

When the Easter hike for Victorian Venturers coincided with the closure of a rail line in the Otways ...

The Hoadley Hide of 50 y

By **ADRIAN WALSH**

The Colac-Beech Forest-Crowes Railway was constructed (in two sections) by the Victorian Railways between 1900 and 1911. When operational, the narrow gauge railway served as the major transport route to the West Otway Ranges for many decades. The railway enabled the creation of settlements and communities in this previously undeveloped region and led to the associated economic advances apparent today.

While not too much of the actual line is still visible today, the route and the substantial earthworks are still very evident. The line was 71 kms in length, running from the Colac Railway Station in a generally southerly direction for 48 route kms to Beech Forest and then generally westerly for 22.5 route kms to a little distance beyond Lavers Hill. According to the "Colac-Beech Forest-Crowes Railway Conservation Management Plan". prepared for Colac-Otway Shire by Norman Houghton, June 2003, the line closed as an operating railway



in 1962.

True to form, leading lights in the Scout Association saw the closing of the railway as a golden opportunity. As a result the Hoadley Hide over Easter 1962 – one of the flagship events for the Senior Scout Section (we call them "Venturers" today) – was held on the then soon-to-be closed railway.

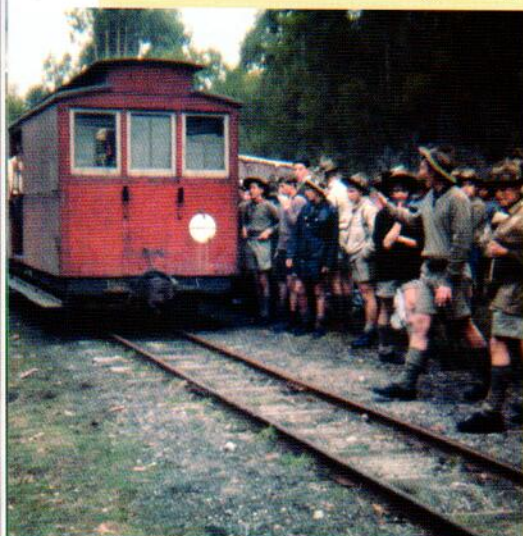
Participants were checked in at Spencer Street Station and loaded on to dedicated trains bound for Colac. From Colac railway station the great adventure began, with participants engaged in "working on the railway" over the next four days. Hundreds of Senior Scouts were faced with a weekend of initiative challenges with a railway theme: derailing and rerailing train carriages; stoking locomotives; effectively

shunting trains; managing complex train signalling demands and so much more.

Hiking and navigation were then, as now, a major test for competitors. However, transport between key centres was by way of the narrow gauge "puffing billy" train itself. Open carriages (cattle cars) were filled to the brim with Senior Scouts who were typically covered with smoke and soot at the end of each stage of the journey.

As the 17-year-old Patrol Leader of one of the competing Patrols, I took some of the pictures here. My Patrol was formed from members of what, at the time, was a combined 1st West Heidelberg and 1st Olympic Village Senior Scout Troop. It was my first Hoadley Hide, and in terms of the competition itself, not a very successful one! But as a fun, challenging and exciting event, it took some beating!

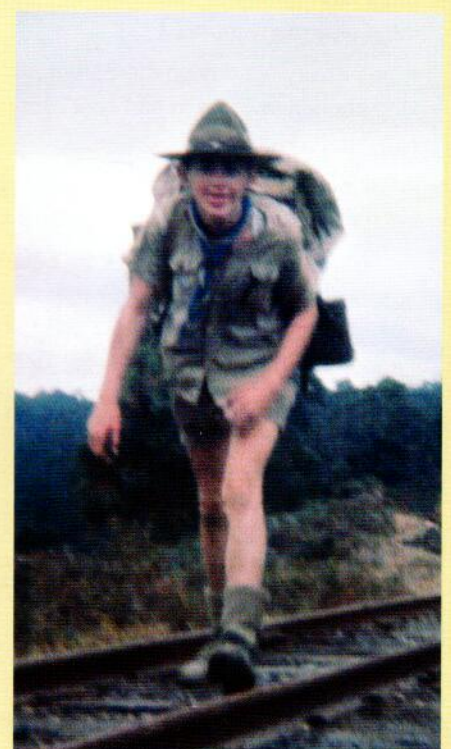
• *Adrian Walsh is, among other things, former Branch Commissioner for Scouts, Vic.*



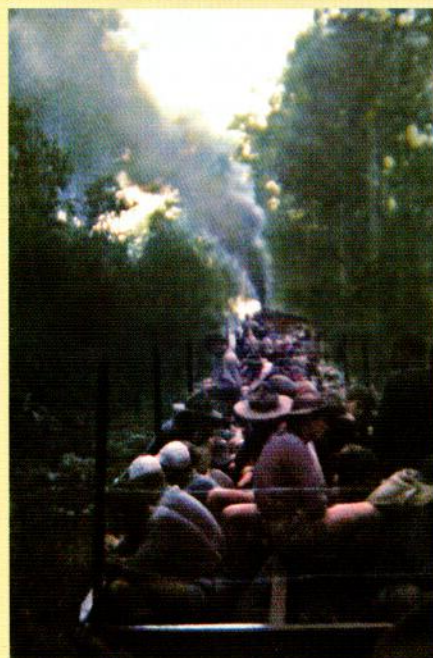
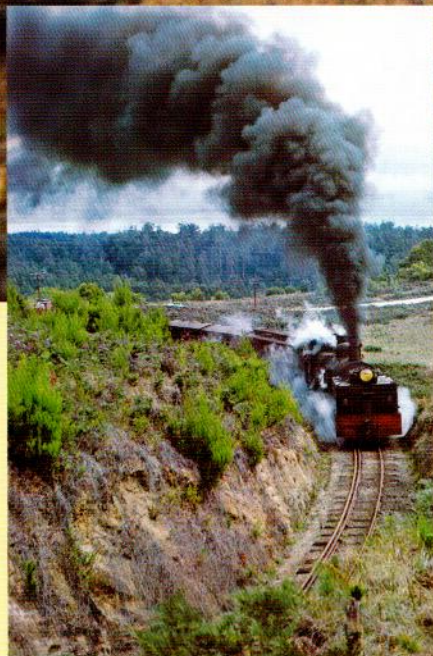
**Photos
ADRIAN WALSH and
JOHN THOMPSON**



The author



years ago



Footnote

It's a small world! Adrian – a life-long Scout – added a couple of the pictures shown here to an on-line Powerpoint presentation as a part of the 50th Anniversary Celebrations for 1st West Heidelberg Scout Group. Somehow Gary Ryan from 1st Eaglemont Scout Group stumbled onto the pictures. Gary happens to be an active member of the Puffing Billy Society. He thought the event worth sharing with the Society and alerted John Thompson, the Editor of the Society's magazine, *Narrow Gauge*. It turns out that John was himself at the 1962 Hoadley Hide – but working on the puffing billy side! In fact his most

significant memory of the event is being up a signal mast with his camera and being pelted with items thrown by the Seniors loaded on the passing train – including, probably, Adrian!

With this reminder, *Narrow Gauge* has now marked the almost-50 year anniversary with not one but two successive articles. *Australian Scout* is delighted to be able to similarly celebrate this half-century of history. Are there any other readers of *Australian Scout* out there who participated in the Colac-Beech Forest railway Hoadley Hide in 1962?