

A grand station sits on the border

Located on the border of NSW and Victoria, Albury is one of the most magnificent stations in Australia outside a capital city.



Journeys

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Nathan Adams, Senior Customer Attendant.

After 17 years' working at Albury Station, Michael Pitcher needs customers to remind him of what a magnificent heritage building the station is.

"When you work here a while, you take it for granted and it's only when customers comment on it that you're reminded it's a beautiful place to work," says Michael, Acting Travel Centre Manager for Albury Station.

Albury–Wodonga is on the line between Melbourne and Sydney, and historically, the fortunes of the twin border towns have been linked to the railway.

Both passenger and freight trains pass through, including CountryLink's

XPT services between Sydney and Melbourne. Five CountryLink platform staff, including Michael, and 28 CountryLink 'on-board' service personnel work out of the station, which is staffed almost 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

The twin towns of Albury and Wodonga are an important regional centre thanks to their position on either side of the Murray River at the New South Wales and Victoria border. The region was opened up after the explorers Hume and Hovell passed through in 1824.

Settlers followed, and the township of Albury was founded to secure a route from Sydney to Port Phillip, near where Melbourne is today.

Albury became the place for travellers to cross the Murray and so Wodonga developed on the other side. Soon, paddle steamers were plying the river and then the railway came to town.

In 1854, the Colony of Victoria was proclaimed and by the 1870s, competition between Victoria and New South Wales had grown fierce.

In 1881, the NSW Government Railways Chief Engineer, John Whitton, oversaw the building of Albury Station, the grandest railway station to be built outside Sydney or Melbourne.

At the time, the magnificent structure was supposed to symbolise a formal shaking of hands between the two great colonies, and in 1883 the two states' railway systems were officially linked. But

– as one modern commentator put it – NSW seemed to be declaring, "Look on this monument, Victorians, and despair!"

Passengers still had to change trains at Albury because the states insisted on keeping their different rail gauges: NSW had the standard gauge whereas Victoria retained the state's broad gauge. This explains Albury's 455-metre platform. The longest covered platform in Australia, it needed to be large enough to accommodate two trains!

Wodonga does, of course, have its own station on the other side of the Murray. But Michael, being the good New South Welshman that he is, says, "It's charming, I suppose, but has nowhere near the grandeur of Albury."

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