

THE SNOW STORY

For the first time in memory, heavy snow almost stopped train operations on the main western line on Saturday and Sunday, 17-18th July. A sudden 23° drop in upper air temperatures over South Australia took place just prior to the weekend, and on reaching eastern Australia deposited snow on the Dividing Range from Victoria to the Tropic of Capricorn; up to two feet being recorded on the Snow Mountains. The snow commenced about 9.30 p.m. on the Saturday and continued about a break until 4.30 p.m. on Sunday.

The initial delay to Western Line train services occurred when a 66 KV transmission line failed about 10.0 p.m. on Saturday, 17th, causing a 1500 volt power failure from Newnes Junction to Lithgow. The current was restored at 10.00 a.m. on Sunday. Two 49-class diesels were despatched to Mount Victoria and No. 4901, worked the 11.15 p.m. Passenger Sydney to Dubbo between Mount Victoria and Lithgow. Diesel power continued to shuttle goods trains while the lines remained open. The snow was so heavy, that points at all stations Katoomba to Lithgow (and it is understood, beyond) became frozen, severely hampering shunting operations. Goods trains were stowed at Katoomba and Mount Victoria, being unable to continue further. The 11.32 p.m. inter-urban train, Sydney to Lithgow terminated at Mount Victoria, due to snow conditions.

The Up Coonamble Mail which departed Dubbo on Saturday evening, was hauled by engine 4902 from Lithgow to Katoomba, where 4616 took over, the train reaching Sydney some two hours late. A much graver fate befell the Forbes Mail which arrived Sydney over 7 hours late. The attaching of the Mudgee cars at Narrerawang was hampered by frozen points, and took 10 minutes longer than usual, while a 49-class hauled the train from Lithgow and reached Mount Victoria, where snow conditions prevented the train continuing further for some five hours (4 a.m. to 9 a.m. approximately). Eventually 4608 took the train on, but so heavy was the snow that one pantograph was weighed down causing further delays. The late running and complete disorganisation also caused cancellation of the morning trains from Lithgow to Sydney, the Forbes Mail performing their work by stopping at all stations.

When Sunday, 18th July dawned, most trains between Lawson and Lithgow stopped, or experienced extreme difficulty in moving. Electric power had been restored, but during the day, transmission line failures caused all signals between Mount Victoria and Lithgow to fail. The 1500 volt was again affected on Saturday night and the weight of snow accumulating eventually broke all phone connection west of Lithgow, a condition which was not rectified for quite some time.

Only after long hours struggling through snow did trains make their way between Katoomba and Lithgow. For example, a train conveying welded rails passed through Katoomba at 7.10 a.m., but did not reach Lithgow until 2.10 p.m., having spent 3½ hours apparently safe inside one of the 10 tunnels between Newnes and Zig Zag. The next train to get through spent six hours at Newnes Junction, while the section to Mount Victoria was cleared by 46-class and a 60-class engine with a watt running light in an endeavour to keep the lines open.

The 8.20 a.m. inter-urban train, Sydney to Lithgow, was marooned at Bell from midday to 6.20 p.m. when it returned to Mount Victoria, eventually arriving Sydney at 10.40 p.m. The 8.54 a.m. train Sydney to Mount Victoria reached its destination only 20 minutes late. Attempting to return to Sydney at 1.15 p.m., the train spent 5 hours reaching Katoomba, and arrived Sydney at 8.40 p.m. The 1.15 p.m. train Sydney to Mount Victoria, terminated at Katoomba and returned on the times of the 3.6 p.m. Mount Victoria to Sydney service, running 40 minutes late.

During the afternoon, 5482 and 6040 were reported in use between Penrith and Mount Victoria, running over the tracks to clear snow. The 2.50 p.m. inter-urban train, Sydney to Lithgow, was hauled by a 46-class engine due to difficulties likely to occur en route. The train reached Lithgow $3\frac{1}{2}$ hours late. (See later account by a passenger on this train).

On a normal Saturday night, heavy livestock traffic is conveyed to Flemington and delays of up to 10 hours took place to these and most other trains. One stock train which left Lithgow at 8.15 a.m. (Sunday-already late) was marooned at Mount Victoria and had not left there by 9.0 p.m. Another which departed at 4.15 p.m., took until 5.15 to reach Bell, where it stayed until 9.20 p.m., and was further delayed an hour at Blackheath. It was necessary to cancel almost all goods trains out of Lithgow on the Sunday as the accumulation of snow in the turn-table pit froze the table and so locked many steam engines in the depot.

However about 7 a.m., 3639 headed west from Lithgow with a down goods and is believed to have been the last train to leave for over 12 hours. Shortly after, 5346 arrived with an up goods on the up main but was unable to proceed past the main station till after 1.30 p.m.

Meanwhile W.44 Concentrate was cancelled at Blayney and one train stowed at Georges Plains remained there until Tuesday. Bathurst and Wallerawang yards were almost full.

Activity at Lithgow ceased till 10.20 a.m. when 4517 hauled dead 8-car inter-urban set U.4 into the down platform. This left at 10.40 for Sydney behind 4602. However, a power failure brought the train to a stand near the old Lithgow station for almost an hour. After another power failure only 100 yards further on, 4517 was attached to the rear of the inter-urban. However, when yet another failure occurred near the loco shed, 4517 proved incapable of taking the train on alone and thus it hauled dead U4 and 4602 back to Lithgow, arriving there some 3 hours after leaving.

During this time 4606, 4519, and 4634 coupled to another 46 (possibly 4625), were stranded in the yards on goods trains, while 5201, 4915 another 49 and a number of 46's were standing covered in snow near the Lithgow roundhouse.

No further activity occurred in Lithgow until it was announced that a train would leave for Sydney at 5.30 p.m. However, by 7.30 no train had arrived and the departure time was then estimated at 9.00 p.m. This train finally got away at 9.50 p.m.

Subsequently a further transmission line failure blacked out all 1500 alt current and signals between Katoomba and Lithgow. The Sunday night Mudgee-Sydney train was worked from Lithgow to Sydney by 4909, & an up perishable train by 4915.

No. 20 Sunday Passenger 7.10 p.m. Dubbo to Sydney with engine 3822 range to Lithgow (load ex Blayney 9/360 tons) arrived at Lithgow virtually on time on the morning of 19th July despite snow along the line in the Bathurst to Lithgow section. 3822 took the train to Lithgow Coal Stage and was there detached. After a delay of about 90 minutes, 4902 and 4904, both operating 2 end leading, took the train on, but the trailing unit, 4904, was shut down at Mt. Victoria as it was almost out of fuel. 4902 was thus left in sole charge of a virtual load of 10/437 tons and put up a creditable performance with its engine 875 h.p., running Penrith to Parramatta in 29 minutes start to stop while Penrith to Sydney section took 62 minutes overall including two stops. Arrival at No. 1 platform at Sydney was 152 minutes late at 8.38 a.m.

Down services from Sydney on Sunday night experienced heavy delays due to signal and power failures. The 6.15 p.m. Sydney to Mount Victoria was terminated at Katoomba, the 7.0 p.m. Sydney to Lithgow was cancelled, its cars being blocked by snow and the 7.55 p.m. Sydney to Lithgow was caught behind a goods train, which was delayed by snow and power failures. The Through West Mail No. 59) was worked by engine 4516 from Sydney to Bathurst and No. 49 Forbes Mail by 4420 to Bathurst, assisted by 4635 Penrith to Katoomba. The Mudgee Mail, worked by 4629 to Katoomba, then by 4902 and 4904 Katoomba to Lithgow, where 46 took over.

Because of the depth of snow at Yetholme on the Great Western Highway tourist coaches from Melbourne and Adelaide transferred their passengers to 3.44 p.m. diesel train ex Bathurst for Lithgow and Sydney.

On Monday, 19th, power was not restored until about 1.0 p.m. and all trains were worked between Katoomba or Mount Victoria and Lithgow by 44 and 45 as diesel locos. Inter-urban trains were also hauled by these means and lengthy delays took place, aggravated by frozen points in and around Lithgow, no communication by normal means, and use of public phones to work trains west of Lithgow, instead of the normal railway links. The Central West Express was worked by a 46-class to Katoomba, 4540 to Lithgow where 3807 took the train to Sydney where it terminated being over two hours late. A diesel connection between Orange and Blayney was arranged.

An inter-urban arrived at Lithgow at about 8.15 a.m. and was hauled Bowenfels by 4915. As no facilities were available to run the loco round the train, and as the up line at Lithgow was still out of service due to points freezing, the train (6 cars of Set U10) arrived back at Lithgow propelled on the wrong road by 4915.

Here 4540 was coupled and 4915 detached and the train left for Sydney about 9.15 a.m. Save for some moderate delays at Mt. Victoria where two trucks and a van blocked the up main, the run to Katoomba was uneventful. At Katoomba station 4540 was detached and coupled to the waiting down Central West Express and U10 proceeded under its own power to Central where it arrived at 10 p.m., 4 hours after leaving Lithgow.

Up morning business services were disrupted on the west because of inter-urban trains being out of position from the previous night and in some cases, their inability to even reach their overnight stabling point. The 4.37 a.m. Mount Victoria to Sydney train started from Lawson and was over 1½ hours late into Sydney, the "Fish" was 40 minutes late because of block working instead of automatic signals, mail trains late ahead, and the 4.37 a.m. also ahead. The "Chips" and the 6.16 a.m. ex Mount Victoria were caught up with the same delays. Other trains were of course delayed by being diesel-hauled, and in one case an inter-urban train at Lithgow was "frozen in" where it had spent the night! It is also reported that one train was delayed between Newnes Junction and Blackheath by the trip gear operating on snow drifts. Considerable difficulties were encountered at Lithgow, because snow had frozen points at the new station necessitating the changing of engines at the Coal Stage.

For some days after the snow, communications west of Lithgow were in a chaotic condition. On the Lithgow-Wallerawang section, where automatic signals control train working, a power failure necessitated block working between these points. Power failures on other sections required trains being worked under emergency safe-working conditions with consequent delays.

The Aftermath: The working of inter-urban trains through snow up to 18 inches deep resulted in water entering the motors. Subsequently a considerable number of motor failures required the withdrawal of cars to dry out motors. On Monday morning, 19th July, the absence of an inter-urban train resulted in the 6.47 a.m. Gosford-Sydney train being composed of an 8-car LUB set and two FS. That evening, the 4.50 p.m. Sydney to Mount Victoria train was composed of LUB set No. 60 which returned on the 4.37 a.m. Mount Victoria-Sydney train on Tuesday. Disruption of northern line services by a landslide and fire on the Northern Tablelands Express upset working on the Tuesday morning (see elsewhere in this issue) but normal working was resumed that evening, except that the 4.50 p.m. Sydney to Mount Victoria and 4.37 a.m. return next morning were again composed of a LUB set.

On Wednesday, 21st, the 10.40 a.m. Sydney-Bowenfels train and its 2.15 p.m. return working were composed of BUB set No. 25, and the 5.7 p.m. Sydney to Gosford train was formed by LHO, and 6-car NIB set No. 112, the trailing HFN not being available and being replaced by the LHO. This arrangement enabled inter-urban trains to be returned to the mountain working, their heating no doubt being appreciated.

On Thursday and Friday, 22nd and 23rd, the 6.47 a.m. Gosford to Sydney, and 5.7 p.m. Sydney to Gosford were formed by LHO and 6-car 112 set; the 10.40 a.m. Sydney-Bowenfels and 2.15 p.m. return were formed by NIB set 110 (heated) and LHO van. On Friday evening, 23rd, an inter-urban set returned to the 5.7 p.m. Gosford, while NIB set 110, being heated, was used on the 6.8 p.m. Sydney to Lithgow and its return 6.13 a.m. Lithgow to Sydney on Saturday, the 9.45 a.m. Sydney to Gosford and 5.7 p.m. Gosford to Sydney return (Sunday), which then formed the 7.0 p.m. Sydney to Lithgow train. On Monday, 26th, the set worked the 6.13 a.m. Lithgow-Sydney, 10.40 a.m. Sydney-Bowenfels and 2.10 p.m. Bowenfels-Sydney. The inter-urban train returned to traffic on the 6.8 p.m. Sydney-Lithgow on Monday, 26th July.

Reports from Southern and Northern areas do not indicate anything other than minor delays to rail services.

Mr. R.J. Jeffries travelled from Sydney to Lithgow and return on Monday, 18th July by the 2.50 p.m. Down and 7.0 p.m. Up trains. The following account will be of considerable interest.....

"Running 25 minutes late from Sydney while it was decided how far it was likely to get, we left Parramatta 34 minutes late, the train being 4 inter-urban cars with pantographs raised but hauled by 4625. A light '60-class Garratt had gone through about half-an-hour earlier. We overtook it at Lawson, which we left 42 late, the snow having started just beyond Linden. At Wentworth Hills, the refuge siding was completely covered with snow, and there was a neat pile of wagons and a 46-class side on to the line at the down end, following the break-away a day or so earlier. At the Katoomba home signal, the 46 came off, to be replaced by 5482. 4530 was standing on the up main behind 5482. After a spell of 23 minutes at the home, we arrived in Katoomba platform at 8 or 70 minutes late. An up inter-urban was in the other platform and it left at 6.15. However we were destined to remain there until 7.46 p.m.

Katoomba station was an amazing sight with no lights in the town, the only ones on the station itself being few kerosene lanterns and those in the signal-box illuminating the diagram. Hordes of officials stumbled around in the snow and surrounding gloom while the signalman could only operate the points with the aid of the gang who prised the points home against the packed snow and then clipped them, for every movement. We were being held pending the arrival of a relief engine with the inter-urban which had stuck in the snow at Bell. Meanwhile, all signals and all lights in the signal-box failed about 6.55, and the Garratt turned up from Lawson at 7.7. Shortly before, 402 arrived on the wrong line with the disabled train from Bell. The Garratt had set out, also on the wrong line, apparently operating as a sort of snow plough. Thus the Garratt and the train must have passed each other in a section, both running in the wrong direction.

The fireman of 5482 on our train told me that they had originally been sent there to keep the points free with steam from the boiler!

The power was off the overhead just beyond Katoomba, and so was the light in the inter-urban cars as a result. We proceeded merrily through the first of the snow, passing and being re-passed by the Garratt, snow flying from under its wheels. At Blackheath the automatic gates were down and half of the crossing signals were showing, but not flashing.

At Mount Victoria, the whole place was without power and a passenger train without an engine was standing on the up main at the down end, with lights still burning in the cars. We left there at 8.17 (178" late). At Bell, a diesel-hauled up livestock was being held, presumably until the Garratt had kept the up main free. We were held 15 minutes at Newnes Junction, "waiting to be clear" from Lithgow. I measured the snow on the down platform with my foot - it was over 12 inches deep. Down through the tunnels to Lithgow Coal Age Box and then to Yard box home signal where, amid exploding detonators, we were met by a hardy flagman standing in the snow, and another man who

piloted us into Lithgow down platform, where we came to rest at 9.30, 214 minutes late. The "Silver City Comet" set was standing beyond where we stopped, to form the Orange connection.

Quite a crowd was waiting for us in the murk, although the 7" of snow I measured on one of the seats would have deterred them from sitting thereon. There had been no lights in any of the signals right through from Katoomba, and including the whole of Lithgow yard. The Refreshment Rooms, needless to say, were tightly closed.

4540 came on our Sydney end, and after loading the aforementioned crowd and their luggage, we started off on the long pull up to Newnes Junction at 9.55, which was not too bad at 175" late. We went up as far as Coal Stage box on the wrong line where we crossed over to the up main, receiving a green light from the box as we did so. This was some reassurance for the driver I suppose. We climbed up through the tunnels without difficulty, apart from being stopped half way up by snow operating the trip gear on the leading inter-urban car. We ran through the Up Refuge at Mt. Victoria, although I didn't realise where the Up Main was until I saw the marooned train mentioned previously.

We left Mt. Victoria at 10.56, (200 late) and arrived at Blackheath at 11.5, only 9 minutes after the up livestock had left. We were here no less than 90 minutes "Waiting Line Clear" from Katoomba. It was cold in the cars, but nothing like what it was outside! The batteries gave out at 11.55 after which we had no lights as well as no heat! A down steam-hauled goods and passenger passed through, the latter departing at 12.29, presumably an amalgamation of the 6.15 p.m. and 7. p.m. from Sydney.

We finally set off and arrived at Katoomba at 12.57, light and power being restored as we passed onto the section still getting power. Another Passenger, presumably the Through and Forbes Mails, amalgamated just beyond Katoomba.

After 18 minutes at Katoomba where our diesel was detached, we left at 1.15 (319 late). There was another Passenger at Wentworth Falls, still lit up, but apparently abandoned by its passengers - the Mudgee Mail, I suppose. We stopped at the signal in the rear of the station to ring up Lawson, but it was still without lights. The signal lights however did re-appear at Bullaburra, and stopping all stations, including Lapstone, we took the back platform at Penrith to overhaul the livestock train, now hauled by the 60-class. Leaving Parramatta 326 late, the driver obliged by putting me off with an unofficial slowing.

Between Katoomba and Lithgow, the traffic was apparently being worked under Rule 307 (trains worked irrespective of the rules under the personal responsibility of the Chief Traffic Manager or similar high official, in conditions of great emergency), with Absolute Telephone Block for following trains." (We are particularly indebted to the many readers from near and far who contributed in various ways to this rather unique article - Ed.)