

Trans-Australian Railway

In 1912, work began on a new railway line between Port Augusta in South Australia and Kalgoorlie in Western Australia. Stretching across 1693 kilometres of Australia's driest and most isolated terrain, the Trans-Australian Railway was completed on 17 October 1917, providing a link between the eastern states and Western Australia and helping to give the newly formed Commonwealth a sense of national unity.

Joining east and west

The Trans-Australian Railway, running from Port Augusta to Kalgoorlie and connecting the eastern states with Western Australia, was arguably the first major work of a federated Australia. Before Federation in 1901, Western Australia had made the construction of a railway linking the nation's eastern and western colonies a condition for joining the Commonwealth.

At the time, the west was linked to the eastern cities only by a rough sea voyage and a single telegraph line. Many argued that this inhibited commerce between the colonies and made it difficult to quickly move troops to defend Australia's southern and western shores.

Travelling across Australia

The Trans-Australian Railway line radically shortened travel and communication time. Mail delivery from Adelaide to Perth was cut by two days, and eastbound travellers who took the train arrived in Melbourne three days earlier than those making the journey by ship.

Many people, including federal politicians, theatrical performers and members of the royal family travelled on the line. They enjoyed the first hot showers ever installed in a rail carriage, ate meals in the dining cars, sang along to the piano or had a quiet drink in the lounge car before resting in comfort in first-class sleeping cars.

The railway was not only for the wealthy. It also provided Australians with greater opportunities for recreational travel and helped Western Australia become a tourist destination. In 1969 the standard gauge rail network was extended east from Port Augusta as far as Sydney, and west of Kalgoorlie all the way to Perth, making it possible to catch a train from the Pacific Ocean across the continent to the Indian Ocean. This has led to the naming of the Indian-Pacific, the passenger train that now runs along the line.



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Questions

1. When did work begin on the railway?

2. How long was the initial railway?

3. The first hot showers ever installed in a rail carriage was on the Trans-Australian Railway.

True / False

4. Why is the passenger train that runs along the railway called the Indian-Pacific?

5. Mail delivery from Adelaide to Perth was cut by three days.

True / False

6. Why was the Trans-Australian Railway important to the new nation?
