

GREAT OCEAN ROAD HISTORY



BUILDING THE GREAT OCEAN ROAD

The making of the Great Ocean Road is a story of resolve and conquest over adversity, and a triumph of great Aussie spirit and mateship.

A MEMORIAL OF BLOOD, SWEAT AND ANGUISH...

Returned soldiers built the road, constructed as a permanent memorial to those who died while fighting in the First World War. It was a huge engineering feat with blood, sweat and anguish, resulting in faster access for vehicles via a coastal route from Barwon Heads via Lorne to Warrnambool.

The ocean provided the first connections with coastal settlements that mostly sprang up for commercial reasons. Some early settlers hunted whales and seals while others harvested the huge trees of the Otways.

LINKING SETTLEMENTS

Inland routes were developed but they were slow and arduous. A railway was established in the 1870s linking Geelong and Winchelsea, with a coach connection to Lorne. Plans for an ocean road emerged in the 1880's but were shelved because of cost and defence reasons.

New impetus for an ocean road came towards the end of the First World War. The chairman of the County Roads Board, Mr W Calder, contacted the State War Council with a proposal that funds be provided for repatriation and re-employment of returned soldiers on roads in sparsely populated areas. This was after the war council had pressed him to employ returned soldiers.



PLANS FOR A ROAD

Calder soon submitted a plan he described as the 'South Coast Road (Western District)'. It suggested a road starting at Barwon Heads, following the coast west around Cape Otway and ending near Warrnambool. The plan was published in December 1917 and the Geelong mayor, Alderman Howard Hitchcock, said he would organise a scheme for its construction. The road would be built by returned soldiers as a memorial to all those who were killed in the Great War. By May 1918 the Great Ocean Road Trust had been formed. It decided the first stage

would be built from Lorne to Cape Patton, a distance of 28.9km (18 miles).

AN EXPLOSIVE START

Survey work began in August 1918 but the difficulty of the terrain and bad weather hampered progress.

It was completed just over 13 months later, with 57.6km (36 miles) of road from Cape Patton to Eastern View pegged out.



Construction work, using thousands of returned servicemen, officially began on September 19 1919, when the Premier of Victoria, Mr Lawson, detonated an explosive charge near Lorne.

MANUAL ENTHUSIASM

initially a lack of funds delayed progress on the road but government helped renew enthusiasm for the project and the first stage linking Lorne and Eastern View was completed in early 1922. Over the next decade, the trust continued its work on the Great Ocean Road with Cape Patton and

Anglesea, while the Country Roads Board built the Cape Patton to Apollo Bay link. It was tough work with no heavy machinery to help — only picks, shovels and horse-drawn carts.

AND FINALLY, A ROAD

On November 26 1932, the route was officially opened by the Lieutenant Governor, Sir William Irvine. It was a sight to see with a procession of 40 cars and schoolchildren lining parts of the route.

At Apollo Bay, there were sports on the foreshore, and the Colac band travelled to Wye River to play during the afternoon.

Road travellers during the early years paid a toll at gates at Eastern View, where a memorial arch was erected. Drivers paid two shillings and sixpence (25 cents AUD) and passengers one shilling and sixpence (15 cents AUD).

The toll was abolished when the Trust handed the road over to the State Government on October 2 1936.



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