

1). RFS 2013 – DAY 4. STAGED AT BETHLEHEM:

The day started with a surprise early stop at the Bethlehem goods yard, as the toaster crews ran out of duty hours, and our proposed line in Bethlehem station needed to be left open for an extra train. So, I got some different scenery for the morning.

The servicing of the locomotives was unremarkable as we have done this several times already. The guests missed it though, as they were having breakfast. But an unusual event was the staging of the coaches within the Diesel Depot for the first time. It was convenient for crew access, nice for the passengers to ramble around and better for security all round.

The guests and the PR people would go by road to Clarens for the day. Clarens is an arty town associated with the scenic Drakensburg Golden Gate area. They would have lunch and speciality beers there. We did some prep and coal loading, and had Italian-style foot-long BLT rolls for lunch before most of the crew, staff and kitchen folks hit the heat-triggered bonk and went to top-deck the sponges for an afternoon nap in the warm, quiet coaches.

We had a surprise photo-session in the afternoon, under the edge of an approaching anvil-headed thunderstorm. Some of the guests remained outside and were trying to capture the lightning flashes on CCD plates. The evening passed into a short rainy night and we would start preparing before dawn for a double-headed steam run into the Eastern Free State.



P01 – One of the irritations on our tours and trips is the frequent lack of communication. It isn't sloppiness though. It is just that things happen so quickly and decisions need to be made on-the-spot that there is often no time to inform all relevant parties. Our night run terminated in the shunting yard due to track occupation at Bethlehem Station and the toaster crews clocking-out on their hours. I was a somewhat confused individual seeing this as my wake-up view and unsure if I should go forward to tend locos or not.



P02 – Turns out it was an official stop after all. So I got a short shift of loco minding both engines from about 1am until 6. I was looking forward to some tripod-aided sunrise pictures but the sky clouded over at sunrise. Sigh... The 15F, surprisingly, behaved okay as she had a good sized bank of coal already. The 'little' 12AR was reluctant to go anywhere above 700 as she had no thermal mass – and the fresh bank wouldn't burn without raking. I chose not to shake the fires, even with keeping the ash chutes closed.



P03 – A front view of the reluctant old tea pot at first-light. It turned out to be a pleasant morning with a nice consistent breeze. (See the smoke trails!) Notice the classic simple, but still effective, SAR-style biplate fire hydrant marker on the left.



P04 – Not a pretty shot, but an educational one, showing the full length of our tour train. Behind the 15F's water canteen is the works caboose, then a day-sitter, then a back-up tanker, the coal handling wagon, a DZ gondola, another loco water tank and then the passenger train itself.



P05 – Luna the Silvery joined me and kept me silent company in the morning. ‘Susie’ the 12AR started picking up steam at about 5pm after I pushed the fire halfway forward and put a little bank at the back. We could have a good clean out at the Bethlehem MPD in just an hour or so.



P06 – The 15F was happy enough with a full width bank of coal – I just knocked the top off, made a front slope on the bank and then put a skim layer on. I was just DYING to blow the whistle though. Why should the train’s contents sleep while I am again awake at unconsecrated hours?



P07 – With the occupation issues, the steam locomotives and the service wagons went on ahead through the station and into the yard. We couldn’t move the passenger train as it had the scat bags all set out already, and a train was still due. The sleepers were later moved from the goods yard into the station by this friendly diesel crew. Thanks guys!



P08 – As an added touch of luxury, the TFR diesel crew even pinned the sleeper train down for us – showing their fitness and flexibility by doing it from the platform side. However, we later checked the ‘pinning’ ourselves and applied scotches. Note the neat headphone/ear muff type crew radio this young man is wearing.



P08 – While breakfast is ‘on’, Coenie-raad is seen doing cable tie patrol after patiently putting the scat bags on for the SECOND time that morning. It was double the ‘fun’ and in the confined space alongside a station platform too.



P10 – Poor Coenie puts up with a lot of crap from the rest of us! Jeandre evilly threatens to plant his toes up that invitingly elevated rump. Luckily for Jeandre’s continued existence and functionality, Coenie is an easy going-soul.



P11 – The breakfast was winding down and the prep for lunch was already underway. These 'home-made' fully-loaded 'subway-style' BLT rolls were a good choice for what would turn out to be a hot day. This food was for crew and staff only ... the guests would be lunching at Clarens.



P12 – Anybody want to hire a train station? This placard was posted on the main doors for the station building.



P13 – Meanwhile, both anvils had been switched pointy-ends Southwards and had been run back from the turning triangle. 15F No.3046 had been run around to the rear of the service train (cf P04), and is pulling the wagons out for shunting, leaving the day-sitter coach and caboose behind.



P14 – Here they are. These two were at the front of the morning service train movement. It was thus very easy to just drop them off here conveniently out of the way, and then to carry on with both locos straight into the turning triangle past the diesel fuelling plant.



P15 – Looking down the classic single points ladder for the diesel locomotive shed. This backing-up move was to get the coal handling wagon cut off away on its own track for easier access for later if needed. The two diverging tracks in the foreground are for the repair shed and you will notice they are rusty from disuse.



P16 – The 12AR and assorted crew members just got to hang around and watch the shunting. They weren't sure if Susie needed to be moved later, and she had raw coal on the grates anyway (From the turning operation) – which could jam the grates if it was shaken up. So the fire needed to burn down a bit.



P17 – The coal handling wagon is spotted on its own for easy access, while in the background, the trio of water tankers can be seen being pushed back towards the workshop's two approach tracks.



P18 – Three tankers were now parked in the 'corner pocket', in front of the workshop, and within easy reach of a fire hydrant around the corner. The assorted Transnetters and Spoories had come out to watch the show.



P19 – Meanwhile, Dawie and Jeandre were checking out 'our' two toasters that were parked here the night before ... even with all the steam action going on! Just goes to show how complacent we become about being with steamers.



P20 – Beware of the steam engine. Has a personality and will of her own. May have sharp edges and hot surfaces. May contain traces of nuts.



P21 – Even though our crews are quite competent, we still need to use a Transnet shunter upon entry into the yard – acting like a pilot. He would also need to let us know which tracks to keep clear as not to hinder the normal operation of the depot. Johann Breydenbach was driving at the time.



P22 – This poor old caboose hasn't moved for several years – that is a crossover track for the sand bins. Notice how shiny the tanker wheels are after their long run.



P23 – Although the caboose has seen some vandalism and is starting to lose its fittings, it is still quite restorable. But we haven't made an offer of repatriation as we don't really have a use for it. The moiré pattern effect in the photo is the still-intact insect screen over the smashed glass.



P24 – The future of the Bethlehem Depot is clouded with ever-reducing rail traffic and there may come a day where this place becomes disused and derelict as well. There are only two diesels on shed today and we never saw more than 5 at a time for the entire stay.



P25 – You would expect to find derelict signal frames or the plinth of a long-gone Van Schoor machine. I found these long-disused radio charger racks poignant of rapid change – as it isn't exactly representative of vintage steam-era technology.



P26 – Two muscular front ends a generation apart. The 15F 3046 is being cleaned first and the 12AR 1535 would be sorted out later. There were negotiations under way to bring the passenger train into the yard, and so we needed a locomotive with a still-intact firebed to do the short haul.



P27 – Ou Bullie-burgers is raking out the ash pan after the locomotive's second quick bunt-back to clear the ash chute from the shallow space above the sleepers. You can see three tankers ready for filling in the background.



P28 – Andreas 'Bobtail' Matthee is at the hot end of this team, busy pulling the burnt-out fire back towards the open grate. He had also just joined us the day previously, along with Dawie and Johann.



P29 – The tankers were being filled too – the rearmost tanker on the left had the hose running in. You can just see the orange hose to the left of the gantry. We wouldn't be going anywhere today, so we weren't in a hurry to fill up.



P30 – Stuffed on scrambled eggs, croissants and cheese griller sossies, our guests surfaced for the morning and rolled their corpulent way to the depot for pictures. But they had missed most of the locomotive action already.



P31 – Shaun Ackerman had gotten written permission from a senior person to stage the coaches in the shunting yard for the night, but it was pettily blocked by the Depot Manager. He got treated to a healthy dose of Ackerman & Saayman. I almost felt sorry for the poor sod. But after some 'firm' discussion, there were handshakes all around and the train was allowed to enter as originally authorized.



P32 – Driver Chris Saayman took the sleeper train in across the quad-tracked main and carefully through the S-bend into the locomotive yard. (A true shunting yard wouldn't have this design.) Our guests had just walked that distance when they could have ridden the coaches – I wondered what they were thinking? But they needed the exercise with the abundant good food they were getting.



P33 – The gruesome twosome that I got stuck with during the tour. The still-gloved Coenie was NOT pleased. He had to remove all the scat bags for the SECOND time and put a THIRD set on the coaches when the train settled in. But it would be nice to have the train local to the locos and for the crews, and it would be more secure in the yard.



P34 – The daytime loco-minders appreciated a bit of shade and so the two locomotives were backed into the diesel depot after they were topped up with dusty diamonds. We did confirm that those tracks would not be used by Transnet diesels. The morning firemen, Andreas (15F) and Dawie (12AR), were also the loco minders for the day.



P35 – At nearly 40 years of age, this still-handsome fellow joined us in the early afternoon. I much prefer the angular shape of these EMD-built 82 ton diesels (EMD GT18MC) and this one is in my favourite colour scheme – Spoonnet blue with the neat grey outline fonts on the sides.



P36 – That eight-cylinder turbo 2-stroker grumbler inconsiderately woke up Simon Bennett, while he was studying hard for his fireman's theory exam.



P37 – Parked protruding through the refuelling station, our long sleeper train bakes gently in the afternoon heat. Nearly everyone remaining at the depot just went to sleep!



P38 – This was an interesting area to explore ... a still used dual-bowser diesel refuelling station. Only mad men and English dogs would dare to be out in the heat.



P39 – Before lunch, the only other person crazy enough to still be moving outdoors was Alan – and even he was carefully working in the shade with drying out and rolling up the fire hoses. The two loco minders had gone totally doggo somewhere dark and cool. Alan had been refilling the drinking water tanker down at the back of the train.



P40 – A bit of action. Two MORE 35's come in, bringing the number of moving-machines to the amazing total of six on this dizzyingly busy core railway line depot. It was nice to see matching liveries though. Over time, the Spoonnet-specified blue paint has proven to be more hard wearing than the subsequent Transnet Citrus-Orange scheme.



P41 – Both the diesels crews properly left the pedestrian walkway free.



P42 – A clear side view of the coal handling wagon. Notice the coal in the right hand bunker is already going down. The Smudge-meister was already expressing concerns about coal consumption and he went for the usual easy targets – the loco minders. I chose to let him live though.



P43 – After lunch, the two 'new' diesels were parked and the single one taken out to work again. We took the gap to load up some Gordon-made coach stairs onto the coal grab. These would be needed for access at the platform-less Vailima station when we would be visiting Sandstone.



P44 – By mid-afternoon we had a classic thunderstorm brewing over the sun-soaked flat lands and I knew that we loco minders, and perhaps the morning crews, would be in for a rather soggy night.



P45 – Our guests had arrived from their exploratory and gastronomic day out at Clarens. Aidan took the chance to shuffle the two locomotives out into the open for a quick last photo session before the thunderstorm hit us.



P46 – A bearer of wet tidings. Simon was tracking the approaching storm on a weather app and here he is showing the technology-challenged Smudge the extent of the cloud bank that had just then overlapped our position.



P47 – Aidan posed the locomotives in a staggered shot, but should have had the 12AR set back for a wider viewing angle from the other side. (More space.) Still, I managed to catch the imposing front end of the 15F machine.



P48 – Dawie (L) and George surfaced after a long hot day – Dawie was just winding down his shift. I couldn't help but admire George's brave fashion sense with weird-looking shorts clashing magnificently with a branded training shirt.



P49 – I finally managed to get a clear picture of the 12-bucket as most of the guests had taken their snaps and were meandering back to the coaches to enquire about dinner. The 15F was moved back but no one thought to move the 12AR back under the roof. Thanks a lot for the wet night, McCarthy!



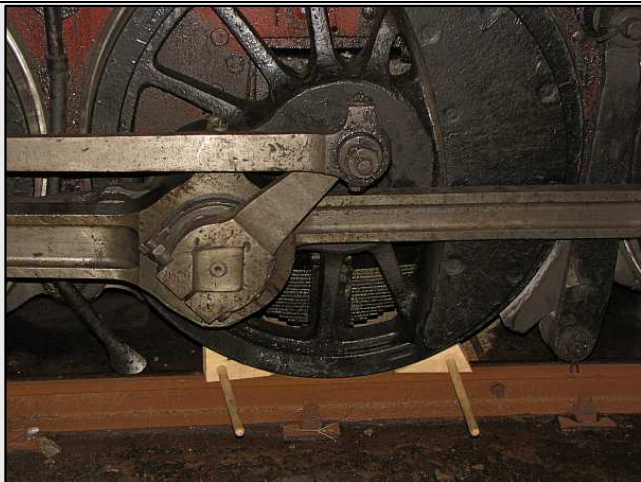
P50 – Dawie gave me the 12AR loco at just under 800 and I had given her a drink after asserting that she would not be moved. She dropped to just above 600 which is too low for safe operation of the brake ejector. I prefer to keep locos between 800-900 for the night to strike a balance between wasting steam and heat with a hot high pressure boiler, and having to thrash the boiler in the morning to get steam up.



P51 – The first boisterous shower of the night shift had stopped and this unretouched photo shows the apocalyptic-looking rainbow with which we were blessed at sunset. (This was a view from the dining coach.)



P52 – Dinner menu for the passengers – Reefsteamers crew got a simpler dessert but also got to enjoy the curry. I wondered how soon the intestinal effects of the curry would load-up Coenie's daily scat bag routine though.



P53 – Oh well, at least my ‘hog’ wouldn’t be running away tonight.



P54 – For all the celestial thunder and bluster, there wasn’t much of a storm after all – just intermittent showers right through the night. The local frogs lifted their raspy voices in courting chorus in the wee hours.



P55 – Warm and dry in the 15F cab, with a confident full-width bank of coal, Simon is kicking the injector cock back to mid-position to close it. You have to find the sweet spot slightly off-center to fully close the loose-linked valve.



P56 – Clearstory engine sheds are great for letting out coal smoke (and diesel fumes), but they do tend to let in the rain. The trio of diesels and the bays were just as wet as they would have been if they were exposed outside.



P57 – Being a Brit In Exile, I love the rain, which is my natural environment. I enjoyed splatting around the yard and environs for scenes like this. It was a hassle keeping the camera and its lens dry. Don’t those well-lit coaches look inviting though?



P58 – The rain was getting a bit more rambunctious and so it was time to mount the soon-to-be-rusty steed. I kicked back and stretched feet out through the fireman’s door – only to realise the boots were getting soaked through ½ hour later. Just call me Reefsteamers’ best and brightest!



P59 – It turned out that I wasn't the only one getting wet!

Some of the crew compartments started to leak with water dripping out of light fittings after making its insidious, invasive way under the curved roof panels. Here is one of the victims who had to find a dry service bay for the night.

Thankfully, none of the passengers had any leaks that I knew of.



P60 – Simon is quite comfy in his deck chair, all snuggled up against the warm backhead and waterproofed against the nasty cold rain. (South Africans are tropical creatures and start complaining when the temps drop below 24 degrees Celsius)

As the tour went on, we got more casual about the loco minding and were popping in every hour or so instead of holding station all night. Jeandre and I eventually adopted the practice of napping in the lounge coach.



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