

STEAM FINALE

When a South Island "Ja" Went North

ABOUT ten years ago one would never have imagined that a South Island "Ja" class steam locomotive would one day haul a train up the North Island main trunk line. That was a time when it was rumoured North Island "Ka"s and "Ja"s might go south and be converted to coal-burners. This never eventuated, of course, though some parts from these locomotives were used to help keep their South Island cousins going during their last few years of service.

In 1969 when "Ww" 480 was purchased by the Railway Enthusiasts' Society and steamed through from Greymouth to Auckland on its delivery trip, many enthusiasts kept their fingers crossed about a safe arrival at its destination. This did eventuate, and it led to further purchases and delivery trips, including "Ww" 571, "Ww" 644, "A" 423 and "Ba" 552. For all of these, except the "Ba", it was in effect a return to an earlier home. Then, in 1971, keen interest in the preservation of steam locomotives resulted in the acquisition by various groups of some of the remaining "Ja" class 4-8-2s in the South Island. A handful of these had been retained in service to work the Friday and Sunday night expresses until steam-heat vans became available in October 1971.

During Easter of 1972 the first South Island "Ja" ever to appear in the North Island worked through from Wellington to Auckland in the course of delivery to the Glenbrook Vintage Railway. It was assisted by "J" 1236 and in the later stages of this "South Pacific Steam Safari" by "Da" 1497. This train, however, travelled the long way around, via the Wairarapa and Taranaki lines (see the NZRO No. 130, p. 47) and missed the section of the main trunk between Marton and National Park with most of the big viaducts.

However, what appeared likely to be the final steam locomotive delivery trip across

the North Island was that of "Ja" 1267 in July 1972. This was a Canterbury engine with its original boiler and tender, and fitted with a cage-type spark arrester, a type that was only fitted to Canterbury and West Coast locomotives in later years.

As early commuters were arriving at Wellington station on Friday, 21 July 1972, their rush for buses and work was briefly halted by the rare sight and sound of a steam locomotive on a train at platform 8. This was the start of perhaps the most memorable trip in New Zealand railfan history. At 7.32 a.m., with "Ed" 101 as pilot in the lead for the passage of the long tunnels out to Tawa, "Ja" 1267 headed a 56ft. van, a 56ft. sleeping car, four 56ft. second-class cars, and an "Rb" bogie wagon of coal, a total load of about 210 tons behind the tender, out of town and on to the main trunk line. From Tawa, 8.5 miles from the city, No. 1267 was on its own.

After a cloudy start this particular Friday turned out fine. "Ja" 1267 was the first of its class to venture up the Manawatu line. This stage of the trip featured a non-stop run through Paekakariki, several photo stops, a quick water stop at Levin, and a longer stop at Tokomaru, where two traction engines and a steam roller from the nearby Tokomaru Steam Museum were lined up in the station yard to greet their main-line counterpart. During this wait,



Photograph: R. J. Meyer

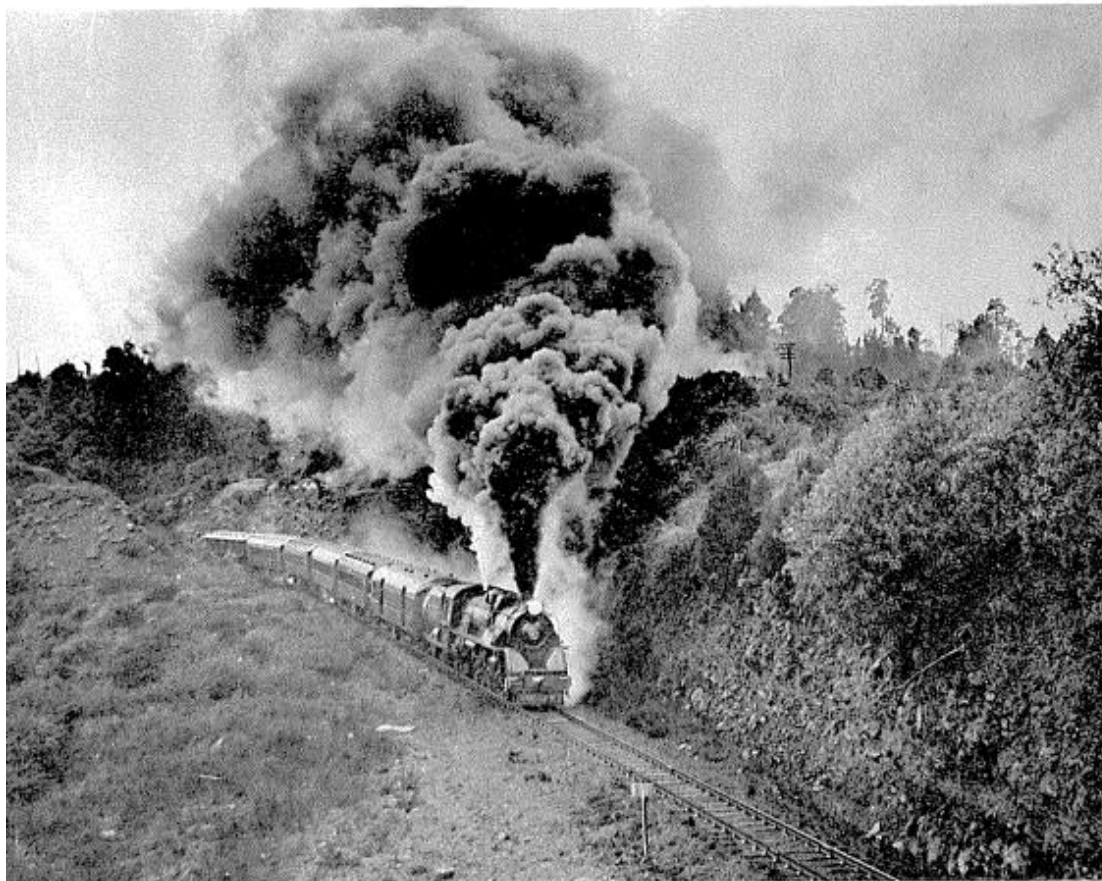
With the "Steam Finale" excursion from Taihape to Teumarunui on 22 July 1972, "Ja" 1267 pauses for pictures near the obelisk marking the site where the last spike was driven in the North Island main trunk railway in 1908. This is between Pokaka and Erua.

the northbound Wellington-New Plymouth railcar, "Rm" 31 on this occasion, and the morning Napier-Wellington railcar, worked by "Rm" 102, passed through. With the way crossings had worked out, the train was 35 minutes late on arrival at Palmerston North and nearly an hour late leaving. Servicing had taken longer than expected.

A smart run was made from Palmerston North to Marton, with a stop to change guards at Feilding, and a photo stop on the Kakariki bank. After water was supplied by the fire brigade at Marton, "Ja" 1267 was on new territory altogether. It was steep grades, bridges, viaducts, and many tunnels after a four-year absence from this kind of territory. In an effort to regain lost time, although crossings were numer-

ous, the various "Da"-hailed goods trains were mostly waiting in the loops at stations. "Ja" 1267 just whistled and puffed its way along. Slight delays occurred at Hunterville, where the fire brigade had not arrived, but where it transpired that water was not needed after all, and at Mangaweka while "Da" 1472 came down the hill with a long goods train. "Ja" 1267 then featured in a photo stop at the Mangaweka Viaduct in the last rays of the setting sun before Taihape was reached at 5.30 p.m., half an hour late.

That night in Taihape a film evening was held in the Railway Social Hall, and at 9.35 p.m. perhaps everyone in Taihape and on the Wellington-Auckland express train 626 knew of 1267's presence.



Photograph: R. J. Meyer

In pouring rain on 25 July 1972, "Ja" 1267 offers the final steam tribute to the 1 in 50 grade and 7½-chain radius curves of the Raurimu Spiral. It was a stirring sight and sound.

Saturday 22 July was a great day. With a very keen driver and a start 24 minutes behind the advertised 9 a.m., a really good performance was recorded on the 24-mile climb of 1,220 feet to Waiouru. Despite a 25-minute wait at Mataroa for a goods train, and despite seven photo stops, Waiouru was reached in only 2hr. 16min. At Ohakune, reached 36 minutes late at 1.06 p.m., lunch was served on the station platform by local residents. "Ja" 1267 took on water fairly quickly, but train 333, the "Blue Streak" railcar, was late and Ohakune became a sightseeing stop for "Blue Streak" passengers.

After "Rm" 131 left for Wellington it was necessary to wait for a long goods train coming down the hill, and soon a north-bound goods was waiting outside to follow us up. "Ja" 1267 then climbed the hill, 1 in 60, in fine style, making photo stops at the Hapuawhenua and Taonui viaducts, a brief stop at Horopito, and more photo stops at the Manganui-o-te-Ao and Makatote viaducts and on the climb to National Park. Here the signals indicated that the following goods train would overtake us through the loop, but a quick inspection showed that we would not need to take water, and the signals were changed to let us leave

first. A photo stop was made at Raurimu with the goods coming down the lower level of the Spiral and "Ja" 1267 in the station. Then the real excitement came, the final 24 miles to Taumarunui being covered in only 39 minutes to bring us in 12 minutes early at 5.18 p.m. (This is reminiscent of "Wab" 687's memorable run over the same section in just under 40 minutes on 22 October 1961.—Editor) The race was certainly on during that part of the journey. On the outskirts of Taumarunui, "Ja" 1267 was racing along just as if it was working a late 144 and recovering lost time into Christchurch, with long, loud whistles and a roaring din from that funnel. One would never believe that a Canterbury "Ja" could make so much noise!

Sunday 23 July brought variable weather, ranging from brilliant sunshine to steady rain. First, with an 8 a.m. start, we retraced our steps to National Park to get more pictures on the Spiral. The 2,086ft. climb from Taumarunui in less than 52 miles was no trouble to "Ja" 1267 hauling the van, four 56ft. second-class main trunk cars, and a 50ft. open-platform car on the rear. This train carried more standing passengers than seated most of the time, there being more than 300 passengers for the 261 seats. Of the eight photo stops made during the climb, four were between Raurimu and National Park.

Although the train was an hour late leaving Taumarunui, and a little more time was lost on the climb, the fire brigade quickly filled 1267's tender at Owahango. No time was recovered on the return to Taumarunui because of the restricted speed necessitated by tender-first running, and then some servicing problems arose causing departure from Taumarunui for Frankton to be delayed until 4.27 p.m., nearly 2½ hours later than the scheduled 1.40. Subsequent reduction in the number of photo stops, however, reduced the arrears considerably by the time Te Kuiti was reached.

After the fire brigade had provided another quota of water, Te Kuiti residents were treated to a double viewing of "Ja" 1267 leaving their station, first "live" and later on their TV screens. In the Waikato area, every station was lined with residents, and at Otorohanga the sleeping-car passengers on train 227, the Auckland-Wellington express, were surprised by the unexpected

sound of a steam locomotive. A brief stop at Te Awamutu preceded a good final run into Frankton, where the platform was thronged with some 1,200 people, including many young children clad in pyjamas and dressing gowns. It was a wonderful welcome for the one-time pride and joy of Canterbury's express locomotive fleet.

Although I'm a Christchurch resident, I probably took more photographs of "Ja" 1267 in the North Island than I ever obtained in Canterbury, and I probably covered more of the North Island railway system than the South. In Christchurch I had travelled many miles behind 1267, but on the North Island main trunk I joined photo line-ups many times, thinking that this would be the last time this locomotive would be in steam. It is, however, intriguing to recall that "Ja" 1267 is the only member of its class to have reached the five highest summits on the New Zealand railway system: Arthur's Pass, 2,417 feet; Cass summit, 2,043 feet; Waiouru, 2,670 feet; Pokaka summit, 2,671 feet; and National Park, 2,647 feet.

MISCELLANEOUS ANNOUNCEMENTS

INFORMATION WANTED on geared locomotives in Australia and New Zealand for a book being compiled by M. Gray, 27b Kemp Street, Mortdale, New South Wales 2223, Australia. Any reader able to help, please contact the Society's Research Officer or write direct to Mr Gray.

WILL EXCHANGE from my large collection of VR tickets for New Zealand tickets on a one for one basis. Large variety of types. Offerings please to P. Walhouse, 51 Riviera Street, Mentone, Victoria 3194, Australia.

WANTED TO BORROW. Every care taken. Pre-1948 English "Railway Observer" and other Railway Correspondence and Travel Society works, especially LNER and GWR histories. Also pre-1948 Journals of the Stephenson Locomotive Society and the Locomotive Railway Carriage and Wagon Review. Leicester, 31 McParland Street, Upper Hutt (Phone UH-88-290).