

Transporting pipes by wagon, 1902



Description

This is a black-and-white photograph taken in 1902 outside the Mephan Ferguson pipeworks at Falkirk, Western Australia, showing two lengths of 8.5-m-long pipe, joined end-to-end, on a horse-drawn dray. The pipes are joined with a collar manufactured for the Coolgardie Water Supply Scheme. A sign on the dray identifies it as belonging to the carriers Moullin and Hayward although the wording is hard to distinguish. The photograph measures 21 cm x 16 cm.

Educational value

- The photograph shows the type of pipe used in the Coolgardie Water Scheme, an engineering feat that attracted worldwide attention at the time it was built, and that has subsequently been declared an Australian national engineering landmark.
- The Coolgardie Water Scheme pipeline that opened in 1903 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 amazingly rich discoveries at 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. The gold-mining industry also needed water to develop, but attempts to obtain water from local underground sources and dams proved unsustainable and finally the pipeline from the coastal region was built at great expense.
- This is one of only two photographs known to exist showing a horse-drawn cart delivering pipes destined for the Coolgardie Water Supply Scheme, as the pipes were usually distributed to pipeline construction sites by train. It was decided early in the planning to lay the pipeline next to the railway line to simplify pipe delivery. Only where the pipeline deviated from the railway line was animal transport used. Pipes were railed to the nearest siding or station and then



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transported in specially constructed carts drawn by horses and sometimes camels.

- Pipes were normally transported in single lengths and joined in the trench in which they were laid and buried, so this scene is unusual because the lengths of pipe have already been joined before delivery to the construction site. Here the two lengths of pipe have been butted together and a joint ring placed around the join. This was possibly the practice where horse-drawn carts transported the pipes. Pipes stacked on top of one another, as on train wagons, would be less stable, particularly over hilly terrain.
- The photograph shows the unique clamping mechanism used for the pipes in the Scheme, a locking bar that runs the length of the completed pipe. One of the two locking bars needed for each pipe is visible at the top of the example in the photograph. More than half of the original pipe laid between 1900 and 1902 is still in use today, and travellers following the Golden Pipeline Trail between Perth and Kalgoorlie can easily identify original pipes because of this horizontal bar.
- The load of pipes shown is outside the Mephan Ferguson pipeworks, one of two factories established on the main railway line east of Perth specifically to manufacture pipes for the Scheme. Each factory made half of the 60,000 pipe lengths needed for the 560-km pipeline, with delivery of the pipes required to begin six months after the contracts were signed on 24 October 1898 and be completed within 26 months.
- The dray belongs to James Henry Moullin and Michael Frederick Hayward, local Perth carriers who may have been given the business of transporting the pipes in the nearby Perth hills area. In this section the pipeline took the shortest route, going up and down hills instead of following the railway's gentler and longer gradient. The pipes would have been railed from the factory to be unloaded as close to the pipeline trench as possible, and horse transportation would have been needed for the 10-km journey from the nearest station to their possible destination at one of the first two pumping stations.
- The large, dark horses shown are typical of those used to pull wagons in rural parts of Australia at the time. Dark horses were preferred because they were less susceptible to skin damage by the sun, and larger horses because they were obviously stronger than smaller ones. Draught horses were introduced to Australia in the 1830s and gradually took over haulage work from convicts and bullocks. In 1901 there was one horse for every two people in Australia, a number that declined rapidly with the introduction of the car.

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