

## Pipes at Parkerville, c1901



### Description

This is a black-and-white photograph of a trainload of pipes en route to a Coolgardie Water Supply Scheme pipe-laying team somewhere to the east of Perth, Western Australia, around 1901. The train has paused alongside the Parkerville railway siding in the Darling Ranges. The load consists of some 12-15 flat-top wagons. The engine driver, wearing a driver's cap, is Walter Dix and the guard on the right is James Coopes. The photograph measures 21 cm x 16 cm.

### Educational value

- The photograph features the pipes used in the Coolgardie Water Supply pipeline, an engineering feat that attracted worldwide attention at the time and has subsequently been declared an Australian national engineering landmark.
- The pipeline opened in 1903 and immediately solved water-shortage problems resulting from the gold rush that began in the 1890s when prospectors rushed to Western Australia's inhospitable eastern regions following rich discoveries at the locations later known as Coolgardie and Kalgoorlie. Men literally died of thirst in the arid country, while others died of diseases that spread due to a lack of sanitation and clean water. Water was also needed for the gold-mining industry to develop, but attempts to obtain water from local underground sources and dams proved unsustainable, so the pipeline from the coastal region was finally built at great expense.
- Pipes to be used in the Coolgardie Water Supply Scheme were transported by train from the railway sidings of the pipework factories on the outskirts of Perth to sites along the length of the route to Coolgardie, 560 km away.
- Wherever possible the pipeline was laid next to the railway line and some historians argue that construction of the pipeline would not have been possible if the railway line to Kalgoorlie had not already been built. Where the pipeline deviated from the railway line, pipes were transported from the nearest siding or station in specially constructed carts drawn by horses or camels.



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- There was a direct correlation between the length of the pipes and the length of the railway wagons. The pipes were carefully designed to fit the rolling stock used by the WA Government's railways at that time. Two bogie-trucks coupled together measured just over 9 m. The pipes were constructed from flat steel sheets approximately 8.5 m long and 1.2 m wide, made in Germany and the USA. They were assembled into pipes at two Perth factories, where the first step in the production line was trimming the sheets to the correct 8.5-m length.
- Each pipe train consisted of about 10 trucks carrying six to eight pipes, usually laid in tiers and kept in position with chocks. Because each pipe train needed to be unloaded quickly to avoid interference with other traffic on the busy rail lines, four gangs of six men were involved, with each gang usually responsible for unloading three wagons. Rivalry between gangs helped to speed unloading. The gangs did not travel with the trains but camped alongside the pipeline's route, moving camp as the building of the pipeline progressed. Between deliveries, gangs excavated the trench in which the pipeline was laid and buried.
- Because trains in the early 1900s were steam powered, the pipe trains required supplies of water and fuel (wood or coal) to be available at strategic sites along their route to refuel. Consequently railway dams were constructed and 'woodlines', or railway lines specially built for collecting firewood, were established. The lines radiated out in ever-increasing circles, leading to the loss of native trees.
- The photograph shows James Coopes, who emigrated with his wife Jane and their infant son from Manchester, England, in 1893, drawn to WA by opportunities for rail work rather than gold. The discovery of gold provided many opportunities for work in roles other than gold mining, and with more reliable prospects of success. James Coopes migrated in response to advertisements placed by the WA Government seeking trained railway workers to work in the State's expanding rail network. He spent several years with the railways, delivering materials to the Coolgardie Scheme.

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