

Rail History

RTBU NSW Locomotive Division



Read below as Bob Newham, Loco Division Passenger Organiser, explores some of the incredible history behind rail in New South Wales. As you will discover, the month of March has many stories to tell...

March 1867

The Picton/Mittagong line was opened in **March 1867** as part of the [Main South line](#).

The line ran north-northwest from [Picton](#), over the Picton Viaduct, across the Great South Road before heading northwest. It then headed west-northwest through a 180-metre tunnel in the Redbank Range.

Stations were constructed at [Redbank](#) (1885), [Couridjah](#) (1867), [Buxton](#) (1893), [Balmoral](#) (1878), [Hill Top](#) (1878), [Colo Vale](#) (1883) and [Braemar](#) (1867). There were a number of smaller stops, sidings and passing loops along the line, as well. North of Hill Top, the cutting through Big Hill was for many years the deepest in Australia. To service the line, Picton became a busy station with a locomotive depot for [bank engines](#), dormitories for train crews, and goods sidings.

The line, while gently curved, had gradients as steep as 1 in 30. It was also a single-track line, and even though deviations were constructed between Hill Top and Colo Vale to ease grades, these factors combined to create a bottleneck, as rail traffic increased. In July 1919 a new double track alignment with ruling 1 in 75 grades between Picton and Mittagong via [Bargo](#) opened. The original proposal was for the line to be shifted considerably further eastwards from [Appin](#) to [Bargo](#) avoiding Picton. This was strongly opposed in Parliament by Picton local interests; hence the 180° curve that circumnavigates the town.

The old line, now renamed the Loop Line, continued to be served by passenger services until August 1978. Most services were operated by [30 class](#) locomotives and later [CPH rail motors](#), although there was a Sunday evening service to Sydney hauled by main line locomotives as recently as 1973.

From the 1960s the line was popular with steam hauled specials, and was the preferred route for most journeys where they could operate without inhibiting regular services. Following its relocation to Thirlmere in June 1976, the [New South Wales Rail Transport Museum](#) commenced operating steam services on the line between Picton and Buxton.

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Cutting through Big Hill

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3016 & 3642 on the Thirlmere Loop Line

March 1942

The Ropes Creek line was named after a nearby creek bearing the same name. It was built during [World War II](#) to transport munitions factory workers to and from [St Marys](#). The line opened from St Marys to [Dunheved](#) on **1 March 1942** and Dunheved to [Ropes Creek](#) on 29 June 1942. When electrification arrived in the 1950s, there was a plan to electrify the Ropes Creek line. For the most part all the sidings in the Dunheved station area were electrified to enable the [New South Wales Government Railways](#) (NSWGR) to use electric locomotives of the 46 class to shunt trains without the need to change to [diesel-electric](#) or [diesel-hydraulic](#) locomotives.

While the line was being electrified, a new station named Cochrane was opened on 2 September 1957. Towards the end of train operation on the line, freight wagons were shunted into the [Sims Metal](#) plant which was about two kilometres from the junction

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with the [Main Western line](#), and there was normally one passenger train in the morning and one in the afternoon, generally formed by a four-car single-deck suburban train, locally known as a [red rattler](#).

The line was closed to passenger rail traffic in the early 1980s, following a downturn in passengers and munitions traffic, but remained open to freight traffic for Sims Metal. However, when that was switched to road traffic the line closed and lay idle for a number of years. On **22 March 1986**, the line was officially closed forever, with an enthusiasts' special being the last train to traverse the section. Not long after that, the overhead power supply was removed.

Between Boxing Day 1990 and 8 January 1991 there was a major shut-down due to track work between [St Marys](#) and [Glenbrook](#) stations, and the line was temporarily reopened as far as Dunheved to allow suburban trains that normally stabled at Penrith to be stabled in the four-track yard, and on the platform 2 or "[down](#)" track on the branch. At the completion of the track work, the line was once again closed.

Overhead wiring for approximately 10 car lengths was retained at the St Marys end of the branch, where it turned off the main western line, to provide a terminating point for trains used on "Y" Link services. With the abolition of "Y" link services to St Marys in 2005, the overhead wiring and associated components were subsequently removed.



The remains of Ropes Creek Station in 2009

March 1950

In 1943 approval was given for the [New South Wales Government Railways Workshops](#) to build 25 freight locomotives. The design was a modified version of the [57 class](#). The main alterations were the use of a [rack and pinion](#) valve gear and the use of smaller cylinders to enable the locomotives to run on the [Main North line](#) to [Broadmeadow](#), a route which had a tighter [loading gauge](#). [Eveleigh Railway Workshops](#) built 11 locomotives and [Cardiff Locomotive Workshops](#) two.

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The first entered service in **March 1950**. The decision to move to diesel power saw only 13 locomotives completed.

Whilst the derived rack and pinion valve gear appeared superior in theory, in practice it required more maintenance and lubrication. The smaller diameter cylinders demanded a later cut-off and used more steam, thus making the locomotives uneconomical in the use of coal and water when compared with the 57 class. Despite the design being made to enable use on the Main Northern line from Sydney to Broadmeadow, few journeys were ever made on this route. They mainly were used on the Main Western line to Lithgow and in a limited capacity on the Main South line to Junee.

After a very short service life, the entire class had been withdrawn by July 1957 and were all cut up by **March 1964**. Some parts were recovered and used on 57 class locomotives. There are no surviving examples, however the tender of 5808 lies near Canberra station. Some 58 class tenders saw further use as water tankers around New South Wales. One is at the Dorrigo Steam Railway and Museum.



29 March 1971

The 442 class were ordered and operated by the [New South Wales Government Railways](#). They were the second generation of [Alco](#) units to be built and were used on both main freight and passenger service in [New South Wales](#). The 442 class were built to replace the [40 class locomotives](#) dating from 1951, as they could not be economically rebuilt to modern standards.

Twenty locomotives were initially ordered from [AE Goodwin](#), the contract stipulating that the 40 class be accepted as a trade in, with some parts from the older units used for the new locomotives. The contract was later extended by 20 units. The first

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locomotive was completed in October 1970 but was rejected due to rough riding concerns in testing, with five months passing before it was finally accepted after modifications to the bogie design.

The 442 class went into service on **29 March 1971** and operated mainline services across the state. In 1985 some (including 23-27, 29 & 30) were fitted with [V/Line](#) radios to allow them to operate services through to [Melbourne](#). This ceased in 1987 with those fitted being sent to Melbourne to have the equipment removed.

By the end of their careers all were based at [Broadmeadow Locomotive Depot](#) and mainly operated on the [North Coast](#) and [Main North](#) lines.

