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English Electrics and the Apple Isle

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Photography by the Author

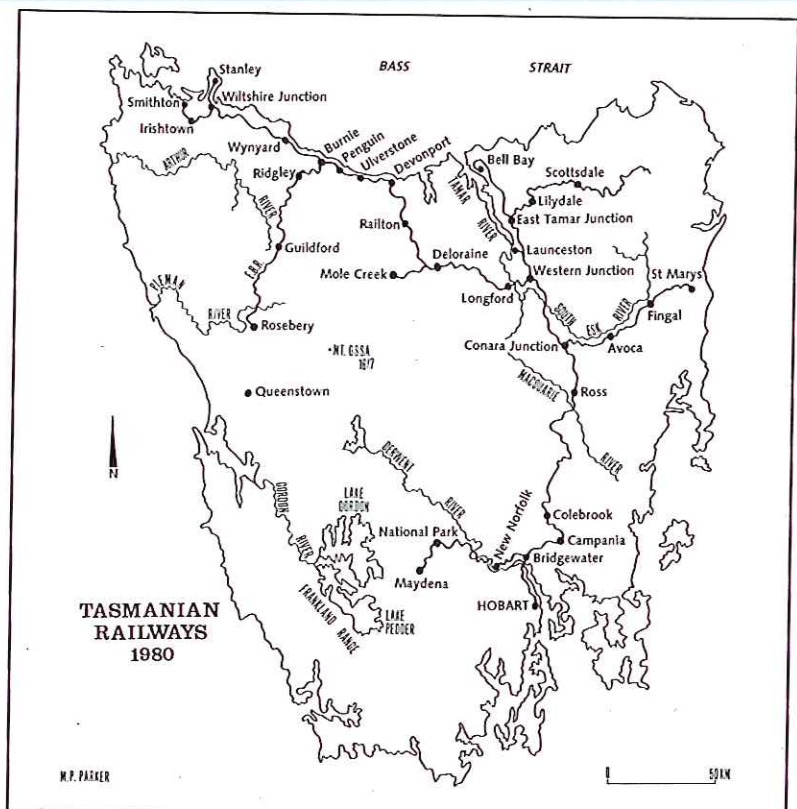
Tasmania's once-delightful railways have not escaped the harsh change experienced by other Australian systems in recent years



I FIRST went to Tasmania as a lad in the late 1960s. Whilst staying in Launceston, my father was told by the 'better half' that it might be a good idea if he was to take HIS screaming children for a walk and thankfully he thought, 'Where better to go than the railway station?'

I still have memories of red engines working there in the yard. Many years later I spent my first annual leave from work in Tassie and it was this holiday that kindled my interest in that state and its railways. It was to be the first of many trips to Van Diemen's Land. I thought there no better place to watch and photograph trains.

To spend a warm, sunny day photographing a goods train clattering its way through the lush countryside was, to me, one of life's small joys. It seemed that all the right ingredients were there: narrow gauge, little trains (a few big ones too), beautiful scenery, friendly railway staff – this joint had the lot!





Z 4 heads a down train between Bridgewater and Boyer, running beside the Derwent River with a load of logs for the Australian Newsprint Mills. The four members of the Z class were built by English Electric in 1972 and whilst fitted with dual cab controls, it was unusual to see them running long hood leading. 17.4.85.

Waiting out their final years in disgrace were the distinctive diesel-hydraulics W 1 and W 2. These locomotives proved to be both unreliable and expensive to run and became the first diesels to be withdrawn from service in Tasmania. They are pictured at Launceston Loco Depot not long before being scrapped. 15.3.81.



Above left: I feel this photograph epitomises the changes that were taking place in Tasmania in the early 1980s. English Electrics X 4 – X 6 – X 13, all built in 1950, wait with a vacuum braked goods train to cross 1963-vintage Alcos 856 – 853 on an air braked log train. The location is Dunorlan, situated on the main Western line between Deloraine and Railton, and the crews are changing over. 9.9.82.

Right: When the locomotive depot at Smithton was closed and the crew and engine transferred to Wiltshire Junction, there did not appear to be a great deal of consideration given to the amenities provided at the latter location. Hence we have this scene of X30 being fuelled by means of a hand pump, with the elbow grease supplied by the local crew. 11.4.85.



Sometimes luck plays a role in railway photography and this was one such occasion. While driving beside the EBR one afternoon to wait for the ore train from Melba Flats, I came across this ballast train heading back to Burnie led by 10 class locomotives 1001 – 1004. They had been working near Hampshire and on the return journey picked up some empty superphosphate wagons at Ridgley. 10.4.85.

In addition, even though the Tasmanian Government Railways had been handed over to the Australian National Railways in 1978, it ap-

peared little had changed when I made my first solo visit in 1980 but things were to alter drastically in the following years. In the early 1980s

the system still retained its charm and character.

Most of my trips to Tasmania were made between 1980 and 1985 and

During one trip on the EBR I was privileged to ride on the engines of the thrice-weekly goods train to Primrose. At Ridgley we went into the loop to cross an ore train bound for Burnie. Here, the driver of 1102 collects the train staff before continuing down the hill to the coast. The train is being hauled by four of the EBR's 11 class diesel-hydraulics. The 10 and 11 class were constructed in Queensland by Walkers Ltd. 9.3.81.





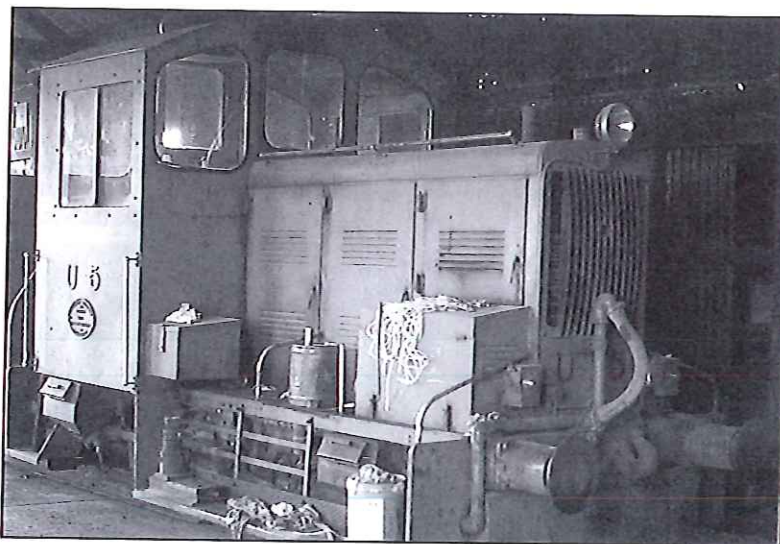
there were several reasons for this. The English Electric diesels, in particular the wonderful little X class diesel-electrics, held sway. The vacuum brake was still the recognised way to retard or stop a train but that new-fangled automatic air brake was starting to take over. Even so, much of the older rolling stock was still running, e.g. wooden bodied C class open wagons and the steel EE class covered vans.

Also, with the exception of the more modern rolling stock, all vehicles were fitted with buffers and screw link couplings. A mate once told me he thought that with this sort of equipment the TGR was the most English of the Australian railways and I'd have to agree.

Another drawback was the Emu Bay Railway, running from Burnie on the coast to Rosebery and Melba Flats. I spent much time around this railway because not only is it photogenic – passing through countryside ranging from open pasture to thick rainforest – but you had their immaculately turned-out diesels which were a sight to behold. Another bonus was that you could ride on their trains. In my mind a trip on the EBR is easily one of the most impressive train rides in Australia.

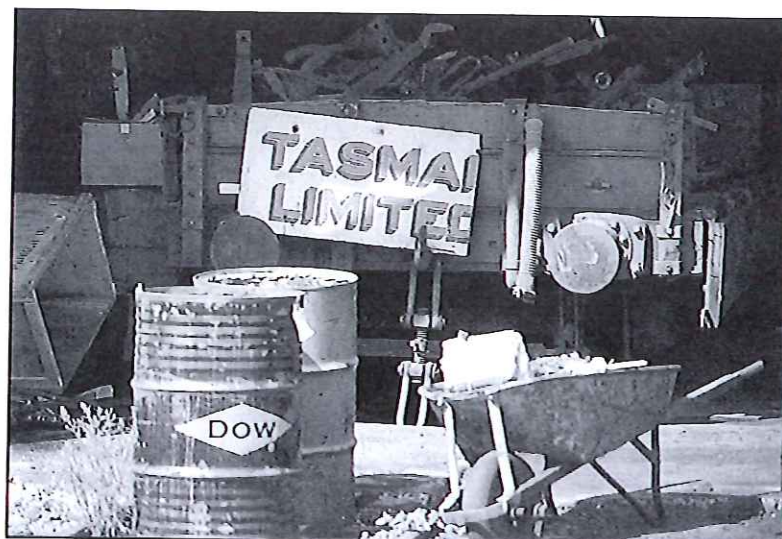
It must, however, be understood that it was not always sunshine and roses. If there is one thing that can make life difficult for a railfan it is the weather and when it turns bad in Tasmania there are generally no half measures.

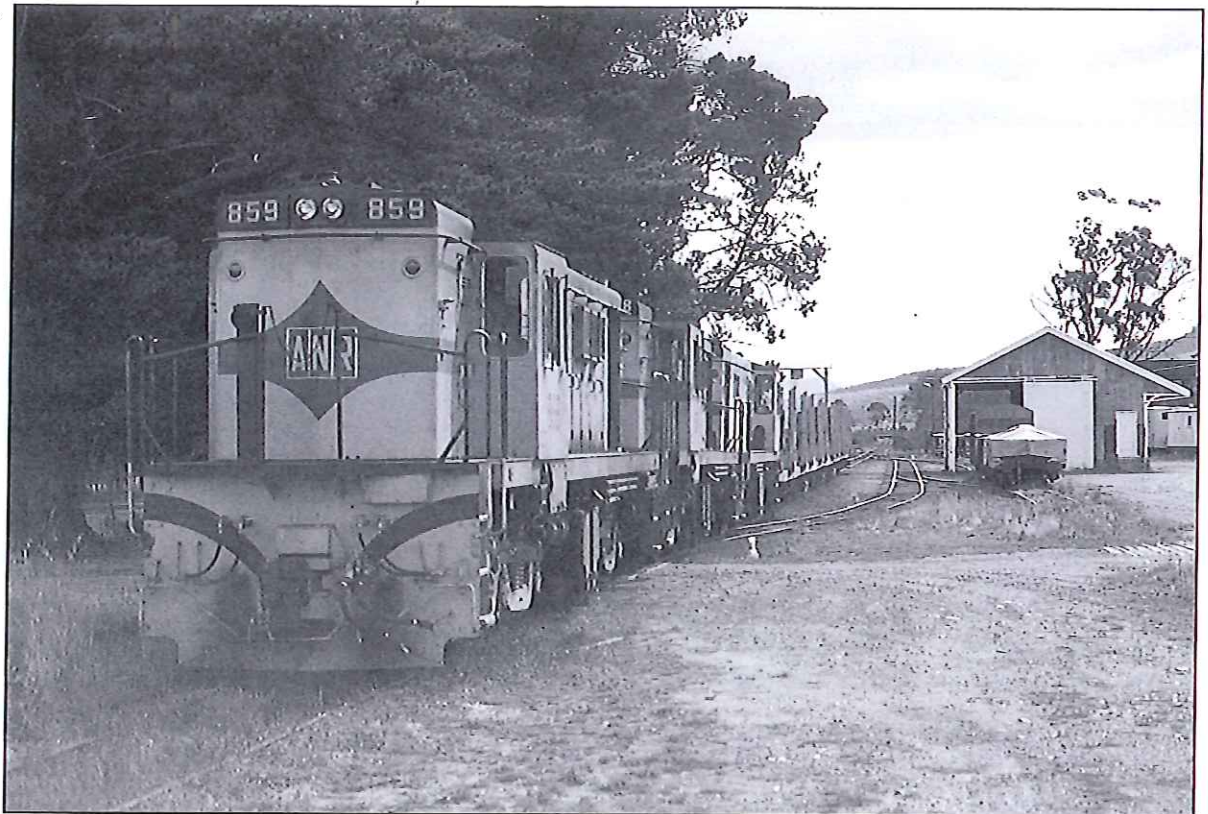
On one occasion a couple of friends and I were waiting for a



Tucked away in a corner of the Smithton engine shed was U5. It hadn't been used for many years and as such became a convenient place on which to stack things. This locomotive was provided for yard work and when required could be utilised on the main line, although with a top speed of only 20 km/h one could not imagine it being used too often for that purpose. 4.3.81.

'So it has come to this.' Hobart. 8.3.80.





On an overcast day 859 – 858 – 867 prepare to shunt at St Marys after arriving from Conara Junction. In 1980 the first 830s were shipped from South Australia to Tasmania, assisting ANR to convert the railway from vacuum to air brake. In all, 20 locomotives of this class were sent south and now they in turn have been withdrawn and replaced with larger, second-hand locomotives from Queensland. 10.3.81.

goods train at Tunnel on the North-east line. At 3 o'clock in the afternoon it became so dark that in order to photograph we had to use 1/15th second shutter speed. A comment

was made saying, 'Well, at least it's even light'. I'll say it was – it was almost pitch black! But if you were prepared to put up with Mother Nature and not scared of 'exposing

a plate' in the rain, I found there were some marvellous rewards to be had.

Unfortunately though, good things never remain the same. After

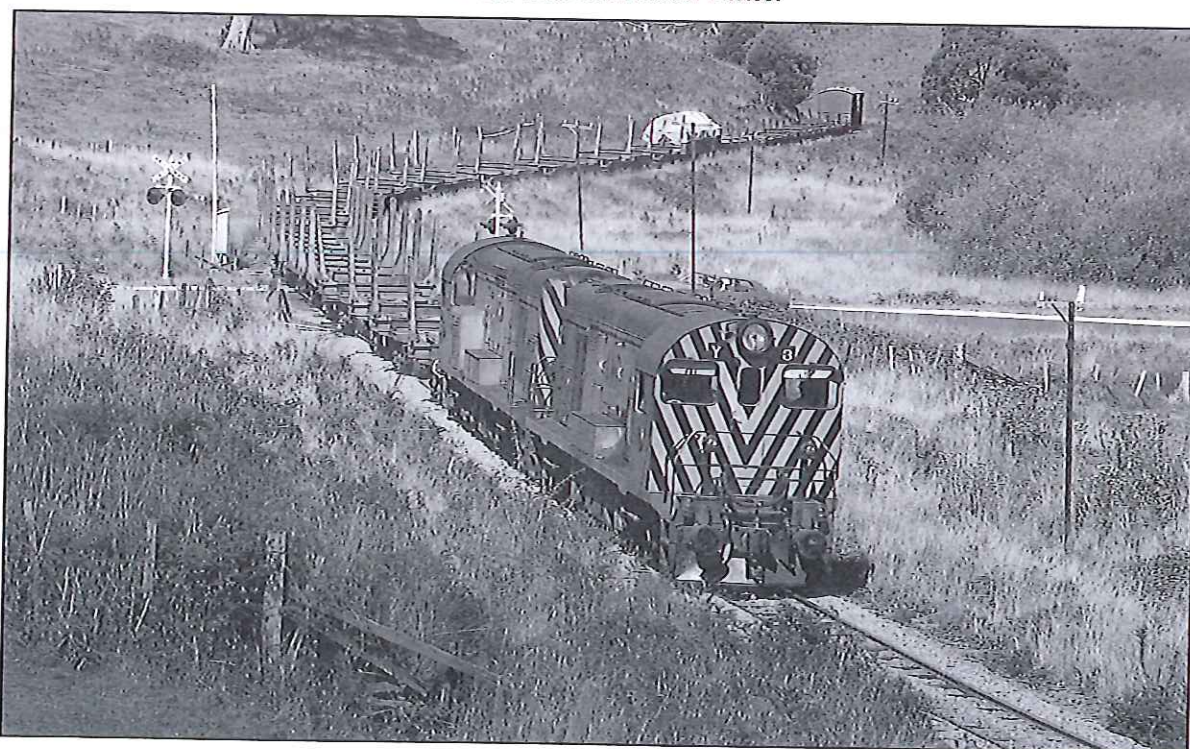
While Mole Creek basks in a short lived burst of sunshine, ZA 4 waits for the last wagons to be loaded before tip-toeing back along the 20 km branch to Lemana Junction. The line was in poor condition with the track speed down to 30 km/h and lower in places. The last train ran in 1985 and the line was officially closed in 1992. 10.3.81.





Some traces of the old TGR were more visible than others. This was certainly the case with VA 1 and V 13 in Hobart, both still proudly displaying the identity of their former employer albeit in storage. The TGR, however, was not the first owner of V 13 – it was acquired from the Mt Lyell Mining and Railway Company when that railway closed in 1963. 16.3.83.

Beyond Scottsdale, deep in the north-east of the state, a Herrick-bound train led by Y 3 – Y 5 ambles along between Legerwood and Branxholm. From 1961 the Tasmanian Government Railways built eight of these locomotives in their Launceston Workshops, two still being in service at the time of writing. This section of line has since been closed. 14.3.83.



1985 change came more rapidly on the railway scene in Tassie. Amongst other things, there was the continued withdrawal of the older diesels and introduction of more modern (!) second-hand locomotives from the mainland and the accelerated conversion of the newer rolling stock to air brake, together with the retirement and subsequent scrapping of

older equipment. I concede these reforms were necessary to keep a rail operation viable against very strong road competition, but from my point of view what they were doing was removing the character from the railway.

So, I abandoned the railway to the economic rationalists as the system was going through some very painful

change and I did not have the heart to watch. In fact it was thought by some that it may not survive. Happily though it does, despite attempts by various organisations, albeit in a truncated form and with a new name, 'Tasrail'.

I think it might be time to renew my acquaintance. ▽