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[Wed, 9 April - Passengers at Boksburg East.](#)

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12th April 📅 Saturday 📅 Festival Day :



FP05 📷 A narrow gauge treasure romps amongst the Cosmos. .
(Pic by Aiden Mc. Carthy)

Today was the planned day off for the Reefsteamers gang. We wouldn't even need a locomotive minder during the day as the fires had been dropped, so no one had to miss the day out looking after the engine. We awoke to an even brisker morning than previously and topped up with another excellent breakfast. The debate was whether to wear short sleeve shirts or jackets, due to the sudden chills in the afternoon at the festival. Be warm later in return for the inconvenience of carrying a jacket around all day. The AEC Regal bus had spent the night waiting at the platform, as it was scheduled to leave at 8:30am. However, the time was put back to 9am. Some of the passengers were moaning around the bus long before then (Pic S01 below), as it stood on the puzzle bricks and with the windows cataracted by the morning dew.

We had our own transport display at the station. Some modern long haulage vehicles provided something mechanical to look at. The Ficksburg station is fortunate in that it still supports an industry. The old goods shed is actually used as a refrigerated store house for foodstuff, and recently, large diesel powered refrigerated containers have been laid out on the platform too. It would be a shame to have the Ficksburg station join the growing list of derelict and abandoned stations around South Africa.



S01 📷 Waitin' for the bus. With the clearstory coach in the background and the intact awnings to the left 📷 this could have been a photo taken 30 or 40 years ago.



S02 📷 A matching pair of Volvo articulated trucks, both operated by different companies, had arrived at the goods platform during the night. They were beautifully cleaned and prepared.



S03 📷 Is this Mauritius or the eastern Free State? Those palm trees impress me on every visit. Our main line coaches actually exceed the photo frame by two coaches on either end.

The bus was started and warmed up 15 minutes before departure, but we boarded in silence. The train was left nearly empty 📷 but some of the folk who'd visited the Sandstone Estates the previous day elected to stay with the train, and some of them chose to spend the day in the Ficksburg Town itself. (Pic S03 above.) I wondered if they had a yen for more civilized company?

Somehow the morning run in the rather crowded, but rather jovial bus didn't have the thrill of our late night ride 📷 but the low sun was kind to the scenery. I got a window seat so I enjoyed the scenery to the full but the windows were still a bit foggy for photography. The chatter on board the bus was boisterous, and we were being filmed for most of the way 📷 guaranteed to make anyone self conscious. A minor detail that demonstrated the age of the bus was the fact that the interior signs were all in English rather than being 📷tweetalige 📷 (Bilingual) One sign that amused everyone was the stern warning 📷Spitting is strictly prohibited. 📷 Eeeew!

The old bus ended up mixed up in a convoy of show-boat MG vehicles, making overtaking on the long driveway interesting! I felt for the drivers of the MG Owners club, having polished and prepared their vehicles, only to end up in a dust cloud. The convertibles were even worse off.

My slackened lower jaw was scraping idiotically on the driveway as we finally got off that charming old bus. There was a bewildering vista of action and movement. I just stood there with the camera pouch (The trademark black tool caddy left on the train this day) and just dithered a bit. I felt like a bee in a fruit jam factory. Where do I go first? I present my heartiest congratulations to the hosts and the participating clubs in the Sandstone Steam and Cosmos Festival.

What a show! This place was loaded with things to see and do, and it was an amazing feat to display such a multi faceted festival amongst the modern infrastructure of an active, operating farm.

In our steam and preservation community, there are a lot more professional and creative photographers than myself who tends to take point-and-click documentary photos. And I sampled as much action as I could on a rocking dodge truck isn't the most stable platform from which to aim your optics. (But it was a lot of fun trying.) Thus, I'll leave the artistic festival related shots to the more talented, patient (and tripod equipped) and instead present you with some photos from my perspective.



S04 It isn't only electronic circuits that have decreased in size over the years. Tractors, both static and moving, modern and vintage, were prominent through the festival day.

The tractor in the far background provided a live demonstration of ploughing with vintage equipment.



S05 General Sherman grows lustily as he confidently steals the show. Here he is about to do a nose dive off a freshly bulldozed sand ramp. The crew were dressed in the appropriate uniforms and head gear too.



S06 Almost as mesmerizing as Avril's Walshearts valve gear, the tracks and the suspension of this recently restored Sherman Tank were fascinating to watch. This amazing vehicle was surprisingly nimble in its one-track-active tight turns.



S07 Sandstone Zamboni. Instead of scraping ice from an ice rink, the Sherman Tank's playground was straightened after every two or three runs by this vintage caterpillar Bulldozer. Those poor cosmos flowers looked rather battered by the end of the day.



S08 Last rites, er ride. A scrapped VW Microbus is being trundled across the showground to be introduced to the Sherman Tank. That long-wheel based forklift handled the uneven ground surprisingly well.



S09 The rear air-cooled engine VW cars and transporters were famous for the horizontally opposed cylinder FLAT-four engines. The later designs for the VW Variant 911 and Transporters, with alternators and rear mounted fan, were later known as PANCAKE engines.



S10 The tank crew did a sloppy job. The steering box, headlamp cup, steering column, cooling ducts and hoses, and amazingly, the radiator, had survived two tank passes.

Our Chief Engineer, Andrew Noddy King, could probably have this vehicle up and running before afternoon tea n' biccies.



S11 The SA Armour Museum provided an awesome display of running military vehicles. Here I'm looking back at the Russian Bear as the convoy drives past the Groot Draai International Airport.



S12 The aftermath of some seriously loaded curry!

The lead vehicle (A gun tractor) had dropped a Cosmos Pink smoke marker bomb. We were the third vehicle in line and it was a total pink-out for a few seconds.





S13 ☞ Non-stop action. The outbound military convoy passes one of the three trains that ran the entire day. (With a varied roster of locomotives) Those signals have been recently rescued and set up for display.



S14 ☞ Aeroplane crossing. The steam train icon on that warning sign is a bit inappropriate for this moment. The Harvard was just starting its engine in this shot.



S15 ☞ One of two Harvards and a Tiger Moth that entertained us the entire day with flybys and acrobatics. (Not to mention the civilian aircraft.)



S16 ☞ The newly restored Bagnal was having transmission problems and didn't run much on Saturday. But the diesel loco still looks a picture resting on the turning triangle.



S17 ☞ One of two NG16s ☞ the heavy artillery of the Sandstone fleet. This engine is approaching the Hoekfontien station to pick up its train after fire cleaning and servicing.

That is the stock shed to the right ☞ crammed full of earth moving equipment, traction engines and two busses waiting hopefully for restoration.



S18 ☞ I wouldn't mind a lounge like this! The charming interior of the Hoekfontien station with an amazing array of pictures and a 2ft shunting yard and open air loco workshop just outside. (With resident Class 10CR)

Sandstone Estates must be one of the few South African organizations to actually understand the use of BACKGROUND sound, with steam train recordings playing mildly but realistically in the background.



S19 ☞ The ☞Mampoer☞ (Moon Shine) machine chugging away with a charming asymmetrical exhaust beat and occasional fruity backfires. Just one of many stationary gas and diesel engines on display.



S20 ☞ The fascination of an ☞open☞ engine. How many cams do you see in this picture? Including the lubricator at the right center ☞ there were four cams steadily clacking away.



S21 ☞ Cosmos! A trackside view of manicured Cosmos, blending into greensward and merging into the wild mountain scenery and the unsettled, bruised sky.



S22 ☞ A cloudburst takes the gap between two mountains ☞ photographed from a late afternoon run to Vailima behind Class NG16 No.153.

We got mildly rained out in the late afternoon.



S23 ☞Genteel revelry ☞ some traditional Afrikaans Voortrekker dancing. I bet those blokes were hot in their suits!



S24 ☞ This bulbous late 40s Ford truck, looking like it's eaten too many doughnuts, is remarkable that it's not in pristine showroom condition, but preserved with the more authentic looks of a hard working vehicle.

What a great day. My day at the festival was curly curtailed by an early call to fire lighting duty. According to the existing duty roster, I was scheduled to be on locomotive lighting duty at 8pm, to help get No.3052 ☞Avril☞ back into steam for the homeward run. The early (3:45pm) departure was caused by the suddenly chilly afternoon and the rain. Everyone scarpers for the wagon house and the Reefsteamers commandeered the bench just outside the door. That rain didn't stop me from waiting patiently in the queue for the coffee-on-the-move stand for a chocolate drink and then mooching around the wagon house interior to check out the exhibits in (dull) daylight. Johann Breydenbach, as the duty firelighter, got hold of me after a frantic ½ hour of rounding up his crew and security guards.

He had a valid reason for pushing for an early start. The wood that had been arranged to get ☞Avril's☞ fire re-started had been stored in the open DLJ coal wagon and had thus gotten wet in the rain. It looked as if we'd be for an interesting session of fire lighting. Seven of us road back (pun purely intentional) ☞ toolbox class, in the jolting ☞Patmobile.☞ Chris Saayman was riding shotgun, although he wasn't officially part of the fire lighting team.





S25 📷 5 of us riding tool-box class in the 📷Patmobile 📷 Pat Ackerman believes that if you drive fast the wheels skim over the top of dirt-road ruts. We could disprove that theory!



S26 📷 A reluctant fire that needed two loads of wood and some hydrocarbon-based medicine before it would eventually take hold.



S27 📷 Some diesel medicine for a reluctant fire 📷 using a coal shovel as a spoon. We had to feed the fire over about 30 minutes to get it to 📷take📷 and ready to accept more coal.

Johann is fit for an old boy, and scrambled like an apple scrumper right over into the load bed of the coal wagon and was soon tossing damp scrap wooden loading palettes overboard. I was taking them forward to the locomotive, while Chris Saayman was chasing a bottle of paraffin to get that fire going. We broke up those pallets using Avril's grate lever as a rather heavy-weight crowbar. I trod on the protruding nails a few times but luckily the thick heels of my safety boots prevented a date with the anti-tetanus injections. Chris laid the firebed and the wood, while Johann passed up the slightly mouldy timbers and I did my 📷break📷 dance.

The fire lit first time and initially looked quite promising. (Pic S26 above) But it was only the paraffin burning and the corners and ends of the damp wood. After a wait of about half an hour, Chris tried more wood. But it didn't help and so we had a whip around for some diesel money but only Chris Saayman had some. It was a refugee R100 note reluctantly pulled out of his back pocket and dolefully looked at in the rapidly darkening cab. Johann and I left our wallets and personal effects in our compartments. After discussion, and trying to recall the price of diesel fuel, we decided to take a 20l jerry can into town and get about 8 litres of dinosaur juice.

Johann and I took a walk through the grain elevators and into town 📷 going commando and climbing over a locked gate. We encountered Sakkie and Andries talking peacefully in the back street and collared them for the walk. I wondered if Johann didn't think I'd have the strength to carry a half full jerry can of fuel, or whether he just thought there would be some safety in numbers. We made an odd group at the gas station 📷 four of us standing around a jerry can, two of us in high visibility vests, Sakkie wearing his footplate beret and Andries in his navy blue para-military uniform.

We naughtily blew Chris's entire R100 note and it was indicative of the high fuel prices that carrying that R100 jerry can back to Avril's cab was no trouble weight wise 📷 although I did have a little trouble keeping up with Johann's typical jack-rabbit pace. I still have the bruises in my calf muscles

By this time, Andre van Dyk had invited himself onto the footplate, which was getting crowded! We fed the fire using a coal scoop as a medicine spoon and got the fire to take. Even so, it took us about 2 1/2 hours just to get to this stage, with a stable fire and the steam pressure was still at 50kPa. I could see Johann's wisdom in pulling us back early and starting the job 5 hours ahead of schedule. I wasn't actually annoyed with him for the early start at the festival 📷 bit even if I was, I would have forgiven him.

From this point on, it is a matter of sit and wait, and top up the lubricators. It wasn't too long before we at 200kPa and able to run the dynamo 📷 which, while sluggish, gave us some light to work by. The engine was in steam by 9:30pm and both Johann and I had been fed from the catering car. (Last year, the footplate crew were sometimes forgotten at meal times 📷 Hardie Visagie was the appointed footplate feed manager.) I made several walks to the power car at the opposite end of the train to fetch oil bottles sufficient for the journey ahead (2 red MH bottles and a green steam oil bottle.) Then an extra trip to fill up the crew's water bottle and a final trip to pinch two large lamb chops from the dining car. I ate mine immediately and gave Avril the bones. Johann battled with his pride and ate his an hour later!

While we were breathing life back into this 100 ton plus lump, the Reefsteamers crew were hosting a braai right on the platform in front of the Jehovah's Witnesses Kingdom Hall. Johann and I, both not being people persons, were content to quietly spend our time in the locomotive cab. We did have a number of visitors through the night, including one very garrulous chap who made up for our silence by talking non stop for about 45 minutes about his railway exploits and about the Colorado narrow gauge. Avril spoke to us in her own language, confidently and steadily coming back to life. In the occasional peace and quiet, when Johann and I were alone, we made two cups of footplate coffee. I also operated the injector frequently, practicing being gentle just as the cones lifted. I still struggle to operate the lever with my feet though.

We has some shunting to do 📷 to get the coal wagon back into the train and to get the entire train marshaled and ready to be off the following morning. Chris Saayman did the shunting, and Johann controlled the shunt. The new fire was so hot, Avril didn't need feeding, so she ran with only one man in the cab. The shunting was enlivened by the fact that Johann Breydenbach's hand signals were hard to see, because of a combination of a weak signaling lamp and the blocked line of vision of a curved station. We eventually set up a relay signaling system and finally, radios.

We coupled up to the coal hopper, by now drawing quite a crowd as they could hear the action going on. Avril's steam and smoke formed an eerily even and solid blanket of smog under the goods shed roof and steam could be seen whiping out in sheets at the opposite eaves. Three of the side-doors of the coal wagon were dropped, to facilitate the parking of the 📷Patmobile📷. It was tricky parking, driving off the platform and diagonally across the angled doors lying on the platform 📷 and not getting the front chin of the bakkie (Pick-up) mixed up with the leftover coal. The move was done with no new dents in the vehicle or the wagon. Some concern as expressed about having the car loose in the wagon and it was tied down the next morning.

The train was put back together without incident and the water tanker topped off for the last time under the gantry. The original knockoff time for the firefighters would have been 2:30am but we knocked off at 1am. The crew were hoping to be out of Ficksburg by 3am 📷 but there was a delay because of pilot availability issues and we only got out of there by 4:30am.

Departure time was neither here or there for me. I had my last shower on the road and sneaked into the Umgeni compartment, aided and abetted by the recently greased doors. I fell asleep quickly and distinctly remember dreaming of watching a tractor parade, and watching an enclosed cab Massey Ferguson tractor, in blue and cream, rolling by with half the rear wheel nuts having been substituted with licorice allsorts As I warned the dream driver about the dream wheels nuts being incorrect on the dream wheels, I clocked my elbow against the wall mounted latch for the top bunk 📷 and awoke to the gentle rhythmic rocking and the soaring beat of a certain special steam engine hauling us steadily through the pre-dawn darkness.

We had just started our journey home.

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