

PREFACE

When driving round New Zealand a copy of “Exploring New Zealand’s Ghost Railways” by David Leitch and Brian Scott, researched and written during the first half of the 1990’s, has been our constant companion. An interest in small ports and all associated maritime matters led to an interest in land-based connections between ports. Some of the directions in the Leitch/Scott publication caused great frustration, being somewhat vague and lacking in detail. Over time access to new technology such as GPS and GIS, combined with the simplicity of Google Earth seemed to provide an opportunity to track and trace the lines in a much more detailed manner and the idea of writing an update became much more than a response to frustration. Recognition that over time the landscape was inevitably changing and rail heritage was rapidly disappearing focussed our thoughts on writing a new and somewhat different book on the subject of “ghost railways”.

During the intervening years there had been some restoration of old railways lines which had been converted to alternative use – as vintage/steam railways; as cycling/walking trails; or as a tourism venture adopting new technology and design to run “rail carts” on old branch lines. Information about all these is readily available online and doesn’t need repeating. Some branch lines had been “mothballed” pending decisions as to their ultimate fate. With these factors in mind we developed criteria for including (or excluding) branch railway from a new publication:

To be included a branch line had to meet the following criteria:

1. It had been operated by New Zealand Rail or its predecessors at some time;
2. There would be reasonable access to viewpoints by travellers in ordinary cars i.e. not 4-wheel drive or all-terrain vehicles;
3. Sufficient evidence of the railway (bridge piles, cuttings, embankments, built heritage, etc.) would still be available for viewing.

Excluded were:

1. Bush lines developed purely to service smaller scale forestry and associated sawmills, or gold or coal mines and never included in NZR services;
2. Lines developed or under development for walking/cycling trail or vintage/steam railway groups, or other users, such as Rotorua Railcarts;
3. Lines restored & being used by vintage railway groups e.g. Weka Pass, Goldfields;
4. Mothballed lines under consideration for reopening or developing significant alternative use e.g. Napier-Gisborne.

These criteria rapidly sorted out which lines should be covered, the final number selected being 42, including a couple which only just squeaked in, primarily because they had something else of particular interest. For example the Shag Point line only just met the criteria, and was included because it has such an interesting local historical context, is easy to visit, and there are lots of other local features to explore. On the other hand, the Outram Line met the criteria, but we considered it lacking in remnants, not very interesting, and only just able to be traced and so omitted it. We make no excuses for either omissions or exclusions, which were entirely at our discretion. The final list is much shorter than the 63 lines covered in the Leitch/Scott publication, many of which either didn’t meet our criteria at all, or were otherwise deemed too insignificant to warrant inclusion.

With selection criteria in place and an outline structure we were all set to embark on the task. Graham Stewart at Grantham House Publishing, who had published the Leitch/Scott book, responded positively and speedily to our approach, and we set about field research. We had already toured several North Island lines and made some rough notes, so we packed up and set off to more formally research the many branch lines in the South Island. This took five weeks, driving along each and every line, day after day, preferably and if time and conditions allowed, in both directions. Lines in the North Island were toured as and when we could get to them, over a 15 month period. Viewing conditions were often not ideal but even a major snowstorm failed to impede progress.

Google Earth became our best friend and provided us with the means to log which roads and access points to explore once on the road. Along the way we realized what a huge asset New Zealand's public libraries are – not only do they have helpful librarians, and are repositories of lots of local information, but they invariably provide a free, uncapped wi-fi service. A daily visit – or two – to the nearest library became part of the routine and plan for each day's exploration. If thwarted by the weather (which only happened on a couple of occasions) we could always retreat to the warmth of the nearest library to write up notes scribbled while on the road, and to spend hours using Google Earth.

Likewise publicans at many locales engaged happily with us, sharing their photograph collections and referring us to other local informants. If we were fortunate our visits to an area coincided with the opening hours of the local museum and we took advantage of their resources. Sadly this happened infrequently, and most times we were only able to note opening times or museum contact information for our readers. We commend the many volunteers who have created and continue to operate such facilities throughout the country.

Even with technological assistance there were times when our efforts seemed to elicit little result and our admiration for David Leitch and Brian Scott increased with each frustration – they had managed without such aids, and some of their descriptions were both accurate and finely detailed. Many artefacts had disappeared from view, not surprisingly, and with our intention to provide a commentary for the car-based traveller viewing vestiges from the roadside, we never ventured over fences or through paddocks to establish whether artefacts remained in the undergrowth. After a particularly hostile chase by an irate farmer who was convinced we had trespassed on his land, we became even more determined that readers of this book would be guided to artefacts they could view – in safety - from the roadside, without the need to access private property. With this one exception everyone we talked to along the way was helpful and added value to our research by pointing out local features we would have otherwise failed to note.

Our diligence was compromised time and again by many factors beyond our control – the weather, the direction of the sun, the constraints of time, distances that could be travelled in a day, seasonal growth masking artefacts, and a myriad of other obstacles to our cataloguing every remaining vestige. For all of these reasons we know that this publication will fail to please all readers, more particularly those rail enthusiasts across the country with intimate knowledge of railway lines past and present in their area. We make no excuses for failing to note some vestiges, and realize that others will be impossible to view at different times of the year. We have however, attempted to be as diligent as possible, and to ensure chapter-by-chapter descriptions are as accurate and informative as our research was able to make them.

We have spent invaluable time at the New Zealand Railway & Locomotive Society's archives at Ava extracting lots of pertinent information by trawling but a small portion of their comprehensive holdings. Volunteer efforts keep this resource in very good order and assistance with finding relevant

documentary information was enthusiastically offered at all times. Our efforts have been supported and encouraged by many in the railways enthusiast world, and we have been appreciative of their willingness to review draft chapters and provide feedback. Within this group a sub-group of those who commit their photographs to online services such as Flickr have been unfailingly obliging about sharing their work, and the service they have provided by giving glimpses into parts of lines which we have not accessed (i.e. which they have explored on foot) has been invaluable. The work of a blogger on a site called ENZED Transport which describes a number of lines guided us time and again to remnants we would have otherwise missed. To this unknown person we extend special appreciation.

Without a doubt railway enthusiasts will be disappointed to find little reference to, or photos of, locomotives or other rolling stock in this book. This is deliberate – there are many railway publications full of information and wonderful photos, and the focus of this book is the formation upon which trains ran, which continue in many places to be a feature of the landscape long after trains have stopped running and tracks have been lifted. This focus includes the structures required to service and support the railway system and which have also, against the odds in many cases, survived the ravages of weather, time and neglect. Once again, we make no apologies for the omission of locomotives and rolling stock and other railways appurtenances, but acknowledge the many other works to which we have referred to establish exactly where branch lines were when our own observations were failing us.

One of the frustrations of this research has been the inconsistency of the railways system in some of its attributes. As soon as we tried to describe something as being used across the network, we would find exceptions. This included the changes that were made over time to fixtures and fittings at every stop on the network – sometimes changes were frequent and it was difficult to pin down details which could be ascribed to a particular timeframe or sequence. The layout of yards, for example, changed as local circumstances changed over time, so describing a yard as having a particular set of shunts or loops had to be based on a description of operations in that yard at a particular time. We had to remind ourselves we were trying to describe each line in general, rather than write a detailed history of any one line. There are already some very good books on some of New Zealand's closed branch railway lines, and reference to these has been a great assistance to our work. We make no apologies for inconsistencies, or for being loose with our measurements, sometimes using the old imperial system and at other times metrics. Converting everything to one system or the other would have made the finished work even longer, and perhaps messier.

We did however decide to be consistent with a naming regime for the branch lines being described. We adopted the names used in the invaluable publication "The New Zealand Railway & Tram Atlas" (4th Edition Reprint (2009) compiled and published by Steve Watts under licence to the Quail Map Company. With only two exceptions we adopted the same nomenclature, the exception being the line between Hokitika and Ross, which in the Atlas is part of the Stillwater-Westport Line, and the line between Waihi and Apata, which was part of the East Coast Main Trunk Line. In the former case we adopted "Hokitika-Ross" as the most appropriate name, and in the latter "Waihi".

Working on this book has confirmed that there are many people throughout the country who are prepared to assist complete strangers who ring them out of the blue, arrive on their doorstep unannounced, or make contact by email. Those noted along the way include Lyall Adamson, Graham Baird, Bryan Blanchard, Chris Bradley, Hans and Anja Claus, Mark Cole, Jim Daniels, Louise Deans, Arthur de Maine, Mark Denne, Trich Devescovi, Carolyn Deverson, Brian Dillon, Murray Howe, Graeme Jupp, Jonathan Kennett, Thomas Law, Neill Linscott, Paul Mahoney, Hugh McCall, Graeme

McClare, Kay Morgan, Paul Oscar, Derek Parsons, Bryn Somerville, Jim Staton, Joe Wallace, Steve Watts, and David Webster, all of whom offered knowledge, or looked up information, or gently corrected us when we had got things wrong or were not accurate. To all of them, and others we have inadvertently failed to note, we extend our heartfelt appreciation. Last but certainly not least, we thank our publisher Graham Stewart who has guided us throughout the writing and publishing process. We are fortunate to have had the services of a publisher who also has a lifelong passion for railways and has a solid reputation not only in the railways world but also amongst publishers.

Where possible photographs have been attributed to their owner. Efforts have been made to identify owners whenever possible and to obtain permission for publication. Failure to do so in a few instances are entirely our responsibility.