

TRAFALGAR – Jervois Basin

The composite paddle steamer *Trafalgar* was built in 1877 by T J McDonald of Echuca, for W J Davies. The vessel was adapted to carry 80 tons of cargo and measured 105.7 feet (32.2 m) in length, 18.9 feet (5.8 m) breadth and 7.9 feet (2.4 m) depth. It was originally 228 gross tons, altered to 127 gross tons in 1918 and to a dumb barge of 116 gross tons in 1933.

The *Riverine Herald* 14 April 1877, reporting on the launch, described the vessel :

...unlike any other boat built at Echuca, she has iron topsides of plates a quarter inch thick. The frames are 2½" angle iron and wooden planking is used below the 3' 6" water line.

R Parsons, 1996, *Ships of the Inland Rivers*, p 137

The River Murray paddler was intended for the Wentworth trade, carrying both passengers and goods. On one occasion it carried 208 prize Merino rams and a pure-bred stallion called Young Hercules, which was valued at 800 guineas and proved difficult to ship.



Trafalgar on the Murrumbidgee, c1900
Photo: Ron Blum

In August 1880 the *Trafalgar* and the South Australian paddler *Gem* entered into a race from Morgan to Wentworth – a distance of 300 miles. The stakes were £100 per side, which was largely supplemented by bets. Despite leaving Morgan half an hour behind the *Gem*, the *Trafalgar* passed its rival two hours later and arrived at Wentworth 12 hours ahead. The event created great interest all along the Murray, as both vessels were considered two of the fastest on the river.

Some weeks later the two vessels raced again – a distance of 100 miles from Lake Victoria Station to Wentworth. Although it made 3 stoppages and was delayed about 25 minutes, the *Gem* was the victor this time, reaching its destination 15 minutes ahead of the *Trafalgar*.

In the late 1880s, following the increase in passenger trade brought about by the Chaffey Brothers' Mildura settlement, the *Trafalgar* was refitted and for some years ran a regular passenger service from Echuca to Mildura.

In 1891 the paddler was purchased by Permewan, Wright & Co Ltd and in 1893 was described as the pride of the Permewan fleet. The *Trafalgar* was sold in 1918 to the SA Farmers Co-op Union Ltd and registered in Port Adelaide. In 1933 the vessel was converted to a dumb barge. It was resold in 1935 to Robert Hy and C Smith of Murray Bridge. In 1941 the *Trafalgar* was purchased by W Dodd of Murray Bridge, who stripped it and removed the wheels.

In 1947 the *Trafalgar* was purchased by Reginald Crouch, for conversion to a ketch. The barge was towed to Port Adelaide, but weakness of the iron frame prevented the conversion and it was beached at the Log Milling Company Area and partly dismantled. In 1954 the vessel was purchased by S C Waterhouse with the intention of completely breaking it up.



Trafalgar today

Today the remains of the *Trafalgar* are a significant feature on the Ethelton mudbank at low tide. Iron framework and wooden planks indicate the original vessel's length, breadth and other construction details.