

YEA  
CHIEVVIOT



RAILWAY  
TUNNEL



**HERITAGE  
STRUCTURE  
SERIES**

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# **CHEVIOT RAIL TUNNEL**

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# CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

TIMELINE

GALLERY

NEWSPAPERS

# HISTORIC FACTSHEET

## INTRODUCTION

**Name:** Cheviot Tunnel  
**Opened:** 12 November 1889  
**Location:** Yea Victoria  
**Purpose:** Railway Tunnel  
**Construction:** Hand made bricks

Cheviot Tunnel was built as a means of taking the new Mansfield branch line from one side of a hill, to the other. Three men died from injuries sustained at the site during the tunnel's construction.



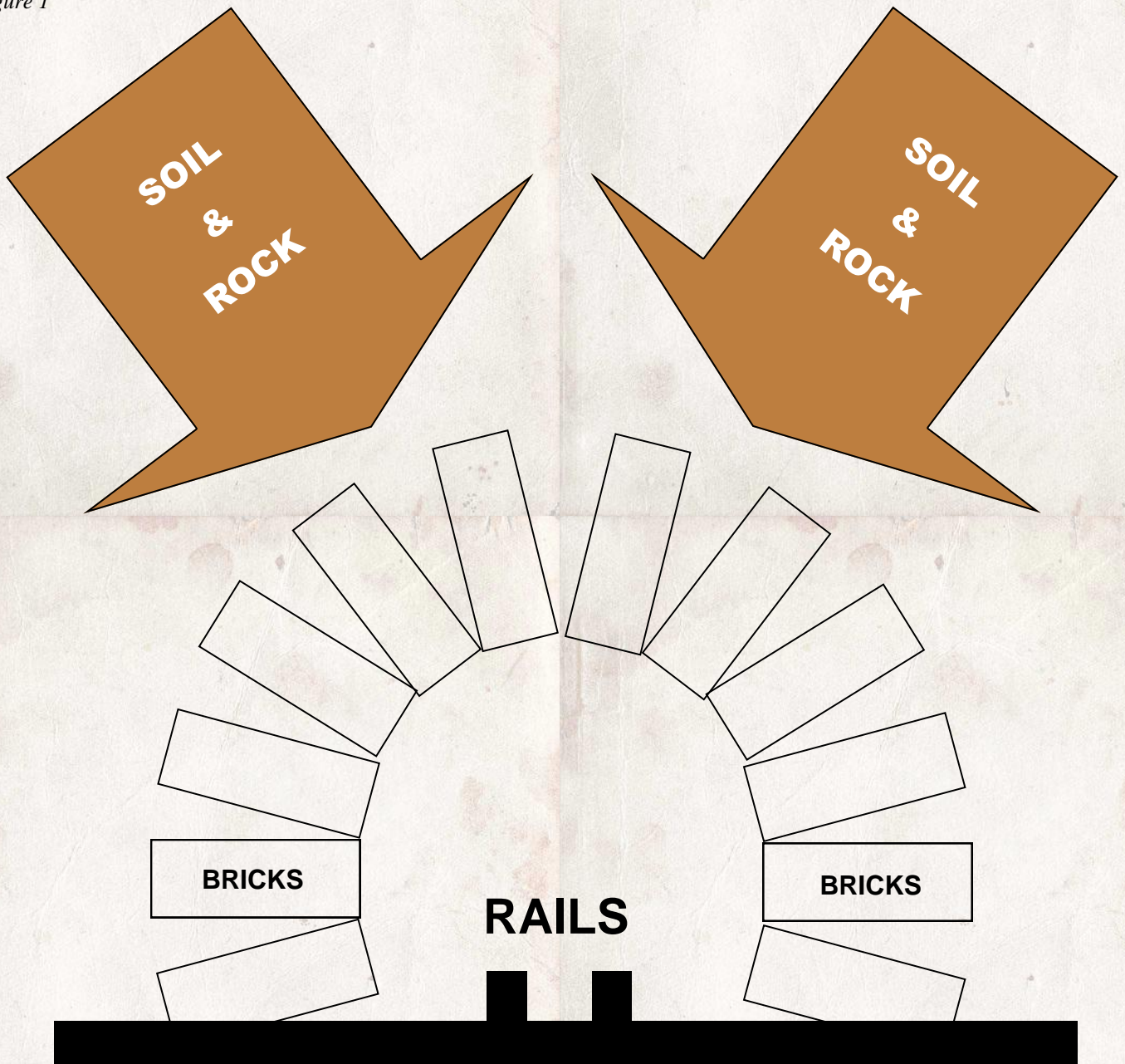
Cheviot Tunnel was first opened on 12 November 1889 and was Victoria's longest rail tunnel at that time at 600 feet (201 metres). It was located centrally between Molesworth and Yea and is 3.6 km east of the old Cheviot Railway Station and served as a vital part of the Mansfield branch line from 1889 to 1978. The tunnel cut through the McLaughlin's Gap at the southern end of the Black Range.

The Cheviot siding located just west of the tunnel opened in the 1880s and allowed for timber transported from the Murrindindi State Forest sawmills to be loaded onto rail trucks, bound for Melbourne.

# HISTORIC FACTSHEET

## INTRODUCTION

Figure 1



Timber was hauled out of the forest to Cheviot by horse and wagon until 1905 when a three foot gauge railway line was built to do this heavy and dangerous work. In 1922 two large cranes were built at the Cheviot siding for lifting the wood from the timber trucks onto the rail trucks. This system of transport operated up until 1937 when road trucks took over the role of transporting timber directly from the forests to the mills.

# HISTORIC FACTSHEET

## INTRODUCTION



During the construction of Cheviot Tunnel, work conditions were poor and resulted in multiple accidents, including two deaths. Twenty four year old Peter Byrne and John Jordan both died from injuries received as a result of an explosion on 14 December 1887. Peter died at the scene and John died two days later in a Melbourne hospital.

Another worker (Mr Fennel) suffered severe bruising when caught under a rockfall during construction. Twenty four year old Daniel Driscoll died in May 1889 from injuries he sustained from a rockfall that also occurred at the construction site. The work on the Yea to Molesworth section of the line ran behind time due in part to these incidents and did not open until 12 November 1889. The Molesworth to Merton section opened in 1890 and the Merton to Mansfield section opened 1891.

# HISTORIC FACTSHEET

## INTRODUCTION

An interesting aspect of the tunnel construction was that it was designed so that its own weight added structural strength to the roof and walls. The upper brickwork was positioned in a wedge like fashion ensuring that the weight of the soil and rock above the brickwork forced the bricks downwards and together (Figure 1). The bricks were made on site out of clay from a local clay deposit by Mr F. Neild for Kelly Bros. Neild later became the proprietor of the richest gold mine in New South Wales (at that time).

The tunnel rose on a gradual gradient ratio of 60:1. This meant that for every 60 metres of tunnel, it rose one metre in height. The tunnel is highest at the Molesworth end. Another point of interest is that there is a 1.4 km long wooden trestle bridge over the Yea River. It is located just west of the tunnel before the Yea township. The rail line between Trawool and Mansfield was decommissioned on 8 November 1978 and passenger services were replaced with bus services in May 1977.

Today the tunnel exists as a significant historical attraction on the 'Great Victorian Rail Trail'. Visitors can walk, bike ride or ride their horses through the tunnel and take in its beauty. Inside the tunnel you can experience the structure up close for yourself as well as the cooler temperatures normally associated with tunnels of this length.

Remnants of the railway can still be found today. Some lantern hooks still exist where lanterns once hung for lighting. Alcoves built into the brick walls still exist where pedestrians once stood as trains passed.

Historical signage placed in 2008 was designed by Russel Wealands and sponsored by Gary Pollard.



# TIMELINE

BASIC TIMELINE OF EVENTS



# HISTORIC FACTSHEET

## TIMELINE

- 14 December 1887** An explosion at the construction site immediately killed 24 year old *Peter Byrne* and severely injured *John Jordan*, who died two days later in a Melbourne hospital. Peter was buried at the Yea township cemetery.
- Unknown** A man by the name of *Fennel* was injured by a rockfall.
- May 1889** A 24 year old man by the name of *Daniel Driscoll* was severely injured by a rockfall at the construction site. He died and was buried at the Yea Cemetery.
- 12 November 1889** The Cheviot Tunnel opened.
- 16 December 1899** Article in the Yea Chronicle identified Mr. F Neild as being the makers of the bricks for the Cheviot Tunnel (made for Kenny Bros.). He was also described as being the present proprietor of the richest gold mine in New South Wales.
- December 1889** The Yea to Molesworth section of the rail branch line was opened.
- December 1889** The opening of the Cheviot Railway siding.
- 1891** Timber from the ranges began being brought to the Cheviot Railway Station, for transportation on the rail system.
- 1892** Balham Station, just east of Cheviot Tunnel was opened.
- 1893** Balham Station closed one year after opening.
- Late 1800s** The first timber tramway line to Cheviot Tunnel was opened.
- 15 September 1911** A major train derailment occurred at Harvey's Gully, 4 miles east of Cheviot Tunnel.
- 1977-1978** The Train Line was closed with the last Passenger train passing

# HISTORIC FACTSHEET

## TIMELINE

through the tunnel on 28 May 1977 and goods train on 8 November 1978.

**Mid 2008**

A new heritage sign was erected at the tunnel highlighting its history. The sign was produced by passionate locals Gary Pollard (printing) and Russell Wealands (research and graphic design).

**2010**

Artworkz commenced work on this factsheet.

**2011**

The 'Great Victorian Rail Trail' from Tallarook to Mansfield was opened to the public. This included access through the Cheviot Tunnel.

**January 2012**

The 7 km Alexandra section of the 'Great Victorian Rail Trail' is opened.

# GALLERY

RELATED IMAGERY

# HISTORIC FACTSHEET

## GALLERY



**Driver Jim Rae driving a J Class locomotive east through Cheviot Tunnel December 1958**

Jim & Valda Rae

# HISTORIC FACTSHEET

## GALLERY



**Cheviot Tunnel on 6 January 2007 — when it could be driven through**

Photograph © Denis Martin 2015

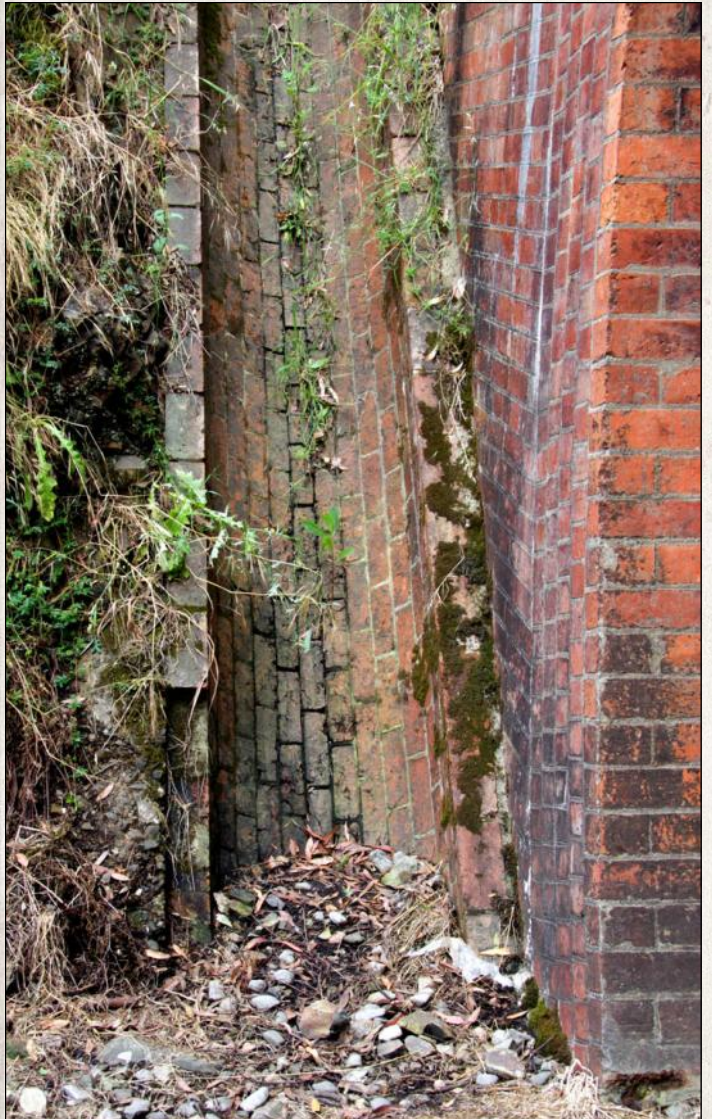
# HISTORIC FACTSHEET

## GALLERY



### TUNNEL SAFETY

The tunnel has built-in alcoves where pedestrians could move out of the path of trains. This area still had an old hand made nail where workers hung lanterns. Today birds rest on the nail.



### WATER GUTTERS

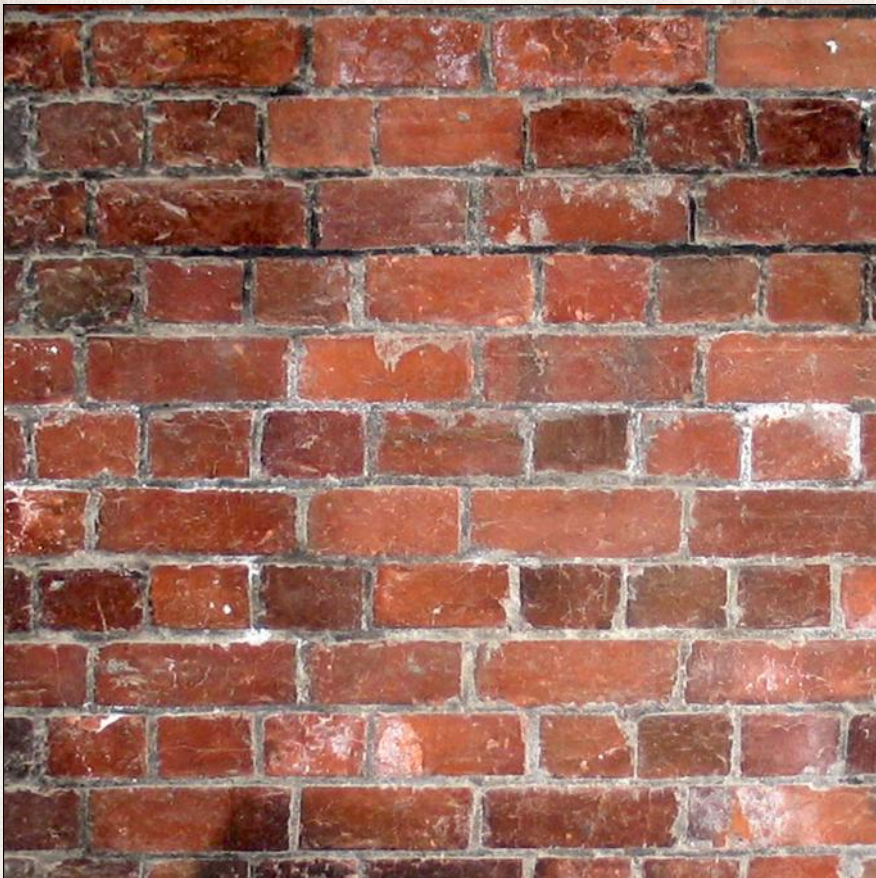
Drainage gutters are located at both ends of the tunnel. These move water away from the tunnel

# HISTORIC FACTSHEET

## GALLERY



**Before sealing in 2012**



**Locally made bricks produced with clay sourced from the Yea area.**

# HISTORIC FACTSHEET

## GALLERY



The west tunnel entrance from above 2012



### **WATER LEAKAGE**

Water seepage through gaps in the brickwork is evident.  
The bricks were made from local clay



# HISTORIC FACTSHEET

## GALLERY



**The west tunnel entrance from above 2012**

# HISTORIC FACTSHEET

## GALLERY



**Local Yea Pharmacist Gary Pollard (left) who sponsored the printing of the new Cheviot Tunnel sign and Russel Wealands (right) who conducted the historical research and did the graphic design.**

**The sign was erected mid 2008 to promote this magnificent hidden treasure and to provide informative background to the tunnel and its long history.**

Photograph © Copyright Russell Wealands 2008.

# HISTORIC FACTSHEET

## GALLERY

### The Cheviot Tunnel A Key Piece of Yea's Rail History

The 201-metre-long, brick-lined Cheviot Tunnel was opened on 12 November 1889 as part of the Yea to Molesworth extension. It formed part of the Tallarook to Mansfield Rail Line, which operated between 16 November 1883 and 18 November 1979. The Tunnel remains in excellent condition today.

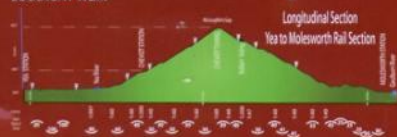
Constructed of handmade bricks of local clay, the horseshoe-section Tunnel enabled passenger and goods rail traffic to cross the Black Range at McLoughlin's Gap, roughly halfway between Yea and Molesworth. It was the only tunnel on the line.

With the heritage-listed Yea Railway Station it remains a timely reminder of the important role that rail transport played in settlement, stimulating the population and economic growth of the Yea township and Murrindindi region.

Due to extensive delays caused by a number of accidents, floods and strikes, the Tunnel took two years to build. Steel hooks that held emergency lanterns remain on the southern wall.



The abandoned Tunnel today, some 120 years later



An early celebration at the Cheviot Tunnel Portal

After travelling 3.5 kilometres from Yea, train traffic crossed the Yea River floodplain before commencing the steep (1:40) 5-kilometre climb to the Tunnel. The climb was only broken by gradients of 1:200 at Cheviot Station and 1:60 within the Tunnel itself. Once the end of the Tunnel was reached, the hard-working stoker could take a well-earned rest as the train descended 8 kilometres on similar gradients past the Ballam Siding to Molesworth Station. The descent, with several tight 25-chain (500-metre), 30-chain (600-metre) and 40-chain (800-metre) radius curves, presented a difficult challenge to the train's drivers. Several minor and major accidents occurred at Suicide Bend (near Sheepwash Lagoon) as trains descended at speed to Molesworth Station.

Immediately beyond Molesworth the railway line crossed the Goulburn River and its broad floodplain en route to Mansfield.



Steam locomotive K161 and D3 exit the Tunnel - December 1965



A horse-drawn load of timber arrives at Cheviot Station. Note the timber tram lines.

Within a few years of its opening, the rail line was used to transport hardwood timber from the nearby Murrindindi forests to Melbourne to meet the growing demand.

The sawn timber from more than six timber mills was transported to Cheviot Station along some 14 miles (22.5km) of 3-foot (0.9-metre) gauge timber tramways using horse-drawn teams. The annual volume of timber transported along this route exceeded 2.5 million feet during the peak timber harvesting years of 1907-15 and 1923-30. The tramlines were used to minimise damage to the earthen roads and tracks.

Three workers were killed during the Tunnel's construction. Peter Byrne (24) died in a large explosion in 1887. John Jordan died later from injuries suffered in that same incident. The third, Daniel Driscoll (24), died following a rock-fall in May 1899. Peter Byrne's grave is in the old Yea Cemetery.

#### QUICK FACTS

Tunnel length	660 feet (201 metres)
Tunnel height	14 feet 4 inches (4.7 metres)
No. of bricks used	675,000 (approx.)
Yea - Cathkin contract	£88,661 (\$177,322)
Date built	Over 2 years 1887-1889
Rail mileage	85.4 Mile (137.4 kilometre)
Elevation	927 feet (283 metres)
Gradient in Tunnel	1:60
Railway service opened	16 November 1889
Passenger Service Closed	27 May 1977
Goods Service closed	3 February 1978
Railway Line Closed	8 November 1978

Proudly produced by Russell Wealands for the Yea Historical Society Inc. Sign generously sponsored by Gary Pollard Pharmacy, Yea

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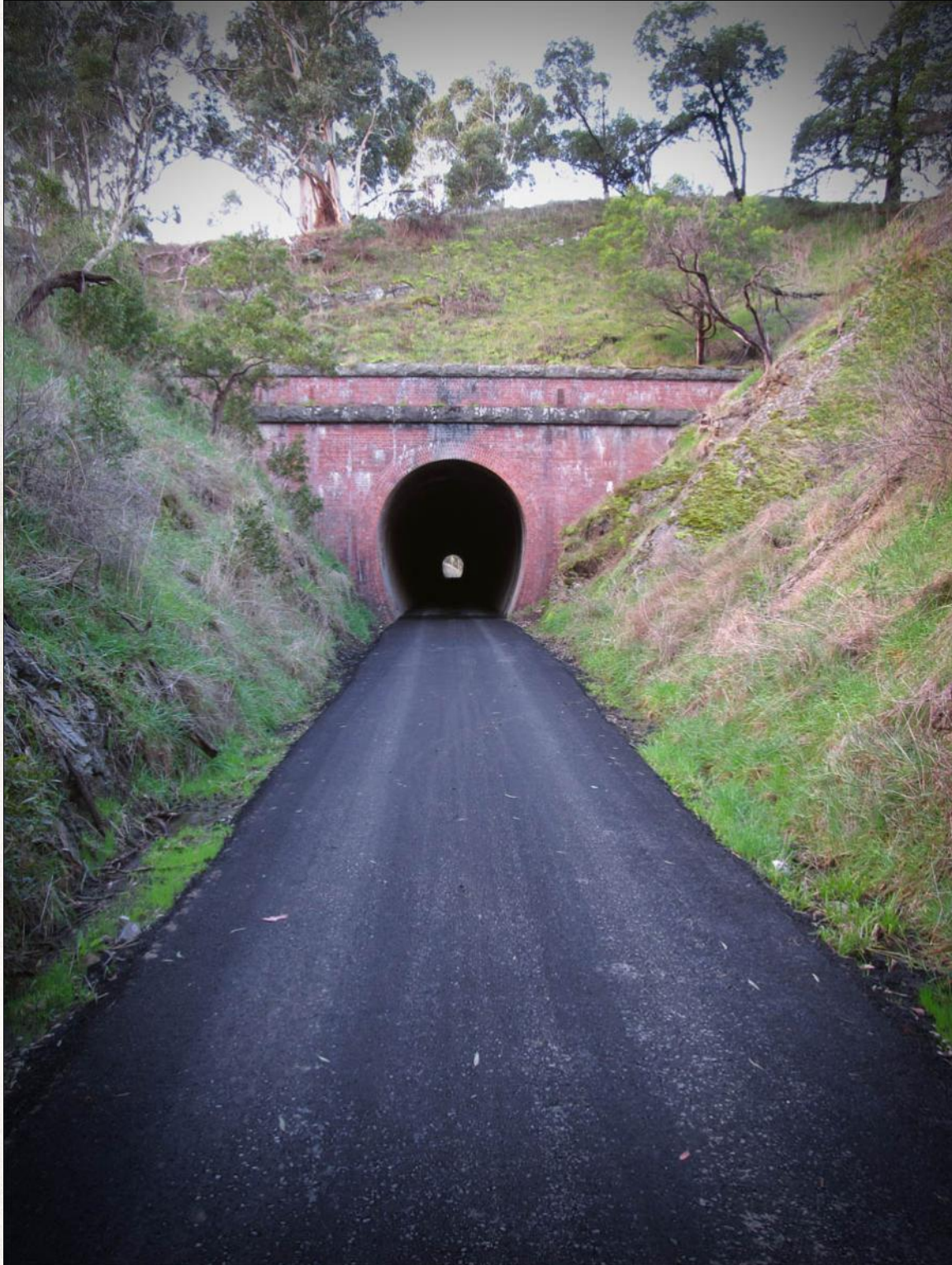
Proudly produced by Russell Wealands for the Yea Historical Society Inc.

**Signage at Cheviot Tunnel erected in mid 2008 and photographed here in 2014.**

Signage produced by Gary Pollard and Russell Wealands for the Yea Historical Society Inc.

# HISTORIC FACTSHEET

## GALLERY



**In this image taken in May 2011 you can see that Cheviot Tunnel was sealed through its entire 200 metre length prior to the Rail Trail opening**

# HISTORIC FACTSHEET

CHEVIOT TUNNEL MAY 2011



**The unfinished Rail Trail in May 2011 (left side of photo) heads west from Cheviot Tunnel towards Yea. To the right is Cheviot Road, that leads you back to Limestone Road.**

# NEWSPAPERS

RELATED NEWSPAPER ARTICLES

# HISTORIC FACTSHEET

## NEWSPAPER

### PEOPLE WE KNOW.

MUSICIAN BECKER has gone to Germany for a trip to see his parents, who are in business at Bremen, a large town on the Oder.

MRS. ANDERSON, late of Commercial Hotel, Yea, is at present lessee of the Theatre Royal, Castlemaine, which has been renovated according to her orders, and new scenery added so as to bring it up to present day requirements.

CRICKETER JACK BARRETT, who is still abiding around the environments of Wall-halla, has joined the ranks of the Benedicts.

HUGH OATES, who left Yea to go into business in New England, N.S.W., has struck out on a larger scale by opening up a large establishment in Wagga. He is by the way a brother-in-law of our esteemed townsman, Mr. Chas. Tyson.

SERG. MAJOR MACDONALD had an extra busy week last month preparing the South African Contingent for their departure. He had to issue each man his kit and record name, as well as to assist in getting them into "nick."

PIGEON SHOT J. D. HAMILTON succeeded in defeating all comers in a match the other day for a Boswell gun valued £28. Mr. Hamilton shot with his new gun especially built for him, in England, to his own order, and valued at 100 guineas.

FAMIER SERGT. BORRIE, who takes and has always taken such a keen interest in Mounted Rifle work, is one of the best known men in camp. He is an admirable raconteur of camp yarns and Mounted Rifle stories. His reminiscences of soldiering would make an interesting volume a la Kipling.

JEWELLER BEGG, who is a native of Port Melbourne, comes of a sporting family. His elder brothers were for many years the mainstay of the Port Melbourne Football Club, in those days one of the best, as well as the cricket club. Mr. Begg, like his brothers, who always played the game for the sport, is esteemed for his sterling qualities off as well as in the field.

MANY friends of Mr. J. D. Webster will be pleased to learn that he has obtained a position as clerk with the Metropolitan Board of Works, Melbourne.

TENOR SINGER JOHNSTON, son-in-law of Mr. T. Wilson, Ghin Ghin, is also an employe of Metropolitan Board of Works. His duties are to receive, order and check all ironmongery required by the Board. On this account it is very difficult for him to get away even for a few days.

It is always gratifying to record the successes of Yeates and surrounding district. The latest is that of Miss Quinlan, daughter of Cr. J. Quinlan, J.P., who was successful in passing with credit, and obtaining her elementary certificate for pianoforte playing at the recent examinations of the Musical Society of Victoria.

CHEMIST J. TAITE, who has been nominated for a position on the Yea Board of Advice, has had considerable experience in such affairs in New Zealand, where Boards of Control are live institutions. He was chairman for a number of years of the Auckland School Committee, and this previous training should prove of value to him and the Board should he be returned.

THE present proprietor of the richest gold mine in New South Wales is Mr. F. Neild, who made the bricks for the tunnel at Cheviot for Kenny Bros., and is well known to present writer. He "struck it" at Wylong, where he had selected after leaving Yea, and is worthy of it all.

TEACHER FRANK BAINEBRIDGE, who has a school near Seymour, is of an inventive turn of mind. He has designed and made a new book cover for the school papers, which is on the market. It has a number of strings inside for each paper, a marker, and a note book attached. Present scribe can recommend them to the "profess" as worthy of their recognition.

MISS EASTWOOD, who has just passed through a very severe illness, is now convalescent. She has had a very severe attack of bronchitis and pneumonia supervening on influenza.

MISS DALEY, who has been officiating as organist at St. Luke's Church during Miss Eastwood's illness, has proved herself very capable and willing. St. Luke's is fortunate in having a second string to its bow.

ACCOUNTANT STEVENS, successor to our friend Billy, at the Commercial Bank, is a capable violinist and will be a decided acquisition to the Yea Orchestra, which he intends joining.

JACK BOOT (MAJOR REAY) of the *Herald*, Melbourne, thought Captain M'Leish was slighted because he was not called on to respond to the toast of the visiting contingents. Major Eddy, who commands the two units, responded on their behalf, therefore it was unnecessary to call on Captain M'Leish, who would certainly be the last in the world to feel grieved.

LIEUTENANTS LINTON and M'KIRDY, who are lionised wherever they go to a ball, speak in glowing terms of praise of the ladies of Yea, who, for style, grace and deportment, can more than hold their own with their sisters in other towns. They also eulogise the general arrangements of the recent military ball, and say they will be here for an absolute cert next year.

MAJOR EDDY said "After the Ball" that Yea should feel very proud of being the first town in Victoria to have the honor of entertaining the Scottish Regiment, particularly as Ballarat, the one time thought-of Federal capital, was to have had that honor.

LIEUTENANT F. PURCELL has been promoted to officer commanding F Company during the absence of Captain M'Leish in South Africa, and an order to that effect has been issued. Our young hero was congratulated on receiving such distinction, and present writer considers he is justly entitled to same as a reward for merit and perseverance. He possesses a thorough knowledge of his duties, and the confidence of his men, which are essential to the success of a military leader, so that we may rest assured the F Company will not deteriorate or lose any of its former pristine splendour under its new commandant, but will be delivered over to his successor as efficient and unsullied as it is now handed to him.

MR. JOS. A. WEIR, who resided with his brother-in-law (Mr. A. C. Tyson), at Switzerland, for some time, is now at Deniliquin, N.S.W. Playing for Deniliquin C.C. against the Natives C.C., on 4th inst., he carried his bat for 27.

Yea Chronicle  
Thursday 16 November 1899  
Courtesy National Library Australia

Maker of the bricks for the Cheviot Tunnel identified as Mr. F Neild. He was also described as being the present proprietor of the richest gold mine in New South Wales.

Yea Chronicle, Thursday 16 November 1899  
Courtesy National Library Australia



*Artworkz*

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