

The second leg of our Cherry Festival Trip started at Kroonstad and terminated in Bethlehem with only one signal check along the way. We did have a hitch though in that the Bethlehem Diesel Depot was closed and we ended up having to stage the Class 15F locomotive in Bethlehem station itself. We were able to 'cut off' the two toasters though. The 2<sup>nd</sup> outbound pilot crew was fireman George Hoddinott and trainee Simon Bennett.

The first formal meal of the weekend was served outside of Kroonstad and it was the current catering and waiting team's first attempt at a Reefsteamers train-board meal – only Coenie Gildenhuys with previous experience. It went well and everyone had enough to eat with hardly any waiting.

The train trip was still a novelty, but you could see the passengers were already starting to fade. It had been a long day for some with having to drive to our Germiston Depot before boarding the train. In spite of the thundery Free-State weather enroute, the compartments were warm and humid. Combine that heat with an afternoon of visits at the bar, then a hot meal after a long day and du-du's becomes irresistible. Because of the minimal crew we had taken, we'd be 're-using' a 'set' for the following morning's steam-powered run to Ficksburg, so they had to quietly go to bed as well for an early start. (Including morning loco turning and serving.)

My night as loco minder at Bethlehem was a quiet night with few visitors, but bracing cool weather. (It kept the mozzies away too!) I'm definitely a late owl, feathering out abundantly under the obsidian dome of the night. The Bethlehem station is IDEAL for walking and meditating – although I couldn't sit cross-legged on a tanker or loco cab because of the traction wires. Poor passengers and crew – fancy sleeping and wasting such a beautiful nocturne! It was a long shift but as expected, the day crews were already at trackside between 4:30-5am.



P01 – We weren't at Kroonstad much longer than required for loco service and crew change; and it wasn't long before we were moving again. Here, the sadly-smokeless train is switching over to the irons that will take us to Bethlehem.



P02 – Coen, Coenie (really!) and Rhynhard discuss the planned layout for the buffet table in the diner. Although they had two sets of crockery and serving dishes, they eventually opted for a single-string, bufferless process flow.



P03 – Doesn't look like much to photograph, does it? But it takes a much braver person than me to cook chips by seething in traditional boiling oil on a jolting, moving train. Wisely, the Kango ladies did most of the chips at standstill.



P04 – The lubricator-scalded Mini-Mienie gets a patch job from Mienie-Major. Unusually, we had no nursing sister on this train, but we did have three qualified first aiders on board. Hennie Mienie was the primary first aid official.



P05 – The 'King' (R) and the 'Kousin' (L) enjoy a chat in the S&B Van. With 2 years' worth of repairs and improvements to the coach electrics and plumbing, little had gone wrong and the still-clean King was at a bit of a loss by now.



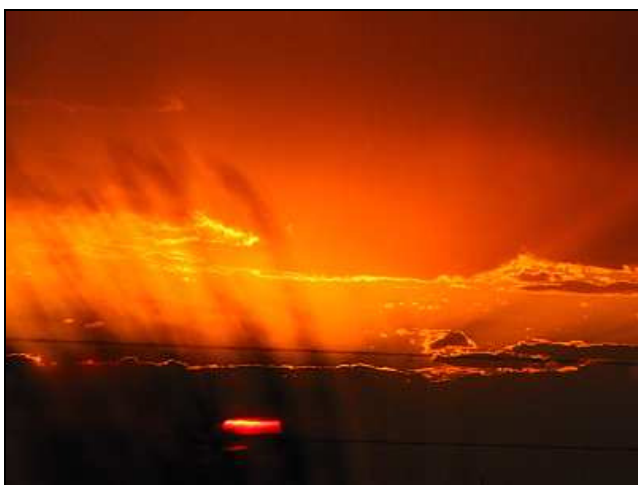
P06 – Edge of the storm...edge of the night. The setting sun finally clears the edge of the cloud bank – the last clouds we'd see until Saturday evening. Note the cinders stuck to the window glass, even from a towed steam loco.



P07 – With appetizing dinner scents making their sneaky way through the gangways, the passengers were starting to congregate. They enjoyed the novelty of watching a sunset from a moving train – something we take for granted.



P08 – They still weren't happy with the buffet arrangement and were about to start faffing around again, instead of feeding the herd gathering next door. The problem was no space for the pie. I wasn't going to stick around and watch!



P09 – Something had gone screwy with my camera settings and the pics were coming out dark even with long exposures. Here is a random sunset picture that I took while doing diagnostics – I liked its almost abstract look.



P10 – Some of the coaches have a 'frosted glass' effect on their aging door-glass stickers, while others have independent yellow numerals. Can anyone tell me what is fundamentally wrong with this picture?



P11 – First seating is almost done. Our first train-board dinner was home-made chips (not the yucky oven-baked kind), gem squash, traditional Afrikaans ‘soet wortels’ (Sweet carrots) and an amazing home-made chicken pie.



P12 – With the food going down well, the bar was suddenly rather quiet. On the previous trips, we’d normally have enough pax for two full dining car seatings and thus the bar would be jumping and the carpets getting drooled on.



P13 – What could be more boring than two women having a ‘baby talk.’ (Or worse ... shoe shopping.) It has a distinctly soporific effect but I suppose males have the same effect discussing sports (esp. rugby) and cars.



P14 – Doing well. The buffet service idea worked and the two waiters were able to keep up with the table clearing and buffet top-ups. Those Christmas bells on the wall have survived about four years and two re-paintings so far.



P15 – If I was riding as a pilot fireman in the cab, I could have taken refraction shots of the water columns and backlit pictures of the fireman. Such as it was, I had to be content with this vinegar bottle. <<Sighing martyrdom.>>



P16 – Not getting off the farm much, I thought this contraption was ingenious. A candle-heated casserole dish holder. I wondered how well the heat dissipation worked with Pyrex or ceramic cookware though.



P17 – A recent improvement to the bar – a bottle rack. Both convenient and safer on a moving train. The bar coach is set to be refurbished and improved later next year seeing that it sees the heaviest usage on our trains.



P18 – The crew eat before or after the passengers. They are hungrily starting to gather here as the first seating is well advanced. The Pregnant One (or baby Emily within) couldn't wait and a mini-yoghurt is going down well.



P19 – With all the passengers and crew in the warmly-lit food service vehicles, the rest of the train seemed sterile and a bit bleak. I wondered how the crews were doing, powering us relentlessly on through the deepening night.



P20 – Here is an economy class compartment with four out of the six bunks set up. It's not as claustrophobic as it looks unless you have wide shoulders and can't turn in bed. We never put more than four people in such a compartment.



P21 –The rotten sods who took the last leg as pilot crew left the pressure midding, but didn't top up the water. So I had to fill the boiler AND stabilize it on my long overnight shift, with the consequent hit in the coal consumption. Grrr!



P22 – We have just discovered that the diesel depot is closed for the night. So, they'll unplug the toasters and we will stage our 14-wheel bean boiler overnight at Bethlehem Station. A slightly different loco minding experience...



P23 – On a ‘field stop,’ the loco crew are usually casual with their changeover, but the scat-bag team have to really hustle to get their bags attached in time before passengers use the train’s toilets and foul the station trackwork.



P24 – Not a pretty photo, but I found it interesting to see how the pole in the foreground was able to cast a distinct shadow on the copious injector overflow steam leakage. An attempt was made to solve those leaks on Saturday.



P25 – Settling down for the night and snuggling up to a pedestrian footbridge, our 15F No.3046 ‘Janine’ has some weird lighting up her skirts. An enterprising line-sider had parked his bakkie and spot-lit the scene with headlamps.



P26 – The previous scene from another angle. Notice that there are no steam leaks on this side. The rarely driver’s injector and Sellars valve set functions perfectly. (I used it through the night.)



P27 – There are still a few passengers mooching about as the train stands at the platform. Even though the yard is lifted, the platforms and roof are still intact and the lights work. Even the fire hydrants gave us good water pressure.



P28 – The passengers often get confused here as the train turns around at Bethlehem and proceeds towards the viewer. These South-East bound tracks head for Ladysmith. The loco depot is off to the left of the bridge.



P29 – I very much prefer to be alone during loco minding. I was quite content to hang around the yard on a cool night, pacing on the platform, the ballast and lineside dykes. It was soothing to watch the thin clouds scrolling Northwards.



P30 – A front view of our not-so-little princess. I found it interesting that it was difficult in the reflected light to distinguish between a graphite finish and the semi-gloss black etching primer that we had used on the smokebox.



P31 – These quad-bladed fire markers are usually right above a hydrant or hose but can be placed in-line instead. The hydrant in question is way off to the left and we had to pass the water hose under the rails of the adjoining tracks.



P32 – Past midnight and the coaches (and contents) are all asleep. This is the train's corridor-side, hence the lights are still all aglow. The security staff made sure to lock up all the doors except the platform-side doors in the power van.



P33 – Rhyndard has fun trying to fire into the corners (to make my faster-burning 3-sided fire into a proper back-bank) and ended up making a mine-dump in the center. ☺ No harm done – I just tidied the fire up with the pricker.



P34 – A rare photo of yours truly in the 15F's hot seat. Notice the duplex vacuum gauge is at zero. We pin hand brakes and scotch the wheels; and do not rely on either live vacuum or residual vacuum (coaches) to hold the train.



P35 – On this VERY busy core line upon which steam traction is banned, three trains passed through the station at night. This one is a tanker train, which is blurred into a pipe-shape by the long exposure settings on the camera.



P36 – From the gated-off footbridge, the yard looks as if it is laid to Gooch's wide gauge. Actually the entire goods yard has been lifted and the remaining rails rolled sideways. The station is now a glorified passing loop.



This Photo Pack was compiled by Mr. Lee D. Gates on behalf of Reefsteamers Association NPC.  
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