

# Alexander Findlay smith Builder of the Peak tramway Hong Kong in 1888

The Peak Tram, Hong Kong's famous funicular railway began operation in May 1888 and has served Hong Kong successfully for well over a century.

In Hong Kong's earliest days The Peak, officially known as Victoria Peak, was used as a signalling post. Soon however, the heat-afflicted Western settlers realised that its elevation would offer relief from the very hot and humid summers. Around 1868, Sir Richard MACDONNELL, then Governor of Hong Kong built one of the first summer houses on the Peak.

At that time, a very limited number of people climbed the steep hills either on foot or were carried in sedan chairs.

The Peak Hotel opened in 1873 on land acquired by Alexander Findlay SMITH. An ambitious man, Mr SMITH was not satisfied with the volume of business attracted by his hotel and felt more people should be encouraged to travel up The Peak. In 1885 Mr SMITH (the Findlay Path on The Peak is named after him) and his partner Phineas RYRIE acquired the rights to the Tramway for the princely sum of HK\$2000!

The Governor apparently told Mr SMITH :

“My dear chap, you are simply throwing your money down the drain. Do you imagine anyone wants to go to the top of The Peak”?

Because His Excellency would not help Mr SMITH brought his own engineers from Scotland. He was convinced the Peak Tram had a future. The project was completed and opened on May 30, 1888 by His Excellency, the Governor, Sir George William des Voeux and Lady des Voeux.

The original tram had 30 seats, the front two of which were reserved for the Governor until two minutes before departure. The steepest gradient was one in two, at May Road, and the original steam engines were not replaced by an electrically powered system until 1926. The ten minute journey on the cable car provided the only mechanical form of transportation to the 1305 foot Victoria Gap until the Stubbs Road was completed in 1924.