

A LOOK AT THE BAY OF PLENTY LINE IN 1965

By D. J. Stout

BY 1965 the East Coast Main Trunk had reached an exciting stage. Steam motive power was slowly giving way to diesel-electric locomotives, and the new deviation centring on the Kaimai Tunnel was giving thought to many new possibilities in this part of the railway world.

The author had the opportunity to travel over part of this line in May 1965. A beginning was made at Paeroa South, where the line to Thames branched off. At that time the Thames branch saw little traffic. The new junction had been set up in the late 1950s to eliminate the need for eastbound trains to reverse at Paeroa itself. The new yard stood about 1½ miles east of the old station, and was provided with four roads. In place of the large, older station at Paeroa was a lonely but pleasingly styled cabin housing tablet instruments and providing shelter for railcar passengers.

The yard was empty that day, and the only train to pass through while I was there was the railcar from Tauranga. It stopped briefly for a tablet change and to set down passengers. A quick look at the instruments showed that the railcar was now on the Paeroa South-Te Aroha section and that a goods train was approaching from Waihi. This train was encountered and photographed as it crossed the combined road and rail bridge at Karangahake. "DF" 1500 was in charge of the train which consisted mainly of "Lc" and "Vs" wagons.

The Auckland-Tauranga railcar was seen near the eastern portal of the Karangahake tunnel, and it seemed to make light work of the 1 in 50 grade. This was in sharp contrast to an eastbound goods train hauled by a "J" class 4-8-2 which was having difficulty with a heavy load and greasy track conditions.

The tunnel relief siding had been re-sleepered, and a 25 m.p.h. speed restriction was in force on the main line because of maintenance work. Waiikino yard and station had disappeared after closure in 1963, but the old wooden truss bridge here contrasted with the familiar steel structures seen elsewhere. Evidence of the need for repairs in this area was obvious from the state of the old 50 lb. rails.

The "J" was shunting in the yard at Waihi. Once the railhead of a branch of the same name, Waihi was in 1965 the limit of tablet operation from Frankton and still boasted semaphore signals. Roadbeds of the old goldmine railways could still be seen near the yard.

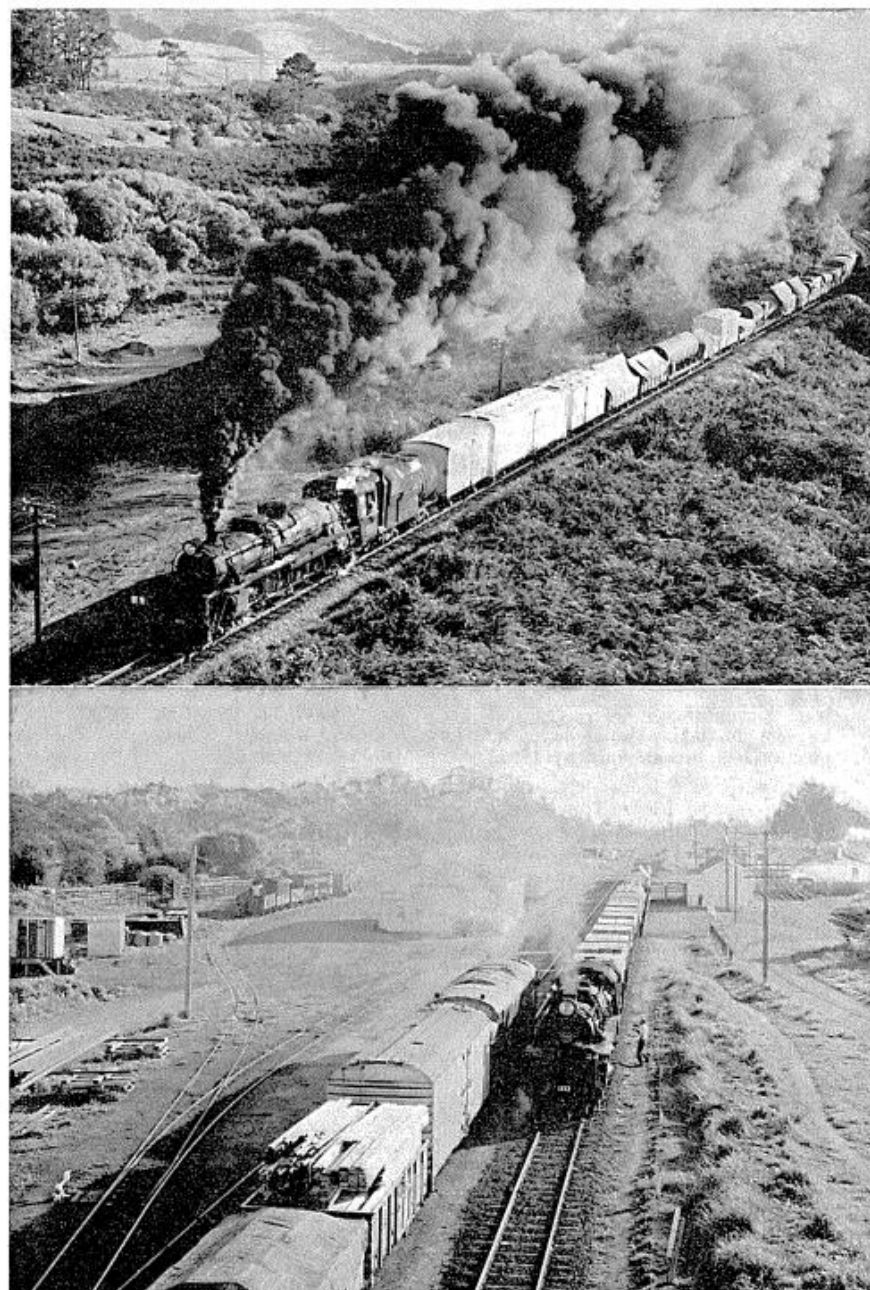
Waimata, at the top of the 1 in 50 Waimata bank, had only a goods shed and a small telephone cabin. This was quite an important crossing station and the point for dropping banking locomotives used from Tauranga. The line from Waihi to Tauranga was under automatic colour-light signalling, but had originally been open section.

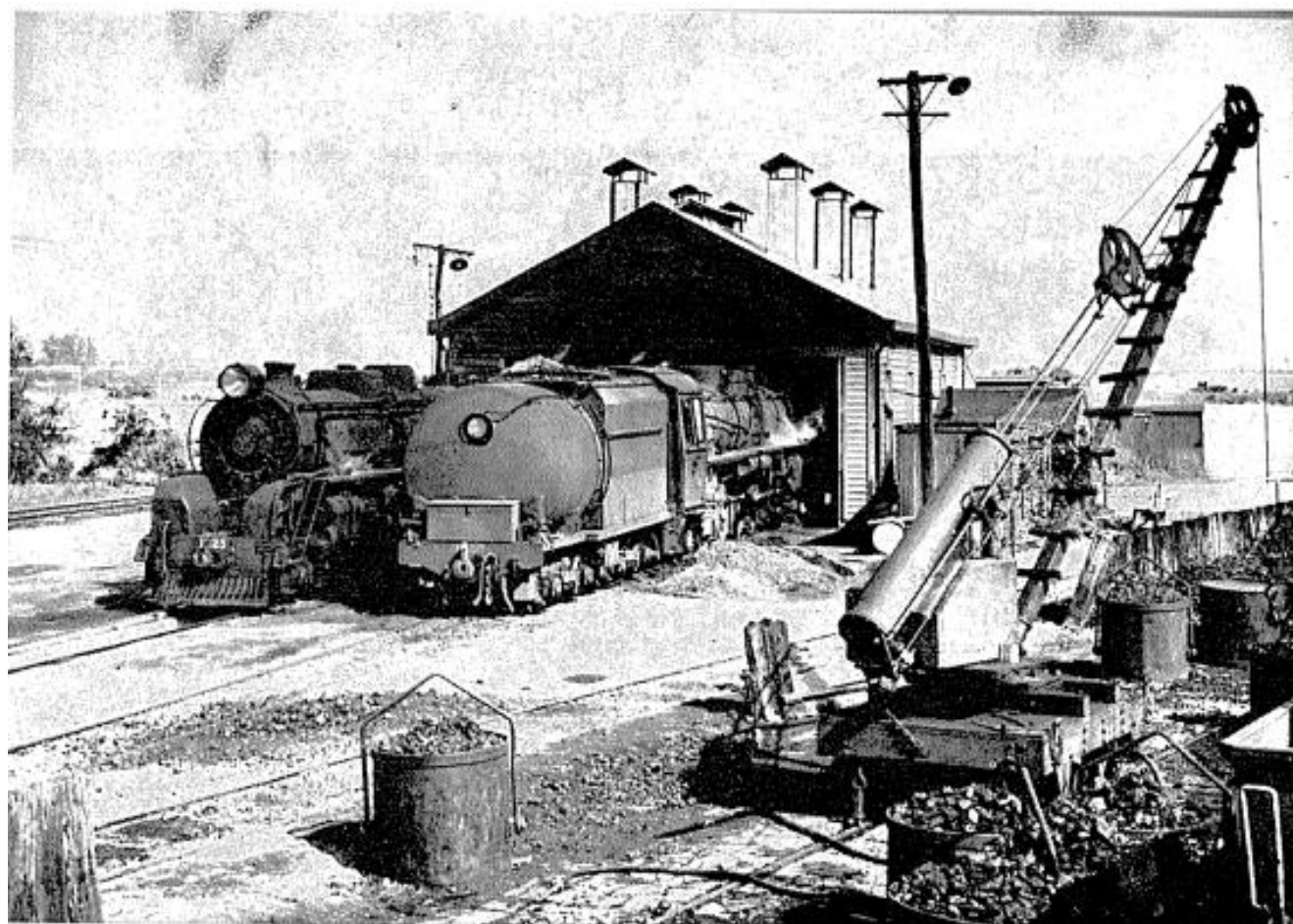
The "J"-hailed goods overtook the author just beyond Waimata and went on down the hill. Track relaying was in progress near Athenree, a station which had lost a lot of importance in recent years. It had a shelter for railcar patrons and a goods shed. Trains had once made

RIGHT, UPPER: Oil-fired "Jb" class 4-8-2 locomotive No. 1213 climbs a 1 in 70 gradient near Waihi with Frankton-Tauranga goods train No. 305 on 17 October 1967. This was the last day of regularly-scheduled steam locomotive workings on this line.

RIGHT, LOWER: At Waihi on 17 October 1967, "Jb" 1213 waits with train 309 on the main line while a "DF" class diesel-electric comes in with a Tauranga-Frankton goods on the loop.

Photographs: R. J. Armstrong





Photograph: D. L. A. Turner

In 1965 Tauranga was home for five "J" class 4-8-2s and several "Df"s. This view of the Tauranga engine shed in November 1965 is complete with two of the coal-fired "J"s.

a point of taking water here, but this practice had become rare by 1965.

Katikati had a moderately large station and a goods shed. This station was important for the needs of the farmers as well as being a crossing station.

Apata had recently been enlarged and would eventually be used as a base for equipment required for the Kaimai Tunnel, two miles to the west. Apata, a crossing station, had the usual facilities. Pahoia station had been demolished after its closure in 1962-63. Omokoroa still had a goods shed and a passenger shelter. A section of track removed from the goods shed road to repair a length of main line damaged in a derailment north of the yard had not yet been replaced. A shelter for railcar passengers had been built at Borell Road near Te Puna. Te Puna itself had a crossing loop and a small station building.

Otumoetai, 1½ miles from Tauranga, was an important stock loading station. It

also had a shelter for railcar passengers. (Railcars replaced the twice-weekly Tanea-tua express in 1959.)

At that time Tauranga shedded five "J"s and several "Df"s. The two-road locomotive shed had recently been lengthened to accommodate offices and crew facilities. The large passenger station still had a refreshment room for railcar passengers. The station and goods shed had been painted about a year previously. Tauranga's future as a locomotive depot was uncertain, for it was possible that, with complete dieselisation, a depot would be built at the large Te Maunga junction, a few miles east of Tauranga. Tauranga was probably destined to be a train control centre on the new Kaimai deviation. At that time it was a C.T.C. centre for the Te Maunga-Tauranga section.

My observations ended here, but I was satisfied with my day out. This line was constantly changing, and the future held many exciting possibilities in store.