

Basic Detail Report



Gem

Vessel number

HV000118

Date

1876

Primary Maker

Air and Westgaard

Description

GEM was built by Air and Westergard in 1876 at Moama on the NSW side of the Murray River. The 27 metre long hull was planked in red gum, which grew along the banks

of the Murray River. Oregon was used for the superstructure to keep the craft light and to keep the draft shallow. In 1882 it underwent a major transformation at Goolwa in SA. There it was cut in half through the mid-section. The two halves were then separated by a bullock team which was used to pull the forward part away from the aft section. A new 13 metre long centre-section was then added to rejoin the vessel. At 40 metres long overall, GEM then became the longest paddle steamer on the Murray River. The legendary Hugh King, known as 'The Grand Old Man of the River' was GEM's captain for many years, and the vessel went through a number of changes in ownership during its long lifespan. It also went through a variety of uses, in more or less the following succession: barge, towing vessel, passenger vessel, home and then a boarding house. GEM was towed up from Mildura to Swan Hill in 1962, the longest tow in Murray River paddle steamer history, and became the opening exhibit at the Swan Hill Pioneer Settlement Museum. Here it became the entry-exit building, local art gallery, museum office, caretaker's flat and Australia's first bush-tucker restaurant. It was also the first paddle steamer to be restored and heralded a resurgence in paddle steamer history, leading to the restoration of a number of other Murray River paddle steamers. As part of the display at Swan Hill it is a major part of the Pioneer Settlement Museum's education program where thousands of students have used it as a part of their study of the Murray River's history. GEM has also been on the Victorian Heritage Register for many years. (Prepared from material supplied by the Pioneer Settlement Museum)

Dimensions

Vessel Dimensions: 40 m x 6.8 m x 1.35 m (131.24 ft x 22.31 ft x 4.43 ft)