

Normally I get involved with the Cherry prep the night before, packing my stuff and needling the fire-lighters. This year I had to deliver electrical terminals on the morn so I wasn't at the depot to catch the morning prep. Sakana was tasked to light the fire at 3am, so unusually, there was no midnight activity at the depot anyway.

This trip turned out to be a lot of fun. As Reefsteamers is up to the whistle-cap in loco trainees, it was decided to roster three of them for this trip as it may well be the last time that we run the Cherry Festival trip. (Transnet have nearly doubled the YQ prices.) With all the trainees on board, the loco shifts were short and sociable, and it was fun just watching those guys enjoy themselves on their first long distance steam experience.

The coach staff, on the other hand, worked their tails off. The catering and waitron staff took the gamble of making the meal servings as buffets. The food portions would tend to be larger as people help themselves, but it would reduce the perennial bottleneck of trying to dish up plates of food from the kitchen. The system worked well and eliminated the problem of people waiting for ½ hour to get their meals with the pre-laid servings of old.

We did well this year with little in the way of mechanical issues and the old girl performed like a champ. The combination leak in the clack and sellars valves was attended to (unsuccessfully) but that was a pre-existing fault. Some of the brakes dragged a bit under 'electric vacuum'. The generator ran great in its new location and has really surprised us with the over 30% improvement in fuel consumption.

Thus, a successful trip and IF this is the last, it is a worthy end-marker to about 6 years of running the Cherry Festival train. We are going to try and negotiate that inflated YQ cost but we aren't too hopeful. Maybe once our debts are paid off we can afford to run a loss-making flagship trip once again.



P01 - What's strange about this scene? It is SUNNY – this year's trip was the first primarily sunny Cherry Run that we've had for years and it was a pleasure departing our depot without rain sneaking through under the coach doors.



P02 - Being short on porters this year and the few we had distracted with other things – passengers mostly loaded their own stuff. But the smarter passengers quickly realized that it is quicker to load up directly through the windows.



P03 - Hott-Nutts becomes Wett-Nutts as he surfaces for air in the 15F's tender and is sun-blinded. A heavy plastic bag added as an extension to the water tower's spout had come off and plopped straight into the tender's water tank.



P04 - Wett-Nutts takes another dive. We had to get that plastic bag out of there otherwise it would get sucked into the injector's water inlet and block the works. They never did find that bag and shut the tender's baffle gates instead.



We did well with the frequently troublesome water hoses this year. The only issue was the tender's water coupler losing its tail sleeve on Thursday night and swamping the track works. I got grumped at for that one...



P06 – At the start of the long trip, the trainee's hi-vis vest is still sparkling clean and the fireman is still smiling. Note the steel cup hanging on the handbrake handle – soon removed under the oscillative movement of the towed loco.



P07 – The rods had been cleaned during a busy short week. In the foreground is the stained and SAR fitter-battered ear of the expansion link and we are looking along the gleaming angled length of the eccentric rod.



P08 - Alan Lawton briefs the security staff before the trip and is advising them to lock doors on the off-side of a platform. These people really did their jobs and were the bane of thieving skankers trying their luck around the train.



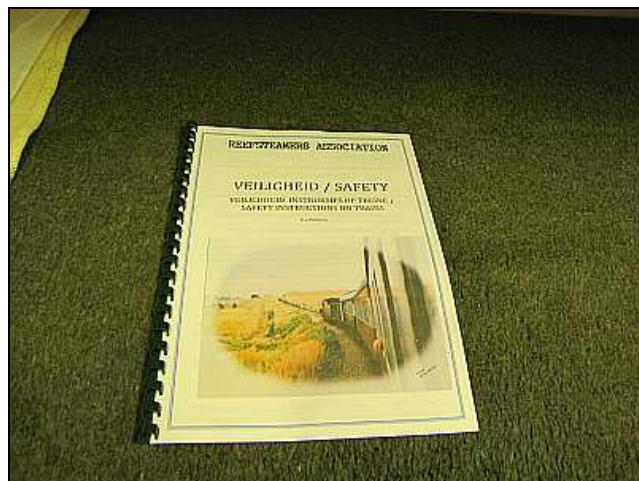
P09 – Here is a typical bed made up with two pillows, double sheets and a pair of institutional grey blankets. The weather was generally so warm, nearly everyone slept on TOP of their beds throughout the trip.



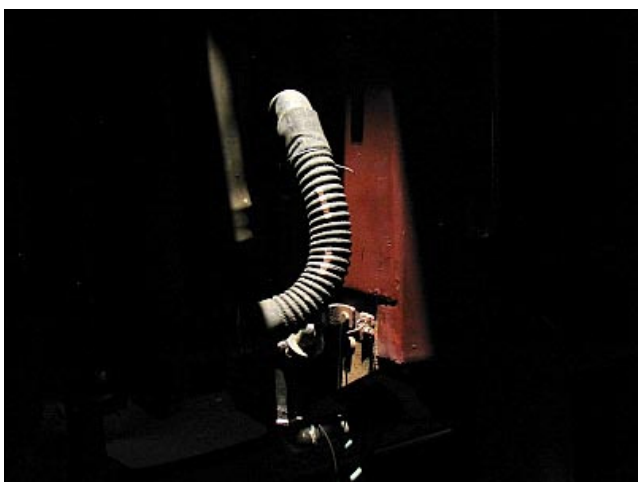
P10 – Sample of a complimentary baby bubbly as organized by Coen Pretorius as a French Stirrup to send the passengers off in style. Appropriately, that rail-basher printed onto the label IS the 15F No.3046.



P11 – The offset bunks of a silver class compartment – as installed by a failed tourism company. Although the bed rails are too deep and the finish is amateurish, the design permits headroom and easier climbing into the upper bunk.



P12 – All the compartments were issued with a safety booklet. It's quite necessary from a legal point of view if a passenger does something stupid and they were previously made aware of the risks, Reefsteamers cannot be sued.



P13 – A spot-lit vacuum brake pipe within the carriage shed. Clifford Matthee made sure he went through all the coach brakes and running gear two weeks previously. (The fireman trainees did the work under his instruction.)



P14 – Dysie brings in a big box of her 'stash' – home-made shortbread. She would be line-siding and joining us for only one night. She made sure each loco-crew and each loco-minder had a bag of shortbread waiting for them in the cab.



P15 – Dysie takes a high-resolution picture of this trip's YQ form – which lists all the stations en-route as well as the expected times. She would need that to plan her insane line-side sprints between stations to keep up with the train.



P16 – A long zoom pic of Safety Officer Clifford Matthee is loafing around the tail end of the train after his preparatory paperwork had been ground out.



P17 - Definitely a motley crew. The outbound crew is unusual as it has four members instead of the usual three. There would be no need for a pilot to ride on the footplate under tow, so we could stock up to the limit of four.



P18 – Rail Car. How to shunt a Tazz. The parking was a bit wild and this passenger narrowly avoided getting boxed in. I didn't have the heart to tell him that old wagon dock tends to flood in rainy weather.



P19 – Because of points failure on our route, we were diverted to Elsburg which meant we had to turn the entire train around. Thus, we are trundling along the depot bypass track while a quad of mismatched toasters pass by.



P20 – Some additional signage on the Power Van's staff toilet. After several days of using scat bags at stand-still, the toilets do get a bit fragrant. But while the wheels are rolling, it is safe to take deep breaths.



P21 – Alan tastes the air with his tongue as the train moves off. We have done our shunting to the inside tracks of the dead lines. Although it was an unusual move, the tower people were able to handle it. Our depot is to the left



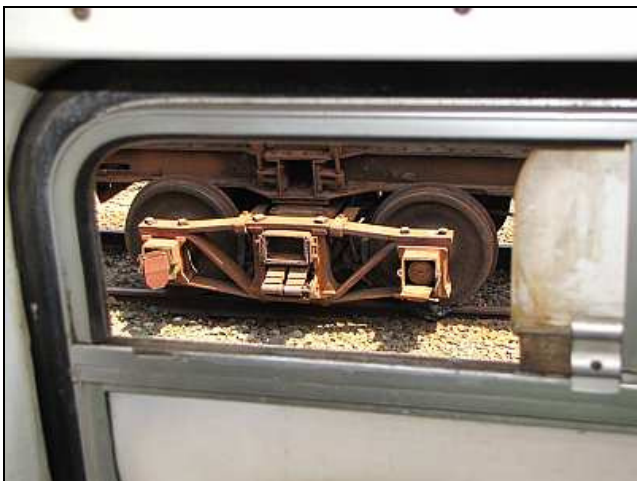
P22 – Coenie (right) had brought in train DVD's to play back but the passengers weren't really interested. The subsequent slide show would normally have one or two people watching all weekend. (Shown is an O&K of SHT.)



P23 – The pregnantly plump PRO ('Smidge') has taken her station at the start of the trip and has already gotten started on the weekend's knitting quota. She didn't have too many problems or issues to resolve over the weekend.



P24 – Close up of a Timken bearing set in the wagon repairs line. Note how the three hex nuts for the cover are safety-tabbed into place.



P25 – While sneaking a quick pee while the train was standing still (MUCH easier to aim) I got this picture of an ancient arch-bar truck through the ungenerously sized sliding window of the toilet compartment.



P26 – The lunch box in tow before Coach No.1. We had two distinct grades of coal in the two coal bunkers on the coal handling wagon. The rear bunker had the slightly softer but definitely larger chunks of coal.



P27 – Cliffie gets a start on his trip-long task of recording all of our train's movements, station pass-throughs and stops on the 960km long journey. Note the layout of a third-class Coupe – the corner sink is under the hinged desk.



P28 – 'Hott-Nutts' (George) and 'Bent' (Simon) chill out and work their way through a large bag of biltong. Simon was one of three trainees who had relatively light duties due to their numbers, and he had a whole LOT of fun on this trip.



P29 – The first official catering job was to peel these onions. These laminated tubers were lethal and had the catering girls in puckered-sinus tears. I could smell those onions more than a coach's length away.



P30 – Typical lounge car scene. As always, the lounge car was the social hub of the train – aided by being one of two coaches with air conditioning. Someone had forgotten to put a mains plug on the water cooler though.



P31 – Rhyrnard Pretorius (Coen's Boet) is sorting out multi-coloured baseball caps for sale – said caps with embroidered pictures of locomotives on them. They also had a range of locomotive-printed cups for sale as well.



P32 – The black-foot tribe. Some off-duty crew members peeled their shoes off at every opportunity while the rest of us just ... wouldn't.



P33 – The original Victor. As one of the very few paid staff, he would be tasked to the more menial jobs such as ash cleaning, coal trimming and scat bag duty. Apart from some very early mornings, he didn't have much work to do.



P34 – The mid-Free State was under scattered thundershowers and the flat-lands made it easy to see the individual cloud bursts right up to the wide horizons.



P35 – A Coach No.1 passenger’s eye-view of the grease stop at Wolwehoek Station. They were pretty strict about not letting passengers and off-duties leave the train on the intermediate stops. That’s Louis in the far distance.



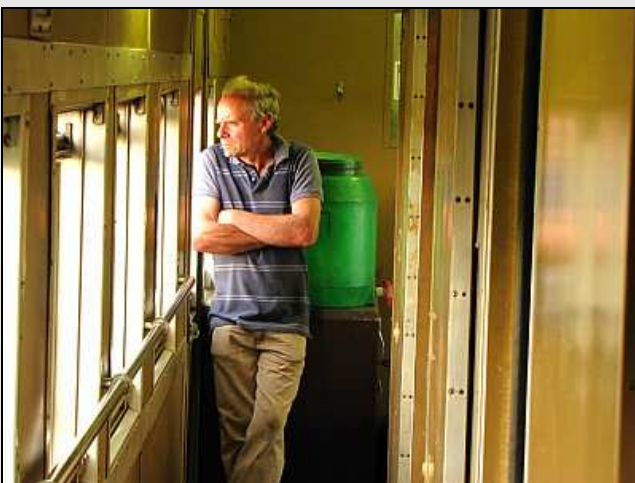
P36 – In the humid confines of Kango’s kitchen, the ladies are working on the shredded-chicken pie filling. As always, the catering crew actually worked longer and harder hours than the footplate crew, as the chefs never worked shifts.



P37 – Windmill in the rain. One of the scattered thunder showers caught up with us (or we caught up with the shower.) The brief bout of rain was a cooling relief on the warm outbound trip.



P38 – Transnet Traction frequently has trouble with vacuum exhausters as they are being used less and less. We aren’t doing too bad here, although they tended to start the train moving with the rearmost brakes still applied. Lotsa squeal!



P39 – Do I look like a ‘people person’ to you? Engineering Manager Andrew King is more comfortable with machines than being with a lot of people. But that angry, shut-out crossed-arms pose is actually just the way he stands.



P40 – Most of us battled to get some sleep because of the weird shifts, environmental noise such as footsteps, spring loaded doors and toilet flushes, and the confined quarters. These guys had no such problems! Zzzzzz!



P41 – Single Track Working. A boop and a baby bump end up rubbing navels en-passant in the narrow coach corridors.



P42 – This truck driver gave us quite a playful accompaniment on his horns as we overtook him on the flat plains. But then his ego took over and he took off, horns blaring all the way and made a right twit out of himself.



P43 – It isn't only dogs who poke their nose into the slip stream – steam train people do it too. Attie (foreground) and Hennie both show the classic elbows-down and bums-out posture of the gravel n' brake shoe fume sniffers.



P44 – The optimized and ventilated generator room was a great success. Even with the large John Deere engine running, it was actually cooler in here than in the coach compartments. The generator ran without problems.



P45 – The waiters were setting up early for the evening meal as the dining car wasn't fully set up yet. Rhyhard Pretorius shows the new Reefsteamers apron with our Class 12AR embroidered over the chest.



P46 – A typical place setting. The center piece is darkly varnished driftwood set out with 'holly' berries which sort of resemble cherries. The effect worked. The serviettes are tucked into what is meant to be a votive candle holder.





P47 – One commodity in short supply on any long distance trip on a Reefsteamers train is drinking water. A casually chatting Simon is leaning on the crew's fresh water reservoir. (The coach tanks are for service water only.)



P48 – We change crews and grease locos at Kroonstad. Crews and passengers are allowed a patella flex and a smoke break. The purposeful looking pair striding away from us are going bogie-sniffing and hot-box checking.



P49 – Naturally the steam locomotive drew most of the attention. Many passengers arrived late-ish at the depot and didn't have time to check out their iron horse while they were packing and settling in. They got their chance now.



P50 – A tired but happy Mini-Mienie (aka Victor) has just booked-off. He should be passing out as fireman next year but already looks the part. The satchel is the train's paper work and needs to be formally handed to the next crew.



P51 – The lead toaster of a set of two. Apart from slightly weak brake vacuum they did well and this was one year that we didn't have to 'assist' the toasters with steam. (Last year was a classic with blown traction motors, et al.)



P52 – Even the Reefsteamers Janney couplers look well-kept. What I found interesting here was that the steam locomotive, with a longer rigid wheel base, has a shorter coupler shank than the pivot-bogied Class 6E1.



P53 – Mini-Mienie got bitten by the lubricator as, for some reason, he removed the oil filler plug on a pressurized device without opening the drain valve or using cooling drench water. The 2<sup>nd</sup> pilot crew did the same thing!



P54 – Not the safest of jobs at jobsite, but it has to be done. ‘Cupcake’ Le Roux does the greasing. Note that fireman Johann is using a home-made rectangular-bodied oil feeder for the slippery stuff.



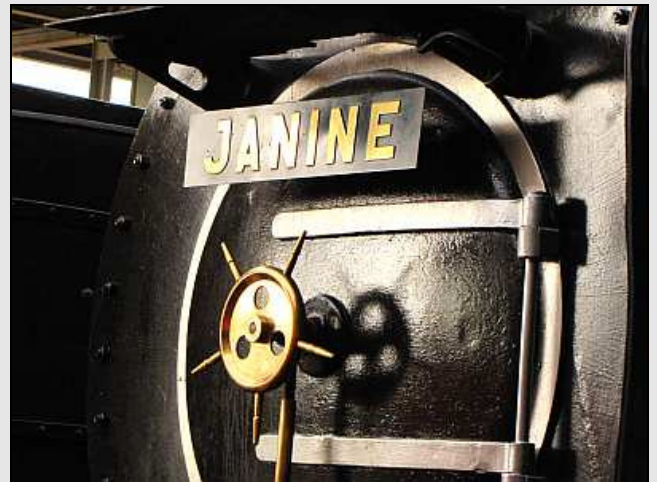
P55 – The Engineering Manager and the Safety Director. In this still picture it looks like ‘Noddy’ King is getting royally crapped-on with wagging finger n’ all. It was, in fact, an amiable conversation.



P56 – Nicolas rode as a paying passenger but donned his vest and got involved with small non-technical jobs here and there. Here he is cheerfully carting drinking water (hopefully) for the Lounge Car’s water cooler.



P57 – Generation Gap. Odd to think that the hauling toasters are also technically obsolete at over 35 years of age. They are testimonies to the wisdom of the policies of standardization and in-house production of ye olde SAR.



P58 – This is my anti-van Dyk insurance. Little Janine’s proud papa will do me an injury if he doesn’t get to see his daughter’s name on the locomotive at least once during the trip. He paid for the naming rights, so it’s only fair



P59 – Back to sniffing bogies and playing patty-cake with the axle bearing caps. Apart from the slightly tardy brakes, no mechanical problems were found. Checking the other side is more fun in close proximity to the toilet scat pipes.



P60 – ‘Beret-bach’ and ‘Cuz Rob’ are just about ready to book-off and just in time for dinner too! Notice the oil spatters on Rob’s previously brand new hi-vis vest. They don’t stay clean for long in a steam locomotive’s cab!



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