

1). RFS 2013 – DAY 3. TRANSFER TO BETHLEHEM:

Monday rolled around and today would be the first of our long distance travels, all the way down to Bethlehem and into the 'meat' of the tour. Enroute from Friends of the Rails' Hermanstad facility, we would be making the first of two stop-overs at Germiston to top up on the supplies, service the Class 12AR locomotive and to pick up the mixed train and the Class 15F 3046. There was a surprising amount of shunting to be done. Haulage between Germiston and Bethlehem was with a pair of electrics and we went down the east line and not through Jo'burg or the Rand Mineral Line.

We were badly delayed getting out of Hermanstad in the morning, which threw the whole day about 1 ½ hours behind. We were banking on Transnet being late with their electrics for the transfer, but would ya know it ... this year they were on time! Fortunately they were patient and waited for us, otherwise we might have been waiting many hours more. This trip was the first night-run that we would do on the tour, which was a bit of a change in the routine for the passengers. It was a long run cooped up in the train and I sensed some of the passengers were getting a bit bored after dinner. The kindles and tablets were out in abundance and I was wondering about the roaming costs for all the data.

There were no mechanical issues from either teapots or toasters on the way down, and apart from a few light fittings going out, the coaches behaved well too.



P01 – The sun has woken up and last night's weary-looking loco minder has just booked-off from a 14 hour shift, and he does 'The Gauntlet' of comments from the rest of the crew who are relaxing before breakfast.

The 12AR locomotive had been run alongside the train and had already left the yard to be turned around to point home.



P02 – The breakfast buffet laid out after the dining car had been vacuumed and cleaned up. We were fairly civilized looking at that time and not in work clothes, so there would be no grease and coal rubbed off against table cloth creases. Although we would eat before the guests today, we had a bonus selection of croissants and apple strudel.



P03 – Coenie-raad and I did the scat bag dumparoo after breakfast. It wasn't so bad as there was a concrete shafted manhole at the other side of the facility, and a wheel barrow had been arranged for our use. After slitting the bags and dumping the contents directly into the sewer, the bags were disposed of within the 12AR's built-in incinerator unit. That's when I got this abstract picture of a rusty tender.



P04 – To get out of Hermanstad on onto the homebound slow line, we would have to cross four active tracks. Naturally it was hard to find a time slot when all four tracks would be clear on the CTC'd main – trains crossing over at Kimberly might cause occupation issues.

Oh well, we just had to sit and wait. Aidan McCarthy prepares to kill the time with a nap to aid his digestion.



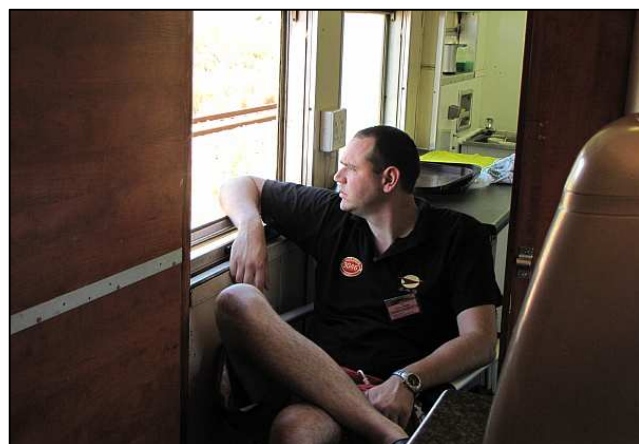
P05 – One of the reasons for the over an hour delay ... the pesky Blue Train had priority. Notice the tree scratches on the blue paintwork – sort of like seeing a Rolls Royce with a dent. Even the Blue Train is not immune for the ravages of 'timbery' trackside monsters reaching out to the trains.



P06 – What? Me Worry? Why? Transnet are always late, so our delay just means we don't have so long to wait for the electrics to pull us to Bethlehem! The Smudge is comfy enough in his work clothes. Note that his Koaly Kiester is wisely planted on a folded box to protect the chair.



P07 – With driver Chris Saayman tweaking the tiger tail, we are romping along in the verdant green of a still-maturing summer. The weather was still settling into the classic Highveld bruiser-storms of the afternoon – all thunder and lashings of fury, but over in just half an hour.



P08 – This spot in the doorway of the Lounge Coach's kitchenette became Warren's 'comfy place' for the tour, even with the deck chair being a bit too low. Wisely chosen, it had an active window media process, generous leg room and a panoramic view of the bar.



P08 – Where it all started... This bleak-looking parkade was MY 'comfy place' during the bi-weekly shopping trips with mother in my pre-teen years. I'd be stationed at the top corner post (RHS) with a satchel full of eight fresh library books and watching the steel wheeled action at the Kempton Park station, goods sidings and the Pretoria Main.



P10 – The rickety old steam train was catching up with the metro ahead of us. Here we are at a stop, close to home at Knights Station. The Transnet-era stations have an interest in their own right with inconsistent styling, paint work and fittings as the results of different refurbishments over time. This station sports the latest grey and blue theme.



P11 – Here we are! Home, hearth and ash-pit! This would be the first of two stops we would make at the home depot during the tour, for restocking, refuelling and servicing. Today, we would also be picking up the 15F No.3046 and the mixed train for our trip to Bethlehem.



P12 – A steam train runs on its stomachs – all 16 of them. That is, you gotta feed the crew that keep the wheels a' rollin! The stopover was used by Feedem Pitseng to load up the next four days' worth of food and drinks, as well as by us for feeding and fettling the big iron horses.



P13 – Backdropped by the slowly moving 12AR, Jeandre hikes a roll of thermal gasket material to join the supplies in the S&B van. The problems that we had with the 12AR's injectors sucking in air through their flanges reminded us that we didn't have supplies of gasket sheeting on board.



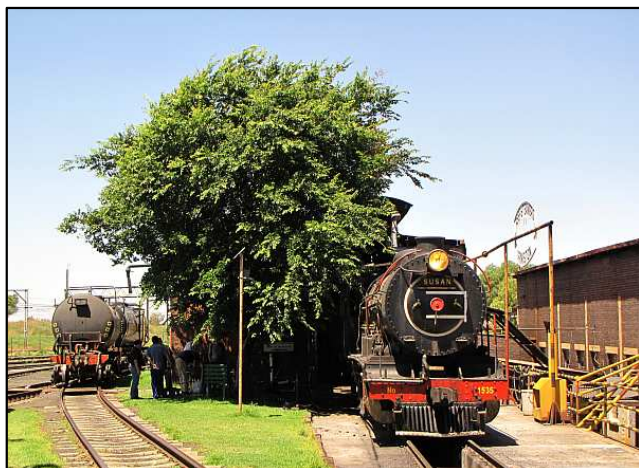
P14 – With the Class 12AR cut off the train for servicing, Aidan is waiting for Alan to pass him the end of a fire hose to fill the almost-empty drinking water tanker. Tankers and tenders often cause delays during servicing so we got filling as soon as we could while the locomotives were prepared.



P15 – The 12-Bucket had been run around the balloon and then backed up to leave an RS and a Friends tanker here. She was facing the right way, but had to get onto the other side of this short train to be able to park over the ash pits.



P16 – Liberally bathed in bright blue-skied sunshine, the redoubtable Susie backs up to have her firebars scratched. Notice the kink between the loco and the tender, as the track gradient changes when passing over the ash pits.



P17 – Here's the track situation with the two water tanks blocking access. They would later be shunted out by the Hunslet up to the top water bowser for filling. The water tower doesn't have the capacity to fill two tanks.



P18 – At Reefsteamers, we strike while the bearings are hot ... well, at least comfortably warm. It helps the grease to flow into the crevices and through the radial drillings of the great bronze bushes in the joints. Here, the manager of the Maurer Swiss Bank is doing the job of pumping in the grease with an 'Ajax' 'chopper' pump.



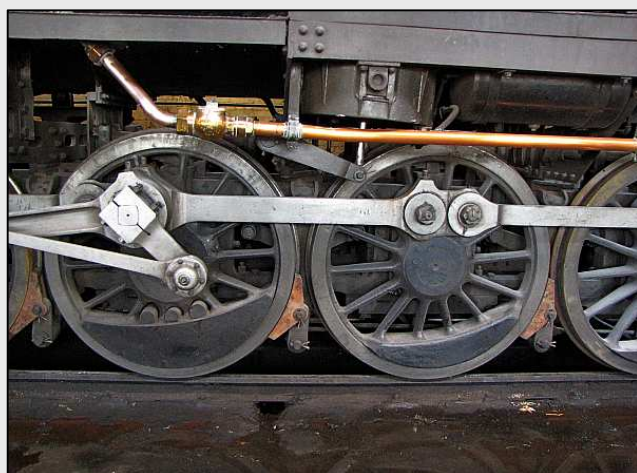
P19 – The warm bearings were a bit superfluous as the Marfak grease sticks were already going soft in the fierce sunshine. Hot sticks aren't easy to use, as they go sticky, and deform when being pressed into the pump. Dipping each stick in a bucket of tepid water eases the job along.



P20 – Marfak grease is a fibrous sodium soap grease and it is designed to emulsify water. This consistency of grease is designed for 'slow running bearings' and for intermittent heavy loads. That's us! Emulsification of water prevents rust-inducing isolated water pockets from forming.



P21 – 15F No.3046 'Janine' had been freshly lit up that morning by Johann Bullie-bach and Swak-Hart Viljoen. These gents would be joining us for this leg of the tour.



P22 – Class 15F main and intermediate driving wheels. She had recently been fitted with a full set of new cast iron brake blocks. Unpainted, they rust within a week of disuse.



P23 – Doing his second road-worthy inspection for the day, as he had done the 12AR locomotive at Hermanstad in the morning. 'Smudge' is seen taking up the brake adjustment nuts under the 15F, while the 12AR is greased up outside.



P24 – The coaches take up a lot of room on the outer washout track – which was designed for locomotives after all. There is no barrier across the end gangway doors, as the doors had been semi-permanently locked from within.



P25 – Alan is checking the coach water top-up process, even while the drinking water tanker up front was still filling up from the bowser. Although this idea does save dragging hoses, it is still time consuming to fill up all those tanks.



P26 – This is the blanked-off stub of a vacuum riser to an emergency stop valve mounted inside the coach. The elderly pipework failed enroute to Hermanstad and the vacuum leak brought the train to a halt in Pretoria Station.



P27 – The luncheon service was already underway for the passengers, even though many were actually rambling around the depot. I'm not a salad person myself, but this meal was well chosen and quite refreshing on a hot day – chunks of cold battered hake over freshly prepared greens.



P28 – Almost a Reefsteamers version of 'Abbey Road.' These youngsters would rather check out the action than eat. Although this was the third day on tour, our guests hadn't yet had the opportunity to see RS locomotives being serviced close up and none had seen the 15-bruiser as yet.



P29 – The 15F 3046 was in full steam and ready to move, so it was time to get the tanker blockade up to the top-side tracks to be filled with water. This was an unusual move for Reefsteamers, as this is the truncated track upon which the Shongololo axles are stored and it is thus rarely used.



P30 – The rubberized canvas fire hoses don't like being kinked. But they also tend to straighten out when under pressure. Notice the guys laid the hose out in a rough square shape to assist the water flow with no acute bends.



P31 – A quick line-side conference going on and Johann looks a bit defensive. It WAS a bit confusing with tankers all over the place, the coaches needing to be turned and the two locomotives pointing in different directions.



P32 – Guided by our youngest crew member and operated by our newest driver, the Class 15F 3046 'Janine' had been run out to the Eastern Yard Gates and is now backing up carefully over the aged point work.



P33 – The big black monster makes quite a contrast to the brightly sunlit upper garden, which is resplendent in colourful pansies at the moment. She was coupling up to turn the coaches around, so the generator's radiator could face downstream and alleviate the overheating problem.



P34 – Seen from a tanker's footwalk, the Class 15F takes the still-occupied coaches for a quick trip around the turning balloon to turn the train around. This bit was easy, as the old locomotive yard is very slightly downgrade and not flat, as a true shunting yard would have been.



P35 – The funny people poking their heads out are our own crew members in the Lounge Coach. Most of the passengers were still eating their fish n' bunny-food lunch when they got to go on their unexpected little trip.



P36 – Johann took it very easy around that curve, and with the coaches squealing and chuntering behind, the 15F takes some strain on the tightly curved upgrade past 'Die Kerkie.' The balloon slopes downwards from both ends.



P37 – The gran' fat aud Glascae lassie only slipped once coming out that curve. Johann was expecting a bit of wheel spin and he slapped that regulator closed in smart time. Still there are a few shovels of coal and several buckets of ash that have gone airbourne right there.



P38 – Ah – the scent of real coal smoke ... you just can't beat it. She picked up her 14 steel-rimmed feet quite quickly while easing into the converging points.



P39 – With more coaches now on the level, the load is getting lighter and fireman Dawie can now get some coal in to patch up the torn firebed. Jeandre stands guard at the points, which he will need to throw for the backup move.



P40 – It isn't often that you get to see this view at the Reefsteamers Germiston Depot – a full set of coaches stretched out on the Southern Bypass Track.



P41 – Easy does it... The backup move was very slow as the long-bodied coaches had to negotiate the reverse curve that constitutes the crossover tuck and its points. The train would back right out the Eastern Gates and then got back to the original siding, with the coaches now turned around.



P42 – We would use one of the 'Friends tankers' as the 15F's water canteen. Here, Aidan McCarthy (L) is rolling up the fire hose, which is awkwardly going uphill, while Alan Lawton had been 'walking de hump' to push the leftover water out towards the free hose end.



P43 – After turning the sleeper coaches, Class 15F No.3046 had to donkey-plod around the turning balloon yet again to restore the correct eastward-facing orientation for the locos. Here, she just backed into and coupled up to the water tanker, with some more of Coen Pretorius's depot garden work in the foreground.



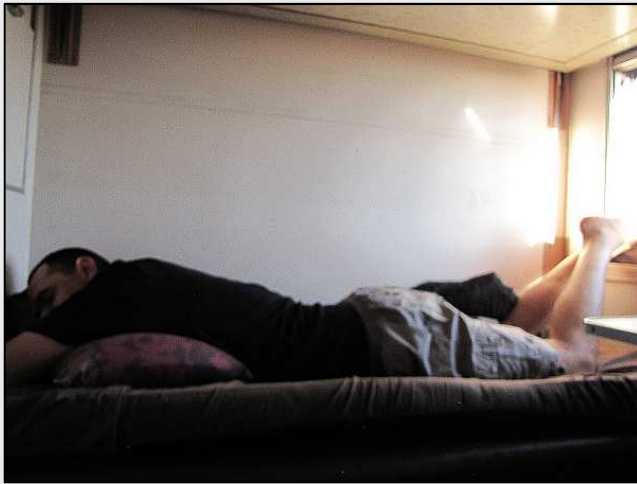
P44 – In the back ground, 'little' Susie makes her entrance. She had just been topped up with carbon crunchies at The Dock and had reversed around the turning balloon. She came in on the South Points ladder as Madame 15F would need to shunt to the adjacent road clear the washout tracks and expose another tanker for the 12AR to grab onto.



P45 – For once in a way, Transnet wasn't late and their two toasters were already waiting for us, who were over an hour late already because of the morning delays. George shows his disdain for the sense of urgency to get moving!



P46 – Lunch is 'on' at last for the Reefsteamers service crew, and we were already on the move. Notice that the Swiss Bank Manager must have made a seriously bad financial deal, for he had just 'lost the shirt from his back.'



P47 – ‘Wedwood’ Warren takes an afternoon nap. The big lunk is so tall that he literally does have to have his feet protruding from the window if he wants to stretch his chassis out on that bed! (These beds are 6ft2 long.)



P48 – An industrial sunset while going through the Sourthern East Rand.



P49 – A pale sunset shot though a curved station. One wonders what history lies behind these places that they were built on curves – why choose that particular difficult location?



P50 – There is something about watching the shiny-topped rails scrolling by in the sunset, the sleepers just a flickering blur and the beads of golden light on the rails always sprinting ahead.



P51 – Yeah ... that's me. I thought I'd better appear in at least ONE of these hundreds of photos coming out.



P52 – A new crew member on board, joining us from today – David Viljoen is enjoying catching up with his fellow steam nuts.



P53 – Another new crew member on board was Johann Breydenbach. He is showing why more Afrikaans people can speak reasonable English, than vice versa, due to the availability of the media. Here, he is happily reading an English novel for training as well as for entertainment.



P54 – The marks of a Train Manager. A Kenwood radio, a vari-coloured signalling lamp (White, red, green and orange) and lots and lots of papers! This was Oom Attie De Neckertjop's work table in his Coupe.



P55 – The barman isn't doing much as the bar was quiet – our guests were civilized drinkers. The bullet hole laptop and the skull décor hard drive belong to Coenie ... rather aggressive schemes for the gentlest soul in the depot.



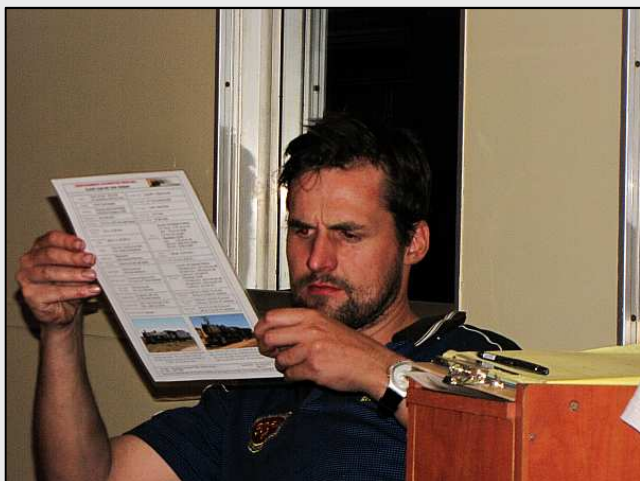
P56 – Fine dining tonight. Very few of our guests lingered after dinner after a long, hot day. The communal coaches were soon left to the Reefsteamers and Pitseng crews, who are used to working unconsecrated hours anyway.



P57 – The recently vacated Lounge Coach was ideal for some of our exhausted crew members to just flop down and spread 'it' about. Some people just have more 'it' than others! Hott-Nutts George calmly meditates in the 'squashed spider' position.



P58 – Some planning was already underway for tomorrow. (Tuesday) We would have to stage the train for the day, while the passengers went to Clarens by bus. The impending Free State part of the tour would be the most challenging from a logistic point of view.



P59 – The most educated out of all of us, Dawie looks like his IQ crashed down through the H-gate as he battles with one of our info leaflets. In reality, the light was too dim for comfy reading and he didn't have his glasses on anyway.



P60 – Carl de Campos gets cornered (again) by one of our most talkative and extroverted guests, Judy. With a slightly queasy tummy, all he wanted to do after dinner was to quietly sneak off to his compartment and die in peace.



P61 – Waiting impatiently for our pudding! Due to lack of facilities, the Feedem staff were unable to keep the chicken warm without it drying out a bit around the edges and they were apologetic about it – but we were hungry enough to eat the oil-soaked socks right out of the 12AR's axle keeps!



P62 – These two would still be preparing the kitchen and some of the goodies for tomorrow's breakfast – so their night isn't QUITE over yet! They wouldn't need to dish-up an elaborate lunch for the next day though, with the guests eating (and 'beer-ing') away at Clarens. (Golden Gate)



P63 – Coenie is now sacked-out from a pre-dawn start and snatches a few hours before a midnight shift of attaching a fresh set of scat bags on the train at the planned stopover at Bethlehem. His by-now aromatic welly boots were already parked outside the door. (Upon threat of bruising.)



P64 – It is past 10pm and certain other people are still full of beans (and scats) after our first lubrication and grease stop at Sasolburg. The cheerful-looking Maurer-man would only be on a locomotive again in two days' time. Note the 'Steam Encounters' books – we still have some for sale.



P65 – Doesn't Wedwood Warren look positively cherubic while sleeping off a hard day's worth of tending the bar? (If I persistently take sneak photos of sleeping people, perhaps I'll get bundled into a private coupe for the next tour ... <Evil Snigger.>)



P66 – We made our now-traditional stopover at Kroonstad to get some grease into the loco-motion bearings, do an oil can round and check for hot bushes n' loose items. These locomotives don't like being hauled at 80kph and they try to jump over their own cylinders even with drain cocks open.



P67 - Simon blew down a few of the glass viewing ports on the lubricator before booking off from pilot-fireman duty, cheerful enough, but well s-s-shaken and stirred. He had a rest day ahead and would be loco-minding the next night.



P68 – Jeandre Gordon, being compactly built and yet still strong enough for the job, is the prime candidate to be sent down to the ballast to grease motion bushes in the confined space next to the station platforms. (This is the 12AR.)



P69 – A little bit of extra light doesn't go amiss as the 12AR's deeply-inset bogie axle box reservoirs are topped up with MH oil. This can be an awkward job even in bright daylight! I was powering that useful 6 LED flood lamp from a lead running out from a sealed lead acid battery in a shoulder bag.



P70 – Both locos were checked for hot bearings and other issues. But the 12AR was checked very carefully because she hasn't been moved so fast ever since recent motion repairs and slide bar setups. We would rather not take her by electric haulage to Bethlehem again, if we can avoid it – the sustained 80-90kph speed is too high for comfort.



P71 – Both of our big anvils were found to be A-OK after their long high-speed haulage, even though the pair did playfully beat their pilot firemen up a bit.

The coaches were OK too. Over the years on this run, we have often had issues with the vacuum exhausters on the electric locomotives not being able to keep the brakes off. (Transnet mainly use air brakes these days.) The two units we had didn't skin any of our brake shoes this year.



P72 – The teapot and the toaster. We already had the green-lighted highball to depart from Kroonstad station before we finished servicing. We actually don't mind the electric haulage to Kroonstad too much, even though the line-siders and steam enthusiasts grumble about it. It saves us the hassle of having to cross over the 4-track main into the yard, only to find no fire-drop facilities and usually low water pressure at the few functional hydrants to be found. A bad service stop can throw a whole day out.

We would be getting a little surprise within about 1 ½ hours southbound gout of Kroonstad, but that will need to wait for the next photo essay! ☺



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This Depot Report was compiled by Mr. Lee D. Gates on behalf of Reefsteamers Association NPC.
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