*Dear Walhalla Goldfields Railway,*

Hi Sam,

*My name is Sam Huffer. I have been researching Victoria’s surviving steam locomotives and heritage railways, and I was wondering if I might be able to ask a few questions about the WGR’s current locomotive fleet.*

*Let me explain.*

Will do my best 😊

*Ever since I was a child, I have had a strong interest in trains, largely thanks to Thomas the Tank Engine and related media. My parents and grandparents would from time to time take me, and later my younger sisters as well, to nearby heritage railways to ride on the trains. The Walhalla Goldfields Railway was the most prominent amongst these, as we made several visits over the years.*

*As I grew older, I also became interested in the Yu-Gi-Oh! Trading Card Game and related animated series. At university, I studied game design and development. Over the last year, I have combined the two by designing my own fan-made cards for Yu-Gi-Oh! as a hobby. Now, you're probably wondering how that relates to trains and the WGR. Well, Yu-Gi-Oh! has a set of cards themed around trains. A few months ago, I decided to design my own train-themed cards using Victorian steam locomotives as their basis. I started researching Victoria's surviving steam locomotive classes so that I could better capture the spirit of each of them in my card designs. Recently, I decided to design a card based on one of the WGR’s locomotives - namely whichever locomotive tended to take the passenger trains whenever I and my family have visited Walhalla, which I believe was the Fowler 0-6-0DM locomotive, but I'll be double checking my grandparents' photo collections to make sure*

*- to satisfy my own nostalgia for Walhalla and its heritage railway.*

Sam to be clear, we are not a heritage railway. When the line closed the then Victorian Railways did what they always do with closed lines and enacted the scorched earth policy and destroyed as much as they could. Fortunately, the Thomson bridge survived only due to a public protest at the time which saved it from being blown up by the Army. We are creating history and eventually heritage , however we cannot claim full heritage status due to an almost 100% rebuild. Fowler 14 was until recently our most used locomotive and came from the old SEC narrow gauge line in Yallourn. It is used much less these days as we have the larger rebuilt 10 Class Locomotive in service, which has the capacity to haul our four passenger carriages whilst Fowler can only haul three. Future carriage builds will be of much lighter construction. Our current carriages weigh twelve and a half tons each, so are very heavy to haul up our steep grades.

*However, I wasn’t able to do much in-depth research about the WGR’s locomotive fleet. Wikipedia didn’t go into much detail about them, the WGR website doesn’t have much more detail either outside of regauging progress updates in the news section, and other online sources don’t have any more information than that, if they mention the WGR or its locomotives at all. In fact, the most detailed source I was able to find was a table of locomotives in a PDF copy of the WGR’s Nomination for Recognition in Engineers Australia’s Engineering Heritage Australia Recognition Program.*

*So, to go back to the reason for my query, I was hoping I could ask for more information about the WGR’s locomotives.*

*- Did Spirit of Yallourn and Kasey belong to distinct locomotive classes, or is Fowler 0-6-0DM and 0-4-0 Baldwin diesel as specific as their classification gets?*

Fowler is as original as when we received it, but I believe the engine is not original and now has a Caterpillar motor. It was originally manufactured in the UK I understand in the fifties.

Kasey 30 was a tunnel slug in the construction of the Thomson dam in the late seventies, early eighties. It had the current body and cab constructed by then WGR volunteers and bears little resemblance to its original design.

*- For all of the locomotives, is there any more detail that can be provided on their working life, both before and after joining the WGR?*

*- Did they or their locomotive classes (if any) have particular nicknames, either on the WGR or in broader use beyond its rails?*

*- Do any of the specific locomotives that run on the WGR have especially unique events that happened to them that might have made for good stories to turn into Thomas the Tank Engine episodes?*

As above Fowler from Yallourn and Kasey from the Thomson dam. 10 class from the emu Bay railway in Tasmania, however when rebuilt by a now deceased WGR member, little effort was made to ensure the locomotive was restored as original and it is a bitser. Parts often have to be manufactured as nothing is standard to the original design. It does a great job but due to parts unavailability, is very costly to repair.

*Any other interesting trivia outside of those questions would also be much appreciated.*

I presume you are aware that we have engaged Federation University Gippsland to prepare a feasibility study and hopefully later on, a full business case for the restoration of the railway back to Erica. This is essential for the long-term viability of the railway and indeed the tourism potential of this area. We are very excited to see this vital extension being seriously considered.

DH 37 is currently under full restoration and we also own DH 72 which is awaiting restoration at a later date. Both were sourced from Queensland rail and have to be gauge converted from their 3'6" to our 2'6" gauge.

*While I am asking about all this information for myself, I was wondering if I might also be able to request, if it is practical, that the WGR add a section to its website covering all this information as well. The Puffing Billy Railway’s website was very helpful when I was researching their NA class locomotives, and I had been hoping that the WGR had similar information available online as well.*

Sounds like a good idea and I will discuss at board level.

*Thank you for your time and any information about the WGR’s locomotive fleet that you would be able to share. I shall link the sources I was able to find about the locomotives for your reference, Puffing Billy’s page on their locomotive fleet for comparison, and my train-based Yu-Gi-Oh! card designs, should they be of interest to you.*

You are welcome Sam and thank you for making contact with us.

Kind Regards,

Graeme Skinner (Secretary)

Walhalla Goldfields Railway