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

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13th April Sunday Homeward Bound:



FP06 A trainload of passengers and memories in equal proportions
Class 15F No.3052 Avril steps out in the early stages of of homeward bound trip.. .
(Pic by Aiden Mc. Carthy)

The mood on the homeward bound steam train was a mixture of relaxed and somewhat reminiscent. People were spread out over all the coaches, and quite a few actually stayed in their compartments. The public center coaches of the train wasn't exactly bustling. Many of us were just sitting quietly and drinking in the morning scenery as we left the embrace of the Malutis and headed towards the platteland (Flat lands) of the Orange Free State. We gave the Vailima Halt a farewell salute. The track gang were still at work and we had to run through the speed restriction once again.

The final full-catered breakfast was lingered over, but the kitchen staff seemed anxious and got going straight away on their lunch preparation. (Pic U01 below) A look at the menu would reveal why, as this would be quite an elaborate meal. Even the house-keeping fellows got involved with the work although you can see in the picture below, that the Safety Officer chatted briefly and then wisely vamoosed. The pudding would have been suitable for signal aspect training a colourful riot of three flavoured jellies and custard.



U01 The Reefsteamers Trains accountants (bean counters) are hard at work.



U02 Washing up after breakfast the second last session of washing up these hard working gals would have to do.



U03 Waiting patiently for our locomotives at a scruffy but still intact Bethlehem station passenger platform.

We arrived at the Bethlehem Depot in fine style and in good time, although the footplate crew were battling with a lot of slack in the coal and the resultant ash build up. (That same ashy coal caught a certain loco minder out just a week later with one dead and one dying locomotive at 3am in the morning.) The coaches were dropped off at a still clearly signposted Platform No.2 and the engine, as well as her bogied entourage, reversed back into the Bethlehem Depot for servicing.

The electrics were still there from where they had been stored on Thursday so their pantographs were lifted and they were re-energized. Only about half the people demounted the train. The rest were either having a snooze, and the more trip savvy were already starting to do their packing, taking the opportunity of having the train standing still.

Some of the fellows went on a prowl of the stripped goods yard tracks. Some discarded but still intact cantenary insulators and hangars somehow ended up stashed in one of the empty battery boxes of the coaches. (These long boxes act as useful under-floor tool and spares panniers once the obsolete batteries are removed.) There was more interest in looking for the dates on the pulled-out track sleeper screws. The oldest date found, on a rather corroded head, was 1933 so some of that track had just made a ¾ century before being

lifted. One interesting feature of the old sleeper bolts is that there have a shallow square nubbin on top of the domed head. This nubbin flattens out if the bolt is driven in place, and remains intact if the bolt is correctly but laboursomely screwed into place.

Interesting souvenirs but perhaps a bit heavy to be used as key-rings.

It was a bit disconcerting to be talking with the marketing guys and discussing ideas for improved communications on our next trip and we were being filmed from a camera monopod.

Some much better and far more attractive souvenirs were the full set of locomotive number plate pin badges as shown below. (At only R50 each) These weren't prominent during the tour actually being hidden away under the bar counter in the busy routine of serving drinks on a moving train. (Joey de Beer as the Bar Manager.) Each one of the restored Reefsteamer Locomotives and each one of the current SIA exchange students (25NC No.3488 Enchantress, 15F No.3052 Avril and GMAM No.4079 Lyndie Lou) all have a representative badge. (The SIA Rhodesian Railways Diesel Class DE2 No.1027 isn't represented in this range though.) The rectangular badge at the bottom of the picture is the general Reefsteamers badge. It was the last one in stock and I brought it.



U04 A slightly out of focus photo of a 1933 sleeper bolt salvaged as a souvenir. Yeah steam train people generally have their cheese sliding off the cracker a bit.



U05 A range of locomotive number plates as badges. The bright spots in the photo are the reflections of the bar lighting.



U06 The new haulage combo backs onto our train note the canopy of the Patmobile and the Reefsteamers riding on top of the coal pile. Notice the red marker for the next dead track.

The new tractive power was finally coupled onto the front end after some delay (Pic U06 above) and then whirring through the station on a center road. Mike Thiel was snapping photographs all the way from the fireman's window, and getting revenge by taking a photograph of me, for a change. The coupling operation was invisible to us from the platform as it was done at the far end but the smoke column apparently wafting from the roof of the electrics gave us a clue. The final coupling was a bit awkward and dangerous with many passengers milling around the front end of the train but fortunately the radios were in use. In fact, the brake pipe connection was performed by the Transnet Pilot.

The trip home behind the double-headed electrics was uneventful as far as Vereeniging. We had our last train-board meal too, Sunday lunch with a combo of strongly herbed chicken and rolled silverside. More people were packing up and the mood was definitely mellowing out. Knitting needles had come out in some compartments, and a single Model Railroader Magazine was read by nearly everyone in the bar car. The North Eastern Horizon was getting hazy and it looked as if we'd be heading home into a high veldt thunderstorm. The last crew change was performed at Kroonstad (Pic U08 below). There would be no more service stops until we arrived at Boksburg East and let the prisoners loose.

We ended up stalled for an hour at Rooival, not far past Vereeniging. It turns out the trailing electric unit was experiencing problems with dragging brakes. The resulting heat build up was so severe that they almost lost the tire from the wheel. So the disgraced electric had to be cut off the train, towed away and the surviving can-o-sparks coupled back on again. I had taken a snooze during the changeover and only realized upon awakening that our train wasn't moving so no pics. I was amused to see Coen Pretorius striding rapidly down the center ballast in bare feet, and then using a suspended guitar-fret like cluster of signal cables on which to stand and hoist himself into the train. I'd swear Coen's feet were manufactured by Dunlop and graded for quarry use.

After that delay, we bowled our way through to the high veldt, the single remaining box cab up front handling the train with ease. Hurray for multiple units! I'm always impressed by the number of surviving semaphore signals along the line but wonder how long they'd survive. Meanwhile, the sky was getting steadily darker to our right, forming an increasingly dramatic backdrop to the scenery. More people were packing up by now, and the kitchen car was starting to be sorted out.



U07 Cummon! Let's get going already!



U08 Crew change at Kroonstad. Notice a full deck as the figure on the left is the trainee fireman also heading forward to ride pilot. (And wasn't even on the roster.)



U09 Classic view of a flat land coal-burning Power Plant. The natural evolution of Steam Power.

As you can see in pics U10 and U11, the fatigue was catching up. I always take at least one picture of a sleeping Reefsteamer on a trip and this trip's victim was Piet Buffels Steenkamp. (Because I can out-run him.) Actually, I'm exaggerating a little just as we hadn't worked all that hard but the rhythm of a train with the warm afternoon sun streaming in through the west-side windows, is quite soporific. We received a sugar boost in the form of custom-made Reefsteamers chocolate coins (Pic U12 below). The R and S make sense to Rands and Sents, if you excuse the forced spelling.





U10 ☹️ A very rare sight in the bar car. Chief Engineer Andrew "hobby" King caught actually relaxing for a change. Note the ubiquitous cup of tea at his elbow.



U11 ☹️ More relaxation ☹️ Piet Steenkamp pushes up zeds and rocks gently in his steam hauled cradle as he catches up the sleep that he missed in the early morning shift.



U12 ☹️ Unstable currency (thermal) which leads to inflation if too much is eaten ☹️ custom made Reefsteamers chocolate money.

The rest of the trip was uneventful ☹️ except for a bird strike on the ☹️Patmobile.☹️ (Pic U13 below) What was ironic was that after concerns were voiced about the bakkie (pick-up) shifting in the likely to be wet gondola, the tow hitch had been tied to the gondolas end panels. And the front end was padded with soft bags anyway. We crossed the Vaal River (Pic U14 below), still under wires and made our way back through the big bad smoky city. One industry, that has quite an extensive network of privately owned lines, is Mittal Steel. (Pic U15 below) They get a lot of razzing from us, as that's where many a good SAR steam locomotive met their incandescent end in the electric arc furnaces.



U13 ☹️ Bird-strike! The train-hauled ☹️Patmobile☹️ lost the right hand headlamp lens, to a bird that had somehow managed to fly in behind the water tanker and low enough to prang the car above the coal pile. It's going to be a very interesting insurance claim



U14 ☹️ Crossing the Vaal River that separates the Transvaal from the Free State is always a milestone.



U15 ☹️ Boo! The fascinating sprawling complex of Mittal Steel, complete with private railway network and this locomotive. Many steam locomotives met their final end here.

Well we wended our way home now on the four track high irons and under an increasingly troubled sky (Pic U16 below) and were back into Commuter Train territory. It was time to say goodbye to our travel mates and in many cases, new friends, after a great weekend together. (Pic U17 below)

The surviving electric unit didn't make the entire journey. It had to be uncoupled and shunted out of the way as there was a wiring fault in the cantenary. Thus, we spent a few extra minutes in the station of ☹️President☹️ (Pic U18 below) to get the steam engine active and fired up a few minutes early, and we made the last miles of our journey quite literally under our own steam. The evening grew dark quickly and it was virtually completely dark as we chugged along past our own depot. The arrival and offloading at Boksburg East, at about 6:30, was dark, wet and unpleasant. It was a little surreal doing things in torch light and it wasn't the sociable lingering farewell that some of us expected. Everyone just wanted to get out of there.



U16 ☹️ Our home coming miles under the banner of a gloomy sky. It would later start raining as we were disembarking.



U17 ☹️ Many farewells as we enter the home stretch.



U18 ☹️ Avril takes the train in President Station after the electric had to uncouple due to a failure in the cantenary. So we arrived at Boksburg East quite literally under our own steam.

The service crew had no choice but to run the locomotive around the train and service the engine in the dark and the rain. But the squall passed quickly and we were soon on our way again, with just a hint of wheel slip from Avril. It didn't take Brendon Anderson, from Umgeni, long to realize that he could now bag a bunk in his very own private compartment. Apparently one of the other guys was snoring badly, and was so deeply asleep that even when they raised his bunk and let it drop, several times, he wouldn't wake. The other victim, beneath me, was about to throw a sandal. And I, of course, didn't hear a thing!

But it doesn't beat the time that I honestly thought Stewart Currie (Editor RSSA Newsletter.) had passed away in his sleep early one freezing cold morning at Bethlehem, as he was lying slack and open mouthed, his tongue canted between his molars, no chest movement whatsoever and his still playing bed-time radio having slipped off from his ear, across his face and the casing was being supported by his lower teeth.

As much as we had enjoyed ourselves hosting and crewing on this trip, it was still a relief to be finally squealing and chuntering through the carriage shed and into the yard. About a third of the team bounced out quickly and naughtily disappeared, while the kitchen crew worked on unloading the kitchen car and the service crew prepared the engine. Class 15F No.3052 Avril would be running the next day, taking a Shongololo Express Train to NASREC, so the fires weren't dumped but rather, cleaned and then banked for the night. With a team of four people working on the engine, it was cleaned and serviced in about 15 minutes. Andrew King occupied himself with looking for wiring and adapters to rig up ☹️ground power☹️ for the stationary train ☹️ as the three guests from Umgeni Steam railway would be spending the night in the yard, and it wouldn't be economical to run the generator van all night just for three people.

After locomotive servicing, the bird-strike was plucked in running injector overflow water and taken away.

We gathered for a last and traditional cup of tea in the club before dispersing. The very successful Free State Explorer was over and we all took good memories of the Sandstone Steam and Cosmos Festival home with us.

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