

Stars of Sandstone 2013: From a driver's perspective

Driving steam at Sandstone is not like any other preserved railway I have driven on, and I have driven steam in many countries around the world.

We start off with a roster for each day together with a consist and timetable that is agreed with ALL of those involved.

Usually the driver and fireman collect the loco at the depot, where it is generally fully prepared, but if for any reason it is not, we get in and give the paid staff a hand. There are four staff members to raise steam, check for defects and prepare the locos. There is also a team of all female cleaners who do a good job on the engines.

The depot is on a lower level to the main station, so after obtaining water, and if required, coal, the loco is worked up hill to the main station at Hoekfontein. There is a turning triangle suitably located so that the loco can be turned to face the right direction of travel. The station has been built with two platforms, one for the main line, while the other is for loop line services.

After attaching to the consist, the Guard will check the brakes, and discuss any run pasts for the photographers or other essential details regarding the trip. We run on the good old vacuum system, and try to run with 21in of vacuum throughout the train, and have a minimum of 6 vehicles for braking purposes on the 1 in 20.

The usual direction of departure is towards Grootdraai. The first part is downhill for about 1 mile with a ruling grade of 1 in 44. There follows an approximately 1 mile uphill section to the summit alongside Sandstone's own grass air strip. It is down again into the turning loop at Grootdraai which we usually traverse clockwise.

We then retrace our steps to Hoekfontein. Departing Hoekfontein in the opposite direction it is level through the sidings/yard until the perimeter fence is reached. The line then drops down for around 1 mile on a ruling grade of 1 in 38 before climbing and levelling out at Mooihoek. At Mooihoek there is a shunt neck with run round facilities if required to run short workings.

After Mooihoek the fun part starts. The line commences downhill before crossing the entrance road at a level crossing. From here the ruling grade is 1 in 22 and the climb is just under 2 miles before a gentle decent in to Vailima siding, which is also equipped with a run round loop. On arrival at Vailima siding, adjacent to the SAR 3ft 6in line, it is usual to take on water.

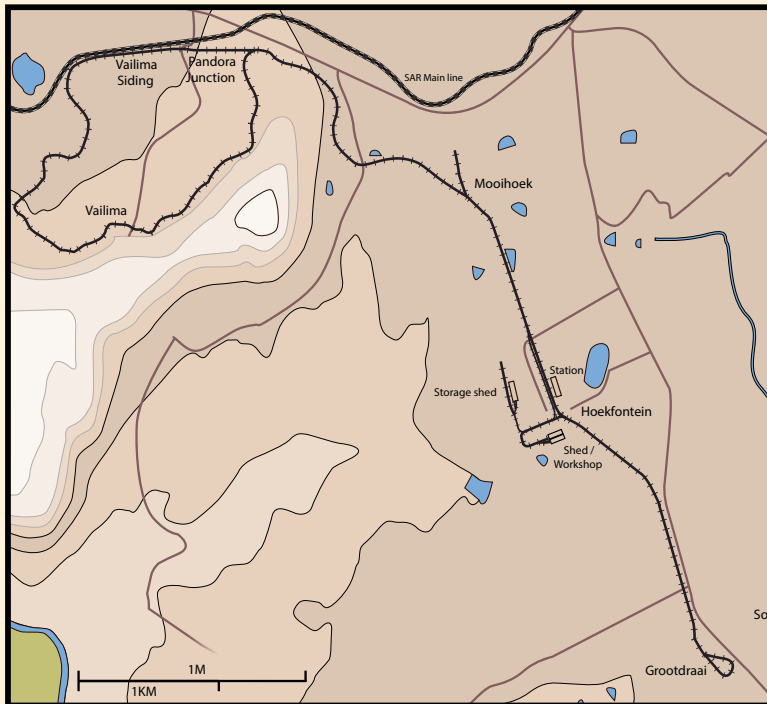
Departing Vailima there is a succession of sharp curves with short uphill and downhill sections for about two miles before reaching the steepest part of the line, which is a downhill section of 1 in 20. Good brakes are the order of the day! From the bottom of the 1 in 20 we retrace our steps to Hoekfontein.

As you may have seen in various photographs we often have more than one locomotive on a train. This brings other details into play. All crews have to work in unison. Not always easy with five locos and 37 vehicles!

The choice at Hoekfontein is either to continue or take the loco to shed. If going to the shed, the shed staff will inform us as to how they require the loco to be left.

Incidentally, unlike most years, in 2013 ALL of the steam crews and guards resided in various states in Australia – NSW, SA, Qld and WA!

David Rollins





Clockwise from top left: A pair of Kerr Stuarts on the Grootdraai balloon loop: 4-6-2T 16 (1344 of 1913) ex South African Railways, with bogie wagons and brakevan, follows 0-4-2ST cane loco 4 TAMARA (4063 of 1924) hauling a single car, 26 March 2012. □ Ex South African Railways 2-6-2+2-6-2 Beyer-Garratts 49 (Hanomag 10599 of 1928) and 88 (Cockerill 3268 of 1936) storm up to the Vailima summit with a freight train on 25 May 2010. □ Tivo 4-4-0 tender locomotives built by Falcon of Loughborough for the Beira Railway wait to enter Hoekfontein with a train from Grootdraai. In the lead is green BR7 (232 of 1895) while behind it is black 97 JIMMIE (263 of 1897), 26 May 2010. □ German volunteers help the staff to prepare a trio of Orenstein & Koppel 0-4-0WT locomotives on the morning of 25 March 2012. (L-R) No.11 HAYLEY (2510 of 1907), No.2 (4102 of 1910), and 10311 of 1922. □ On 31 March 2012, ex South African Railways 2-6-2+2-6-2 Beyer Garratt 153 (Hunslet Taylor 3898 of 1968) hauled 6 cars around the Vailima Loop with an Australian loco crew. At Vailima Siding, John Mere attends to the watering in readiness for the climb while John Lyas takes time out of his visual inspection to speak to an onlooker. Photos: John Browning

