

## Outside the Cobb and Co booking office, Coolgardie, 1895-97



### Description

This is a black-and-white photograph taken in the street outside the booking office of the coach proprietors Cobb and Co Ltd, in Coolgardie, Western Australia. It shows a coach crowded with men and drawn by five horses, with four bystanders alongside. The wide dirt road is flanked by several low buildings. The photograph measures 38 cm x 51 cm, and was possibly created by Greenham and Evans.

### Educational value

- This asset features a coach that was the only form of public transport to and from the Coolgardie gold fields before 1896 - coach travel was thoroughly uncomfortable for passengers, as the coaches had hard, wooden seats (thinly padded with leather) and straw on the floor (for warmth); although the springs on Cobb and Co coaches were well known for their innovative suspension system, the condition of the dirt roads, without grading or bridges, made every trip unbearable; passengers were often instructed to shift sides to prevent the coach from capsizing, or told to get out and walk in hilly areas.
- It shows the coach driver up front - drivers were well known for their skill and knowledge of the terrain; they could manage a rein for each horse and apply two brakes, one on either side of the driver's box; they worked at night and in all weathers; two passengers could be seated beside the driver, and could help by opening and closing gates.
- It reveals five horses pulling the coach - strong, active horses were used in this formation for the eight-passenger coaches; the two horses at the back, called 'polers', were used for the heavy work, and the three at the front were for pace; the leader was centre front and did much of the steering; horses averaged a speed of about 6 to 7 miles (about 10 to 11 km) per hour and horses were changed every 15 to 30 miles (approximately 24 to 48 km); the shortages and high prices of water were serious problems for coaching company owners;



**Categories:** Transport and Travel

coaches often stopped on the road between Southern Cross and Coolgardie, unable to go on because of the lack of water.

- It refers to a company that operated between Southern Cross and Coolgardie - Cobb and Co met demand for transport to the gold fields and also carried mail and gold; there was no connection between this Western Australian company and Cobb and Co in Victoria, New South Wales and South Australia; at one time three coach companies existed at Coolgardie, but the arrival of the railway in 1896 made them unprofitable after a relatively short period of operation.
- It shows the coach crowded with passengers, some of whom are formally dressed - the relative cleanliness of these men suggests that they are probably starting their gruelling trip, as after a two-day journey between Southern Cross and Coolgardie they would be exhausted and filthy; passengers were sometimes required to dig the coach out of the sand or bail water from a well for the horses; sitting outside in the heat was really no better than sitting inside where passengers were suffocated by clouds of dust.
- It is one of 53 photographs exhibited in France to promote Western Australia at the 'Exposition Universelle Internationale de 1900' held in Paris - 15 of these photographs, including this one, were subsequently chosen for a Bank of New South Wales exhibition during the 1962 Commonwealth Games in Perth.
- It suggests an effect of the expanding population in the area - by 1898, 15,000 miners and prospectors, businessmen and their families lived in Coolgardie; they needed facilities such as transport, power, communications, schools and hospitals; along with the infrastructure of the towns that grew up in the region, people needed to have fresh water; this led to building the Coolgardie Water Supply Scheme, later known as the Golden Pipeline, designed by C Y O'Connor.
- It is an example of a gold-fields streetscape - Coolgardie had only existed for a few years at the time of this photo; it displays the typical structure of wide, dirt streets, suitable for turning teams of horses, lined with low, wooden shops and small businesses; awnings protected the public from the worst of the weather, but there are no footpaths.

**Copyright** Reproduced courtesy of Battye Library

**Creator** Unidentified

**Identifier** Battye Library number 000696D  
Battye Library number 816B/TB4479

**Source** National Trust of Australia (Western Australia) <http://valuingheritage.com.au/>



**Categories:** Transport and Travel