

# The Nilgiri Mountain Communication and Transport

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**Abstract:--** In the past the natives of The Nilgiri's had their own well recognized paths, passed and tracks to end from the plains below. The first European to set foot on the hills Father Finicio claimed up the Sundapatti pass from Mulli to Melur in 1602. The track was later named Sullivans gate after he improved it around 1826. Roads which are not classified as panchayat, village or than roads with reference to their location either in the village panchayats or the town panchayats notified under the Tamilnadupanchayat act 1958. Now the Highways and Rural works Department is incharge of planning design construction and maintenance of roads and bridges in Tamilnadu.

The Nilgiri Mountain Railway was opened for traffic only up to Coonoor from Mettupalayam in june 1899, and was managed by a British firm the Madras Railway Company under an agreement with the Government of Madras, it was later extended to Ootacamund. The Nilgiri mountain railway is the most Authentic and original rack and adhesion railway in the World.

## INTRODUCTION

Europeans and Sepoys on January 2, 1819, began the ascent from the village of Denigonkot, situated two miles above the foot of Nilgiri. This expedition was launched from the erstwhile fortified site of a 12th century Hoysala commander, called Dannayakankottai, now submerged in the Bhavanisagar reservoir.

The Nilgiri mountain railway has been inscribed as world Heritage site by UNESCO. The Nilgiri Mountain rail build in 1899 which takes off from Mettupalayam at 1700ft Meter sea level and ascends within a short span of 46 kms to 7300 feet MSL to reach Ooty.

*Mr. Sullivan went on to lament:*



The road so easily followed by the Baddaguers had entirely vanished; every trace of it seemed to have disappeared as by

enchantment nobody has found it again until this day inspite of long and careful efforts. The expedition on the third day managed to reach the vicinities of Kotagiri with the grudging assistance of MuddahGowder, Mr. Sullivan's chief guide. A stone incised memorial to this event is found at midhene near Kotagiri, the native village of MuddahGowder.



Mr. Sullivan was by no means the earliest of the colonial officials to explore the Nilgiris. Leaving aside Dr.Francis Buchannan deputed in 1800 by Lord Welleslet, the Governor General himself one should mention William keys, an

Assistant Revenue surveyor acting under the orders of W.Garrow the then collector of Coimbatore. He was the first one to report on the already existing three passes leading up to the mountains from the lowlands. Keys surveyed these passes in the year 1812.

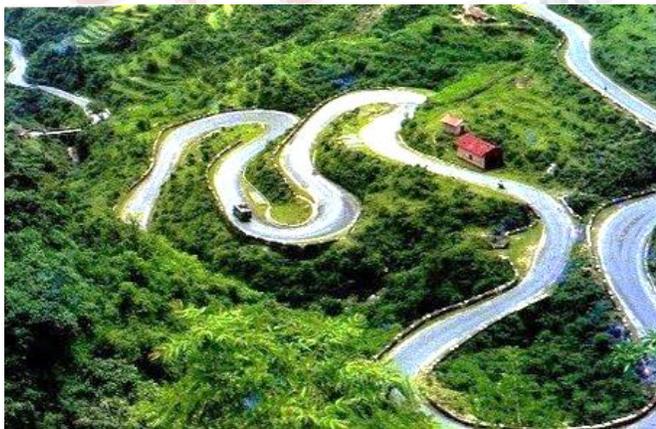
**The First pass:** The first pass mentioned by him originated at Dannayakankottai and via Arakode, Denad and Nedugula

reached Kotagiri and its length was about 25 miles. Mr.Sullivan on his expedition followed this path.

**The second pass:** The second pass originated from sigur valley across the once copious sigur river, the actual site from which it commenced sported the grandiose name Devarayapattana. This path without touching Ooty and via Kalhatti, Kavaratti, Hannikorai, Tuneri and kukal reached Kotagiri and length was about 20 miles.

**The Third pass:** The third pass led up from Halatti now called Palapatti near Mettupalayam via Doddapanai and Kunjapanai reached Kotagiri. Its length was only about 13 Miles, Halatti was a large seasonal pastoral camp site for the buffalo herds of the Badaga of bygone days.

The two other important passes one began from the Badaga village of Kengarai and via what is presently known as Kotada estate reached Bagapanai and irula village and descended to Halatti. Another was the more frequented MelurManjakombai pass to Sundapatti in the then Malabar District. This pass or ghat actually formed part of the route followed by Fr.G. Fenicio, the Jesuit priest and the first ever European to ascend the nilgiris way back in the year 1603. Kotagiri to Ooty Road: Mr.Sullivan's decision to choose the longer Denad pass in the year 1819 was probably dictated by his intention to have a tentative estimate of assessable land revenue pertaining to many a habitation on the way. The same logic determined his expedition to cover the distance of about 13 miles from Kotagiri to Ooty. His trake lay across the extensively cultivated Badaga territory between Ellekambai and Tummanatti in the valley below the present day Kotagiri- Ooty road.



**CoonoorGhat:**

This newly projected pass commenced from Nellithorai, south-west of Kallar and was ready by the year 1834. Capt.W.Murray of the pioneer corps during the construction

of the path, in a dispatch dated 10 December 1831 to his Quartermaster General said the coonoorghat will always be the grand entrance into Neilgherries. It seems to have remained so. Thought this first Coonoorghat which made its inroads in 1834 came to be constantly used it was also noted that it was also noted that it was very faulty in its alignments. They had to be rested at every hour on the long haul because of the steep gradient it usually took more than 12 hours to reach Coonoor from the Bhavani-crossing. As a result the passengers carried by palanquins were greatly delayed in their onwards journeys.

**The Nilgiri Mountain Railway:**

The Nilgiri mountain railway considered a marvel of engineering skill in the construction of railway lines is one of its kind in India. The steepest not just in India but in the whole of the Asia is the Nilgiri Mountain Rail build in 1899.



**History of Mountain Railway:**

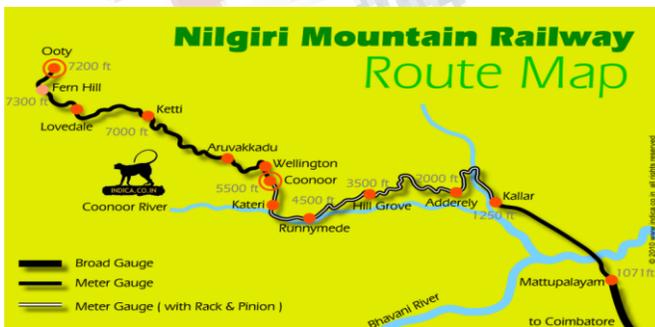
The Nilgiri Mountain Rail was in 1602 when JacomeFerrieri, a Syrian Christian priest first stumbled upon the wild forest areas of the Nilgiri mountains. It was the firsttime that the beauty of the blue mountains was discovered by the outside world. But the tiresome climb to mountains prevented people from visiting it till 1800s. It was left to the District Engineer of Nilgiris, Mr.J.L.L.Morant, to conceptualize mountain Railway.It was in 1854 when proposals were first mooted by the British to build a railway up the hills from Mettupalayam. After several proposals and attempts by various companies to start the line, it was finally left to M.Riggenback, the Swiss inventor of the Rigi system, who gave final shape to Nilgiri Mountain railway in 1880s. Work on the Mettupalayam – Coonoor line started in 1891. By the time the station from Mettupalayam to coonoor was officially opened by the Governor of Madras on Aug 11, 1899 and on Jan 1, 1903 the line was taken over by the Indian Government. The Coonoor – Fernhill station was opened on 15-9-1908, and the coonoor- ooty station was opened on 15-10-1908.



The Nilgiri Mountain Rail is a 45.88 Kms from Mettupalayam to Udhagamandalam. Udhagamandalam which is also known as Ooty is at an elevation of 2200 metres above Mean Sea Level.

X class locomotives from Switzerland are in use presently on the station between Mettupalayam and Coonoor. These are compound locomotives having four cylinders instead of the conventional two. The main Cylinders use high-pressure steam to drive the wheels of the loco whereas the small cylinders use low-pressure steam to drive the rack system. The youngest X class loco is over 50 years old and the oldest is over 80 years old. These steam locomotives are maintained at the Coonoor loco shed and at the mettupalayam shed.

The Train of the Nilgiri mountain railway are opened on Absolute block system with Neale's table token instruments. The maximum permissible speed between Mettupalayam –Kallar and coonoor- Udhagamandalam is 30 KMPH and the maximum speed between kallar- coonoor is 13KMPH. There are 13 Level crossing gates in the station, out of which 5 are unnamed level crossings.



**Racks:**

The track beyond Kallar is steep right up to Coonoor, the gradient being 1 in 12.5 maximum. This had necessitated the adoption of the swiss rack system of railway to cover a distance of 20 Km from Kallar to coonoor. Special rack bars

are provided centrally between the track rails on special chairs and these bars are laid on the slope of the line itself and form a ladder up which the engine climbs and pushes the train.

The racks are laid centrally and are bolted to special case iron chairs fixed to the sleepers by fang belts. These racks are laid in a double row above the running rail so that the tooth of one is directly opposite the gap of the other to ensure that the engine pinions do not work off the racks when negotiating curves. The rack bars are laid only between stations and do not exist at stations where are on level gradient. Special rack entries are provided to enable the engine to enter the rack position smoothly and ensure proper meshing of the cogwheels of the engine with rack bars.



The locomotives are tank engines of the four-cylinder compound type the high pressure cylinders working the adhesion engine and the low-pressure ones superimposed on the former working the rack engine. Steam acts through a separate set up of cylinders and drivers a special crank shaft connected by spur gearing with the axle carrying the toothed wheel. The spur wheels are in duplicate and if one is damaged the other works. A mechanical device has been fitted to the engine whereby oil is forced by steam through a pipe on to the pinions and thereby to the rack bars. These X class locomotives, originally build in Switzerland which haul the NMR date back to 1925 and 1952. The question of electrifying the entire line from Mettupalayam and Coonoor has been mooted since 1908 but nothing has come out of it. Presently the train between Coonoor and Ooty is hauled by a diesel engine.

**Timings:**

One pair of passenger trains runs on Mettupalayam – Ooty section and two pairs of passenger trains run between coonoor and ooty. During summer season an additional pair of train is run between mettupalayam and ooty. The mountain train leaves Mettupalayam at 7.10am and reaches ooty at 12 noon. While returning the train leaves ooty at 3.00 pm and reaches mettupalayam at 6.35 pm. A summer special service

is also run during the months of April and may starting from mettupalayam at 9.30 and from ooty at 12.15 between coonoor and ooty there are four daily trains each way.

NILGIRI MOUNTAIN TRAIN									
SR	FROM STATION	TO STATION	DEP	ARR	FARE	FARE	FARE	FARE	FARE
5141	COONOR	UDAGAMANDALAM	07-45	09-05	100-00	50-00	10-00	5-00	
136	"	"	10-40	12-00	100-00	50-00	10-00	5-00	55
143	"	"	12-35	13-50	100-00	50-00	10-00	5-00	
138	"	"	16-30	17-50	100-00	50-00	10-00	5-00	55
37	"	HILLGROVE	15-15	16-07	50-00	50-00	10-00	5-00	
37	"	METTUPALAYAM	15-15	17-35	130-00	65-00	10-00	5-00	55
59	UDAGAMANDALAM	COONOR	9-15	10-20	100-00	50-00	10-00	5-00	55
12	"	"	12-15	13-20	100-00	50-00	10-00	5-00	
12	"	"	14-00	15-05	100-00	50-00	10-00	5-00	55
12	"	"	18-00	19-10	100-00	50-00	10-00	5-00	
12	METTUPALAYAM	UDAGAMANDALAM	7-10	12-00	145-00	75-00	15-00	10-00	55
12	UDAGAMANDALAM	METTUPALAYAM	14-00	17-35	145-00	75-00	15-00	10-00	55

AVAILABLE VACANT SEATS IN RESERVED COACH CAN BE OBTAINED FROM THE BOOKING OFFICE. RESERVE TICKETS WILL BE ISSUED 45 MINUTES BEFORE THE SCHEDULED DEPARTURE OF THE TRAIN.

**CONCLUSION:**

In the strict sense of the term, none of the English Colonial administrators laid any new routes or roads to Nilgiris. Theirs was only a discovery means of access across the terrains that already existed. However, to Mr.Sullivan should go the credit of retracing almost all the old paths to the hills, within their contours and making them suitable for what was in those days known as wheeled Traffic, The Nilgiri mountain railway which has earned a world heritage status will be a glorious 100 on Oct 15 2008. There are only about 30 of such vintage railways left in the world. It is one of its kinds in Asia. Several pioneers were intimately associated with this wonder railway.

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