

# The Coal and Shale Tramways of West Katoomba.

## THE KATOOMBA COAL COMPANY.

On a first things first basis it is thought necessary to mention the construction and operation of a surface haulage tramway which was laid by John Britty North to connect his coal mine, located at the base of the sandstone cliff escarpment of Malaita Point, to the crest level of the immediate area at a locality which became known as "THE ENGINE BANK", the site of the present terminus of the famous Scenic Railway at West Katoomba.

John Britty North had acquired an area of some 640 acres of some-what sterile land forming the high-level water-shed of Katoomba Falls Creek, with the intention of exploiting the coal seams which out-cropped at the base of the cliff many hundreds of feet below. According to local testimony the adits of the coal mine were opened about 1879 and the double-tracked haulage way to the cliff-top probably dates from the same period. In connection with the latter transport facility advantage was taken to lay the narrow-gauge skipway, appraised as having a track width of 24 inches, along a precipitious waterworn fissure a few feet in width which, after passing through a natural tunnel near its crest, descended to a grade of about one in one to the upper level of the talus slope. The length of the skip-way has been given at 1300 feet, the difference in levels between the two termini being about 600 feet.

At the bankfoot of the skip-way it is surmised from a present day examination of the site there may have been two tram sidings ranged side by side, one for inbye and the other for outbye coal skip movements. Both lines extended a short distance from the bankfoot, amidst a surround of tree-ferns and other rain-forest growth, before entering the adits beneath Malaita Point, a towering sandstone buttress surmounted by a strangely shaped rock pinnacle known as the Orphan Rock to generations of sight-seers. It has been said by a bush-walking friend, Gordon MacGregor, that the mine tramways emerged on the western side of Malaita Point and crossed a skeleton bridge about 300 feet in length and some 30 feet in height, constructed of bush timber, which spanned a ravine to serve several adits driven into the coal outcrops below the southern cliff-face of a rugged

amphitheatre which abutted on to the eastern cliff formation of the Narrow Neck Peninsula. This sheltered area is given over to a luxuriant wilder-



*An old view near the base of the present scenic railway.*

*A. Grunbach colln.*