

Shoot Through Like a Bondi Tram



"Bondi Tram" at Bondi Beach

One hundred years ago the tram line was extended from the Bondi Aquarium terminus at Fletcher Street to a balloon loop at the southern of Bondi Beach. Early morning tram journeys were particularly popular with bathers, as it was then forbidden to swim at Bondi Beach between the hours of 8 a.m. and 8 p.m.

Those were the days when steam tram motors hauled two passenger cars and supplies of coke and water were obtained at various points along the line. On wet days an additional car was attached to cater for extra passengers, as the rain turned dirt roads to mud and made travel by horse-drawn vehicles difficult.

The steam trams used an "old shrieking whistle", made "nerve-shattering noises" and caused "earth tremors" and "hurricanes of dust" in warm weather, much to the annoyance of pedestrians and shopkeepers. They rejoiced at the introduction of clean electric trams.

The new electric tram services to Bondi Beach began on October 19, 1902, even though there was only a three-inch clearance beneath the Bondi Road overbridge. This situation was eased the following year when the track was lowered under the bridge. 1905 saw the Bondi line chosen as a destination for the new tourist tram service and the first of a number of moonlight excursions.

The Bondi and North Bondi surf life saving clubs were established in 1906, by which time bathing restrictions had been removed, and the popularity of surf bathing led to improved summer Sunday services.

Destination signs with coloured symbols evolved from the days of steam trams. The Bondi Beach sign was white with a red centre, and "Bondi" printed in white on a black background.

The first of the popular O class trams entered service on the Bondi and Waverley lines in March 1908 and they were in general use by 1911. Nicknamed "rattlers" and "toast-rack" trams, they successfully carried passengers until 1957 and are remembered with nostalgic affection.

*The conductor on the running boards crying "fez pliz",
The segregated smoking sections, usually occupied by men.
The canvas blind which was pulled down to keep out the rain.
Straphangers jostling for seats as passengers departed.
The paper boys who jumped on and off calling "payur".*

The Bondi tram loop was demolished as part of Waverley Council's Bondi Improvement Scheme in the 1920's and the trams rerouted along Campbell Parade to a new terminus at North Bondi, the site still used today by the buses.

Another tram route reached Bondi Beach via Curlewis Street. This was an extension of the Bellevue Hill line which relieved congestion along Oxford Street. The official opening, which took place on Saturday, December, 19, 1914, was performed by the Minister for Public Works. A second ribbon was cut by Mrs Joseph Barracluff, wife of the Mayor of Waverley, when the tram reached the Waverley boundary. The Bondi via Bellevue Hill line received a priority allocation of the new corridor R class trams in 1933.

The last Bondi tram to "shoot through" was during the early hours of Sunday, February 18, 1960. The R class corridor tram was crammed with last-tram riders and had a boisterous journey. It left Bondi at 3.30 a.m. and arrived at the Dowling Street depot minus most light globes, some handrails, all upholstered seat cushions, the lifting jack, a headlight glass and all destination rolls.

Once the favourite mode of transport, only the memory remains of when you could "Shoot through like a Bondi tram".

Published by Waverley Library, February, 1994.

We gratefully acknowledge extracts from "The Eastern Lines of the Sydney Tramway System" by David R Keenan.