

Neranwood Sawmill and Tramway

Location

The mill site is located on private property behind the Neranwood tea house and adjoining residence. GPS of Mill, 28 deg 7 min 34 sec S, 153 deg 17 min 41 sec E. The tramline ran from Mudgeeraba rail siding climbing up the valley of Mudgeeraba Creek to a saddle and then descending into the Nerang Valley and terminating at the mill.

Recommended Heritage Boundaries

Recommended heritage boundaries of the mill are lines parallel to and three metres from the edge of the foundations of the mill foundations.

Recommended heritage boundaries for the tramline are five metres either side of the centre line of the tramline (a) from the roadway at the saddle descending towards Mudgeeraba until and end point to be determined roughly one kilometre from the saddle; (b) from the saddle on the Nerang side to a point where the formation emerges from broken country down near the level of Nerang Creek.

History

Sawmilling was long established in the Nerang area when the Nerang Hardwood Company was registered on 20 March 1923. In Queensland terms it was unique as (1) a public sawmilling company which largely represented grazing interests; and (2) it built a substantial locomotive-operated tramway to transport sawn to government railway rather than log timber to the mill. Such tramways were common in Victoria but not in Queensland.

The principal person involved in setting up the company was the timber merchant William Dearden who lived in Hamilton in Brisbane. He had been in 1909 one of the vendors involved in floating the Queensland Pine Company (with major works at Yarraman) and became its managing director. At that time he was domiciled in Melbourne and brought Victorian ideas to the Queensland industry. In an agreement dated 1 December 1922 between Dearden and Robert Cumming, a Brisbane accountant, with stock-brokers Acworth and Bullen, the company was floated with £200,000 capital, Dearden receiving 15,000 fully paid one pound shares for his interests. Leading graziers such as Rowland Edkins and Ernest Bell of Coochin were amongst the inaugural directors.²¹

The enterprise was substantial with a well-engineered two-foot gauge tramline built from the

railway yard at Mudgeeraba, following the creek and then steadily ascending to cross the range at a saddle and then descending steadily down to the upper Nerang. The narrow gauge permitted sharp curves but the line was still marked by substantial earthworks, particularly on the western descent. The township of Neranwood sprang up around the sawmill at the terminus,

To mark the start of cutting, directors invited their guests to travel the seven miles over the tramline, sitting on improvised seats on the tram trucks. The sawmill was powered by a "huge boiler which once rested in the hull of a Commonwealth steamer". Over luncheon Dearden explained that the company intended to invest in mechanical equipment to assist in drawing logs to the mill.²² The operation was unprofitable and despite the issue of preference shares in 1924, it had only a short existence. In 1928 the assets were sold to Federal Forests Limited. The depression delivered the coup de gras and at the end of 1930 the railway siding at Mudgeeraba, then belonging to Federal Forests Limited was placed out of use.²³

The company could have saved the expense of the tramway by using the road which within a few years connected Mudgeeraba, Neranwood and Springbrook where sawmills operated from the 1940s.

Site Description and Condition

The remains of the sawmill comprise only the concrete foundations, presumably for the steam powered engine(s) and boiler. The remains are massive but convey little meaning without site interpretation.

The tramway remains consist of well-engineered formation, washed away in places on the Nerang Creek side. There was no positive identification of sleepers or dogspikes and no rail was seen nor were bridge structures. The washaways, although sometimes major, are probably the natural result of lack of maintenance resulting in blocked drains turning the embankments effectively into small dams for which they were not designed and consequently failed.

Assessment of Significance

The tramway formation demonstrates how the transport problem was overcome before the era of reliable motor vehicles and without government assistance. It was unusual among timber tramways in Queensland being designed for sawn timber rather than logs. This made the narrow 2 foot gauge a logical choice, particularly in rugged

terrain. The privately or locally built narrow gauge tramway was an important part of Queensland history prior to reliable motor vehicle road transport. This tramway is a good example of using existing technology. The tramway was a well-engineered, linked to sawmilling, and demonstrates important characteristics of such tramways (criterion d).

Recommendations

The location of the mill site, close to housing, the small amount remaining and the relatively short life of the milling operation point to the mill site of its own not having a high priority for heritage conservation, unless linked with the tramway. This would not appear to be the case as it is separated from the clearly recognisable and accessible sections of the tramway.

The role of the tramway could be understood with interpretive signs and map and if turned into a walking trail with minimum disturbance to the existing formation. On the western side, there are restrictions on land use because of the water catchment reserve which help ensure preservation. The washouts provide difficulties in making this a walking trail. Achieving a reasonable length, would require work so that its use did not accelerate its erosion at the washout sites. On the eastern side, vegetation control would be the main requirement, sufficient only to keep the track accessible.

References

1. Company 38 of 1923, A/28610, Queensland State Archives.
2. *Queenslander* 2 August 1924 p. 30; *Architectural and Building Journal of Queensland* September 1924 p. 74.
3. *Weekly Notice*, Railway Department, No. 1 of 1931.



Mudgeeraba-Neranwood Tramway formation just east of saddle looking towards Mudgeeraba

Mudgeeraba-Neranwood Tramway and Neranwood Sawmill

Undergrowth on tramline formation about half a kilometre each of saddle descending towards Mudgeeraba



View of tramline descending on western side of saddle towards Little Nerang Creek



View of concrete foundations for machinery of Neranwood Sawmill, Neranwood

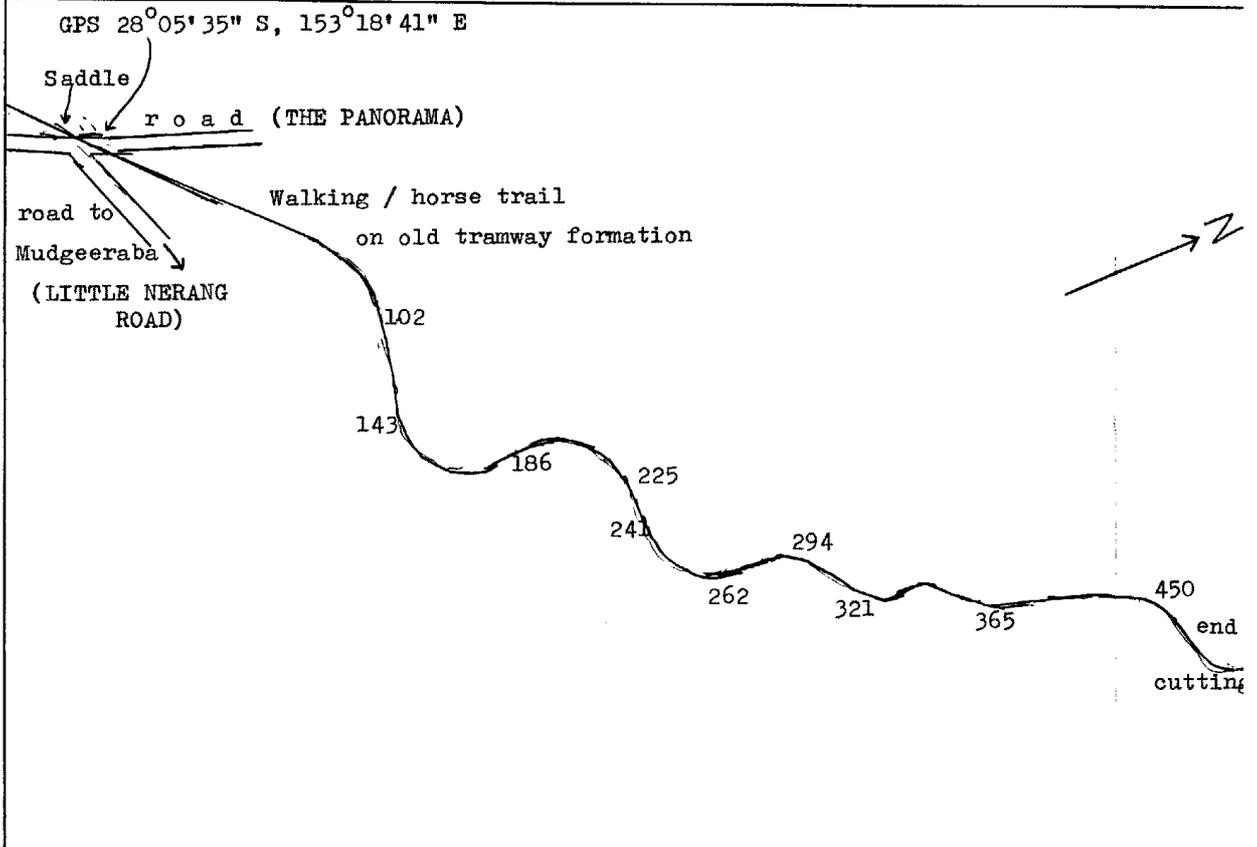


NERANWOOD - MUDGEERABA TRAMWAY FORMATION

Mudgeeraba direction from saddle on ridge

Map ends where lantana &c. too difficult to penetrate
without clearing

(Distances in paces approximately 1.3 metres)(wet & overgrown)
Scale approx. 1:2600



B A T R A M W A Y F O R M A T I O N

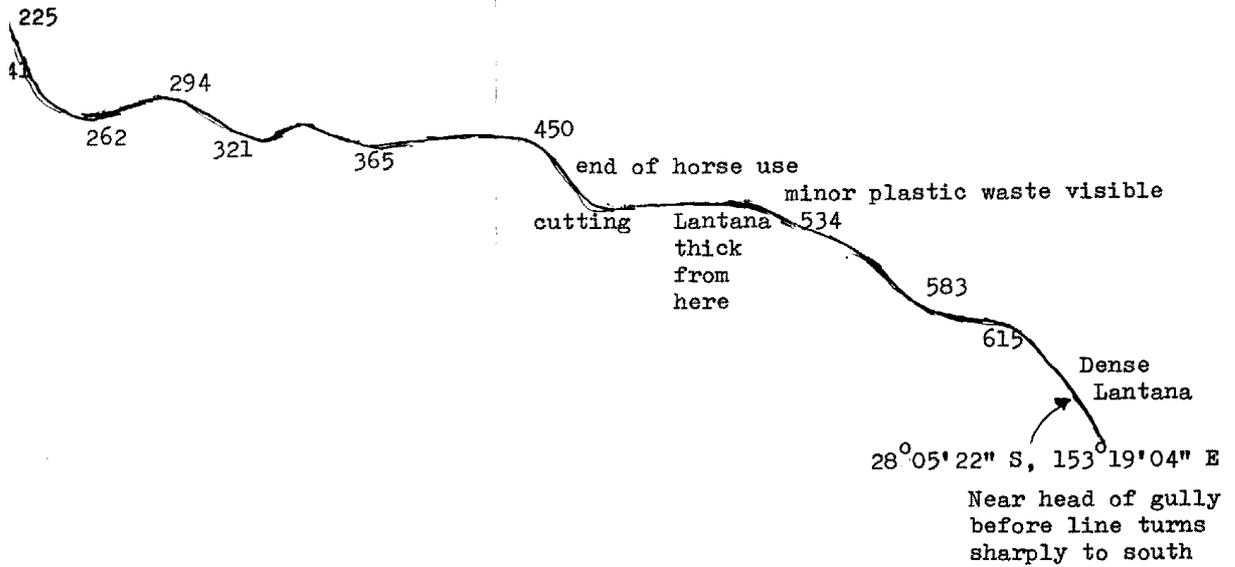
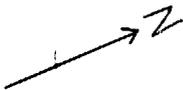
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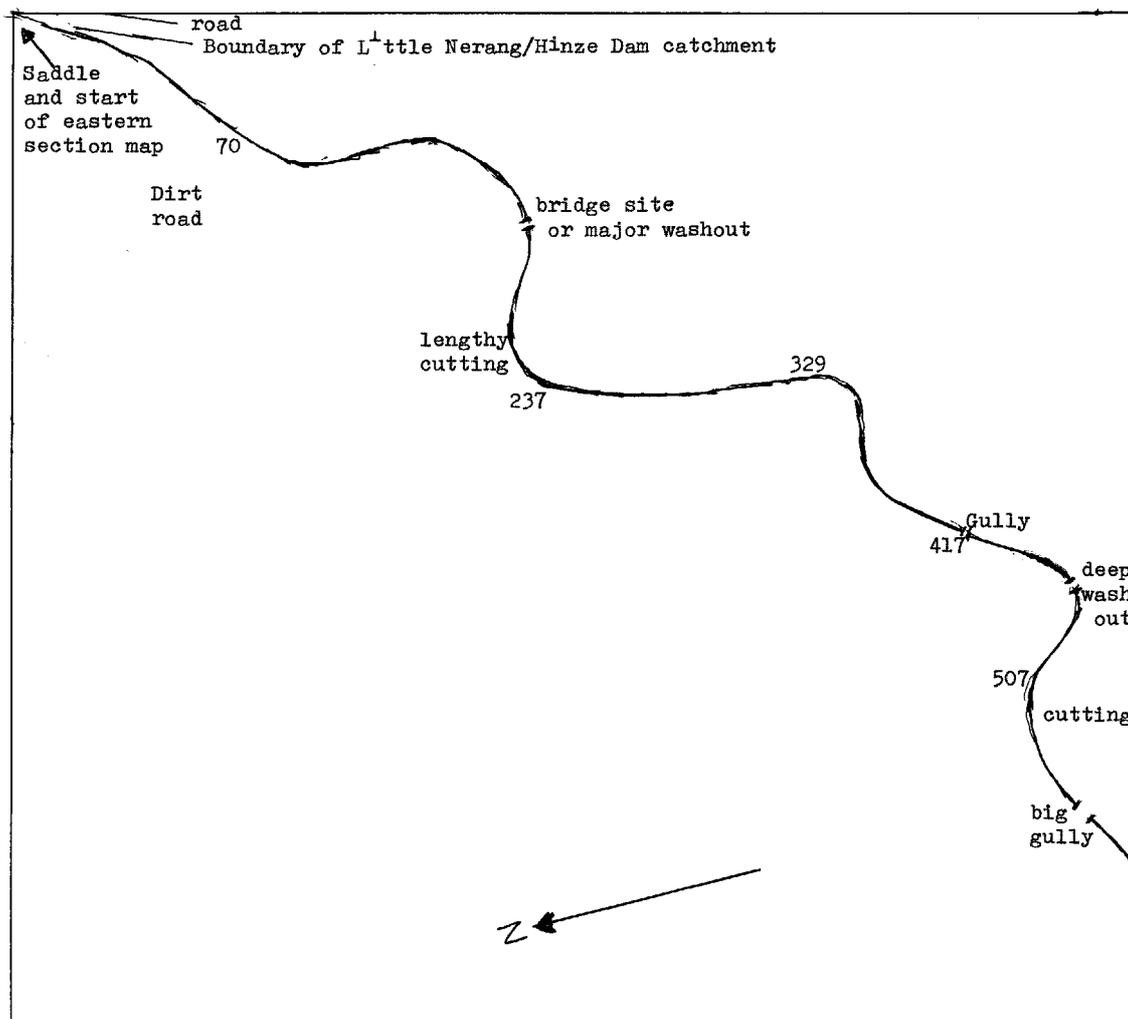
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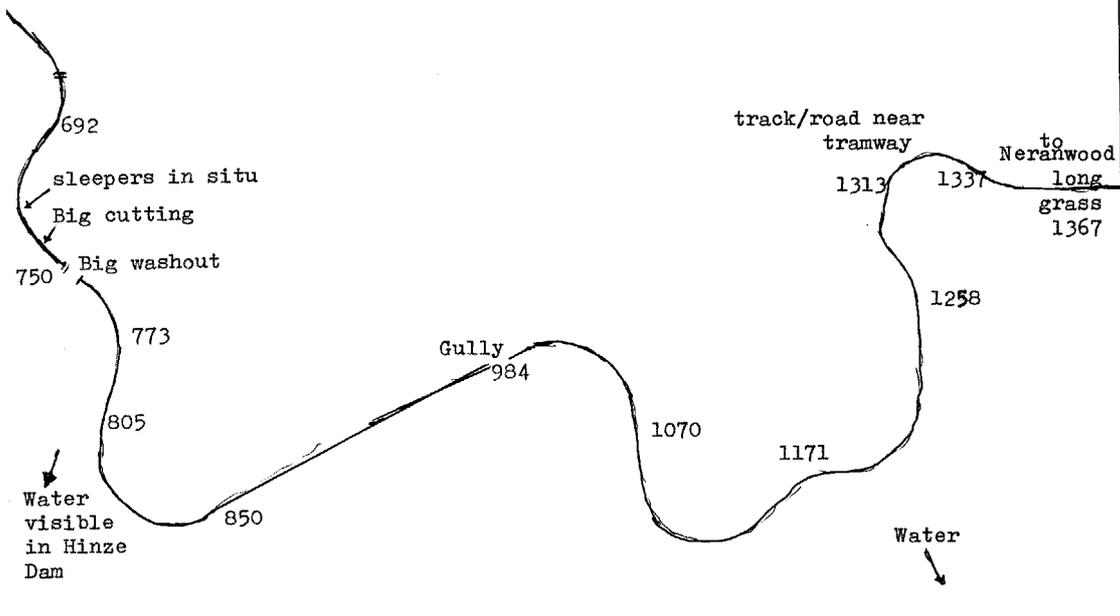




NERANWOOD - MUDGEERABA TRAMWAY

Scale 1:2600 approximate (1 mm = 2.6 m / 2 paces)

(Approximate distanees and directions
with constantly changing directions and
obstructions and washouts at intervals)



245

