

Some Branch Line Reminiscences — 3

JOHN L. STICHBURY RECALLS A RIDE ON

THE TUATAPERE BRANCH IN 1951

On Tuesday 14 March 1951 I decided to spend my first day in Southland touring the Tuatapere branch line, and found the train in the bay platform at the western end of Invercargill station. An "A" class Pacific locomotive, No.407, was in charge of 30 wagons, two passenger cars and a van, and sharp on time at 7.33 a.m. we were on our way.

For the first 7½ miles to Makarewa Junction, the train used the Lumsden line. This section was quite suburban in nature, and we picked up a lot of passengers, most of whom alighted at Makarewa. Leaving this junction on time at 8.4 a.m., "A" 407 wheeled train 637 around a sharp curve to the west, and so we left the Lumsden line. A brisk run followed over excellent track to Thornbury, 18.9 miles from Invercargill and junction for the Wairoa Branch, with just two stops (Waianiwa and Waimatuku). The two switch-out tablet stations of Oporo and Wrights Bush were passed without stopping.

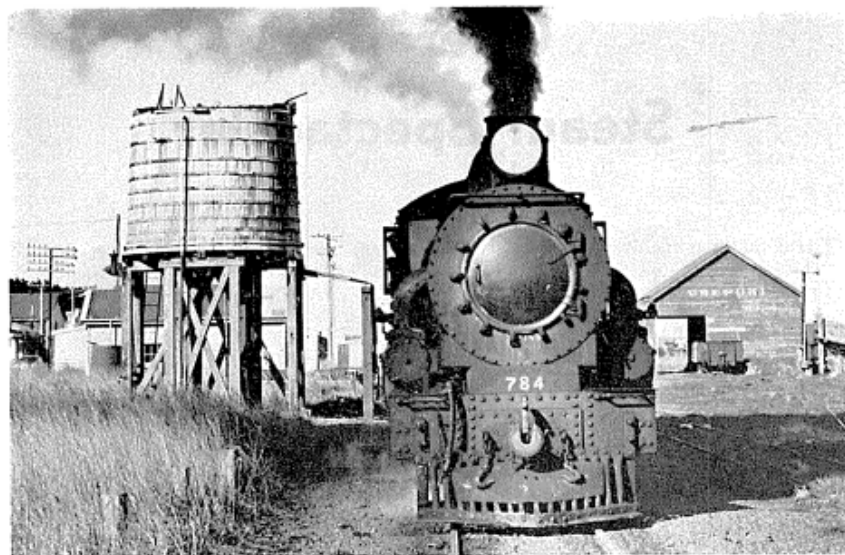
We took the west loop at Thornbury, and soon the morning cavalcade of branch trains were all in, and I thrilled to see this little-known branch station holding three quite long trains, all mixed. "A" 406 had brought the 6.25 a.m. mixed from Tuatapere for Invercargill, and "Ab" 731 was officiating on the 22-mile Wairoa branch. It had worked the 7.15 a.m. Wairoa-Thornbury mixed to connect with the Tuatapere line trains. After much changing of crews, we were on our way again, our next stop being the important town of Riverton, 25.1 miles from Invercargill. Here we did a lot of shunting, and I became the sole passenger in the car-van that now graced our train.

Riverton was the end of tablet working, the balance of the branch being worked

Tuatapere Branch Railway in 1932

Stations	Distance Miles	Height above Sea Feet	Goods Shed Feet	Standing Room for Wagons on Sidings
MAKAREWA	0.00	37	—	184
Brankholme	1.49	60	—	12
Oporo	2.95	50	—	88
Waianiwa	4.24	65	—	29
Wright's Bush	6.27	66	—	89
Waimatuku	8.46	56	—	37
THORNBURY	11.40	52	60 x 30	178
Otaihai Bush	15.75	61	—	—
RIVERTON	17.55	35	80 x 30	160
Longwood	20.70	139	—	159
Tihaka	22.67	57	—	21
Colac	24.75	51	—	69
Wakapatu	27.94	56	—	18
Ruahine	30.21	56	—	30
Pahia	31.75	73	—	42
Hirsts	33.70	84	—	—
Orepuki	35.25	111	40 x 30	84
Te Tumutu	38.50	184	—	14
Waihoaka	39.80	198	40 x 30	60
Tewaewae	43.15	125	40 x 30	52
Te Tua	45.47	155	30 x 20	43
TUATAPERE	47.82	129	40 x 30	176
Pike Piko	50.36	152	—	31
Pukemaori	54.29	172	—	38
Orawia	56.12	235	37 x 22	86

under "open section" rules. The track as far as Thornbury was maintained to 50 m.p.h. standards, but from Thornbury to Tuatapere the limit was 40 m.p.h. for pas-



Photograph: D. L. A. Turner

"Ab" 784 at Orepuki on the Tuatapere Branch in August 1967, when the goods shed was looking a little the worse for wear.

senger trains and the usual 30 m.p.h. for goods trains.

The route out of Riverton I found extremely pretty with its curving bridge and embankment, and then the climb above the estuary and out into country that was covered with heavy bush not too many years earlier. Soon we were within sight of the Foveaux Strait, through which the seas of the Antarctic Ocean pour relentlessly. We stopped to shunt at a ballast siding right on the coast, and then we passed Tihaka before making another shunt at Colac, 7.2 miles from Riverton. After this we had a good run through some nice farmland with ocean on one side and bush on the other to the once-important station of Orepuki, 17.7 miles from Riverton (42.8 miles from Invercargill). The four flag stations between Colac and Orepuki were Wakapatu, Ruahine, Pahia, and Hirsts. There was once a 50ft. turntable at Orepuki, which had also been an officered station and terminus of the line for some years. The station building and watering facilities remained in 1951,

but there was an air of much more activity than was now evident.

Stops were made at each of the next four stations, Te Tumutu, Waihoaka, Tewaewae, and Te Tua, for passengers, while the railway made its way as best it could over the undulating countryside. Thus we reached Tuatapere, a busy station 55.3 miles from Invercargill with a big yard, locomotive depot, turntable, etc. Out past the depot the line disappeared on its last few miles to the terminus at Orawia, but service beyond Tuatapere was confined to a goods just twice a week.

My return trip began at 1.45 p.m. and was notable for the lack of shunts en route, a long stop at Riverton waiting for the scheduled departure time, and the crossings with the evening exodus of branch-line trains out of the city, the 4.14 p.m. to Tuatapere, which we crossed at Oporo, and the 4.30 p.m. to Kingston, met at Makarewa. Our arrival time in Invercargill was 5.30 p.m.