

A Brush with Nessie by J Crosse

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'You've got more chance of seeing Nessie than you have copping that Scottish 08 you need' quipped Mike to his mate despite the hour, just turned midnight on a chill March night. The wind whistled up Darlington station approach as a dozen hardy souls congregated behind a building to try and keep out of its icy blast. Where was it, why was it always late? No use asking the station staff, even if you could find one at that hour of the night. They could not tell you where the coach was that was already half an hour behind time.

Coach? I here you ask. Well you wouldn't catch a train to do the annual three day Easter Scottish bash now would you. A trip to Scotland at Easter had become somewhat of an institution by the mid seventies. Its origins would seem to lie in the steam era when the Railway Correspondence and Travel Society had this annual pilgrimage on the calendar, but that was a much more leisurely and genteel affair than that planned for this happy band of spotters.

There were some perks to be had at this un-earthly hour in 1975 as the local females, in the briefest of skirts, were either scurrying home or dashing from one night club to another, but all most of this group really wanted was to get on board the coach, in the warm, and go to sleep. And if that wasn't your bag then you could get down to the real business and note down the passing of 47470 and 47524.

Shortly before 12.15 am the growl of a Bedford engine could finally be heard- what excuse would it be this time- perhaps the head wind was too strong?! As soon as the coach pilled up there was the usually unseemly scrum for the best seats. Some thought these were at the back, others at the front, which ever you got, it was home for the next three days. Pity the poor soul that got the short straw of sitting next to 'smelly sock' George.

Those joining at Darlington were the lucky ones as this was the first pick up. Yours truly did not have to scramble for a seat. The one behind the driver was his by rights. It was no good having the navigator sat at the back although there were plenty of back seat drivers around. Three days supply of drink, crisps and chocolate biscuits were hurriedly loaded aboard and we were off. Now of course it was too easy to head north so it was east to the next pick up at Stockton, then via Durham and Chester-le-Street to Newcastle Central, where, due to expert navigation and a heavy driver's foot, we arrived just fifteen minutes down to pick up the last of our contingent not long before 2 am.

Now some stabling points received coach loads of enthusiast nearly every weekend but I'll bet that our first port of call must have been one of the least visited on the network. Rousing everyone from their slumbers was the challenge as we pulled up at Tweedmouth in the pitch dark to locate the resident class 03 which turned out to be Gateshead based 03102. It was the practice at these small stabling points that as long as the loco could actually be seen from the coach, one hardy soul would be turfed out into the night to note down the number. This could be quite a hazardous operation in a yard with no lighting, especially if he was not fully awake at the time. Mind you, when he had tripped over a few signal cables he soon woke up. I say 'he'

but we did actually have two females on the trip. One was there just for the scenery but the other was definitely a fully accredited number cruncher.

Now you will have gathered from the fact that Tweedmouth was on the agenda that this trip was routed via the A1 to Edinburgh so the next port of call was Millerhill stabling point and this was quickly followed by Craigentenny carriage sidings. Many of the travellers that day had been to Scotland at least once and so most were more into hunting shunters than the big stuff. It was a bit like 'look after the pennies and the pounds will look after themselves. If you went out of your way to find all the shunters, in the process of so doing you would catch up with all the big locos.

Searching for 08s meant that the solitary example at South Leith, on this occasion 08565, had to be tracked down before we headed for Waverley station. Now if you were a DMU fan this was not good news as there was to be no visit to the DMU depot at Leith Walk. Coincidentally this was the only place that I ever encountered a British Transport policeman- good job I had a permit that day!

The stop at Waverley, as dawn was breaking, allowed people to take a comfort break and have a freshen up whilst some availed themselves of the buffet facilities. However there was just one number to note, 47461.

And so the first proper depot- Haymarket, where the unmistakable sound of burbling Deltics welcomed all and sundry. This was the one time in the whole trip that time keeping was critical as there was a 9.30 visit to Glasgow works. Miss the allocated time and that was it- no second chance there, so everyone was kept on their toes going round Haymarket where yours truly had the first cop of the trip- an MCW DMU car. Arrival at Glasgow Works brought all the coach loads of enthusiasts together for the first time that weekend. Of special interest to some at the works were the lines of withdrawn Claytons, maybe the first and last time that some of our number would see any of these machines. Another odd ball was D3045. This shunter had always been based on the Southern region and yet for some strange reason, following withdrawal, it was towed the length of the country for the removal of spare parts. It was cut up at the works in 1976.

There was no need to rush around the works as the coach driver had gone off in search of a belated breakfast. In today's health and safety conscious age this trip would pose real problems with driving hours but back in 1975 the driver was on duty for 21 hours, although the driving was punctuated with numerous shed stops. Now if you have watched any of the Billy Connolly 'World Tour' programmes on TV, these feature maps of his tour itinerary, this appearing to wander aimlessly around the country crossing over itself several times. Thus having arrived in Glasgow for the works visit you might anticipate a tour of the Glasgow sheds, but how wrong you would be.

Head east was the instruction to the refreshed man behind the wheel as we headed firstly to Grangemouth, where the first Class 37s were encountered and then Falkirk where 20030 and 24014 were to be found. Now firmly on a northerly course 08347 was located at Stirling before the tour headed for the next real shed a Perth. No stopping for lunch however as we had to make Inverness by 7pm. Now being at Perth one might imagine that the next call might be Dundee- silly people. It was

actually Fort William so 'go west' was the order. It's a long way for not a lot, having to go to Fort William but if you need that shunter then you just have to go.

Someone who had not been to Fort William was the renumbering man as the 08 was one of the very last in the country to receive its TOPS number and was still masquerading as 3886 at the time, not receiving a new number until July when some mis-guided sole applied 08316 to it instead of 08718. Keeping it company were 20138 27012/20 and 27111. Having tracked all that way west, and with probably no railway installation due north of here before reaching the north pole, it was obviously time to go (north)east to reach the highland capital. As the coach negotiated the roads alongside Loch Ness spotting of a different kind amused some- was that Nessie? Well it certainly wasn't a Brush- of any description. At Inverness the bit of the trip organisation that most people did not see was the major logistical exercise of finding bed and breakfast for up to the ten coach loads of enthusiast who descended each year on this Saturday night. A tour all around the city took place dropping off here, there and everywhere- and some one was going to sleeping with smelly socks George.

The coach driver could not wait to get to bed but others, who had been cat knapping all day took it upon themselves to visit the shed that evening just in case something worked off that night.

Sunday morning dawned with a beautiful sunrise as all across Inverness frying pans sizzled with sausage, bacon and egg. A hearty breakfast was essential as supplies of sandwiches in ruck sacks were already dwindling and trade at the coach 'tuck shop' was going up by the hour. The hoards from B&Bs descended on the shed as parties from all over the country mingled together and yes- in Inverness there was a Brush- 47467 along with a good selection of 24s and 26s. It was a good idea to try to be the first coach off down the road as that would avoid problems later on if a shed master became fed up with the constant stream of visitors.

The first part of Sunday was not exactly tiring, as following the Inverness visit, it was a three hour drive to Aberdeen. Most of the motive power here was of the heavyweight variety in the shape of 40s and 47s but the first 06 was also on shed. In those days an 08 was kept at Montrose so it was a quick detour to that town to record 08725 whilst 40068 passed through. Dundee, once home to the last Pacifics in Scotland, was a shadow of its former self, almost over run with DMUs, just eight locomotives graced the depot but another 06 was in the bag. Now we were heading back into civilisation, finding 08274 at Methil and 06008 at Markinch.

Thornton Junction, formerly another large steam shed, was also host to considerable numbers of DMUs, resting on lines where once WDs had stood in large numbers. And on we went; no chance for cat knaps now. Kirkaldy was next with 06002/7 before we came to the one place where you could not (legitimately) get round- Townhill wagon works. Although it was a works it also had an allocation of shunters and with 40 plus spotters in tow there was no chance of sneaking in there so everyone had to be content with the sighting of 08145 20191 and 20224/7.

Time to cross our outward route again with a call at Whifflet to record 08566 and 20109 before heading for Glasgow and that DMU stronghold of Hamilton. Amongst

the 47 DMU cars those who wanted just engine numbers had to hunt out 06004 and 08212. There was also the first sighting of an electric unit on the move in the shape of 083.

As you will appreciate from the list of calls, time was by now rapidly running out on day 2 of the Scottish extravaganza but there was plenty to be seen at Motherwell shed, with almost the full range of typical Scottish motive power being represented. Finally an electric binge was to be had at Mossend yard to round off the day. Now if you think finding B&B at Inverness was hard work, try Glasgow in 1975.

Well do you want quantity or quality? Some would say that Inverness was the quality- but not a lot of it. If so, then Eastfield and Polmadie were the quantity. There were nearly as many locos at these two sheds as had been recorded at all the other locations put together. Perhaps the oddity at Eastfield was the total absence of Class 26 power whilst Polmadie produced rows of Claytons and a Class 50. As the person in charge of a trip, you always had to watch the clock. On this day we had a deadline as some people had trains to catch at Carlisle and I knew we had to make the advertised time back there. When confronted with approaching a hundred numbers to take and all the walking up and down rows of engines, it is surprising how long a large group can take to wander round a shed like Eastfield. And wander they did, and chase as one might a thirty minute allowance expanded into fortyfive minutes. With a repeat performance at Polmadie, half an hour was the deficit as we headed for an electrifying visit to Shields Road, where, despite it being an electric depot, DMUs were present as well. It was interesting to see 81001, 83001 and 85001 all present with the former having moved round from Mossend where it was noted the previous evening.

With Glasgow behind us, it was time for the coach driver to set about some time recovery, but of course we were not yet heading for Carlisle. Larkfield was the next port of call for 08754 and 25234, thence to Greenock (08323) and Ardrossan (08344/5). The supplies in the tuck shop were diminishing rapidly as the final lunch time came and went before we rolled into Ayr, firstly to visit the harbour for 08446 and then to the shed for the last great gathering of Scottish motive power, classes 20, 24, 26 and 27. This was to be the last chance for a leg stretch before the run to Carlisle but there was one final shunter to hunt out at Auchinleck, 08735 being the resident on this occasion.

Time for another knap for those who were not in charge. Someone must have opened the roof light as a waft of smelly sock suddenly hit those at the front of the coach, thank goodness he was getting off at Carlisle. Just two stops to go. Firstly to Dumfries where Kingmoor allocated 08107 lurked along with 27040 and finally to Kingmoor yard itself. No permit to visit here, these were bonus numbers, hard won with a pair of binoculars. And so it was with a sense of achievement that we headed for Citadel station to arrive on time after three days of hard work at the front- an achievement never acknowledged by those at the rear.

Having deposited our smelly cargo and some other very decent people at the station the coach, with ever declining numbers wound its way east to Newcastle and beyond, retracing its route to return to Darlington some seventy hours after it had

set out. Now on this occasion, Mike was wrong. We didn't see Nessie, but we did see a Brush and also the required 08.

Millerhill 08572/711/4/7, 27002, 40107/60/4/5, 47296

Craigeninny 08882, 24002, 27118/209

Haymarket 08575/722/63, 20111, 24072/94/111,

25033/4/215/6/26/30/40, 26005/8/12/4/8/21/5, 27002/101/13/7/201/12,
40064/89/166/7, 46023/30, 47220/469/516/42/4, 55004/6/14/8 plus 8 DMU cars

Glasgow Works D3045, 8508/16/25/9/31/6/52/74/80, 08348/421/738/852,
20002/89/115/23, 24096/130, 25231, 26007/22/44, 27005/8/10/32/104/10/22 plus 8
DMU cars and three electric units

Grangemouth 08175/441/2, 20102/18, 24016/9/106/47, 27026, 37152/5/7/237

Perth 08276/736/62, 24098, 26009/11/27/31/41, 37151, 40066/159, 47007/274/467

Inverness 08568/620/728/851, 20114, 24113/6/24/5/7/8/9,

26015/20/8/9/30/2/5/7/40/3, 40062/159, 47467

Ferryhill 06006, 08443/515/764/817, 24066, 26019/33/4, 27044, 40015/60/4/71/2
47051/268/70/4/411/523

Dundee 8616, 06005/10, 08426/8, 24101, 27004 plus 35 DMU cars.

Thornton Junction 08341/425, 20024/39/85/6/217-20/2/6, 24020/95 plus 29 DMU
cars

Motherwell 08217/29/313/6/563/723, 20099/101/6/8/17, 24017/73/90/9/150, 25197,
26016, 27006/16/25, 37147/205, 40055, 47007/200/318

Mossend 08280/319, 81001, 85002/37/9, 86007/223

Eastfield 8539, 06001/3, 08143/73/227/321/6/46/447/505/731/3/855/83,

20011/48/80/103/221, 24001/3/8/10/97/100/9, 27001/12/5/7/8/21/3/35/42/102/5-
9/12/14/201/3/5/6/10, 37146/8-50, 40009, 47053/141/84/269/427/61 plus 27 DMU
cars.

Polmadie 8504/42/6/8/50/7/63/73/607/8/12/3, 08074/414/551/693/719/881,

20017/36/96/100/4/5/7/12/20/5/84, 24009/13/8/71, 25237, 26038, 27007, 37145/54/6,
40061/173, 47200/424/89, 50010

Shields Road Area 24015, E3087, 81001, 82008, 83001/12, 85001, 86029/236 plus
11 DMU cars and 17 EMU sets.

Ayr 08430/3/48, 20093/4/110/21, 24012, 26010/7, 27009/28/9, 40103, 47206

Carlisle Yards and station 36, 08105/415/9/51/2/66/911/2, 25124/96-9/322,

40033/97/116/25/39/60, 45022, 47284, 50006/34, 81012, 83004, 85035,
86030/217/37, 87025