

Rail Transport and Mining Infrastructure

As the tour buses transit between sites we will notice the railway that links the mining area and also Broken Hill with the rest of Australia. In particular, there are extensive sidings in Crystal Street.

Broken Hill was linked by rail with the coast at Port Pirie by extending the already approved Silverton Tramway to Broken Hill. As the New South Wales Government would not allow the South Australian Government to build a railway to cross the border, the last 19 miles of the line was built by a private company as the Silverton Tramway. The tramway was built to the SAR gauge of 3' 6". Although a "tramway", it was in reality a main line transporting concentrates and ores from the mines to the smelters and port facilities on the coast and as a backload to Broken Hill it transported supplies - principally coal for boilers at the mines and timber for the timber sets used underground in mining.

The main sidings and locomotive servicing facilities were located in Railwaytown, a suburb of Broken Hill with sidings running to the south and north to serve the mines. The main passenger station was at Sulphide Street (now a Museum). There was an extensive network of shunting lines to the various mines and to the Central Power Station.

The NSW Government began to build a railway connection with the rest of the NSW system with the first stage of the line being constructed to Menindee and opened in 1919. The terminus for the train was at Crystal Street Station, which is still there but abandoned. In November 1927 the direct link to Sydney was completed with the finalisation of the bridge over the Darling River at Menindee.

In September 1937 the NSWGR placed into service the Silver City Comet, an air conditioned rail car which ran between Broken Hill and Parkes. This was, possibly, the first air conditioned train in Australia. The Silver City Comet is on display at Broken Hill. As the NSWGR gauge was standard gauge the two rail systems were not compatible.

During World War Two land transportation between South Australia and Eastern Australia became important with the threat posed by submarines and mines to coastal shipping. Extensive transshipment yards were constructed at Broken Hill in 1942 to allow transshipment of munitions. However, the threat was never fully realised and the yards remained under-utilised.

With the purchase of the Sulphide Corporation by the Zinc Corporation in 1948 a modern zinc smelter was constructed at Cackle Creek, south of Newcastle. This started to take lead and zinc concentrates directly from Broken Hill in the 1960s via rail, marking the first major use of the rail link to NSW. This was the well-known W44 Concentrate Train.

In 1970 the 3' 6" gauge railway from Port Pirie to Broken Hill was converted to a 4 foot, 8½ inch (1435 mm) gauge, thus completing the standard transcontinental gauge line from Sydney to Perth. The Silverton Tramway was reduced to shunting the mine sidings until 2006 when the freeing up of the railway market allowed the company to expand operations as Southern and Silverton Rail.

BHP smelter remains

Visible behind the railway sidings (to the West) are stone masonry walls which were part of the BHP smelters (dating from c1890). It is not clear what bit of the smelters these remains represent.



BHP smelter remains from Chrystal Street looking across the railway yards