



BS19 – Here's a more distant view of the locomotive servicing scene. That neat white fire hose was in three sections and you are seeing less than a third of it in the picture. Guess what the extra length did to the water pressure?

The sealing washer had gone missing for the bell coupling for the additional tender filler lines, so the hose had to be routed through the water chute. The sharp angles and the kink as it goes into the chute slows the water flow down even further.



BS20 – The 25NC has moved back to prepare to couple up to the coal handling wagons and the ash cleaning starts in earnest and you can see this stuff is still smoking. Andries has already started trimming the coal in the 12AR's tender, so fireman Dawie Viljoen voluntarily steps in to help with this hot, dusty job.

You will notice that Shorty (left) is wearing a set of clean light-coloured gloves. All the labourers at the depot, including the ash cats, were given a full set of new protective safety gear just before this trip. Elize the 25NC made only two piles of ash.



BS21 - The businesslike front end of the 25NC contrasts with the cutely drawn puffer choo-choo on the sign. A sign of the times (pun intended) is that the railway warning sign's standard steam-train icon has been superseded and replaced with a stylized electric cab unit, complete with SAR era nose striping.



BS22 – What's with the coal trimmers shovelling the coal sideways instead of towards the cab? They are shovelling coal overboard for payment for Pieter of the Transnet staff to shovel up the ash. This dying depot runs on a skeleton staff anyway so the fellow could do something useful and earn some coal to keep him warm during the cold nights – or perhaps to sell to those who live in camps without electric service.



BS23 – Packing away the hoses involves uncoupling them, sometimes not easy to do without straining the vulnerable ends. Then you have to get the surprisingly heavy and bulky water out of them. Sometimes you can walk pussy-foot on a hose but that can cause punctures in rough terrain. Here, Philipp Maurer takes the safer option and walks under the hose and forces the water to run to drain off down-hill ahead of him.



BS24 – Andreas Matthee in the early stages of rolling up a hose and you can see by his leg strokes that he's doing this at a rapid pace.

This job usually results in the unfortunate service crew member showing a lot of crackus between the gluteus maximus. Andreas is still doing well with his overall bottoms still firmly hitched up at the rear and sparing the rest of us.



BS25 – Not one of ours! Here's a badly worn cast iron brake shoe that I found on top of a dead brake shoe pile. Whatever equipment this came from obviously doesn't get many regular inspections! The top of the brake shoe is the end facing the right. The double wear pattern looks as if this particular shoe got partially kicked out its bracket.

Other worn brake shoes were found that had actually broken into pieces at the narrow end.



BS26 – With the Class 25NC already moved off to couple up to the coal service wagons and take them back out to the Bethlehem Station again, Susie the 12AR is backed-up along the sand-house track. We had found fire hydrants behind the diesel depot, which had better water pressure. As frequently happens, it is the poor water supply that has slowed us down.

Heaven help this depot if they have a fire! However it isn't Transnet's fault if the town council's water pressure is low.



BS27 – An EMD type Class 35-200 dozes while the 12AR takes on water. Just after this photo was taken a call had come in that one of the two locomotives on a goods train had broken down on the Ficksburg line and the other unit wasn't running well. This diesel locomotive was rudely awoken, started up and taken out as an emergency relief engine.

This was bad news for us as the breakdown was before the first passing loop and the line is single track – so we couldn't proceed until this locomotive had started up, warmed up pumped up air pressure, moved out to the train and pulled the train back with one dead and one dying locomotive in addition to the load. This neat blue-painted locomotive made it though!

This General Motors EMD locomotive was built in South Africa in early 1974. The USA classification of the locomotive is GT18MC. This is the diesel equivalent of a class 19D – being specifically designed as a branch line engine, which make's the rescue duty even more impressive.



BS28 – Toaster heritage – Our leading electric unit in late SAR+H livery (short stripes on the sides) still has the builder's plate on the nose door. This locomotive is the most numerous type of any type locomotive ever built for the SAR. (The 15F holds the record for steam and the 34 class for the diesels.)

Both the 6E and the 6E1 have electronic traction control. However they have very different designs for transferring their torque. The original class 6E have air bellows between the bogies and the frames while the Class 6E1 has the distinctive external traction links. The simpler mechanical design won out.

The previous generation of 5E's and 5E1's had a rating of 351kW for each of the four traction motors while the 6E's and 6E1's have a rating of 550kW per motor. Both models use slip ring motors.



BS29 – A fairly rare shot in a real life situation, an unobstructed side view of a working locomotive.

Because of the missing washer, the bell coupler could not be used to fill the water tank – and this locomotive doesn't have an extra filler pipe as all our others do – so both the tank and the loco tender have to be filled from the top. If the valves are open between the tender and the tank car, the water can actually flow backwards to the tank car as well.



BS30 – In the foreground is a diesel refuelling station, with red disk targets showing the swivelling heads and the black enclosures protecting the flow meters. In the background is our mobile 'fuel depot', the DZ wagon full of coal and the hydraulic coal grab wagon.

As the Bethlehem Depot is to be closed soon, this neat little fuel station will become as obsolete as our coal stages.



BS31 – Finally, we can start the next stage of the journey. We received the message that the failed goods train had been pulled through the Bethlehem station and we were free to go. We took it easy anyway, as the day was totally washed out. That looks like Johann B's beret in the foreground but it's actually Philip Maurer driving the 25NC. We are entering the South Eastern yard thought of the Bethlehem Station. Note the lifted tracks on the right side. They've done such a good job of stripping that the hangars and insulators are missing from the cantenary gantries.

7). COUPLING UP AT BETHLEHEM :

Coupling up went with few issues. We were in a hurry but had to take our time as passengers were roaming the platforms. Although it would be a passenger's own fault if they got left behind, and they sign that as a disclaimer, it would still be a bit of a PR disaster. So we took our time and the weather was getting darker and murkier by the minute. It looked like we'd be playing 'slip-n' slide' with the 25NC with the more sure-footed 12AR doing most of the work. In actuality, the locomotives went fairly well with good coordination between the drivers. It sounded worse than it was because of the different steam-beats going in and out of time, caused by the different wheel diameters. 12AR's never ran with 25NC's in the SAR days.

Another PR disaster was looming though. In our original plans, the passengers were to arrange their own food on Friday night – either at the Cherry Festival itself or within the Ficksburg Town. But we would now be coming in so late that the town's restaurants and take-aways would be closed. So we'd be at risk of cannibalism with a trainload of starving passengers on board, and possibly losing a crew member or two.

While the coaches were standing at Bethlehem, Chairman Elize Lubbe got some organizing going and sent runners out into Bethlehem town to get ingredients for an impromptu curry and rice meal and get the kitchen car fired up. Luckily we always carry ample reserve supplies of LPG gas for cooking.



CB01 – The 12AR and her 31 000 litre water canteen have just been coupled up to the waiting train, with quite an audience. Everyone was in a slightly hyped-up mood at seeing the train coming together at last. The failed goods train had run through about ½ hour previously and was dispatched to the sidings at the other end of the station.



CB02 – Hot Lips! In the crazy world of our steam, Elize kisses Elize. The class 25NC Locomotive, previously called 'Anne', was renamed to 'Elize' at Bethal in 2007. This is, of course, a posed shot and luckily the stationary smoke deflectors hadn't picked up much radiant heat from the graphite coloured smoke box. That would have been a real chap-stick special!



CB03 – The rationalization continues at Bethlehem Station and many of the North East Sidings have been removed, leaving a lumpy wasteland of grease spotted ballast.

Notice the very bad corner wear on the left–most rail. The tattered pieces hanging off the right are the braided-cable bonding straps used to ensure electrical continuity across the joints. These are not only used for signalling as is commonly supposed, but also as earth returns for the traction current on electrified lines..



CB04 – If you fart, my ears will pop!

I dunno what to say except that this is Oom Attie 'charming' the ladies ... the funny thing is that he gets away with it too. The lady in question shall remain unidentified for my own safety.

8). OUTBOUND TO FICKSBURG :

I'd been up since the early hours of the morning, so it was time for this poor photographer to lumber off to bed, having had enough of steam locomotives and associated humanity for the time being. Unlike most of the Reefsteamers and presumably the passengers, I don't find the rocking movement of a bunk that is under steam-powered transit to be particularly soothing. In fact, I find it a bit unsettling—possibly because with hearing aids out for a sleep, I can't hear the TWO locomotives which were just 1 ½ coaches and a water tanker away. So I don't get audio cues to go with the motion.

Nonetheless I slept somewhat but was awoken, not by the movement of the train or the call of the whistle, but the delicious scent of curried mince wafting through the 'Sandstone' sleeper. I might be deaf but the olfactory equipment works fine! 1 ½ hour's loco-rocked nap was enough to get my petals fresh n' bloomin', and I was back on my feet to roam the train once more.

By other reports the locomotives ran well even though drizzle started coming down at roughly 5:15pm. We were actually lucky to have a relatively dry loco service session. Darkness fell quickly as the heavily laden skies clouded out what little light was left and we were soon running in drizzly pur-blind darkness. Next stop! Wetburg. Er, I mean, Ficksburg!



TF01 – From now until we polished rails at Ficksburg, the lounge car would be jam-packed and the licensed bar doing fairly good business. It was a pity that it was dark outside already as we try to time our steam-hauled evening runs to be able to enjoy the majestic scenery of the Eastern Free State under the dramatic mellow light of the westering sun. All the passengers could see was the occasional porch light of an isolated farm house and endless rain drop patterns. It's DARK out in that part of the world.



TF02 – Disco Diana! The sound system is just out of frame behind the ashtray to the right so Dizzy-Di is getting all the vibes! Just something that she can't help and she has provided much amusement for the rest of us on many occasions!

Although Diana is wearing her coach controller costume, she was actually rostered to help with logistics and house keeping and was thus correctly wearing her jacket as a mark of a duty member. Notice that the high visibility vest is correctly OUTSIDE the wind breaker jacket. (See next pic.)



TF03 – Unlike this way round, which is a common mistake, putting a jacket on OVER your high vis-vest. All of us do it at times without thinking and here I've caught Train Safety Officer Clifford, of all people, in the act. Bad Cliffie! Bad boy!

He's just done the vacuum tests at about 4:30pm here and has walked back to the loco. He's keeping an eye on the passengers and crews milling about on the platform end.



TF04 – It's MY bar and I'll dance if I want to!

Catering and housekeeping manager Aletta Lubbe gets into the swing of things and tries some dance moves out. It's hard to move gracefully under that restricted ceiling height though.



TF05 – The emergency curry and rice meal was served a little past 7pm. For an improvised meal with hastily purchased ingredients and a surprised catering staff, the meal was delicious – better than many that you'd get from a restaurant or take away. It even had chopped bananas in it.

As an additional bonus it was hand-served through the length of the trains, many passengers being pleasantly surprised by being served a bonus supper in their own compartments!



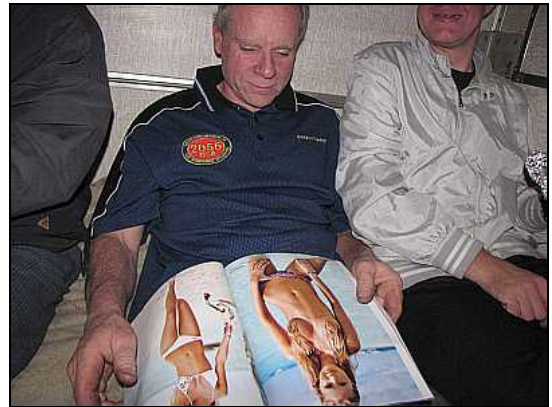
TF06 – The night is but still a pup, but many of the day's crews are starting to fade. Clifford Matthee (right) is looking distinctly tired here and he must still supervise the stopover at Ficksburg.

James Thomson (left) looks like a crew member but is riding as a passenger – getting the best of both worlds. Familiarity with the train crews and procedures but not being rostered. Actually, this was a relatively easy trip, rostering-wise and we had almost twice as many crew and service members as we could have gotten away with as a minimum.



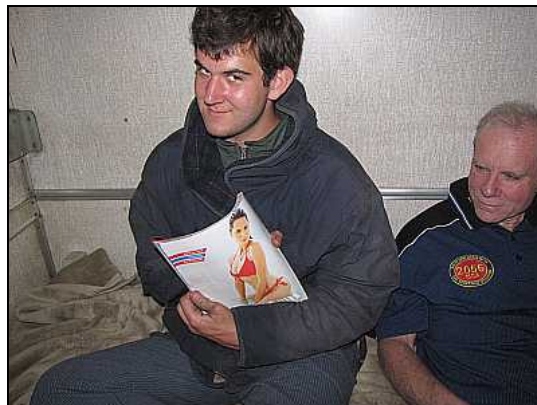
TF07 – Boys Club. I made my way to the front of the train, ahead of the waiters handing out tubs of curry and rice, to put myself in the queue again. (It worked and I got a 2nd helping!)

Coenie couldn't wait for supper and had organized some boerewors and bread rolls. Wearing a light coloured jacket like that is not a good idea on the train. Fortunately Coenie wouldn't have much to do until we started experiencing generator trouble the following day. (Water in the fuel.)



TF08 – Boys Club 2. As a welcome change from engineering bulletins and blue prints, a copy of 'Sports Illustrated' had been floating around the train the whole day and it had now ended up in the B compartment of the Power Van.

Andrew King literally lies back and takes a relaxed look at the low-axle-mass bikini girls while we eat our curry. It's actually quite rare to see Andrew both a) Clean b) Relaxed, on a long distance steam train trip. Coenie's gay and I have my dignity, so that is at least two of us that wouldn't be pawing through the magazine. (I confess that I did take a few glances though.)



TF07 – They took a casual vote as to the most attractive girl and Luca shyly shows the winner, the rather pneumatic brunette on the cover page. I'm sure she would have felt honoured being voted-in by this gritty bunch. (Not)

9). NIGHT TIME AT FICKSBURG :

The weather had become colder and even drizzlier upon our late arrival at Ficksburg (8:30pm) Because of the weather, there wasn't much passenger activity on the platforms – nearly everyone staying on board the coaches. A few hardy souls tromped on down the rain-slicked line to visit the show grounds – where the gaudily lit fairground rides were still operating. Even the waterproof loco crews were somewhat scarce.

At close on 11pm, with Ryan and little ol' me on loco minding duty, the toilet bag guys started their work. The rain had stopped, along with the accompanying keen wind, tapering down to a slight drizzle and the evening turned out pleasantly cool and fresh. It wasn't quiet though as the compressor units for the refrigerated warehouse cycle 24/7 – but the empty yard was peaceful enough. With both locomotives ready to doze for a few hours and Ryan Fincham already dozing peacefully in the 12AR's cab – I took the opportunity for an owl-time ramble around the station. I stayed away from the silos though since Lucas Dreyer seriously damaged his ankle on an unseen embankment the previous year.

Here are some night time pictures.



NT01 – One of the landmark features of Ficksburg Station are the massive mature palm trees all planted in a widely spaced row. As the station building is no longer occupied (it was a Jehovah's Witness Kingdom hall last year) there are no lights showing and the palm trees usually stand in almost total darkness. Here, our train provides dramatic under-lighting. Looks like a station in subtropical Mozambique, doesn't it?



NT02 – Fred Sewell did a remarkable job on the lights. Many were repaired and many others were converted from inverter type systems to straight alternating current mains. But the outdoor vestibule lights are generally the most unreliable lights on the coaches due to exposure. The entire train had retained a full set of working vestibule lights by the time it had gotten to Ficksburg and in the rain too!



NT03 – One of the annoying things about the Reefsteamers yard are the obstacles and back drops to unobstructed photography. The Ficksburg yard, by comparison, is wide open and the single floor station hidden behind the coaches. The drizzle is really shining up those tracks but this station sees relatively little yard traffic out of grain harvesting season.



NT04 – An effect that I noticed in 2008 and recaptured this year was the 'Las Vegas' gold mine dump effect of the bluffs that stand just behind the show grounds – taken with a long exposure. These are actually not floodlit. The actual horizon is actually 2/3 up in the picture – just the weathered rock strata showing up in the exposure.



NT05 – Seen through a rain tipped lens, resting quietly after her 460 km long journey, Class 25NC No.3472 'Elize' is being kept warm by yours truly. I'd seen that the coal was good, so was only 'feeding the goldfish' on this massive loco. I had laid a fairly small bank of coal and was then topping it off with occasional rounds of up to five loosely spread shovel-loads each.

With a train full of sleeping passengers, it wouldn't do to over-fire your engine and have her pop-her-corks and roar away into the night. Admittedly, there is a tanker, a DZ, the coal grab, the power van, the kitchen car, the dining car and then the bar car before the first set of sleeping passengers ... but the principle still applies. (The motley crew sleeping in the power van don't count. ☺)

The 'rusty streaks' on the smokebox's front plate is actually a double shadow caused by the yard lighting. The 12AR is just out of frame to the left. This dormant, but beautiful machine was officially my charge for the night.



NT07 – My assistant loco minder is really enthusiastic, wide awake and alert tonight! I ended up looking after his locomotive as well as my own – but I didn't mind. Double the fun!

Ryan Fincham has just 'hit the bonk' and he's out like a busted light bulb!

Ryan had just discovered that even a very fit tri-athlete needs a bit of sleep now and again in 48 hours. However, he had understandably taken every opportunity to grab some real steam experience and was even lucky enough to get a cab ride to Ficksburg during the time that he should have been sleeping to rest-up for the star-lit shift.

While Ryan is drooling down the cab window, you'll notice the firebox door is open. It breaks the draft through the grate and allows cooler air to mingle with the hot air and slows the rate of pressure increase. You can see the steam being pulled into the cab just below the wing plate. That long cylindrical object the foreground is my tripod bag.

Notice the two green cans of valve oil heating up for ease of flow during the morning lube-up session.



NT06 – The black back-lit hulk of the 12AR No.1535 looks a bit more wide awake under the water tower. Actually she was drowsing at the 1000kPa mark (12 o'clock on the gauge dial) and very gradually gaining pressure. The blower is not on during this picture – just the air was very still, hence the vertical smoke column.

She isn't feathering at the safeties either, they are a bit further forward. That backlit steam visible in front of the cab is from the inevitable small leaks at the turret valves.

You can't see what's on the other sides of the engines – the trackside brush is overgrown and the deeply shadowed pathway along the line is narrow – the trip-worthy roots and abundant dripping, clinging, face-slapping leaves. The open area of the yard, with the crunchy ballast underfoot, is far more pleasant and actually a safer area in which to move.



NT08 – There is, however, activity going on towards the rear of the train. These guys had slipped up a bit and should have been fitting the toilet bags just after the train arrived. Luckily the passengers hadn't eaten an awful lot that day and the emergency curry and rice meal would probably only make its next appearance for the following morning's deposit – so the station wasn't fouled. Just nitrated slightly. (All that beer...)

I deliberately took the shot at a long distance with the flash to see what those high visibility strips would look like – and as you can see, they work very well indeed.



NT09 – Things that go bump n the night. Shorty is caught applying a fresh bag to the discharge pipe of a toilet. The train isn't going to move for 1 ½ days and Transnet would be understandably upset if they were left with regular piles of potty all spaced exactly one coach apart and fouling their ballast.

The concept of an open discharge from a train's coach toilet sounds foul and primitive, but in normal train service, passengers would not be sleeping, eating and living on board a stationary train. In transit, the occasional human waste that gets dropped on the ballast of an open main line is quickly dried up and sterilized by the fierce African sun.

Sink and shower water ('grey water') is allowed to discharge straight to open ground even when we are standing.



NT10 – A fitted bag lying alongside a commonwealth bogie. You can see by the deflated appearance of the bag that this crew made a mistake – they should have 'primed' the bags with liquid lime as a deodorizer and disinfectant. But that makes an unpleasant job even worse. The horizontal pipe above the bogie is the insulated steam heating pipe – now disused.

This is perhaps the humblest job of all on a long distance and often the toilet bag crews have to be up and gingerly removing those now-full bags before the locomotive crews, themselves early risers, are busy preparing their charges for the day's work.

It goes to show the logistic of a long distance trip – we not only have to feed the passengers, but also worry about dealing with the other end of the alimentary process.



NT11 – A bonus for those who like machinery are the trucks that are usually to be found waiting on the loading aprons – sometime up to 5 or 6 trucks at a time. This neat tarp-sided CAT crate carrier waits through the night facing the teamster platform. The loading bays and access roads of Ficksburg Goods Shed are still in good shape and are in regular use as the old goods shed is now a refrigerated warehouse.

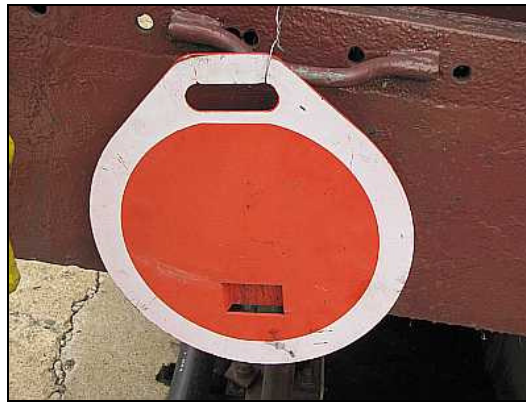


NT12 – A Ficksburg landmark, one of two grain silos that are served by the station. This silo is usually used by road trucks but still functions to discharge grain into railway wagons as well.

The strange light of top is not a UFO! It is the horizontal bar of a Christian cross – the vertical lighting having failed. Those trees cover the rough ground area where Lucas Dreyer hurt himself the previous year and I stayed well away from that area.



NT13 – My last photo for the night as I return to my two slumbering, warm-bellied iron ladies. I might take a nap myself – but will try to shovel some coal in the 12AR's tummy without waking Ryan up. My care with the shovel was somewhat academic actually, as Ryan was waking himself every 10 minutes to frantically scan his cell phone for MXIT messages from the fantastic, amazing PRINCESS PRISCILLA and looking sleepily glum when she wasn't replying – at 2am in the morning!



ZZ01 – That does it for the first half of the Cheery Festival Trip report.

This Trip Report was compiled by Lee D. Gates on behalf of Reefsteamers
For observations, corrections and suggestions – email me at leeg@leaf.co.za

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MOTIVATION : The Reefsteamers Depot Reports and associated Photo Essays are created on an unpaid volunteer basis in my leisure time, for the love of steam.

Germiston Steam Locomotive Depot.
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