

THE MAPLETON TRAMWAY

by John Knowles

Details of the Book

The Mapleton Tramway was a two feet gauge light railway, 11 miles or 18 kms long, which in 5½ miles or 9 km to the west of Nambour in Queensland climbed the Highworth and Blackall Ranges. The line was in many places located on shelves in the mountainsides with magnificent views over the coastal lands to the sea, used steep gradients and very sharp curves, and reached 1247 feet altitude.

The line was built over the first range by the Moreton Central Sugar Mill Company of Nambour between 1897 and 1904 to tap what it was hoped would become sugar growing lands. Building that section severely damaged the finances of the company. That was ironic in that only modest amounts of sugar cane were ever grown in the area beyond the range. The line was extended to the top of the second range at Mapleton by the Maroochy Shire Council in 1914-15, the Shire having purchased the section already built by the mill company.

The company portion was initially operated by horses and gravity, but that was very expensive, and eventually a Shay geared steam locomotive was obtained. The Shire bought a second such locomotive. The line as extended was used to haul sugar cane, log and sawn timber, fruit, cream, small livestock and supplies, as well as passengers and mails. With its poor alignment, the very slow speed of the geared engines, and the stops en route, the journey took two hours.

With the light loads possible on each tram, the need to tranship some of the traffic to or from the 3 ft 6 ins gauge Queensland Railways at Nambour, and the development of motorised road transport almost from the very year the line was extended to Mapleton, the line proved a technical anachronism after less than twenty years. Its revenue was never sufficient to service the debt incurred by the Shire to buy the mill portion and build the rest, and the line had to be supported financially by ratepayers. The Council kept it running only while revenue paid the working expenses, something which was prolonged a little by the shortages of World War II. It was closed at the end of 1944, but it was not until 1966 that the Shire paid the last of the debt.

The author explains the several puzzling aspects in the history of the line, describes the route, and describes how the Shay geared locomotives worked. He gives details of the traffic conveyed, how the line was operated, and some information on the finances. This includes the excursions operated at weekends connecting with QR trains, and the private siding to the general store at Mapleton, where goods were unloaded from the daily tram across the store verandah.

The book has 92 pages, of A4 size, and has 81 illustrations and an Index. Of the illustrations, five are aerial photographs of the route in 1940, four are maps of the route, and six are diagrams of the locomotives and rolling stock. The book is bound in sections with drawn on soft celloglazed cover. The book has a bar code, and is ISBN 0-9593651-5-X. It was published by the author in 2004.

The book is available from the distributor, the Australian Narrow Gauge Railway Museum Society (Mapleton book), P O Box 1135, Woodford, Queensland 4514, tel (evgs) (07) 3273 2014; the Light Railway Research Society of Australia, P O Box 21, Surrey Hills, Victoria 3127, <http://www.lrrsa.org.au>; and ARHS/nsw Railway Bookshop, 67 Renwick St, Redfern NSW 2016, www.arhsnsw.com.au.

Addenda and Corrigenda

The **deep cutting** mentioned on pp 6, 8, 25, 28, 29 and 82 was on the climb from Burnside to the Mapleton Road, not far south of the latter road. In Fig 5.08, it is the cutting in shadow below arrow head 8. It was the making of that cutting which caused the construction cost of a portion of the first section built to increase by £1000 and the company to lose confidence in Engineer Pope (see "Moreton Mail" 3rd March 1899, where inaccuracies in specifying the work put out to contract are reported). The cost of the difficult first section should read £7265 for 2 miles 52 chains, or £2590 per mile (p 9). This cutting was filled in after closure.

From where the line left the Mapleton Road beyond Highworth, it went along a ledge on the north

side of the ridge above the deep valley of a gully, the same gully as that which the line headed in making the horseshoe curve. At its highest, the ledge was about 100 feet above the gully. There was a waterfall beside, and at one stage the line was in a narrow but short **gorge** of that gully, about 20 feet wide. Fig 2.01 on page 8 is at the western end of that gorge. The line then crossed the gully twice in short succession, and again on the horseshoe. The bridge on the horseshoe is shown in Figs 5.06 and 5.07. Fig 5.20 (p 40) should have shown the line crossing the gully twice in a short distance just before the horseshoe (it correctly shows the line crossing the gully on the horseshoe).

The intended **tunnels** seem to have been through spurs in the Highworth Range, but no record says exactly where.

The early mentions of **Mapleton** as the intended destination (page 7) were shorthand at the time for the then Mapleton Road (realised from references in the 1904 Report on Central Mills - see footnote 22 to Chapter 2). This was probably much the same as the intended routes to the Murtagh property at Dulong and the head of the Maroochy River (page 9).

It was **Mackenzie** who made the comments and recommendations on p 10 attributed there to Phillips (bottom of left column to right column). Phillips made the comments from para 5 of the right column ("went on to say").

There were 14 **bridges** on the main line (p 37). There were the two extra bridges mentioned above for the two crossings of the gully in quick succession, and there was a third bridge on the Highworth Range. All three bridges on that range were single span.

The position with **branches** is even more complicated than reported, beyond the scope of this history to unravel. Two roadbeds exist south-west of the crossing of Burnside Road on the **Perwillowen** branch, into the valley of Coes Creek, possibly associated with the 1900 alterations or the 1925 replacement of the branch.

The **Dulong** branch did reverse direction at Thrush's Road and continue south-east, eventually to cross Dulong Road, with two bridges on the section beyond Thrush's Road. The location of the terminus of the public goods service to Dulong operated by the Mill company is not known.

A spur ran north from the northernmost point of the main line, just north-west of Doig's Point, and became two branches crossing **Kureelpa Falls Road** to climb to the edge of the range, much on portable track.

All the branches featured considerable bridges, indicating that the only way to transport cane early in the twentieth century was by tramway, and that cane growing was intended to have a long life in the Perwillowen and Dulong areas.

"Dulong" was not the first two feet gauge **Shay** (p 43, RH para 4).

It is not clear on p 47 that the **cylinders** of the Shay locomotives were attached to the side of the boiler, and were joined to the crankshaft housing by sections which served as the crosshead guides. There were gaps in the **crankshaft housing** for the two cranks. Towards the end, both engines had reinforcing of the leading gap (Figs 6.04, 6.10, 7.10 and 7.21). From the number of bolt or screw heads in that reinforcing, it would seem that the housing on the rebuilt engine is from "Mapleton", even if the engine is from "Dulong" (p 57).

References are made on pp 48 and 52 to the tractive efforts required to move the loads and the **adhesion** required to ensure the wheels gripped the rails. For adhesion to be satisfactory, the weight on the driving wheels should be at least four times the tractive effort at the wheels. If the weight with full water and coal supplies and tractive effort were as given in Table 6.01 on p 46, the ratio was 4.65, with half of both the supplies consumed 4.26, but with both empty only 3.88. It was therefore important to keep the coal bunker and water tanks as full as possible to ensure adhesion, especially of the rear truck. Although the drive of the two trucks was connected, the rear truck led on the hardest inclines and would have tended to slip first.

[BACK TO HOME PAGE](#)

Amended 3 April 2007