



*Photo taken by Prof. Gallo, Chief Engineer, sometime in the late 1930s/early 1940s. This picture depicts a train at Mai Atal. JBT comments "It shows the morning 'rush hour'. Freight trains tended to leave Massawa in the cool early morning, often double-headed. One lengthy train proceeded across the flatlands to Mai Atal. There it was split into two or three or more lots, which left later for Asmara over the steeper gradients, sometimes with a further shedding of load at Ghinda. In this photo the loads have been detached, and the loco can be seen behind the littorina, taking water and already blowing off steam before following the daily passenger train, which has already started en route to Asmara. The littorina has duly arrived from Asmara. The Ropeway appears to be in operation as a skip can be seen moving and the protective netting is in good order.*

Courtesy of John Broughton-Thompson

*section is in action quite frequently, being used to carry salt from the pans at Gherar peninsula. It is not, and never has been, a very considerable factor in communications between Massawa and Asmara, and can scarcely ever have justified its capital cost of about half a million pounds. It is no faster than transport by either road or rail and has never carried more than a small portion of the total traffic along this route. No passengers are carried.*

*In character with the whole slightly fantastic and typically Italian nature of this grandiose scheme are the two stories commonly told about it. One relates that two men got in a skip at Massawa and were taken off at Asmara raving mad; and the other that an Italian who also made the whole journey, but*

*under official auspices, was given a special medal by Mussolini!!!*

A British Ministry of Information booklet, 'The First To be Freed', tried to separate fact from fiction when it reported in 1944:

*'there were continuous thefts from the railway and even heavier ones from the aerial ropeway, which drops 8,000 feet in forty-eight miles down some of the remoter stretches of Eritrea's lawless mountainsides. Some of the criminals were undoubtedly baboons, which learned how to swarm up the pylons and help themselves, but the unearthing of caches totalling £3,000 in value and the conviction of thirty-five employees proved that a human element was concerned as well'.*