

WODONGA–CUDGEWA RAILWAY LINE (former)

ADDRESS: off Murray Valley Highway, Wodonga

STUDY NUMBER: 2C HERITAGE OVERLAY NUMBER:

DATE: Commenced in 1887 and completed in 1921

CONDITION: Fair

INTEGRITY: Fair



Platform at Bonegilla Station (RBA, June 2024)

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

What is significant?

The *former Wodonga–Cudgewa Railway Line* within the City of Wodonga is significant including the permanent way, railway formation, remnant platforms (Bonegilla and Ebdon), three mile posts (at 187, 194 and 195) and associated infrastructure and landforms such as culverts, drains, embankments and cuttings, as well as all existing materials associated with it such as piles, sleepers, hooks, and tracks. The first section of what was initially the Wodonga-Tallangatta branch line opened in 1889 and reached Tallangatta in 1891. Between 1916 and 1921 it was extended to Cudgewa. From the 1950s, there was gradual closure of the line culminating in 1981 with the full cessation of services.

How is it significant?

The *former Wodonga–Cudgewa Railway Line* within the municipality is of historical significance to the City of Wodonga.

Why is it significant?

The *former Wodonga–Cudgewa Railway Line* is of historical significance as the major 19th century transport infrastructure developed in the northeast of Victoria. It assisted in opening the rich Murray and Mitta Mitta River flats to agriculture and develop the pastoral resources of the district. Commencing in the 1880s, the Wodonga-Cudgewa Railway line connected the rural east of Wodonga with the greater Victorian rail network allowing for a more efficient and economical flow of local goods and resources to the nearby State capitals - Melbourne and Sydney. These exports included cattle, timber, wine, wool, sheep to name a few of the region's primary exports during the 19th and 20th centuries. The line also allowed for the mobility of residents who were able to move between Wodonga and their homes with greater freedom. The line also facilitated historic migrations in Wodonga's history, such as the movement of migrants to the Bonegilla Migrant Camp and army personnel to the Army Camp via Bonegilla Station. The line also enabled the construction of key regional infrastructures critical to industry growth at the time, such as the Kiewa hydro-system and the Hume Weir. (Criterion A)

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION

The former Wodonga–Cudgewa Railway line comprises 111 kilometres of former rail line extending from Wodonga Station to Cudgewa Station, of which 30 kilometres is located within the municipality extending broadly from Wodonga Railway Station to south of Ebdon Station and continues through the Shires of Indigo and Towong.

In the City of Wodonga, the railway alignment extends from the former Wodonga Railway Goods Yards near Osborn Street, south and parallel to the Thomas Mitchell Drive, passes through the northern edge of the Bandiana South army barracks and Bonegilla before following the south side of Lake Hume and northern side of the Murray Valley Highway

The formation has mostly been converted to a bicycle trail as part of the popular High Country Rail Trail, while the adjacent land is either grassed embankments or cuttings with large areas of undulating pasture, some lined with gum trees. In some places rails remain embedded in the roadways at level crossings.

The platform at Bonegilla Station, which dates from 1941, is partly original. The retaining wall is in the standard format of pre-cast concrete frame with the original concrete edging, with a high level of aggregate and grooved upper surface, remaining above. The signage has been renewed and a concrete stair has been introduced to one side.

The Ebdon Station platform site consists of original and reconstructed features and Lake Hume forms a backdrop. The retaining wall is typical format with concrete slabs which slot into a steel frame and has new timber edging. Non-original features include concrete stair, picnic shelter and table, and interpretive sign. The station signage has been reconstructed. Nearby on the south side are brick and concrete culverts extending beneath the asphalted path, that is the former location of the tracks.



Platform deck at Bonegilla Station (RBA, June 2024)



Bonegilla Station, original concrete edging to the platform (RBA, June 2024)



Ebdon Station showing retaining walls, timber edging and concrete stair (RBA, June 2024)



Brick culvert near Ebdon Station (RBA, June 2024)

Three rail mile posts, which demarcate the distance from Melbourne, survive two of which are in their original location (194 and 195), whilst another has been relocated (187). These triangular

concrete posts are about 800mm in height and their respective number is cut vertically into two faces.

The 187-rail mile post was originally located in Wodonga near High Street crossing but has been relocated to the Mann Shopping Centre on Elgin Road. The two mile posts near the Bonegilla and Ebden, respectively the 194- and 195-mile posts, remain in situ. The 192-mile post, originally located near Lone Pine, had been removed for repair and its location could not be confirmed.



187-mile post, Elgin Street, Wodonga (RBA, June 2024)



194-rail mile post (Biosis, September 2022)



195 rail mile post (Biosis, September 2022)

HISTORIC THEMES

- 3.1 Establishing pathways
- 3.3 Linking Victorians by rail
- 4.6 Exploiting other mineral, forest, and water resources
- 6.7 Living on the fringes
- 7.4 Defending Victoria and Australia

HISTORY

Construction of the Wodonga-Cudgewa railway line commenced in 1887, known then as the Wodonga–Tallangatta line, opening in 1889 and completed in 1891. Over a five-year period during the early 20th century, the branch line was extended eastward to Cudgewa by 1921, and subsequently became known as the Wodonga-Cudgewa line.

Wodonga Railway Station was constructed in 1879 as the terminus for the Victorian Railways North-East line. During the 1880s plans were made for a branch line to extend further east to Tallangatta, capturing the pastoral and agricultural townships of Huon, Bandiana, and finally Tallangatta according to the Act No. 821 of the Victorian Parliament in 1884, which authorised the construction of the branch line.

Construction commenced in 1887 with a newspaper article from March of that year outlining the progress to date, relating to the preparatory works involving 400 men, as follows:

The contractors for the Wodonga and Tallangatta railway are pushing on the work with great vigour, and if they are favoured with fine weather they anticipate

completing the line within the contract time. There are about 400 men employed. The work already done is tangible evidence of very considerable progress having been made. The whole of the line is cleared of timber, and half the side-drains made. Two of the largest cuttings are also finished, more than half of the posts and rails for fencing are on the ground, and the whole of the fencing wire is at the Wodonga railway station, as well as some large stacks of sawn timber. All the culverts for three miles are in. Pile-driving at two bridges was commenced on Thursday morning. The contractors have requested the Government to forward rails at once (*Albury Banner ...*).

Logistical and weather setbacks however delayed completion as reported in January 1889.

We learn that the contractors for the second section of the railway from Wodonga to Tallangatta are experiencing considerable difficulty in getting their rails and other materials necessary in the construction of the line on the ground. It was by an arrangement made with Messrs. Barker and Co., the contractors for the first section, Messrs. Thornton and Co. had a portion of their material brought some distance beyond Foard's at a fixed rate. Lately, however, owing to the difficulty on the part of Messrs. Barker and Co. in procuring suitable piles for the Little River Bridge, Messrs. Thornton and Co. have been disallowed the use of the first section, and they must now bring everything they require by teams to the ground. It need hardly be remarked that this will be found a very costly way of conveying heavy loading. Messrs. Barker and Co.'s contract time expired in March of last year, but it is very much open to question whether the contractors will be in a position to hand over the line by March of this year. Undoubtedly a great many unforeseen difficulties have arisen, which have materially retarded the progress of the work, such as being unable to get limber in the locality, wet weather, &c.; but the fact that the contract is now nearly ten months behindhand, and is yet in an unfinished state, might possibly lead some people to think that the work has not been pushed on as expeditiously as it might have been. On the other hand, Messrs. Thornton and Co. have vigorously pressed on their section, and now, through no fault of their own, they meet with a complete block (*Albury Banner ...*).

The line formally opened in September 1889, initially terminating at Bandiana, before being extended to Huon in that year, including the Bonegilla and Ebdon stations. Construction continued to Bolga in 1890, and to Tallangatta in July 1891, completing the Wodonga–Tallangatta line. It was however briefly closed between April and October 1899 due to lack of traffic. (Heritage of the High Country Rail Trail, 2006).

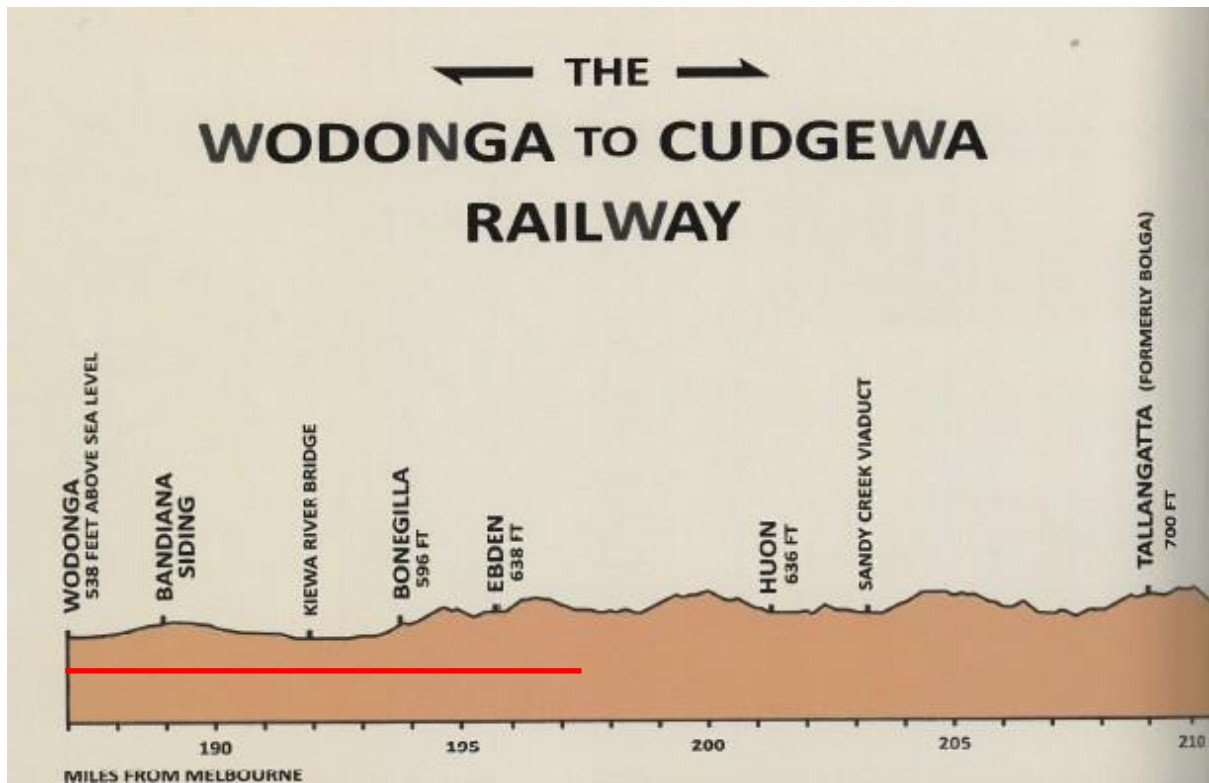


Diagram showing profile (in feet) and distance from Melbourne (in miles) of first section of line, with extent in municipality highlighted (N Anchen, *A Railway to Cudgewa*, p4)

Though these towns possessed small populations, they were significant pastoral, agricultural and resource contributors (i.e. timber) to the Victorian and inter-colonial (later state) markets. During the 19th century they were only accessible by coach, bullock and dray, or on foot, impeding the economical export of their goods – a solution was required. The railway line opened these remote townships to Victoria and Melbourne to their exports and tourism, contributing to the growth of local populations, industry and small businesses over the decades (for example see 'Wodonga', 1887).

Ebden station was originally known as 'Bethanga Road' until 1904 whereupon it was shortened to 'Bethanga'. In 1910, the station name was changed to 'Ebden' in recognition of Charles Hoston Ebden, one of the first European settlers who overlanded with Hawdon and established a squatting station at Mungabareena on the site of the future Albury in 1836 ('Bonegilla', 1910, pp. 4, Serle 1966). The station name change was subject to a community petition to the Railway Commission who involved the Council to garner support for the name change.



Ebden Station, circa 1922, when horse and cart and bullock wagons continued to be employed. Note the goods shed in the foreground was the largest building (*Wodonga Yesterday*, fig. 90)

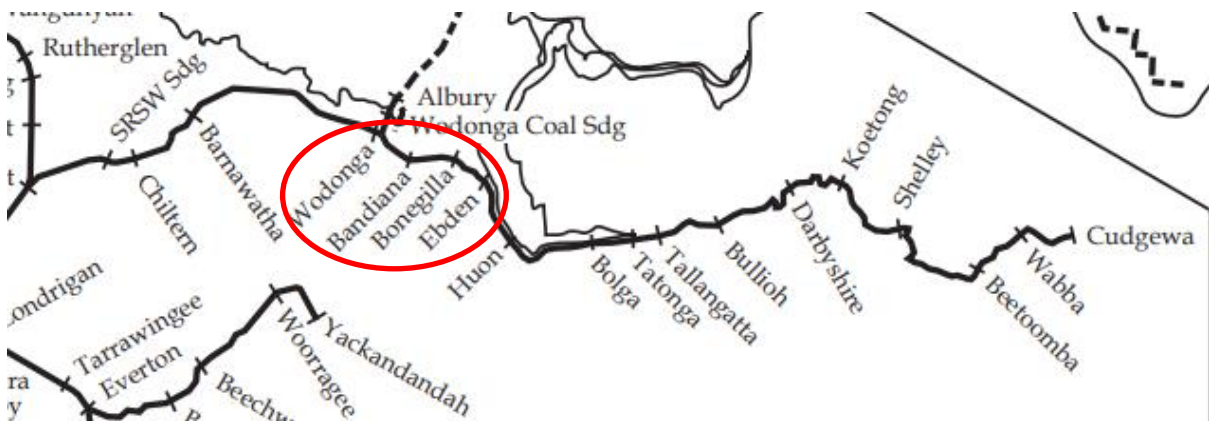
Into the 20th century, plans to extend the line to Cudgewa commenced, however, construction was halted when World War One was declared. Construction recommenced during the war and by 1916 the line extended to Bullioh, Darbyshire, Koetong, and Shelley; Beetoomba in 1919; and Wabba; and finally, Cudgewa in 1921. From 1919, construction of the Hume Weir put significant and ongoing pressure on the line necessitating upgrades and a deviation to Huon station in 1930 to 1932, and for decades to come (Heritage of the High Country Rail Trail, 2006).

The following timetable from the 1930s reveals that there was only one daily passenger service between Wodonga and Tallangatta, a journey which took about two hours. Three days per week, there was a continuing service to Cudgewa, which took another five hours.

Table 71		WODONGA—CUDGEWA.			
READ DOWN		READ UP.			
a.m.		Melbourne	p.m.	p.m.	
6 30	DAILY	Lv. (Spencer-street) R Ar.	12 30	10 20	
p.m.					
1c44		Ar. .. Wodonga R 57.. Lv.	THURS., SATS. 7 45	TUESDAYS. 3 5	MONS., WEDS., FRIS. 3 5
2 15		Lv. " Ar.	7c29	9c55	12c50
2a24	 Bandiana.....	a	a	a
2a32	 Bonegilla.....	7 a 9	9a31	12a23
2 48	 Ebden.....	7 3	9 24	12 17
3 8	 Huon.....	6 39	9 0	11 52
3a28	 Bolga.....	6a16	8a37	11a26
3 53		Ar Tallangatta Lv	6 0	8 20	11 10
4 30	Lv..... " Ar.	..	..	10 30
4 49	..... Bullioh.....	..	..	10 11
a	..... Darbyshire.....	..	..	a
6 28	..... Koetong.....	..	..	9 17
7 30	Ar..... Shelley T Lv.	..	..	8 45
7 40	Lv..... " Ar.	..	..	8 30
8 30	Ar..... Beetoomba.... Lv.	..	..	7 20
8 35	Lv..... " Ar.	..	..	7 5
a	..... Wabba.....	..	..	a
9 25	Ar..... Cudgewa Lv.	..	..	6 30
p.m.			a.m.	a.m.	

Timetable of the Wodonga-Cudgewa railway line, 1930s

During World War Two and into the post-war years, the line became an important resource for troops, and later refugees and assisted migrants. From 1941, Bonegilla Station serviced the nearby and newly built Army Camp. The Camp was transformed into the Bonegilla Migrant Centre from 1947 until 1971 and the railway was used to transfer emigrants from Station Pier at Port Melbourne.



Train system in Victoria in 1930 showing the Wodonga-Cudgewa, highlighting the extent within the municipality (Railway Map of Victoria in 1930, unknown).

The last main phase of expansion were the works to Bandiana Station to facilitate the Kiewa hydro-electric project, which was completed in July 1949.

Reconstruction and extension of railway sidings for the new railhead established by the State Electricity Commission at Bandiana will be completed next week.

It will handle 300,000 tons of rail-borne construction material for the Kiewa hydro-electric project.

From August 1 all material sent by rail to Kiewa will pass through Bandiana.

Bandiana has been established as the new Kiewa rail head, due to the freight economy, rail facilities and easy road haulage. With sidings in both New South Wales and Victorian gauges, it will handle traffic from both' States (Age).

Despite a revival in the late 1940s the track further east from Huon came under threat and the Wodonga-Cudgewa Rail Line closed in the same way it was constructed: incrementally over the course of decades.

In 1950 and 1951 the rising water levels of the Hume Weir caused sections of line to be deemed unsafe. Local opposition to the closure of these sections ensured parts of it remained open, except in the case of Tallangatta. The Board of Land and Water predicted Tallangatta would be fully submerged by the expansion of the weir ultimately necessitating the closure of the town and the train station (Tallangatta: The Town That Moved, 2016).

This was the beginning of this latter section's disuse and degradation, as local governments invested in other transport projects, such as the Wodonga Rail bypass, to move people and goods through the Wodonga and Towong Shires.

The Heavy Rail was installed from the Wodonga-Ebden section due to numerous migrant special trains throughout the 1950s and 1960s. These consisted of locomotives such as A2's, R's and later B class diesels. Bonegilla was the planned terminus for these special trains, however, a run around loop was not constructed at the station and so the terminus for these trains was pushed forward to the next station on the line at Ebden. These migrant communities contribute to a significant chapter in the region's social history when following World War Two, approximately 320,000 European migrants from non-English speaking countries passed through the Bonegilla Migrant Training Centre between 1941 and 1975. The centre was the longest-lived and largest post-war migrant camp and those who comprised its transient community made significant contributions to the region in the decades that followed (Persian 2012).

By the 1970s, patronage declined dramatically and services accordingly. This was in part due to the road upgrades which were undertaken for the Snowy Hydro Electric Scheme) for transport of goods and materials.

Bonegilla Station was closed to regular passengers in 1961 but was used until 1971 for the migrant centre and again used by the Army during the Vietnam War. The station platform was reduced from 860ft to 50ft in 1974, then was completely closed in 1981 and by the late 1990s had deteriorated into a state of disrepair.

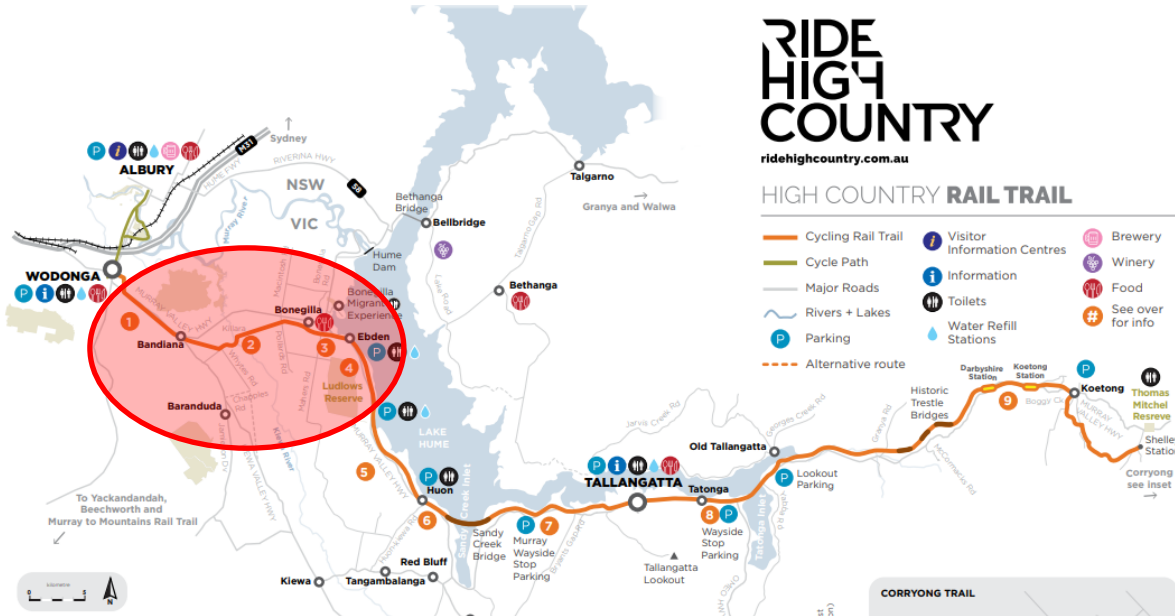
Passenger services at Ebden Railway Station ceased in March 1975, and the last regular goods service ran on 21 April 1978, and the entire rail line from Bandiana to Cudgewa was decommissioned in March 1981. All buildings were removed after the closure of the line, with only some platform mounds being retained.

As part of the development of the High Country Rail Trail, the Apex Club of Wodonga rebuilt the passenger platform at Ebden between 2006 and 2008. Further upgrades were made during 2010-2012 including a picnic shelter and table, station name board and interpretive signage (*Ebden Railway Station*, 2022).

In 2009, the line between Wodonga to Bandiana – the final section – closed.

In 2019, the Wodonga-Cudgewa line between Wodonga and Shelley was converted into the High Country Rail Trail.

In 2020, the Rail Trail Advisory Committee received \$3,450 toward the reinstatement of Bonegilla Station platform and by the end of the year, the work had been undertaken.



Ride High Country Rail Trail map, highlighting the extent within the municipality (High Country Rail Trail Map, 2018)

COMPARISON

There is no comparison with the municipality for this type of infrastructure.

The sections further east in the Shires of Indigo and Towong include some different elements such as a series of timber trestle bridge in Towong where the terrain is more undulating.

RECOMMENDATIONS

EXTENT OF LISTING

It is recommended that the former Wodonga–Cudgewa Railway Line in the City of Wodonga is included in the Schedule to the Heritage Overlay of the Wodonga Planning Scheme.

The listing extent includes approximately 30 kilometres of railway line from Wodonga Railway Station to south of Ebden Station, within the City of Wodonga.

The extent includes the platforms at Bonegilla and Ebden stations and three miles posts at 187, 194 and 195 miles.



Extent of the Wodonga-Cudgewa railway within the municipality (VicPlan)

PLANNING SCHEME CONTROLS

Planning Controls	Y/N
External Paint Controls Apply?	N
Internal Alteration Controls Apply?	N
Tree Controls Apply?	Y
Solar Energy System Controls?	Y
Outbuildings or Fences Not Exempt Under Clause 43.01-4?	N
Included on the Victorian Heritage Register Under the Heritage Act 2017?	Y
Prohibited Uses Permitted?	Y
Aboriginal Heritage Place?	N

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