

1). RFS 2013 – DAY 5. EASTERN FREE STATE:

The pre-dawn start was intermittently wet and the fellows took the chance of a forthcoming hot run without dropping fires in the morning. Try shovelling ash in the rain! This would be the first time that the full length passenger and mixed train would be moving under its own steamy power. Unlike trying to cross the quad lines outside of Hermanstad the previous day, getting out of Bethlehem proved to be simple enough and we were soon throwing smoke on the east side of town!

The ride was a muted one with dull and cloudy weather. A train full of line-side photographers would have been in a morose mood due to the bad light – but our touristy friends didn't mind too much. We made two stops along the way for photos, being Fouriesburg and Generaalsnek. We were taking more time than we planned, so we only had time for one run-by each. We hadn't fully allowed for time for the extra shunting required at Fouriesburg needed to get the mixed train separated for the 12AR run by and also to eliminate water tanker between the locos for the next stop at Generaalsnek. Shunting takes time!

At Ficksburg, we faced a debacle with no water, which threw the cotters off our plans. We were planning to turn one loco around there and take the train back to Kommandonek where we would stay overnight. The clouds were starting to break by then too. We were hoping to maybe do a double ended run-by with a loco at either end. There is no water available at Kommandonek, so we asked Sandstone Heritage Trust for help as they have borehole water available at the Vailima halt.

We would end up staged on the main line (With both permission and detonators!) opposite Sandstone Estates for the night. It made for a rough night's loco minding with a LOT of walking – but that is for the next photo essay!



P01 – The iron crews came on duty at about 2:30am and at the time, it was not raining. (For a change!) Here, you can see the slightly blurred Jeandre reporting for duty, and he was seriously looking forward to being the third man on the big ol' 15F for the coming double-headed Free State run.



P02 – The Class 15F locomotive had the better fire in the morning, so she was moved out first. Although there was less clearance for ash drops, we didn't want to drop ash down into a wet diesel inspection pit. Fire cleaning was a only a cursory affair this morning though – more of a raking.



P03 – The open double-bay workshop looked a bit forlorn amongst all the activity. There were a few tools stored in the adjacent building, but it is clear that the majority of the maintenance work is done elsewhere. We could do with some overhead walkways like that in our 15M workshop – but they'd ruin many photos and cause bumped heads!



P04 – The rain started up again, so Susie was moved back under cover, so the delicate Dawie and Philipp would not get wet. Nice! No one cared about the poor bloody loco minder though! Reefsteamers' loco minders are not allowed to shift engines alone unless they happen to be shedmen, passed firemen or drivers.



P05 – That is a Dawie opening the blower after laying some coal on a half-opened and partially-shaken fire. (Ash chute closed over the pits.) I didn't shake-up overnight for fear of waking the passengers. Apart from a jammed valve on the turret, needing spanner treatment, the 12AR woke up OK.



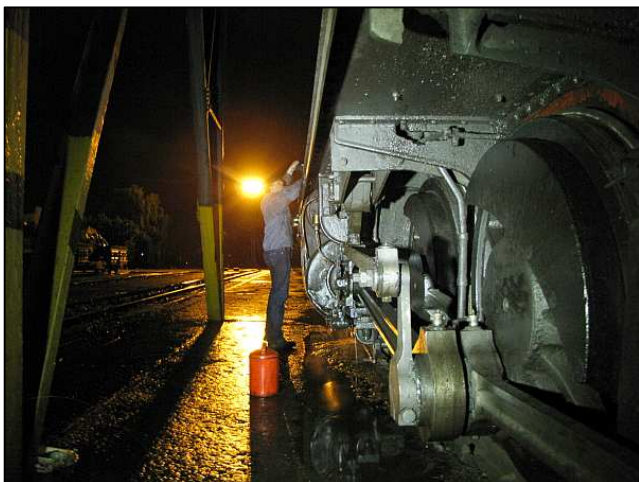
P06 – Both of the auxiliary tankers had been filled on the previous day, and they were communicating with the loco tender by means of a pipe. We had plenty of water to go on with. In the background is a damp Herr. Philipp Maurer getting set to do some early morning dripping greasing.



P07 – How much loco racket could the passengers hear, I wondered? Not to my surprise, none of them were brave enough to leave the coaches for some rainy photography – the relaxed, lazy pace of their tour already setting in.



P08 – A diesel brake shoe rack. We are considering modifying or recasting some locomotive brake shoes to use replaceable composite friction liners, as we are running out of spare stock to use. The 15F chows her brake shoes.



P09 – Swiss-tease Maurer tops up the oil cellar for the LHS valve spindle. The lead loco on a Bethlehem tour is the Reefsteamers 'top-link' slot and all our drivers desire it. Philipp got the position in honour of his massive financial, work and travelling contributions to the RFS 2013 Tour.



P10 – Seen greasing the eccentric pin on the Expansion Link, Shaun Ackerman was given the second slot, also in recognition of a substantial financial contribution and the work he put into the tour coaches. Shaun and Philipp constitute SAR Steam Tours Management and Organisers.



P11 – Mounting the 15F's front end to seal the smokebox door, senior driver Philipp Saayman was happy to be the second loco's fireman. He is our leading fireman and paid driver Ackerman the compliment of saying it would be an honour to fire for him. That is quite a compliment for a seasoned railway man to a volunteer younger than himself.



P12 – Simon (L) rostered himself on the 12AR as third man for some firing experience. He was thus knackered the following night and unilaterally begged off from the next loco-minding shift. (Which was a toughie) I was NOT pleased with him, but I forgave the cheeky sod for grabbing a rare opportunity for some true main line experience.



P13 – The thousands of lubrication points on a typical SAR locomotive are a right penance in the rain. The water also gets into the axle boxes, especially on the 12-Bucket. I was shielding my camera from the rain with my trademark sheep drover's hat, one of the reasons why I wear it!



P14 – At least this one was fairly dry! This is the 'five-lung' Detroit lubricator for the 15F. It had already been serviced and the feed set to get the slippery stuff running through the oil lines prior to running. (We'd be taking off after a relatively quick shunt of picking up the two-part train.)



P15 – Susie the 12AR is finally sorted and chuffs forward to take her place in the light, pattering rain. She would have a four man crew today – Driver Maurer, Fireman Viljoen, Third Man Bennett and a Transnet Pilot.



P16 – Side-by-side and ready for some light fire tickling and then coupling up the two halves of the train. The strange torch globe effect on the 12AR's headlight is a rain drop that landed in the PERFECT location on the camera lens!



P17 – Old drivers never die! They get shunted to the back of the shed to do the paper work. Oom Attie is missing all the loco servicing action, but on the plus side, he is nice n' dry in his coupe, and has a warm cup of coffee at hand.



P18 – Unlike many who reminisce about trains, I personally do not find the coach movement conducive to sleep. But I was slowly awoken from an uneasy morning sleep by the stillness, as we had been parked in Fouriesburg for a while.



P19 – 15F No.3046 'Janine' was getting her ration of table cloth-stainer as I expected, but in my sleep-dusted mind, it took me a while to 'click' that the auxiliary tanker had been removed to take part in the coming goods train run-by.



P20 – A bit of contrast ... A 6ft3 man on the ballast next to an almost 13ft high locomotive. As the expansion link's eccentric bush gets some grease, the summer-green trees form a nice green backdrop to this lengthy machine.



P21 – After the first flurry of photographs under a bruised, lowering sky, our guests ran out of angles! We spent some time hanging loose while waiting for the 12AR to come through. I was impressed that Transnet had been replacing some of the ancient wooden sleepers with concrete units.



P22 – After some cell-phone interlocking with the pilot on the 12AR, Ackersmudge pulls the 15F away from the stationary sleeper train. The intent was to clear the front end to attach the goods for departure. Just look at that thin jet of sulphury yellow smoke – a tell-tale flag of poor coal.



P23 – These level crossing identification and response signs have started appearing on our routes – a excellent idea to have a call-back number for remote locations. Of course, does anyone answer the phone?



P24 – This classic old railway house, now a bit neglected, is bookended by one of the original reasons for its existence. 15Fs did run on this line for a short while before being replaced by a brace of 25NCs based at Bethlehem.



P25 – With a distinctly blurred future behind sharp wires, a derelict Peugeot 504 sedan is the only occupant of the open pickup yard. Peugeot cars, especially the Pininfarina-styled 404, were very popular in pre-sanctions Apartheid South Africa until Peugeot disinvested.



P26 – Transnet have been replacing the sleepers for the outer passing track, which is now being used as a passing loop. This station has FOUR types of sleepers; wood, iron, std. concrete and wide-section concrete. Note the bad hump over the cattle grid – the center track is not in use.



P27 – The 12AR loco crew took a while to get going but we were soon treated to the sight of the ol' 12-Bucket hammering the rails while upgrade into the station, with the mixed train rattling and swaying behind her.



P28 – The sun stubbornly stayed behind the clouds for the run-by, resulting in manky, muddy colours for the cams. So I went for the black and white look. I was located roughly in the middle, with half our guests behind me on the crossing.



P29 – Philipp had to keep a tight hand on the train as it would be charging over a hump of badly laid track (on the cattle grid) and then barrelling through the crossing and the points yonder. He had already stopped at this point and was receiving instructions to advance and then reverse to couple to the train again – as we were short of time.



P30 – Back on the main and reversing up to the train once more. The track we had used for the run-by (center) is rarely used but the points for the adopted passing track would have been too sharp for the speeds. We still needed to 'uncap' the train to put the 15F back on – so the photographers still had some shunting action to capture.



P31 – Herr. Maurer looks exhausted after this short sprint on a non-electric non-microchip-equipped locomotive. And he wasn't even the fireman! Fireman Dawie looks nonchalant enough, although I bet the bolted plates in his wishbones were aching a bit by then.



P32 – Half of the mixed train is left behind and the 12AR has just shunted out to take the middle road. She still had two water tanks bookending the coal handing wagon. The tarpaulin visible on the front tanker is covering our line-side firefighting pump, which isn't a priority in this wet weather.



P33 – The two steam machines are now side by side and the length of the 15F and the long ex-23 Class EW Tender combo is evident, as it is hiding THREE goods vehicles that had just been parked onto the center road.



P34 – Both locomotives are now coupled and just pulling off with the center-road load. Note we left the 12AR's water tanker off for a more natural double header appearance for the next photo run-by, which would be at Generaalsnek.



P35 – Pack your bags and unload your bladders! We're off!

After this run-by, there was a sudden run of drinks in the Lounge Car, even though it wasn't a warm day. Look at all the beers that are in evidence in the photo!



P36 – After holding his fort against the thirsty barbarians, 'Wedwood Warren' ticks off the cool drinks that the crew requested. (Each member was allowed 4 free drinks a day.) Some of us discovered that the diluted Oros fruit squashes in the kitchenette were far more refreshing than the fizzy stuff, and it wasn't from this 'metered' supply.



P37 – Grant Fryer, Chairman of the Hilton Steam Heritage Association, was strategically using this steam tour as a facts gathering exercise for his home club, as well as for leisure. Hilton has come into some money as a 'Public Benefit Organization' and are looking to expand their current restricted operation, but they need experience.



P38 – Getting into the iron-bound twisties in the Eastern Free State, our train is making its way through a flange squealer of a reverse curve. These curved shots do get a bit samey after a while, but there has to be at least one in every photo album!



P39 – Today's lunch. I particularly enjoyed the taste and texture contrast of the big chunks of beetroot served with the mashed pumpkin. The crew got to eat first this time.



P40 – The Feedem people in a rare moment of 'not up to much.' You can see bugger-all from the kitchen itself, so they had come out here for chicken-scented sight seeing.



P41 – The scenery gets more rugged and mountainous the further east you go. I liked this one with the monochrome green of cultivated land contrasting with the variegated shades of the wild lands.



P42 – Stopped within the photogenically curved station of Generaalsnek. You can see the entire service train ahead of the S&B van. (Which is displaying a white wing light) Ahead of the train is the Transnet Pilot who had checked the points, even though we wouldn't be switching tracks.



P43 – We only managed one get proper run-by done at Generaalsnek Station. The rain was threatening again and we still needed to run through to Ficksburg for servicing and turning, and then run back to Kommandonek to bed-down for the night. (Well, that was the plan, anyway.)



P44 – Parts of that track were overgrown with a prickly salad of spikey things and thorny things. The guests with flip-flops and open sandals needed to tread with care, especially those with short trousers on! Note this unused passing track has iron pan sleepers.



P45 – Generaalsnek, 142 Miles (227 Km) out from Bloemfontein. South Africa metricated in 1973, but the railways continued to use the imperial system for signage.



P46 – This derelict station building has been the subject of a number of Attie's railway ghost stories involving 'Die Ou Stasiemeester', who still waves his lamp at unwary souls.



P47 – With 15F ‘Janine’ yelling to be away already, Dr. Smudge gives instructions to the lead locomotive crew for the moves to be made at Ficksburg. The faded signboard next to the big kettles is a road crossing warning board.



P48 – Out of all the smiling people on the train, it is the golf-capped Gordon who is giving me a bit of stink-eye. He was in a reasonable mood really and is about to playfully wag his finger at me for taking yet another candid Bennett pic.



P49 – The afternoon weather broke and we could see several isolated cloud bursts, including this one to the south of our position. We would ourselves be riding within an isolated burst of rain within the next ten minutes.



P50 – A window-framed kopjie.



P51 – We didn’t waste time in Ficksburg! As soon as the train was stopped and safely pinned to the tracks, the 12AR was cut off and she is seen trundling around to the gantries at the other end of the yard. The station is on a curve, so our guys were being extra careful and moving at a crawl.



P52 – Going gingerly around that blind curve. A moving steam locomotive can be dangerously quiet, especially when you become inured to hissing noises. Jeandre has just swung out for a better (and cooler) view and we would soon have passengers sticking their heads out as well.



P53 – With a yellow-uniformed audience in the shade of the canopy, the old goods shed is still in good nick, but looks a bit bare these days. In recent years, it was refrigerated and had cooling plant and containers arrayed alongside on the platform as well.



P54 – A pair of mounted policemen came clip-clopping by, while on duty for the neighbouring Cherry Festival that was operating. I was impressed with the calm, proud, alert demeanour of this equine, even after passing a certain big black hissing predator. I did notice that the rider wisely crossed the steam operations at the furthest track away.



P55 – This iron horse is 'escorted' by the hay-burning variety, as 'Janine' the 15F had also just been cut away from the train and is starting her own careful backup move towards the water gantries.



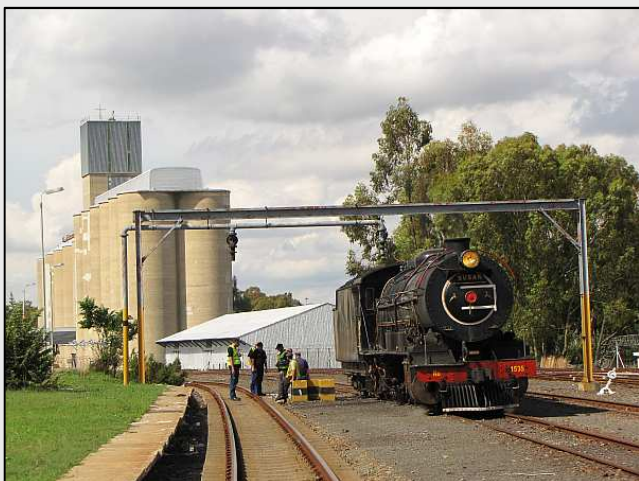
P56 – The 15F is also making her careful way offstage from the curved arena of Ficksburg Station. Hott-Nutts is almost of sight and yet he is only 'halfway deep' in the scene. These are the rails normally used for Transnet's trains



P57 – The palm trees of the bricked-up Ficksburg Station are still standing tall. In the foreground, Gordon makes his casual way to where the action is at the wrong end of the train.



P58 – Gordon made a pit-stop to wash his 'tekkies' in a handy puddle. I don't think the two horses dropped anything, but as cattle sometimes graze on the overgrown station platform, placing your feet requires some care!



P59 – Oh JOYOUS tidings!

There was no water at the gantry – and after it had been previously assured there would be water there too. Ficksburg has been prone to water problems in the past few years as the town's pumps break down or get vandalised, and due to an ineffectual, politicized town council, they take forever to be reinstated.

It is one reason why we will no longer stage the train at Ficksburg for the annual Cherry Festival.



P60 – Freight haulage, old school African style.

A bunch of African ladies carry their loads on top of their heads in a traditional scene that is becoming rarer in the urban landscape. The two ladies in the middle are using folded blankets as cranial padding.



P61 – With not much else to do, Alan (L), Aidan (M) and Dawie (R) sit on the highly laid rails and chat, while other crew members are scouting the area and looking for a local water shut off valve. They were not successful. (The local fire hydrants weren't working either.)

The 15F was left parked on the center road – with no need to back up to the water gantry.



P62 – Some of the guests were checking us out with curiosity and wondering what it was that we were up to. Our German-speaking PRO was off on a wild water valve hunt and this particular group of people were all primarily German-speaking.

We were planning to fill up here and then go to Kommandonek to doss for the night. But with no water here and no water there either, we would have to make arrangements to stay the night at Sandstone Estates to top up on borehole water.

We would thus turn one loco around here (the 12AR) and head back with the locomotives running tender to tender for another steam run and photographs. We would then stop at Kommandonek and run the train back east to Sandstone's Vailima halt for the night. The train would be parked with a locomotive at either end, pointing in opposite directions.



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