

**5). OUTBOUND TO KROONSTAD :**



ST01 – It is breakfast time and the crew enjoy the first meal sitting of the entire trip. Each meal time had three sittings in the dining coach due to seating capacity but unusually, the crew were rostered first because of their wacky working hours. That's Dennis Edgar on the left, about to sloop yoghurt back into his bowl. Chris Saayman (Center) finds a pat of butter awkward to open with thick fireman's fingers, while Johann B., after only 2 hours sleep, is already hammering his main course.



ST02 – A typical breakfast meal. The morning cucumber slice is a Shongololo Express trademark, whose staff did such a fine job. No table cloth though ... the dining service was a little spartan. This was deliberately adopted to help keep the costs down as Reefsteamers strives to keep the ticket prices within reach of ordinary South Africans, not just wealthy Overseas Tourists. It's a shame that most South Africans will never 'do' the Blue Train or Rovos Rail.



ST03 – Breakfast Buffet. Seen here are two types of yoghurt, four varieties of breakfast cereal, fresh milk, a basket of assorted muffins and four varieties of bread. Unseen at the other end are two types of fruit juices and the condiments for the bread. An ample spread and most crew and passengers enjoyed a three course breakfast. The toasters do look awkward with their dangling cords – but we have found people prefer to toast their own bread rather than have it grow cold and hard in a rack.



ST04 – The train is in the outlands south of Jo'berg and this is the third sitting. The dining car was repainted for this trip, with an attractive pale arctic green from the original flesh-brown colour. The green makes it look much brighter and is closer to the green used by SAR for their mouldings. The dining car can seat about 36 people. The objects between the lamps are Christmas bells.



ST05 – There's something special about having a leisurely breakfast on board a train, whatever the motive power may be. Unlike an aeroplane, you can actually see the landscape whizzing by. Although this experience is not new to them, father and son, Cliffie and Andreas Mathee do some yoghurt flavoured glazing-gazing as the twin electrics hauling us pile on the speed to 70-80kph. Notice their similar postures....





ST06 – if the footplate gang ever feel sorry for themselves in the Vulcan's forge of the loco cab, maybe they should come and work in the cramped, steamy sauna of the kitchen. The Shongololo Express kitchen staff were brilliant at what they do, cooking up relatively complicated dishes in these cramped quarters.



ST07 – The 85KVA generator set that had to be installed to handle the extra load of the electric geysers and enhanced lighting. The engine itself ran faultlessly, but we had problems with water contamination within the diesel fuel and the whole tank had to be drained and refilled on Saturday. But it's become a tradition to have generator and electrical troubles on a long trip – while the vintage, supposedly unreliable, steam locomotives just take everything in their stride.



ST08 – A pleased looking Coenie has found what he was sent to look for all the way from the opposite end of the train, a length of semi-rigid hose with which to drain a faulty geyser. Coenraad 'Coenie' Gildenhuys was rostered as an assistant to Andrew King – helping out tremendously with the repair and oversight of the coaches.



ST09 – The geysers fitted by the failed Setimela company are of low quality and were giving us trouble already on the outbound trip. Several of the circuit breakers were running close to thermal capacity and tripping out occasionally, aided and abetted by the long duty cycle required by ridiculously small heating elements in the large tanks.

This one developed an earth fault when it got hot. Andrew and Shaun (Capped) are arranging a pipe coupling to rig up a drain, so the element can be removed. The drain was successfully rigged and we drained the tank through the nearest door.



ST10 – We pulled into Greenlands at about 10am for our first servicing stop. This is one of an increasingly rare remaining SAR-era illuminated station signs. They have been removed in the areas with active commuter service, and replaced with the yellow and grey branded Metro Rail era signs. Most of these old signs in the outlying areas have been vandalized.



ST11 – While I was following Attie out to the steamers, an unusually short train powers through the station. With Transnet's emphasis on bulk freight, this is a fairly rare sight. Notice that the track in the foreground has been lifted and the traction wire has been removed from the cantenary– this fuzzily overgrown platform will never be used again.





ST12 – Driver Piet Mollentze and fireman Dawie Viljoen (Right) were pilot crew for the 12AR – basically towed loco minding. They are giving their locomotive the once over as the grease sticks are being retrieved from the power van at the other end of the train. Piet looks like he's passing a kidney stone through his prostate here, but it's just because he is facing into the rain.



ST13 – Oh good! The grease sticks have arrived ... let the greasing commence. Piet is greasing the crankpin journal on the main driver. Dawie unwraps the long, firm plasticine-like sticks. As the weather is cold, they are harder than usual and are not very sticky – so they don't need to be lubricated with water to be handled. The bearings are warm enough to melt the grease within their working clearances.



ST14 - This eccentric crank bearing on the 12AR was running hot and received an extra generous helping of soothing valve oil in an attempt to ease it up. The issue turned out to be clearances being slightly too tight on the Vesconite bushing. On this long distance run we had a longer time for the heat to build up compared to our normal day trips. After this check and receiving extra lubrication on the outbound trip, the bushing settled into service with no further problems.



ST15 – Here's the entire train in the photo frame. The steam fans would naturally object to the bland pair of toasters at the front, enforced by a steam ban on designated extremely busy main lines with less than two dozen trains per day. We objected too at first. But those same toasters save us a lot of work in preparing the steam locomotives, as well as eliminating a typically four hour service stop at Kroonstad which would have otherwise been required. The presence of piped water in those yards is not to be assumed.



ST16 – I wasn't quick enough to take a note of the station but here's a fairly rare sight, even from the traditional SAR days. Four gulf red and french grey cabooses or more correctly, crew vehicles, rest peacefully. They look as if they are in current use perhaps for maintenance on the line. A glance at the varying window arrangements shows that each van is different and each one is probably a heritage treasure in its own right.



ST17 – A not glorious moment in the annuals of the 'Secure Movers' company – with one of their trucks securely stuck and definitely not moving! How the dickens did he get into that predicament? (For foreign readers, we drive on the left side of the road, which would be the lane closer to the camera.)

The smudges are water drops on the train windows.





ST18 – It was a dull and drizzly day all the way to Ficksburg – but Reefsteamers stalwart Diana Sanderson is always ready to brighten up the day with a camera flash contest. She wins nearly every time with her camera, which is so large it needs an Obelix's menhir-sized back pack to lug it around. You can see the eyes, but you cannot see the smugly evil grin.



ST19 – This little pink-clad cutie also did her bit to brighten up the day – this is Craig Gibson's daughter entertaining herself, her good friends the Ackermans and the rest of us with dance routines and mimes in the wide aisle of the bar car. That's Katrina Ackerman looking on fondly. We usually don't get many children or teens on a Cherry Festival Train



ST20 – Visitors in the locomotive cab can sometimes be annoying if you want to get things done, particularly if you're trying to stoke the boiler or clean the fire. But they also have a way of rejuvenating one's appreciation of these old machines as their steam encounter is a very rare treat for them. We who regularly work with steam can sometimes get a bit jaded and cynical. These three cheerful rugby-player-gone-to-seed sized fellows are of the second variety.



ST21 – Officially, only Train Mangers., Safety officers and crew are meant to disembark at an intermediate stop but we relax the rules for a servicing and crew stop – but it gets a bit chaotic. This is a fireman's view of spectators, passengers. train officials, train staff, crew members and one suspected alien just mixing it up on the platform. I have just taken on my duties as pilot fireman for the Class 25NC and 'Oom' Attie is still to arrive to warm up the driver's seat.



ST21 – I fired twice by hand – the first time upon departure with just a few spread-out scoops and lots of blower to reduce smoke in the station area. But I would have to face these controls for the journey as the 25NC doesn't steam well under load with a half loaded fire bed. For loco minding and pilot firing, you can get away with it but you have to consider what the crews need when shunting under our own power at the end of the pilot run.



ST22 – Oom Attie finally comes on duty after working with the service team and assisting the trainee Train Manager. Attie does easily 85% of the Train Manager duties and hardly gets to drive these days. Notice that the duplex gauge at the top left is indicating vacuum on both sides, but you can see the vacuum ejector is isolated by the downward pointing lever just above the reverser's wheel. The electric locomotives are creating and controlling the vacuum. However, the pilot loco driver can still apply and release the brakes if he needs to in an emergency.





St23 – Here's the signal to go – this is a four aspect signal and is indicating a single yellow which usually means there is one empty track-section between us and a train ahead. In this case, however, the single yellow signal is being displayed as a speed restriction for a set of points that we need to cross over – indicated by the white lights. (These will be the first of three sets of points we would meet.)



ST24 – We are rounding the massive goods yards just South of Kroonstad. Although our locomotives weren't providing any power, their speedometers were working and we were being towed sometimes at speeds between 80-85kph. I did a similar trip on Dave Shepherd's 15F last year and she was a proper old kidney-puncher, oscillating and trying to jump over her own cylinders. By comparison, Elize the 25NC was a smooth ride.



ST26 – Passengers take pictures of the train rounding a curve so often that it has become a bit of a cliché. However, it's not often one gets a view of the whole train from the loco cab. We had 12 coaches, a DZ of coal and the coal handling wagon (grab) visible in this picture. The 25NC's water tank is hidden behind the tender and the 12AR's water tank is in between the locomotives. We had 16 vehicles in tow.



ST27 - Oom Attie shows a practical demonstration of 'pissing in the wind.' Unknown to him the stream blew back and went down his trouser leg and over his shoes. I made him hike his feet and I rinsed down the footplate with the spray hose. True SAR drivers convert sweet 'Spoorie Tea' into weed killer. The 'big jobs' are normally done on the shovel – which explains why I only use my own dedicated shovel for footplate cooking!



ST28 – Driver Attie had the 'lee-side' of the engine (pun intentional), the rain slanting down from the left. So he had no problems settling down comfortably and watching the line ahead. To my surprise, he didn't have much to say. Notice the famous Attie comb-over is gone and his dome is chrome. I had the rain on my side but those swivelling glass wind deflector shields work quite well.



ST29 – Roller bearings rule! Our TIMKEN equipped engine didn't need regular greasing while the 12AR receives some tribological anointment. Contrary to popular belief though, the massive roller bearings on a Class 25NC ARE greased at intervals, with soft white grease via a plunger pump. But it is generally a shed job. The electrics are still there – you can just see their pantographs peeking out above the 12AR's tender.



ST30 – After going through the tunnel and approaching Bethlehem, I was too busy stoking up and preparing the fire to attain full steam pressure to take photographs. Here we are trundling into the Bethlehem Depot approach road with the 12AR doing most of the work. Shaun ‘Smudge’ Ackerman had taken Attie’s place. Somewhat unusually, the two toasters had gone on ahead of us and were parked in the depot trackage for the weekend rather than on truncated passing loops further down on the main.



ST31 – It is not uncommon to move into the Bethlehem Diesel Depot with a crowded cab, as it’s a fair walk from the passenger station. ‘Smudge’ and I somehow managed to pick up two ash cats, one fireman and a recycled Spoorie.

That supercilious look down alongside the nose is a characteristic Dawie Viljoen pose and it’s just the way he stands – but it does make people uncomfortable. But I’m sure he was just dying to pass comment on my fire! That’s Shorty in the center and Piet ‘Rag Top’ Mollentze to the right.



**6). SERVICING AT BETHLEHEM :**



According to the informal rules of the gricer community, these photos should not have been taken. The leaden grey skies were washing out when adjusting the camera apertures to take pictures of black steam locomotives and the only colour in many of the pictures are the Hi-Vis jackets worn by the crew members. None the less, it is a sequential set of pictures of a double steam locomotive service, in a dying depot that has long since been given over diesel traction and a few electrified storage lines.

This service took us most of the afternoon. Firstly the two steam locomotives could not have their fires cleaned at the same time because of the ash disposal problem. The water pressure was quite low too. But upon finding a slightly better fire hydrant and settling down to wait for the 12AR to top up, a goods train broke down on the line upon which we needed to run and a relief locomotive was sent out. So the long service was academic as we wouldn't have been able to leave the station any until the failed train came home. It was a hard working, but sociable afternoon for us steam nuts but the passengers were getting restless with the four hour wait at the Station Platform.

Most of the passengers took it in their stride but there is always the one or two that complain about the time keeping – irrespective of the disclaimers included in their tickets. We were also anxious to be gone, as not to be running through to Ficksburg in the night time hours. (Transnet forbid night time steam working except under special conditions.) We've actually been forced to make an overnight sleep-over at Bethlehem before but this time we got away with it and were able to run.



BS01 – We poodled through the depot and out to the turning trying in the great grassy beyond, still coupled up. But then the locomotives were uncoupled and turned one-by one as the sidings at the triangle's points are not long enough.

Here we are closing onto the 12AR waiting on the last leg, so as to couple up again. We were over optimistic and made at least three failed attempts to couple on that very sharp curve. But we eventually trundled in circus elephant style – nose to tail.

By this time, Piet Mollentze had taken over the fire. I hadn't stoked around the triangle as I thought Dawie Viljoen was meant to do it (and would be offended if I did instead) Well, he didn't and I didn't and as a result ... no one did it and the 25NC's pressure gauge needle was sagging towards the west wind.



BS02 – Servicing commenced immediately. In spite of the many empty tracks, the steam locomotives would be confined to one specific track for fire cleaning as it is the only one with some semblance of functioning ash pits.

This is not that track. But the Class 12AR's servicing starts, not by cleaning the fire, but by greasing the motion bearings while they are still warm. The grease sticks go soft within the bearing cavities and flows easier into those clearances. The still coupled 25NC, mostly hidden by steam, waits alongside the diesels in the shed. (Don't forget that there is still a water tanker between the two locomotives.)

Notice the dirty streaks on either side of the front coupler. That's the rust and dust that was thrown up by the wheels of the coaches on the run to Boksburg East. Trains don't have mudflaps!



BS03 – Gotcha! One of the hardest shots to take on a steam locomotive is not the perfect evening 'glint shot' with the rods down and the whole train in the picture's frame, but rather, an unobstructed view of a grease pump in service!

This is Johann Breydenbach doing the greasing, even though he wasn't officially on duty at the time. The pump is a classic 'AJAX' type with the bayonet sleeve. Johann is greasing the journal bearing on the driver axle – the nearer bearing being the big end of the connecting rod. These pumps are industrial types and are not specifically only made for steam locomotives.



BS05 – The fellows greasing the engines are the two outbound drivers. Johann Breydenbach already applying the slippery stuff. But the service crew and the footplate boyo's need to coordinate. Shaun Ackerman and Dawie Viljoen are talking things off with the be-hankied Piet Mollentze while a usually cheerful Michael Thiel gives me a somewhat grim look.

What have I done wrong now, Mr. Thiel?



BS04 – Many of the crew members have their own characteristic cap, the greasy cloth cap of Smudge, the tweed cap of Pat slightly Jnr., the peaked leather cap of Maurer, the Emperor Palpatine Hoodie of Thiel, the plain baseball cap of Viljoen, and the badged black beret of Breydenbach. Even yours truly has a wide brimmed drover's hat.

Piet 'Rag-Top Mollentze wears a hankie rather than a cap and it is interesting to note that it is the same hankie that he used to wear when operating steam engines on the railways.

Piet is looking a bit pensive here as he's trying to keep track of going on with everyone moving around, including a few present day Transnet staff and he knows he's about to be told to move the engine forward.

Yeah ... It's starting to rain. But the cool day made the warm work of locomotive servicing a lot pleasanter.



BS06 – It didn't take long to grease Susan's warm bearings, kick out a bit' o kibble, and she's been shunted off to be backed up over the little ash pits. The 25NC is inching forward to take that slot on the tracks.

That is Philipp Maurer taking the tender for a walk while Dawie holds the hose. Andreas Mathee is walking alongside the tender with the clip-on bell coupling for the filler pipe.

That Transnet fellow dressed in blue kindly gave us a handful of new wooden scotch blocks for our use on the trip.





BS07 – With half the fire cleaned and fresh coal a-burning, the 12AR backs in for the second half of the fire cleaning, this time over the little pits. It sounds counter intuitive to move a steam loco with a fire that is only half burning, but so long as there is enough steam pressure to operate the vacuum brake ejectors, the cylinder-induced draft is beneficial to get that half-fire burning hot enough to withstand the heat loss involved cleaning the second half of the grate..



BS08 – Already sporting a healthy 1 ½ day's growth of wiry beard, fireman Andre van Dyk looks back on the 'blind' side of the engine. No rear view mirrors on these big ol' beasties!

Because we were dealing with short trains and light locos, we weren't using the radios, although they were all switched on and hanging safely in their cab harnesses. This was a line-of-sight hand signal servicing session.



BS09 – The 12AR has had her fires cleaned and has left a lady-like flat-topped pile of loco poop in the foreground, with the top of the pile scraped flat by the ash pan as the loco moved off.

The 25NC, with a 71sq foot firebox, makes a much ampler pile of poop so she wasn't cleaned on the plain track, but just received a lube job and an unavoidably slow-paced water top up. No.3472 Elize is pulling off now to take her place on the foreground track for fire cleaning.



BS10 – Seen though one of the empty bays of the diesel shed, the Class 25NC 'Elize backs up to the ash pit equipped track.

There seems to be much extra movement, because of the ash residues, but Transnet are now justifiably intolerant of piles of ash left between their irons. They no longer have the staff to clear it away – seeing that diesels and electrics don't leave ash. The extra labour required to clean up after these magnificent but filthy machines is a mark on the debit side of their balance books.



BS11 – Class 12AR No.1535 'Susan' looks a little jealous as she drifts in next to her big sister being cleaned on the adjoining track. Aided and abetted by the increasing steam-condensing chill of the day, she is doing her best to obscure the competition.



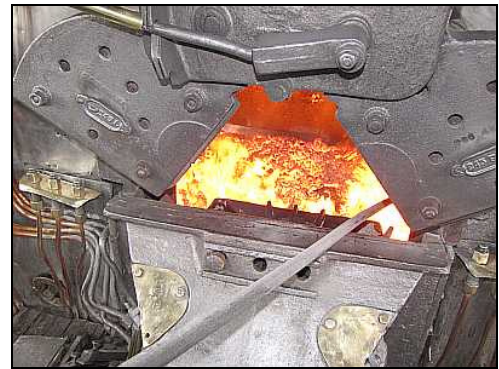
BS12 – A cheerful looking (and still clean ☺ ) Andreas Matthee sets to the task of raking out the 25NC's firebox with the recently repaired ash pan coolers running nicely. Although this ash pan is huge, it is well designed and easy to rake out.





BS13 – How not to go down a tender’s ladder. This is Andries, who rarely works on the engines proper and couldn’t figure out a way to get down while holding a shovel. On an SAR loco, the trick is to place the shovel head behind the ‘goose necks’ of the brake pipes and leave both of your hands free.

This locomotive does not (yet) have an external tender filler pipe that Reefsteamers has fitted to the rear of most of the other locomotives.



BS14 – At the other end of all that steam, ‘Smudge’ Ackerman, who normally drives on these trips, had voluntarily stepped back to service duties only to give Drivers Piet Mollentze and Philipp Maurer a chance to drive on the scenic Bethlehem line.

‘Smudge’ is just starting to push ash forward into the open drop-grates – the exposed end of one of the open grates seen towards the top of the open butterfly doors on the 25NC locomotive.



BS15 – What a treat! Two great old machines from nearly 45 years apart, getting serviced side-by-side. The 12AR’s fire cleaning is about done, while they are still vigorously shaking the grate on the 25NC, as evidenced by the copious grate shaker exhaust. Andreas is still in there, somewhere.

Driver Piet Mollentze has migrated to the 12AR, which he will run and he is seen topping up his oil can at the extreme left. He is deliberately starting at the end of the locomotive as far from the ash pan as possible so fly ash is less likely to stick to the freshly lubed motion gear. In the center, with his legs apart, stands Philipp Maurer who is swishing his oil can but cannot get started until the dust and steam settles.



BS16 – In contrast to the drama and action of preparing our two graphite coated tea kettles, the pair of toasters sit quietly with both their ‘panto’s’ (Pantographs) dropped, switches flipped out and the traction motor windings cooling off.

To this day, something that the railways have always been good at is standardization in types (if not colour schemes!) The 6E’s are already getting uncommon and the 6E1’s, with their distinctive diagonal traction control struts are technically obsolete and are gradually being put on to lighter weight long distance runs, or being converted to the single cab Class 18E primarily for freight. I wonder if anyone will one day be proud that they’ve helped preserve a Class 6E1 in original condition?



BS17 – Depending upon the amount of ash (and clinker) a steam locomotive has produced, it normally needs to be moved at least once during the fire cleaning operation. Service-Crew Smudge is just checking that all personnel are clear before he shifts the rolling iron, and finds out that outbound driver Philipp Maurer is still head-deep within the works.



BS18 – Mr. Maurer has stood back and Smudge moves the iron to position the ash chute of a clear section of track. Notice in the cab that Michael Thiel is still applying his rods to the fire.

I’m standing on the walkway of the 12AR’s tanker for this pigeon eye view.