

Chert Incline - Mt. Victoria - N.S.W.

by F. John Reid



The least known incline that operated in the Blue Mountains of NSW was the one that existed at Mount Victoria and saw about five years working life. It was constructed for conveyance of chert and timber from the Kanimbla Valley.

Mention is made of the incline under the heading "Chert Siding" ("1") located near the old 77¾ mile post from Sydney on the western railway and train passengers today can still see two concrete blocks on the "Down" side which indicate the location of the long abolished siding. The siding, no doubt, was used to provide materials for the construction of the incline and later for shipment of chert and timber.

Chert: In the mid 1920's chert was used as a road metal and the Blue Mountains Shire Council had their own quarry on Mount Victoria Pass. Chert road metal was transported to Mount Victoria railway station in the Council's steam truck (which weighed, when loaded, about nine tons) and trucked for road works in other parts of the shire ("2").

In 1924 the Mount Victoria Chert Road metal and Timber Co. Ltd. was formed to operate and build the tramway incline from the area adjacent to the 77¾ mile post into the Kanimbla Valley. Towards the end of March 1925 the company "had constructed a railway from the quarry to the company's own siding, and had installed a winding plant. Arrangements were being made for the purchase of an up-to-date plant and machinery for the working of the quarry and timber mill" ("3"). It was during this period that the company also received numerous inquiries from Councils for quotations for road metal ("4").

Official Opening

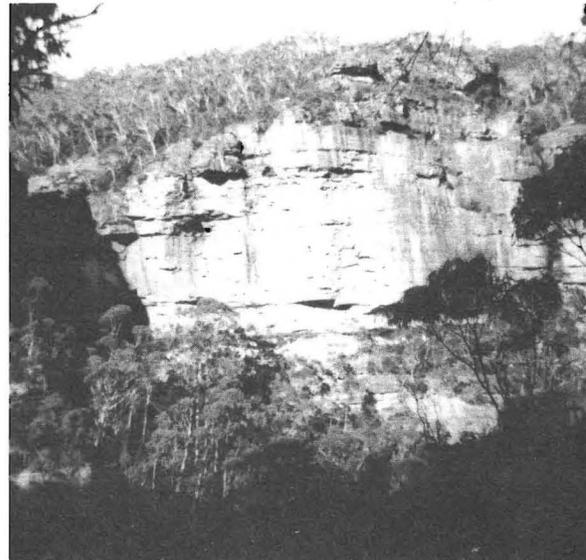
On Saturday, October 16, 1926 Mount Victoria held a Grand Carnival in ideal weather conditions ("5") and at 11 a.m. that day the Chert Company's plant was officially opened ("6").

The company had expended £15,000 in the development of its industry and at the official opening ceremony the works were visited by the directors (Messrs. F. Pontey who was the chairman, W.P. Lister, John Rankin, and Chas. Ireland), Mr. Jas. Dooley, M.L.A., Mr. L. McDonald, M.L.C., Queensland and their friends. This party saw Mrs. Pontey (chairman's wife) break a bottle of wine just as steam was turned on. Mr. Dooley congratulated the company upon the efficiency of its plant and stated "that as the day for demanding good roads had arrived, their enterprise would be abundantly rewarded" ("7").

Mr. Pontey then replied and gave relevant facts about the construction that had taken place during the past three years. He stated that some portions of

What remains of the commencement of the main trestle. By some luck this was not destroyed in the bushfire of Tuesday 5th Feb, 1952 and even as late as 8th August, 1976 it could still be seen.

F.J. Reid photo

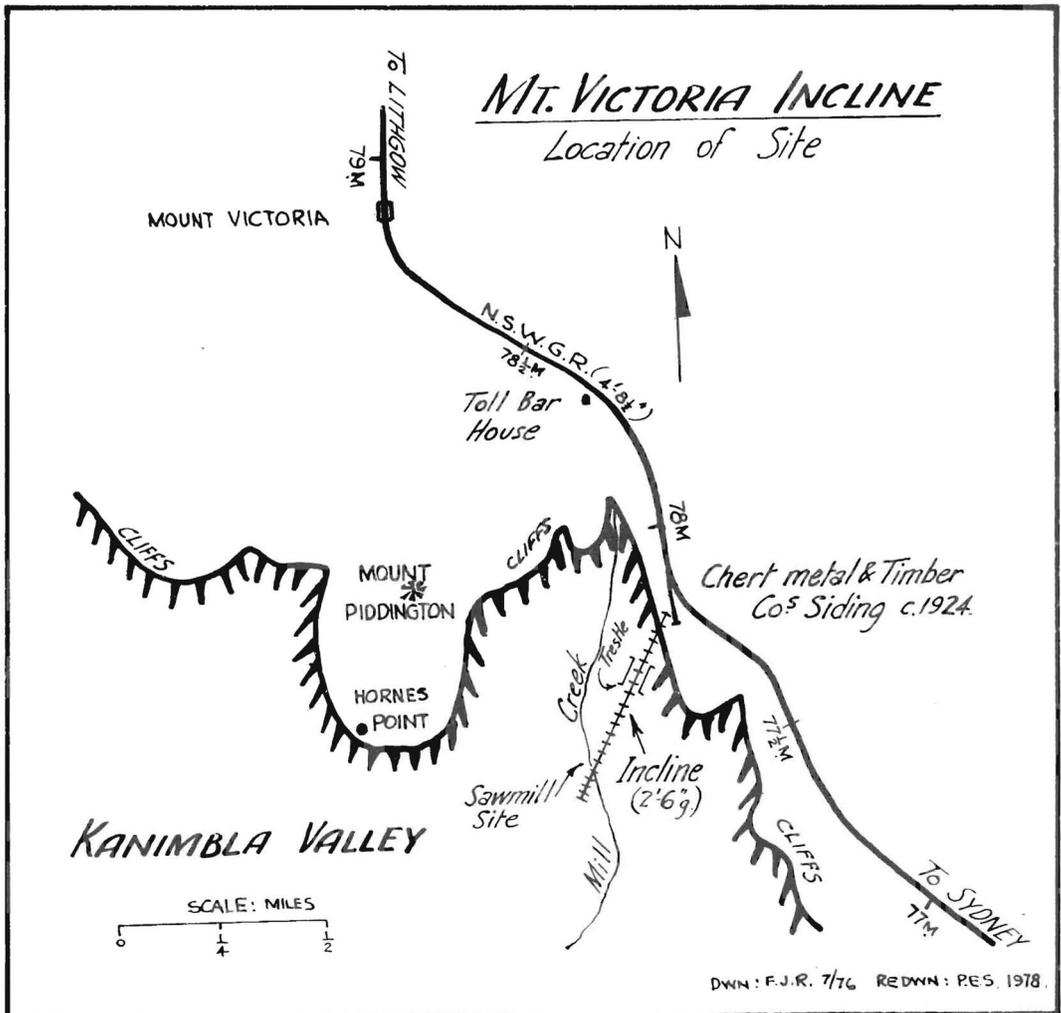


the work had been particularly costly especially when it was considered that over 20,000 tons of cliff had to be blown away to enable the half-mile incline tramway to be laid down. Even at this stage of the company's venture the chairman mentioned that a "modern saw-milling plant was on its way to Mount Victoria, and in a very little while would be in full working order ("8")."

The chert venture carried out by the company appears to have been known locally as Williamson's quarry. Within 12 months the quarry was in financial difficulty as a new company the Mountain Industries has been formed with a capital of £1,000 to take over Williamson's quarry. The Mount Victorian Correspondent for "The Lithgow Mercury" stated "it is hoped their venture will be successful" ("9").

We will now look at two other aspects of the company's activities, "The Blackheath Bulletin" of Tuesday, March 24, 1925 mentioned that "a small drive has been opened into the coal seam that the company intends working when the machinery is installed". A coal mine was in use but from questions asked in the local area it would appear that once the whole venture was abandoned the mine, for safety factors was blown in.

Timber:- At the base of the incline timber was felled and a sawmill established adjacent to the terminus for cutting of same. On a personal visit to the incline terminus on Saturday, January 17, 1976 it was possible to see on the timber mill sight an anchor block still "in situ". Timber felled in Kanimbla Valley included stringbark, box timber, red gum and ironbark. On the western side of the



incline terminus rested 30 foot poles. It is thought that as well as sawn timber being transported up the incline the 30 foot logs were also and could have been used for harbour piles.

Besides chert and timber being hauled to the incline summit from the valley it is worth mentioning that firewood was also conveyed. Mr. H.J. Hammon ("10") in a personal letter writes "when I was aged 15, in 1926, my father and I were engaged in cutting firewood in that section of the Kanimbla Valley, and the operators of the incline would, for a fee, cart our firewood to the top".

Incline Today

The top section ("Chert Siding" end) of the incline can still be inspected today. Leaving the Toll Bar you follow the railway line till you reach the two concrete blocks mentioned previously. Arriving here you will find a path that will lead you down to the cliff face overlooking Kanimbla Valley. The formation is steep and it was in March 1975 that the Blue Mountains City Council under the Labor Government's RED Scheme made a fire trail in from the Chert Siding to the cliff face.

The bottom section of the incline is considerably overgrown and can only be undertaken in clear weather and it is necessary to approach it from the valley end.

Details of the Mount Victoria incline are as follows:

Length — half a mile.

Width of incline formation — approximately 9 feet.

Gauge — thought to be 2 ft. 6 ins.

Distinguishing feature of incline — two wooden trestles. Larger trestle thought to be about 300 to 400 ft. in length. This trestle started at the cliff face where the blasting occurred and enabled the tramway to reach the valley.

The smaller trestle was built across Mill Creek at the incline terminus and was probably about 30ft. in length. Both trestles were subsequently destroyed by bushfires that swept up the Kanimbla Valley in 1952. The same fire destroyed the timber mill at the incline terminus.

Elevation of incline at Chert Siding approximately 3,250 feet.

Elevation of incline at terminus in Kanimbla Valley approximately 2,400 feet. Drop from summit to floor 850 feet approximately.

Average gradient 2 in 3.

The construction cost was £15,000.

Access to N.S.W.G.R. — Chert Siding opened Sunday, 22nd June, 1924 and closed on Sunday, 22nd February, 1931.



View of where the cliff was blasted away to enable the trestle to be constructed so that the incline tramway could reach the Kanimbla Valley floor. Photo taken Friday 23rd May, 1975.

F.J. Reid photo

Any Photos

Concluding Remarks: —

No doubt a lot of information has been lost about this short lived tramway incline. This article has not given the full story. It would be interesting to know if somebody somewhere has a photo of the incline when it was operational.

Gone forever is the sight and sound of a steam locomotive working a passenger or goods train past the long abolished Chert Siding. Perhaps some loco crew may still remember doing a shunt at the siding in the late 1920's. And as a final remark gone also are the activities associated with the Mount Victoria incline.

Tonnages (see reference "II"). The following is a record of the minerals out of Mt Victoria covering the period 1925 -1931:-

1925 - 7,633.72 tons.

1926 - 10,900.54 tons

1927 - 4,531.52 tons.

1928 - 517.44 tons.

1929 - 1,230.88 tons.

1930 - 1,828.64 tons.

1931 - 463.54 tons.

As coal and shale tonnages are dealt with in the Commission's Annual Reports the above figures therefore would be for minerals from the Chert and Timber Siding only. No details are available regarding timber removed from the siding.

References

1. The Railway Crossing of the Blue Mountains by R.F. Wylie and C.C. Singleton. Bulletin No. 248 June 1958 mentions Chert Siding and tramway incline on page 90.
2. The Lithgow Mercury, Friday, August 29, 1924.
3. The Blackheath Bulletin, Tuesday, March 24, 1925.
4. Same reference as for 3.
5. Advertisement regarding Grand Carnival appeared in The Lithgow Mercury, Wednesday, September 22, 1926.
6. The Lithgow Mercury, Wednesday, October 20, 1926.
7. Same reference as for 6.
8. Same reference as for 6.
9. The Lithgow Mercury, Monday, November 28, 1927.
10. Personal letter from Mr H.J. Hammon dated 21st January 1975. Mr H. J. Hammon is Managing Director of Katoomba Scenic Railway Pty Ltd.
11. Figures supplied by Mr J. H. Forsyth, Archives Officer, P.T.C. of N.S.W.



Lever as used on Mt. Victoria Incline. Inscribed on concrete portion of lever is "NL 1926". There were three (3) of these levers on the incline. When this photo was taken, this lever near the incline summit was still "in situ". Since being taken the lever has since been removed, by no doubt vandals. Photo taken on Sunday 27th April, 1975. The two (2) other levers were located and are still in their original positions about halfway on the incline.

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