

**YOU**

Right: A retired city tram swings past the hulks of two older veterans at the Bylands tramways museum. Sadly, they are badly weathered and will probably be used only for spares.



**OFF THE BEATEN TRACK BUT ...**

**Back on the rails**

A WIND-SWEPT paddock perched high in the Great Divide near Pretty Sally is about as far as the imagination could take you from the crowded, noisy streets of yesterday's Melbourne.

By **JOHN McLAGAN**

But it is the unlikely home of the remnants of the fleets of trams that have changed their way around the metropolitan area and Victoria's provincial cities for almost a century.

This is the Victorian Tramways Museum — where, according to a small, but dedicated band of enthusiasts, the days of streetcar glory will never quite be allowed to fade away.

Why build it at Bylands — a "blink-and-you'll-miss-it" hamlet on what was the old Hume Highway just after it crested Pretty Sally and headed down into Kilmore?

It is rather a long way off the beaten track, agrees the Tramway Museum Society's Tony Sell, but it turned out to be just the ticket.

"We explored 15 or 20 sites around Melbourne, but nothing was found that really jelled," he said as he stood among several Melbourne old-timers rattling

along 400 metres of track the society has at Bylands.

One ambitious plan was to build the museum at the former police paddock at Knox, in the eastern suburbs, in conjunction with a historical park envisaged by other organisations.

"But it fell of its own weight, and never got off the ground," he said.

Bylands might have looked like it was for the birds, but it had a mile of uninterrupted track already down, something most of the other sites lacked and was still reasonably accessible to Melbourne.

The railways had closed its branch to Heathcote from the main Melbourne to Seymour line and sold a section to the society in 1969.

After a lot of working bees the track was narrowed for the trams an old tramways shed arose with the help of army explosives men who had to blast out the solid rock

15 cm (6 in) below the surface. Now almost all the society's two dozen or so "veterans" are there.

The fancy ex-tramways power poles came from William St, in the city. Finally the switch was thrown a couple of months ago and the first trams were groaning over the tracks.

The sounds of the first electric motor to turn over and the first set of wheels to trundle over the rusty rails were music to their ears, according to Tony Sell. "That day there were a lot of very happy people

around here," he said. "And a lot of sore heads the next day!"

There are plans to reconstruct a 1920s streetscape. "But that's a long, long way off," says Tony Sell.

For the time being the society will concentrate on lengthening the track and buying up old trams. "We know where most of the old veterans are," he says.

Putting on the power burned up most of the available funds — most of the money comes from visitors, passengers and souvenirs.

And they need quite a lot more to get beyond the penny section...



A horse drawn tram in action at Kilmore



Pictures: IAN BAKER

This vintage cable car in the museum provides a good playground for young visitors.

The Tramways Museum Society claims to have the best collection of cable trams outside San Francisco and will eventually have a set running, provided it can find some way to install the cable.

It already operates horse-drawn tram rides in Hudson Park, just down the road at Kilmore — Charlie, a former milk cart horse, permitting — and several of the

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