

Comet Tales & Walking Trails



STEAM DRIVEN PUMP

SITE 15

In earlier times, before the Comet railway weir was constructed, water for the steam locomotives was obtained from a well in the bed of the Comet River to the west of the town. The well was situated near the low-level timber rail bridge built by *Engineer Robert Ballard in 1878*. During the severe 1969 drought Tom Dunbar of Stewart Park reopened this well to water his cattle and horses.

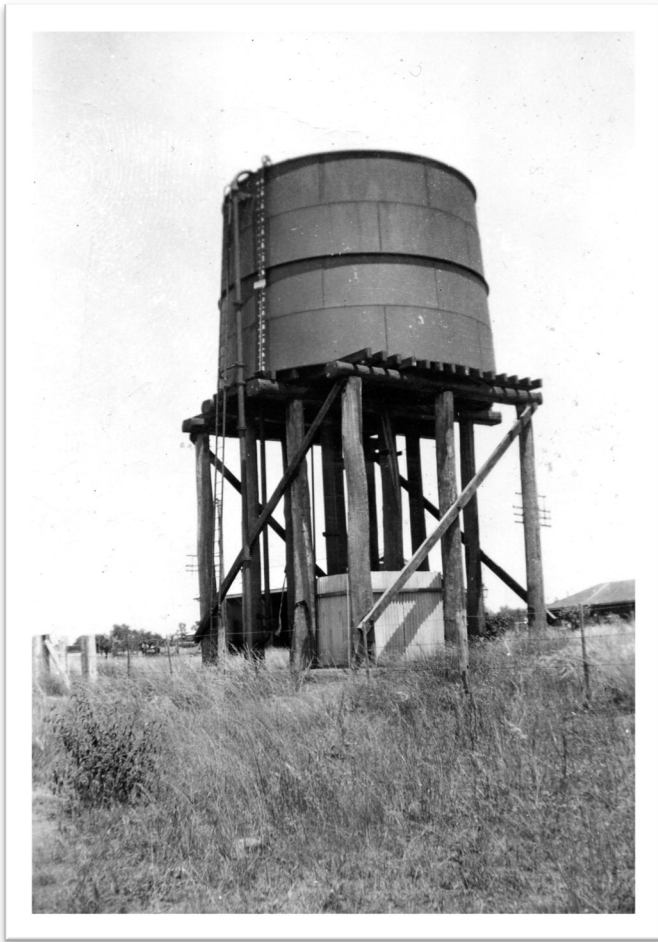
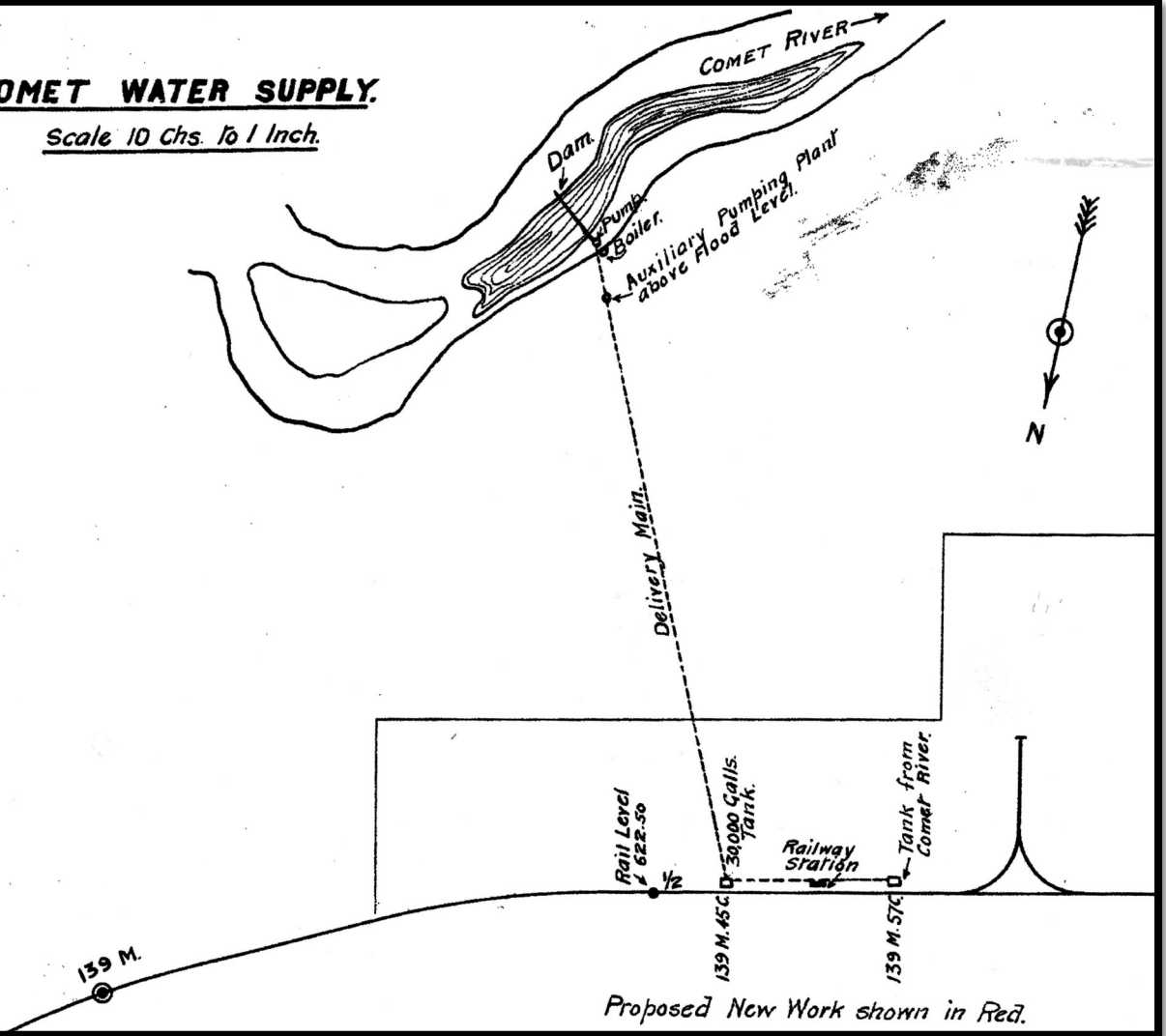


For a short while in 1916, Comet Railway Station was referred to as "Comet Tank".

The construction of the railway dam on the Comet River in 1915 saw a coal fired, steam driven pump installed on the high river bank to lift the water from the dam and deliver it to a *136,382-litre (30,000 gallon) steel tank*. This tank sat on a high timber stand situated at the rear of the *1878 Comet railway station*. The height of the tank stand allowed for the gravitational distribution of the water to the hydrants watering the steam locomotives and the town.

COMET WATER SUPPLY.

Scale 10 Chs. to 1 Inch.



**INFORMATION
ON THE COMET
WEIR AND ITS
CONSTRUCTION
CAN BE FOUND
AT SITE 16
COMET WEIR
1915/16**

NEW BOILER FOR COMET PUMPING PLANT



NEW BOILER FOR COMET PUMPING PLANT.—The Railway Department removing the old locomotive boiler from the pumping station on the weir in the Comet River. Here is the old boiler suspended from the branch of a tree preparatory to being loaded on a timber jinker. The new boiler was placed into position last week.

Morning Bulletin (Rockhampton, QLD. : 1878-1954)

Monday 7 August 1939, page 9

New Boiler for Comet Pumping Plant — The Railway department removing the old locomotive boiler from the pumping station on the weir in the Comet river. Here is the old boiler suspended from the branch of a tree preparatory to being loaded on a jinker . The new boiler was placed into position last week.



Disused locomotive steam boilers were often used for pumping water in the early days. The steel pipeline which carried the water from the pump shed to the iron tank can be still seen where it crosses a gully to the south of the township.





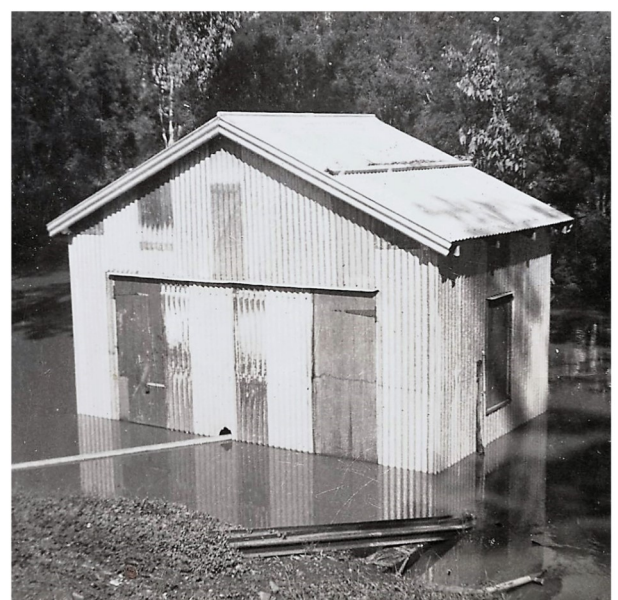


LOCOMOTIVE STEAM BOILER SHED

Jack Murphy, a local carrier, supplied the necessary coal to the corrugated iron shed housing the locomotive steam boiler.



In 1937, a 12-horse power diesel engine was installed in another shed on a lower level to pump the water. However the old steam boiler was kept and was brought back into service when rising flood waters inundated the diesel engine. A railway fireman was brought from Emerald to fire the steam locomotive boiler during the inundation to ensure the supply of water to the tank in town.



William (Bill) James Ernest Ellis was employed by the railway to pump the water to the station. He attained his Certificate of Competency as Third-Class Engine Driver on the 4th April 1913 at Emerald. Bill and his family's home was situated where the Comet water treatment plant is today.



BILL ELLIS AT THE COMET DIG TREE BEFORE IT WAS FELLED



THIS PHOTO IS BELIEVED TO BE HIS WIFE ON THEIR FRONT VERANDA.

TOWN RAW WATER

Town residents could connect to this raw water supply free of charge, however they had to look after their own pipelines. There were many lovely gardens and plentiful fruit trees in the town during this time.


I remember our bathwater would be quite brown when the river was running, and I would wash my face under the clean rain water tap to finish bathing. Clean tank water was a very precious commodity and used only for drinking and cooking. There was a cold-water shower room situated under the steel tank stand for the railway lengthsmen to use on completion of their daily work.

END OF AN ERA

The 1960s saw the end of the steam engine era with the introduction of diesel locomotives. As there was no longer a need for the old coal fired pumping plant, the shed was demolished, and the boiler taken away for scrap. All that remains now is the ash pit, the old smoke stack and the flagged floor of the shed. There is some interesting stone work to be seen on the lower side of the site.

The huge steel water tank which had supplied the township since 1916 was sold to Wallace McKenzie of Rhudanna, Comet. The tank was removed sometime in the late 1990's.



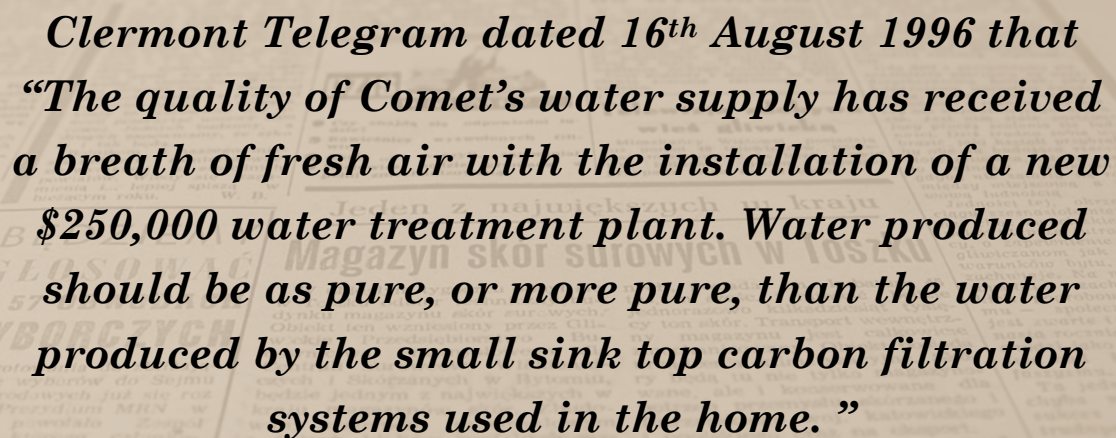


The *Central Queensland News* dated 13th November 1975
stated that

“In an official ceremony under gray skies at the home of
Mr and Mrs Ray Watson, Comet, on Sunday,
Emerald Shire Chairman, R. C. Morton
turned a sprinkler on to
officially turn on the Comet water supply”.

The Emerald Shire Council purchased the Railway Weir from Queensland Government Railways for \$1000.00 and put in a treatment plant to provide water to the town. The water had chlorine added but was not filtered. This was the second big ceremony for the township since 1970 when electricity was switched on.

However, later with the new water infrastructure, water meters were installed to households and businesses, with town residents now having to pay for their household water.



Clermont Telegram dated 16th August 1996 that
“The quality of Comet’s water supply has received
a breath of fresh air with the installation of a new
\$250,000 water treatment plant. Water produced
should be as pure, or more pure, than the water
produced by the small sink top carbon filtration
systems used in the home.”

The Clermont Telegram further stated that “the project received State and Federal government funding with Emerald Shire Council providing \$45,000.”

UPGRADE TO THE COMET WATER TREATMENT PLANT

On 3rd July 2007, Jim Pearce M.P. member for Fitzroy, officially opened a further upgrade of the Comet Water Treatment Plant on behalf of Andrew Fraser, Minister for Local Government, Planning, Sport and Recreation. The project was sponsored by Ensham Resources, the Queensland Government and the Emerald Shire Council. This upgrade has assured town residents of very good supply of quality reticulated water.

With the amalgamation of four shire councils in 2007, the Central Highlands Regional Council now manages Comet's water supply.

What a long way Comet has come. Where the old locomotive boiler and steam driven pump, which delivered water to the town for so many years once stood, the water is now lifted with an electric submersible pump to the treatment plant, before delivering this precious commodity to the Comet township.

I guess most of us take clean water for granted but looking back over the years I think how lucky I am now to have clean filtered water to bathe in but many of us still prefer our drinking water from rain water tanks.

*Compiled by
Rosemary McLeod,
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Acknowledgements:

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Photos:

National Library of Australia; State Library of Queensland; Rosemary McLeod collection; Audrey Ellis; Queensland Rail / Greg Hallam; Robyn Morawitz.

