

# Quarterly Tours



**NATIONAL TRUST – SRI LANKA**

30 th May 2015

## Tour - Programme.

Leave Colombo Fort Railway station at 07.00 hrs .

Leave by coach from the Peradeniya station to the Peradeniya Botanical Gardens and then to the Peradeniya University Library and to the Peradeniya University Archaeology Museum.

Lunch at Peradeniya Rest House.

After lunch proceed to the Trinity College Chapel.

Leave Kandy 16.00 hrs.

Tea at the Ambepussa Rest House around 16.30 hrs.

Expect to return to Colombo 20.00 hrs.



Colombo in the mid 1960s with Railway detail

*Text , Plans and Photographs:*  
**Mr. Vinodh Wickremeratne**

This historic railway line was built a century and a half ago. The Technical College at St Sebastian was the starting point of the railway line.

The **inaugural journey** of the train was on 27<sup>th</sup> December 1864, from Maradana yard to Ambepussa. The **guest** of honour on this occasion was the **Duke** of Brabant (later King Leopold II of Belgium). On 2<sup>nd</sup> October 1865, the station for Colombo was



first sod



ready for operations and the first **Revenue Train** was open to the public and tickets sold in old Sterling currency. This station was simply known as **Colombo** at first (with its board in only English).

The ornate entrance to the fort, demolished to make way for the Break Water Line in the 1870s.

All railway distances on the **5'6" Broad Gauge track** are measured from Colombo as this is the starting point. At present distances are calculated on the metric scale.

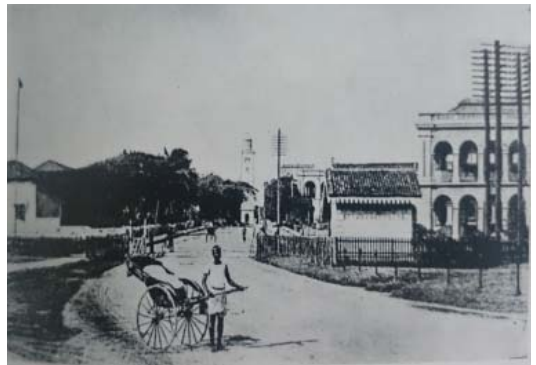
A **level crossing** (under the present overhead-bridge) existed till 1920



Colombo Terminus.

Now only the tower on the right exists. The Colombo Railway Museum is located here. The portion from the 3rd door from the right was demolished in 1908.

linking **Parson's Road** and **York Street**. Due to the **increase in vehicular traffic at this level crossing** it was decided to **raise** the road and to construct an overhead bridge over the rail track. The Breakwater Line to the harbor was done away with in 1924. The present port was connected by a rail

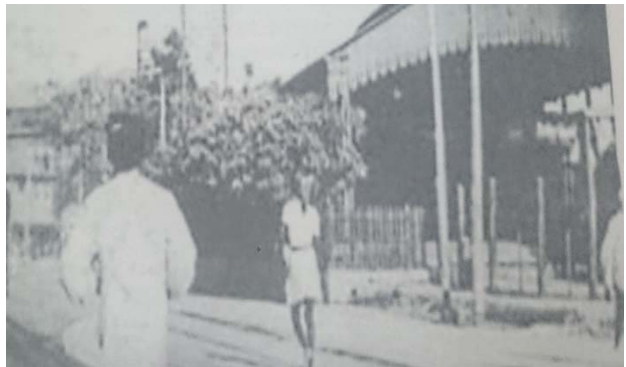


track through Bloemendaal in 1923.

This present Fort railway station is the third site and building and was constructed by 1917 and built on reclaimed land of the **Beira Lake**.

The level crossing on the Break Water Line at the beginning of Queen's Street between the Galadari and the Kingsbury. Note the Light House cum clock tower, Echelon Barracks, the gateman's hut, the rail gates and ceramic insulators of the telegraph poles.

The original Coast Line, was, unbelievably on the car park outside this building. There was also a



branch at the southern end of the platform towards the harbour called the **Racquet Court Line** (later called **Cement Siding**, now the **Customs** new building is on it.), which crossed **Norris Road** (as Olcott Mawatha was then known) and headed towards the **Khan Memorial** clock tower and on

The Pettah Station, now the lake side bus stands.



to the docks where the **Colombo Port Commission** has its private railway). The existence of this line can be placed at 1889 as evidenced by the **List of Speed Restrictions** – 5 miles per hour for this line that year! Another

The original Break Water and Coast Line, The Beira Lake was reclaimed about 1910 and the station we know as Fort was built on the reclamation. The southern line seen in this photo was lifted by 1917.



line exited the ports line nearer to the clock tower, crossed **Prince Street (Fort)** and entered **Chalmers' Granaries**. The level crossing was tarred over in 1979 and this service to the granary was discontinued.

A damp morning in the 1950s outside Fort Station, note the tram lines and the now demolished Station Master's bungalow.

On our way out.....there used to be **narrow gauge (2'6")** lines on the right, which took diminutive trains towards the **Kelani Valley** and the **Safragam**,



(lifted early in the 1990s).

On the approach to Maradana (the station on this location was built about 1908) one would notice the New Olympia building on the right

The same location more than 80 years later. Note the double line tunnel towards Slave Island and the abandoned Break Water Line tunnel.





Central Station.

and the train travels under a set of motor bridges. In the days before the 1960s, another form of railed transport shared the motor road – the electric **Tram Cars**.

The first major railway accident was at Gongitota, Enderamulla, and the train carrying workmen to the site toppled over causing serious injury and death to 25 workmen.



The harbour approach triangle at Orugodawaththa and the deviation to Kolonnawa.

At Gampaha (16 ½ miles, 36' Elevation) this train will stop if there are bookings. Gampaha is the capital of the district. The name for this area was also referred as **Henerathgoda** where the 3<sup>rd</sup> Botanical gardens were

**established. The station which dates back to 1865 is seen conserved on the left.**

Mirigama (31 miles -164' Elev.), is a bustling town and the site of the disaster of the Talaimannar, Colombo accident of 1964. The Walawwa of the Senanayake family is at Bo-tale.

The next station is, Ambepussa (34 miles – 182' Elev.) and we are halfway on this journey up to Kandy. Some of the structural steel sections used in 1864-65 was imported from England. The present station dates from the 1910-1911 .Further on the left is the deviation of this track to the **Railway Quarry**.

Alawwa (40 miles -190' Elev.) Station is next. An important station for passenger and freight **transfers** to and fro to reach the planting districts of Narammala and Giriulla. Walakumbura is the next sub station with the Kurunegala vehicular road on the left.

Polgahawela station is the next junction on this rail track and from this main line the railway to the North & Eastern lines deviate from here. The colour light signaling system set up in 1962 ends here.

Our next substation we encounter is Kadigamuwa (55 ½ miles – 639' Elev.). During the Second World War, **Lord Louis Mountbatten** is believed to have

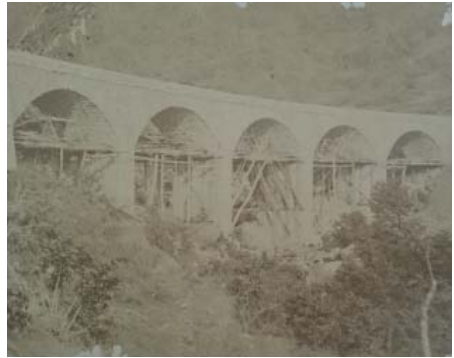


used an **airfield** in the neighborhood at Mawathagama, This is the closest landing strip for light aircraft to Kandy and was frequently used by Mountbatten and his military staff when arriving from India and Burma. This was a quicker way of leaving and entering Ceylon and Kandy rather than trying to reach **RAF Base Negombo** (now Katunayaka) or the **Colombo Aerodrome** at Ratmalana.

Ihalakotte (59 miles – 1,057' Elev.) is next. Till around 1972 this was called **Alagalla** but a political or cultural reason warranted a 'name change'. Balana (62 ¼ miles – 1,405' Elev.) is the next station. Old British records list this as **Balanny**. Sensation Rock, Lion's Mouth and the breath taking view eastwards with Bible Rock in the Aranayaka area and Uthuwankande of Saradiel fame. There is a near vertical drop of a several hundred feet from the railway line in this area.

The line levels out at Kadugannawe (65 miles – 1,690' Elev.) with the icon of that town, **Captain Dawson's Tower** on the right. The **pusher** locomotives are detached here and sent back to Rambukkana to assist other trains up if needed. On the right is the new **National Railway Museum** opened 27<sup>th</sup> December 2014 to coincide with the 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Ceylon's railways.

The next station is Pilimalawe, which also received a name change from **Giragama** in 1972.



The Allagalla Viaduct under construction in 1866.

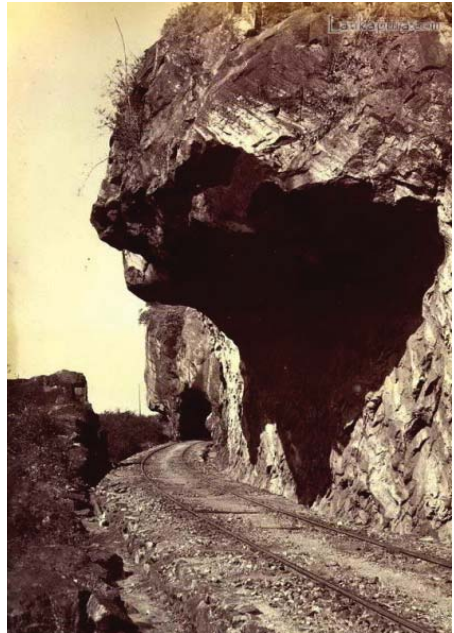


Tunnel under construction.

Peradeniya Junction (71 miles – 1,553' Elev.) is next. There is a triangle track formation here for the lines to the hill country terminating at Badulla. The original 1867 station for Peradeniya exists as a tool room but the exterior has been conserved (with an unfortunate colour). The current operational buildings are just over a hundred years since built. When Peradeniya was elevated to 'junction' status it was called Peradeniya Junction. The line crosses the Mahaweli River to enter the Kandy sector of the line. A new station was built across the river, this was called **New Peradeniya**. Due to the University complex in the area it is now named Sarasavi Uyana (a granite building, now aesthetically massacred)

A few halts and substations on the way and the train would reach Kandy (74 ¼ miles – 1,602' Elev.)

On this leg of the Main Line in either direction trains, go through thirteen tunnels. Tunnels are numbered, No 1 just before Ambepussa, the rest between Rambukkana and Kadugannawe. There is a No. 5A and No. 9A, these are extra tunnels bored 1905-6 between Nos. 5 and 6, also between Nos 9 and 10. Outside No.s 5A and 9A one could see the original trace of the line outside these 'new' tunnels. The longest tunnel is the Alagalla Tunnel No. 5A which is 1,364 feet.



Lions Mouth

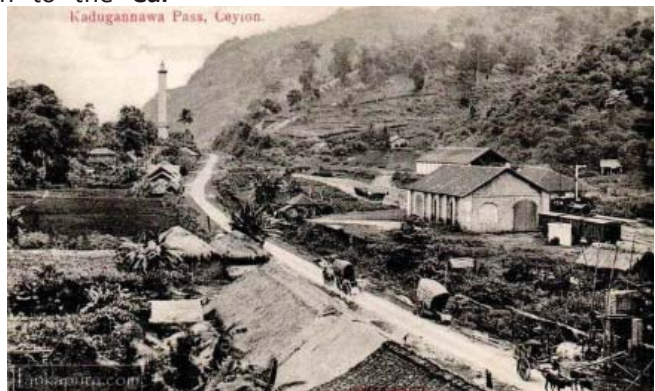


Sensational rock

Spectacular bridges are the ones across the Kelani, then the bridge across the Ma Oya, across the Rambukkan Oya and the Na Nu Oya closer to Peradeniya.

There had been the **Five Arch Viaduct** at Alagalle but this was earthed over and only one arch remains.

Other unique features of note – main stations have a **Horse & Carriage Docks** to load cars in to the **Car**



**Carrier**, and in days gone by, horses into **Horse Boxes** and coaches on to special carriers.

Kadugannawa

**Turntables**, to change the locomotives' facing direction are provided at main stations.

Signal Cabins, abandoned after the Colour Light Signalling was introduced, are visible in most stations.

One must **compare** the speed of construction with what happens

today (and does not) ...just four years to complete this difficult task of 75 miles, bridges, tunnels and ravines. With primitive machinery and tools, no communication aids, just runners, horses and Mr. Faviell, the Contractor).



Kandy View