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MARTIN'S ALPINE TRAMWAY

Ferntree Gully has never been short of visions for future prosperity. Local historian Ray Peace writes about the cable trams that never came to the Gully.

Ever wondered where the name Alpine Street came from?

It harks back to an obscure nineteenth-century tramway. Actually it never existed: the proposal itself was remarkable enough, more so seen in context.

In 1888, anything seemed possible. Marvellous Melbourne's land boom would go on forever; tourists loved the Dandenongs; scenic Fern Tree Gully appeared destined for greatness.

Meet John Martin

John Martin was a prominent and respected local resident. He owned much of what is now Ferntree Gully Village (and donated land for Ferntree Gully's shire hall in 1892). Martin's house, north of The Avenue, was described as a show place in the 1890s. It was still the only house within 20 chains of Ferntree Gully rail station in 1900.

There are no records of Mrs Margaret Martin; between them the Martins had five children, all boys, all with the middle name John. There are likely descendants of the family still in the area today.

John Martin was certainly wealthy enough. Was he genuinely interested in local development, or was his eye on the main chance? At this remove, we shall probably never know. But he scented opportunity.

The Railway was coming. It would bring thousands of extra visitors to the famed Fern Tree Gully, on the tourist map for thirty years, but lacking easy access. Victorian Railways were providing a station a short walk from the bottom of the Gully - though not as yet Sunday trains. In any case the Gully's upper end was deemed more scenic.

John Martin's Big Idea

Nineteenth-century technology could do anything. As well as electricity and steam, there was cable. Cable trams successfully took to Melbourne's streets in 1885, as in many cities around the world. Cable had advantages over Victorian Railways steam trains. A grip from a light-wheeled car attached to a

continuous underground cable wasn't constrained by inconvenient gravity or rail slippage. So John Martin devised his Big Idea. Not feeling eloquent to explain it himself, Martin hired a hack writer to do it for him. The hack (wise enough not to have his name published) produced a 120 page tome titled *Guide to the Upper Yarra & Fern Tree Gully*, now housed in the State Library of Victoria's Rare Books section. After loquacious descriptions of Marysville and Warburton, the scribe, following the still incomplete steam train line to the Gully, waxed lyrical about Mr Hosie's farm on Scoresby Road and then a development known as Bayswater Hills. No exact geographical reference is given, though it appears to cover parts of northern Boronia and The Basin.

Heading down the VR line, the writer compiled odes to Mrs Blair's Fern Tree Gully Hotel, Mr & Mrs Potter's Club Hotel, Skoglund's Mountain Store, and John Thomas Dobson's orchard near where 'the road bifurcates or branches, the right hand leading to Lysterville [sic]'. All of whom advertised.

The Gully's finest parts

Paeans of praise were reserved for the heights of One Tree Hill, '1454 Feet [429 metres] Above Sea Level'; here something near greatness was planned. The Gully's finest parts were up where William Murphy, the national park ranger, lived with his family. Here, '...it is contemplated by a gentleman interested in the progress of Fern Tree Gully and its surroundings to construct a cable tramway to a spot within an elevation of 250 feet [74 metres] of the top of One Tree Hill.' The proposed track gauge isn't known. Steel rails rather than timber would have certainly been used for durability. Five eighths of a mile (1 km) long, two intermediate stations were planned on a bearing 'slightly north of due east, from east of 'The Main [now Ferntree Gully] Station'.

At the top a few hundred metres' walk would bring tourists to the top of that famed Gully. And Martin to his fortune. The hack could barely contain his effusiveness; numerous typos and slips littered

