

One thing or Another

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A few years ago while trekking around the country, I came across an old mate of mine. Harry was living in a classic little shanty perched atop a ravine. I was invited inside where in his modest little home we had a cuppa and a chat about old times. After a while he offered to show me around. The land he occupied was small for a rural plot, a little grass and a few bushes and attached to a nearby tree, a laundry line. But a few steps from his back door we beheld a fantastic view of the Nok River Ravine many feet below. In the distance I could just spot the railway line winding it's way down to the settlement of Nok where a reasonably sized railway station and facilities were evident.



Stepping back inside, we took a few paces and we were at the front door. Just outside runs the railway line climbing up the ravine heading to Dipstick located to the east of our location. Right outside the door the line crosses a gorge with an old steel truss bridge much in need of a coat of paint.

One thing led to another and on a whim, we decided to bike down to the nearby waystop and go for a train ride. Harry knew the driver of the coming freight train and said he would arrange for us to have a cab ride. In a flash I whipped out my camera and asked if photo stops were on, to which the reply "quite possibly", delighted me. Harry doubled me on his bike to the stop where we waited for the train to arrive.

It was not long before our train arrived. Hauled by Bb55, it consisted of an Hc cattle wagon and a 30ft guards van. Not quite what I had in mind, but beggars can't be choosers and I certainly could not get my money back. Our horse looked a little the worse for wear with plenty of signs of rust, dust and decay. The funnel had an oily shine and oil laden dust caked the glands around the cylinders. Oily streaks ran down the drivers side cylinder



wrappers where it had leaked out of the Westinghouse pump. The driver went around checking the oil reserves and greasing where necessary to keep the old girl in working order - whatever that might be. While we waited for a water refill, we were entertained with the arrival of a pretty pink Dj locomotive. Bringing a much larger train than ours, it would be there a while before getting the right of way to leave again. Being a bit short on film and more interested in the steamer, I chose not to take any photos of the Dj. I have regretted that decision.



Further along the line I could not resist taking a photo of a farmers house. It looked so tranquil in it's setting with the farmers tractor outside where he had left it. The ground was not wonderful, however the tidy house and maintained tractor indicated a comfortable living was being made.

We are soon underway with John driving and Freddy on the shovel, we head out along the line and before long enter a short tunnel. Upon emerging from the tunnel a workman's hut and motorised jigger come into view. There has been a slip and we are required to reduce speed as we pass by. The slip has been contained by driving old rail into the ground backed up with boulders. With a blast from the whistle our short train passed this scene by. John spurred Freddy on, reminding him of the grade coming up and to get a good head of steam up.



He said it was quite safe, but just wanted to take it a bit easy. A few feet below us a stream trickles by splashing over boulders. John said that even in the winter time when it rained most, the level of the stream did not rise by that much, and in the summer there was always some water flowing, which was just as well since it was the water supply for a few houses down in the valley.

We trundled along through rural farmland heading for the distant mountains. Soon bush clad terrain surrounded us as the Bb echoed it's way up the valley with it's diminutive train. Getting low in coal Freddy and John discussed the best place to load, deciding that we would have to take some at the next station, Wherarwi. The coal up here was not as good as that at Nok, so Freddy thought he would only take enough to cover that leg of the trip and load up to the brim with the good stuff at Nok. A mile or so from Wherarwi, John slowed the engine while we crossed a built



Coaling at Wherarwi took about half an hour to complete by the time we had hand filled the bucket several times. It did not help that the old Bb had a few air leaks reducing the effectiveness of the pneumatic coaling crane.



Finished coaling, we moved up to the water vat to replenish our supplies after the slog up the valley. On our way again we were back into rough country to continue our journey to Dipstick. Running along a shelf of rock dropping away into a deep ravine, John and Freddy had an easy time keeping the train running swiftly along. John announced that soon we would be entering a cut-

ting that would lead us to a high steel truss bridge crossing a very deep bush clad valley and said that we were nearing the end of our run for the day. Sweeping around the next curve the train rumbled out onto the massive steel structure. The main centre pier cast a weird shadow on the bush clad rocks far below. The rocky terrain is very stable, but caused problems



for the engineers blasting their way through at each end of the bridge. The line passed through several deep and bush lined cuttings before leading into a long dark tunnel. Emerging into the daylight once again the scene had changed into a picturesque rural vista with the line following a lazy river splashing it's way through the rocks. Nearing our destination now we slow before stopping on a plate girder bridge at the Dipstick home signal. After a brief wait we are cleared to run past the signal and we pull into the station, our journey over. Harry and I bid our farewells and offer thanks for the ride to John and Freddy. Our fun is over and it is time for the loco crew



to have a break before coupling up more wagons from the yard and continuing on their way. For us it is time for another cuppa and to close the photo album and carefully put it back on the shelf.

