

An inspiring & tireless group involved in social welfare, cultural matters, fund raising for the Hospital & representation for miner's wives.

1950's Poppet Head was relocated from Kirrak Area airshaft (No.24 Shaft) that closed in 1968 to Apex Park, Murray Street. The current structure replaced a similarly designed structure made from 25 meters high round poles in 1972. 24 such structures, varying from 20-25 metres high built over Wonthaggi coalfields shafts. This structure now houses the mine whistle, which blows daily at midday. It once signalled changes of shift across the coalfield. The mine whistle, made by Danks & originally housed at the powerhouse, has a sister whistle, made for the Titanic, at the bottom of the Atlantic Ocean.

1951 Rail cars were introduced; steam trains were only used in holiday periods.

1961 The last passenger steam train.

1965 The last goods steam train

1968 State Coal Mine closed. Only 109 workers were left when the final whistle blew.

1978 The last goods train on the 7th November marked the official closure of the rail line. The last Passenger railcar departed on the 4th December 1977. The rail line was transformed into Victoria's only coastal 'Rail Trail' in 2000 & the 16km trail is popular with cyclists, walkers & horse-riders.

1982 The State Coal Mine - East Area was reopened as a tourist attraction offering public underground tours, historic buildings & walking tracks. The Mine temporarily ceased underground tours in October 2004 as a result of an engineer's assessment of the winder & skips used to take visitors out of the mine. Above ground tours are still conducted from the visitor centre.

1993 June 12 a 'micro-burst' storm hit Wonthaggi with a destructive downdraught of winds over 140 kph. The storm lasted two minutes & left two almost parallel lines of destruction. The town was hit with a \$10M damage bill. Many buildings had their roofs blown off & there was structural damage to 76 houses & 26 businesses.

2005 Wonthaggi is now a vibrant, regional rural centre. It is one of the fastest growing municipalities in the State with a current population of 7,500.

Special thanks to:

Lynn Chambers, Wonthaggi & District Historical Society.

The Plod Wonthaggi & District Historical Society Newsletter and Museum.

Parks Victoria. State Coal Mine Page

www.parkweb.vic.gov.au and publications.

Out to The Wreck, Joe & Lyn Chambers

(Wonthaggi & District Historical Society)

Taberners, A Wonthaggi Tradition, Katheryn

Ferrito. *20 Shaft's Blown Up*, Simon Longstaff.

It's on at the Union, Joe & Lyn Chambers.

Wonthaggi Historical Society, 1982.

For Further Information:

Wonthaggi Historical Society

Museum at the Old Railway Station, Apex

Park, Wonthaggi Open: Saturdays 10-2pm

Ph: 5672 2009

<http://wonthaggihistoricalsociety.org.au>

Wonthaggi Genealogy Inc (Family History Centre) Shop C 48-50 McBride Avenue,

Wonthaggi Ph: 5672 3803

Visitor Information Centres

Wonthaggi Visitor Information Centre

1 Bent St (cnr Bass Hwy), Wonthaggi

Phone: 1300 854 334

Email: woninfo@basscoast.vic.gov.au

Inverloch Visitor Information Centre

16 A'Beckett Street, Inverloch

Phone: 1300 762 433

Email: invyinfo@basscoast.vic.gov.au

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Wonthaggi History

Past to Present



www.visitbasscoast.com

Pre Settlement Prior to European settlement, Wonthaggi area was home to the Bunurong people, who came to the coast for shellfish and stone for toolmaking. They travelled between traditional campsites in small family groups of possibly twenty or thirty. Middens, stone tools early accounts of cloaks made of possum skin and bone fragments are all we have to guess at the lifestyle of these people. Conflicts with early sealers & whalers, together with European diseases, caused rapid population decline & by the 1840's most of the surviving families left the area to join other Koolin tribes in the Melbourne area.

1798 Surgeon Bass sailed a whaleboat from Sydney to chart & explore the Victorian coastline. Bass named Venus Bay, Cape Paterson & Westernport.

1826 A party led by Captain William Hovell from Corinella discovered coal near Cape Paterson & Harmers Haven. Samuel Anderson used this coal when he settled on Westernport in the 1830's. Small & isolated mining operations followed in the 1840's.

1852 Richard Davies rewarded by the State Government for finding a workable coal seam on the beach near Wonthaggi. This seam was called the 'Rock & Queen'. The Victorian Coal Company raised approximately 2,000 tons about one mile east of this for shipment to Melbourne. Difficulties with transport closed the mine. The lease was held until 1914.

1909 The State Coal Mine opened after a miners strike in New South Wales starved the Victorian Railways & Melbourne's coal industry, forcing hasty development by the Victorian State Government to open the State Coal Mine on the Powlett Coalfields & thus supply coal to the Railways.

Digging began 11th November under supervision of Mr Stanley Hunter on the Powlett River coalfields. Within three weeks four shafts had been dug. The first coal was despatched on the 25th November 1909 – lifted up the shaft in wicker baskets then taken by bullock team to Inverloch & there loaded into ships for Melbourne.

1910 Within weeks of the sinking of the first shaft for the State Coal Mine, a canvas town, housing hundreds of miners had appeared. The population swelled to 2000, all housed in temporary canvas. Land for a permanent town was purchased & the building of a model town was started. By June 1910, 100 houses had been built.

Government Brickworks were established in 1910. Bricks were transported by narrow-gauge rail to build Billson Street Primary School, Wonthaggi Post Office (now the library), the State Bank, Town Hall & various private businesses around Wonthaggi.

The town was officially named Wonthaggi & a reservoir was built on Reservoir Hill. The Nyora/Woolamai Railway was extended to Wonthaggi. This 22km extension was built in 10 weeks! The first steam train arrived in Wonthaggi in February 1910.

Miners & their families took advantage of their proximity to the coast & soon tracks, such as Wreck Beach track & Cutlers Rock track radiated from the new town to the coast. Huts were built at popular spots from driftwood. Many 'friendships blossomed' & often 'matches made' out at the beach.

1911 On January 4th an act of parliament declared the Borough of Wonthaggi, & the elected council of nine members held their first meeting in the then Court House in Court Street. A fire in Billson Street burned along to Graham Street destroying businesses, a true disaster for the new town.

1912 Railway Station built. This unique Queen Anne style building included offices, waiting rooms (ladies–west, gentlemen–east) & had provision for a heater for the foot warmers. The building still stands & houses Wonthaggi Historical Society Collections.

Powerhouse & workshops started. The powerhouse provided power for the town as well as the mine. By 1915 the State Coal Mine was the first in the southern hemisphere to be fully electrified.

1913 & 14 The Miners Union played a big part in obtaining facilities for the town. Every miner paid a levy each pay to set up a medical panel for families, the Workman's Club, a co-operative store in 1913; Miner's Dispensary, dental clinic & hospital in 1914.

1914 Pit Ponies. 100 ponies ranging from 11 to 14½ hands were used at the three pits in production. At No.18 Shaft, miners & pit ponies were lowered 400m down in a cage. Pit Ponies were stabled above ground, hosed, combed & fed after work. Pit Ponies were a very important part of the coal mining process from 1914 to the close of the mine in 1968.

1915 Wonthaggi Hotel opened Melbourne Cup day 3rd November, built at a cost of \$5000 by Charles Taberner. The Hotel has been owned & operated by the Taberner family since. There were 4 hotels in Wonthaggi in the early days.

1919 Wonthaggi State School No. 3650 was built using State Mine bricks. It opened in March & was extended in May. The infant school opened 1922.

1922 Wonthaggi Secondary College opened, initially as a Technical College. The school split in 1967-69 & a new campus was built in Dudley Road to offer more academic subjects. Today the original building is the senior college campus & Dudley Road houses the junior campus.

1923 The jawbone of a 74ft sperm whale, found washed up on "Wreck Beach" by Jack Keighley (unemployed butcher) & Harold Pleydell (unemployed miner), was sold to the owner of the Wonthaggi Hotel for £25. It remains there to this day.

1924 The Union Theatre opened and was the heart of social life in the town. Home to the offices of the Wonthaggi Miners Union; it played a leading role in the development of Wonthaggi. Entertainments ranged from Beauty Queen Carnivals, Boxing competitions, 'flicks', fetes, flower shows, school balls, weekly social & dance nights. The Union was the only theatre to show pictures on a Sunday night to accommodate the miners who worked shifts. The 56-year-old building burnt down 10th April 1980.

1929 Coal production peaked at 662,159 tons. The mine had 1,821 employees & the town a population of approximately 12,000 people.

1930's The 1930s depression severely affected the State Coal Mine. Many men were laid off in 1932. Industrial unrest was followed, by a 5-month strike in 1934. The Wonthaggi Miners Union was the first to form a Broad Committee during strike. While operational, 85 men were killed in single or double fatalities. Two major disasters occurred both in No.20 Shaft & both due to the ignition of methane gas. The first explosion in 1931 killed 4 men, the second in 1937 killed 13.

1934 Wonthaggi celebrated 25 years with a 'Back to Wonthaggi' carnival.

1935 Wonthaggi Miners' Women's Auxiliary was, the first miner's women's organisation in Australia.