

Mail by Rail by Tom Luke

Not only does this rhyme but until the 1960s the vast majority of all Royal Mail was carried by the railways.

As a lad working at the Bendigo Post Office Mail Room it was part of my duties to attend the Bendigo Railway Station during a lunch period on all weekdays. My means of transport to the Railway Station were either my bicycle or a ride with the mail contractor.

This was a period of the day when from 11:15am onwards all country trains to the north of Bendigo arrived and departed and passengers and freight were transferred to the 12 noon train to Melbourne.

On both what is now platform's one and two were mailboxes. These had to be emptied taken to a small building on platform two and sorted, local mail was taken back for further sorting to the Bendigo Post Office Mail Room and all other mail placed on the Melbourne train. The van bags that arrived on the country trains also had to be sorted also and this mail dealt with in the same way as the mail from the postboxes.

During the period from 11:15 until 12 Noon the country trains on the lines north of Bendigo also departed these were Korong Vale, Echuca, and Swan Hill.

Korong Vale was a railway town at this time and a switching point for several other lines to the North of Victoria.

Mail sorted into the van bags was for small stations and localities that were not large enough to warrant an official Post Office. Van bags were hung in the guards van by yours truly and the guard would deliver and pick up mail as the train arrived at these small stations. Van bags had a leather satchel at the top with the names of the localities on the trip attached to a huge canvas bag underneath for incoming mail and parcels.

The mail for all country both North and South plus Melbourne was delivered and picked up on both platforms by a special mail contractor.

After the arrival of all country trains and the sorting of all mail I would conclude my duties at the Railway Station and on some occasions partake of a pie and sauce along with a cup of tea at the refreshment rooms which were situated on both platforms. Total cost for this fine repast was eight pence or in today's parlance less than ten cents.

These railway refreshment rooms were situated at many major rail stations on the Victorian network. In this area we had Bendigo, Castlemaine, Maryborough, St.Arnaud and Kyneton. At these major stations the train usually had a 10 min stop when you could alight from the train purchase your refreshments and continue on your journey.

Travel by train during the World War 2 Years.

Travel inside Victoria during the years of the war and petrol rationing could be slow and arduous.

For example St.Arnaud where my grandparents lived is only 110 KMs from Bendigo and can be driven by car today in a little over one hour.

A trip to the same destination in the 1940's was as follows:

7AM Leave Bendigo by train arrive an alight at Castlemaine.

Late morning leave Castlemaine by a mixed (freight, livestock and passengers) train to Maryborough.

Mid afternoon leave Maryborough on the Mildura train and arrive in St.Arnaud at 5PM.

As children we thought this was great as we got food and drinks at the Refreshment Rooms at both Castlemaine and Maryborough.

Train travel in the 1940's "Slow but reliable"

TRL 21/04/2012

<http://users.nex.net.au/~reidgck/s-trains.htm>

<http://railnutternewsau.tripod.com/SteamR711toStArnaud.html>

<http://www.victorianrailways.net/motive%20power/rsteam.html>