

MEDIA RELEASE



28th August 2023

100th GHAN Naming Anniversary

Opened in 1879, the railway through the Pichi Richi Pass was the first section of what became the Central Australian Railway to Alice Springs. It was also the first section of the Great Northern Railway which was intended for Palmerston (in Darwin).

Before the railway was built, the only method of transport to the interior of Australia was by horse and dray, or by camel trains. Trains hauled passengers, coal, troops, livestock, minerals and agricultural products between Port Augusta, Quorn and beyond for nearly 70 years.

The Ghan is one of the oldest named trains in Australia, and possibly the most famous and Wednesday, **August 30, 2023** marks the **100th anniversary** of the naming of *The Ghan*.

There is general agreement the GHAN name is derived from Afghan and the Afghan Cameleers who once provided transport to the outback.

Prior to August 1923 the South Australian Railways, the operator of the train, took 3 days to make the train journey from Adelaide to the end of the line, Oodnadatta, and enroute passengers had to stay overnight in hotels at Quorn and Marree.

On 30th August 1923 a significant event occurred in Quorn, in the Flinders Ranges, when the Oodnadatta train, still operated by the South Australian Railways, arrived in Quorn from Terowie. This train had a sleeping car attached with the aim of reducing the travel time by removing the 2 overnight layovers.

This innovation of the American Commissioner of the South Australian Railways, W.A. Webb, was quite an event for the railway workers at Quorn and for those who travelled the line and there was quite a gathering of spectators interested in seeing who was travelling aboard the sleeping car.

When the train arrived in Quorn only one passenger alighted from the sleeping car, an Afghan cameleer who was carrying his prayer mat and heading to a quiet corner of the Quorn station yard to say his evening prayers. Amongst the onlookers was Ernie Smith, a locomotive driver and proud

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unionist. Smith commented “*Struth! If that is all that is coming aboard, we’ll have to call it the Afghan Express.*”

That name, the “Afghan Express” travelled north with that first train. Pichi Richi Railway’s first Honorary Life Member, the late Alfred George Williams, as a young man, was employed as the assistant to the pumper at Oodnadatta and he heard the name coined by the engine crew when it arrived the following day.

From that day on, the railwaymen who operated the fortnightly passenger train to Oodnadatta and later to Alice Springs, when the line was extended there in 1929, referred to it as the “Afghan Express”. Over the years they abbreviated it to the “Ghan Express” and later to just the “Ghan” as it is now known.

This naming occurred whilst Oodnadatta was still the railhead of the Great Northern Railway.

That AFGHAN EXPRESS train is now named "The GHAN" and has gone on to become one of the **world's great train journeys!**

Journey Beyond Rail now operates The Ghan and Pichi Richi Railway runs the *Afghan Express* service on that section of the original Ghan line.

In Pichi Richi Railways locomotive and carriage collection is that same sleeping car which the Afghan gentleman rode, SAR Sleeping Car “Alberga”.

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