary antics regarding the early years (up to 1890s) of the Ghan’s railway (the Oodnadatta Express) which provide additional hilarity. The Alice Springs railway was a “comedy of errors”.

**1901 AND ALL THAT** We, (or most of us) know that in 1910 there was an agreement between the Commonwealth and South Australia that the former would complete the railway between Oodnadatta and Pine Creek (in the NT). The deal was done between Prime Minister Alfred Deakin, and Tom Price who was SA Premier. The non-delivery by the Commonwealth was the source of much angst, and resulted in 50 years of soured Commonwealth – State relations.

**OLD WARS AND NEW ENEMIES.** A sort of year by year look at the fortunes, misfortunes, etc. from the 1930s.

**THE RAILWAY GAUGE** Australia has got itself into a right pickle with its railway gauges. I present comments regarding the impact of gauge on *The Ghan*.

**THE DEVELOPMENT OF TOURISM IN CENTRAL AUSTRALIA.**

**THE STEAM LOCOMOTIVE IS A CURIOUS BEAST** It consumes vast amounts of money, coal, water and more money.

**LOCOMOTIVES** including diesels.

**CARRIAGES** Deals with the carriages specifically built for *The Ghan*.

**DINING A LA GHAN** The problem of keeping the beer cold during the journey and other logistic issues surrounding the operation of the dining car. Includes line drawings of dining cars.

**FLOODS** Des Smith said the rivers of Central Australia had different personalities.

**MARKETING AND SERVICE.** This looks at the evolution of the standard of service, and of innovations that did and didn’t work. E.g “The Alice”, motorail, coach class.

**THE CONCEPT OF SOCIAL OBLIGATION.** The Commonwealth Railways was all about nation building and running railways that the states would, ’t or couldn’t. It wasn’t designed to make a profit. But in time, the Commonwealth Government cried “Enough!”

**THE MALUKA** Paul Everingham was NT Chief Minister in 1980 at the time the new railway from Tarcoola to Alice Springs was opened. He set out to have a named train to Darwin. This was his train – the train that never was.

**REMNANTS OF THE GHAN** Carriages and locomotives in preserved collections. It will include a description of the operation of the National Railway Museum, Richi Richi Railway Preservation Society and Steamtown Peterborough. I also hope to include some content from the Ghan Preservation Society at Alice Springs and the Ghan Preservation Society with the section cars at Curdimurka. There will also be coverage relating to Marree and Farina.

**BOB, THE RAILWAY DOG** is one of our favorites and the Great Northern Railway to Oodnadatta was Bob’s favorite haunt.

**THE GHOST TRAIN** – There were some in the 1860s and 1870s who sought the involvement of London syndicates which would build the great railway, and in exchange would be granted land in South Australia to the extent of about a third of the area of the State. This chapter is a “what if” -! What if the great transcontinental railway had been built in the age of steam?

# PART TWO

## APPENDICES

**AN EXPANDED CHRONOLOGY.** A potted history of events with some maps and diagrams. 10 pages

**TIMETABLES.** Unlike most famous trains that have worked to a timetable that has been remarkably consistent from year to year, the schedule of *The Ghan* has been one of constant change. This listing explains the reasons behind the changes and includes reproductions of timetable documents of selected years... about 20 pages

**PARSONS AND THE FIRST TRAIN – PUGAREE JACK.** The first train to Alice Springs was all about saving lives.

**INCIDENTS AND ACCIDENTS -** surprisingly few other than related to floods.

**1923 VICE-REGAL TOUR** The report by the Adelaide *Register* of the journey in June 1923 to Central Australia by the SA Governor, Sir Tom Bridges. The expedition was a goodwill tour by the Governor to the outback mission stations. The expedition included study of the land to be traversed by the extension of the Oodnadatta railway. The entourage included Commonwealth Railways Commissioner, Norris G. Bell, and SAR Chief Commissioner W.A. Webb. Murray Aunger supplied the three Dort cars that did the tour without a problem – not even a tyre to change! Webb organised a special train for the return from Oodnadatta - it knocked 10 hours off the previous running schedule! It was as a result of this tour that Webb recognised the need of the northern parts to have a faster service to Oodnadatta, and hence the sleeping-car express that began on 30 August.

**MILEAGES** I am not sure the “official distance” Adelaide to Port Augusta is correct. There are also irregularities along the old Alice Springs route. Des Smith is a former Chief Civil Engineer of the Commonwealth Railways and is one of the “many Smiths”. He has been working with me on this task. One of the sources of error is the “Coonamia Conundrum”.

**NOMENCLATURE** Derivation of place names.

**FROM THE NEWS** . In 1954 a journalist from the *News*, interviewed a retired engineman who had driven *The Ghan* in the 1920s. There is strong reason to believe that this driver was Ernie Smith. 2 pages.

**THE 1889 PARLIAMENTARY TRIP TO ANGLE POLE** Angle Pole was the original destination name of Oodnadatta. 30 Members of Parliament did a trip by train to the railhead. This excursion has been reported in detail by the Adelaide press. Freidrich Krichauff was one of the parliamentarians in the group. He was also one of the pioneers of photography in South Australia. His photographs from the trip were of very high quality and were reproduced in the *Pictorial Australian*. The originals are in the Collection of the State Library of South Australia and have been included. There is a Krichauff Range in NT.

**LINKING NORTH AND SOUTH** on 21 January 1927 the first sod was turned at Oodnadatta for the Alice Springs extension railway. Typical of such gatherings where state and federal politicians gathered together there were the inevitable speeches which summarised the history and the aspirations of all present. It was all done standing out in the open. The one thing we are not told is the Oodnadatta temperature that day.

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**EPILOGUE**

**I expect to be able to take orders early July and will send an advice and quote a price at that time. Price will not exceed RRP \$78 which is the price of previous titles in the series.**

**If you are fairly certain about ordering and don't want to miss out I will be pleased to keep a list and will make early contacts. If so please advise a phone number. Otherwise the only action requested of you is to pass this on to any others who may be interested.**

**There will be special prices for pre-publication orders and deals for multiple copies.**

**THE OVERLAND - A SOCIAL HISTORY.** This title was released in May 2020 and sold out by October. A reprint has been done and is now available.

**JOHN WILSON**  
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