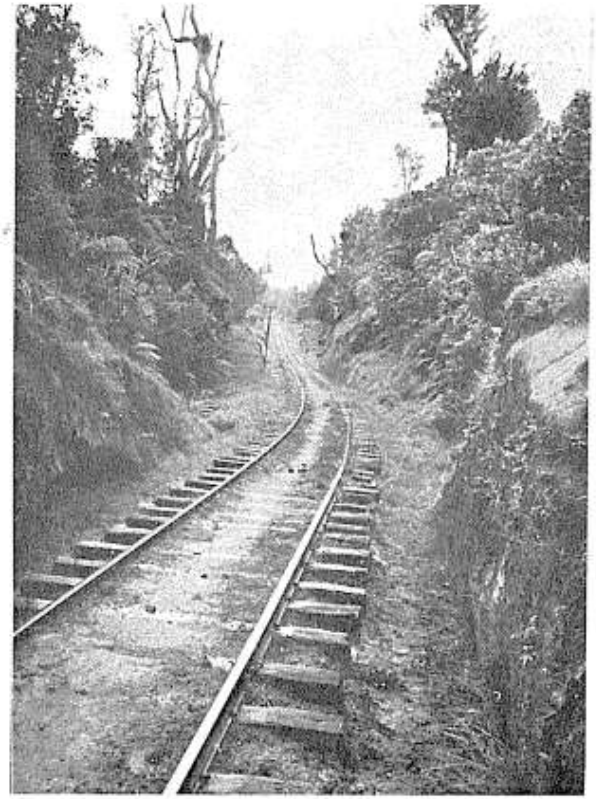
Mamaku Bush Tram Ceases Operation



LEFT: The "ingenious rail tractor" arrives at Mamaku with another load of logs from the bush in February 1970.

Photograph: T. Hurst



RIGHT: A view on the bush tramway about five miles south of Mamaku on 20 April 1973 showing the character of the 3 ft. 6 in. gauge track.

Photograph: R. M. Collins

USE OF the bush tramway that served the NZR Stores Branch sawmill at Mamaku, northwest of Rotorua, was discontinued from about 19 October 1974. This particular line was reported to have been built about 17 years earlier, but NZR involvement with a sawmill and tramway at Mamaku dates right back to 1915 when the Department purchased the Mamaku sawmill and bush worked by the Mountain Rimu Timber Company and also acquired cutting rights over adjacent blocks of Crown land.

As readers of *Cavalcade of New Zealand Locomotives* will know, two 16-wheeler logging locomotives were acquired as part of the deal, and these apparently were used for many years to bring logs in from the bush. One was sold in 1928, but the other survived at least until 1953.

Meanwhile, about 1944, an "F" class locomotive, No. 254, was allocated to the Stores Branch for use at Mamaku Sawmill, but in 1952 it was reported as back in use on the coal shunt at Frankton. It is believed to have come back there about 1947. In 1949 "F" 257 was reported as on loan to Mamaku for a time.

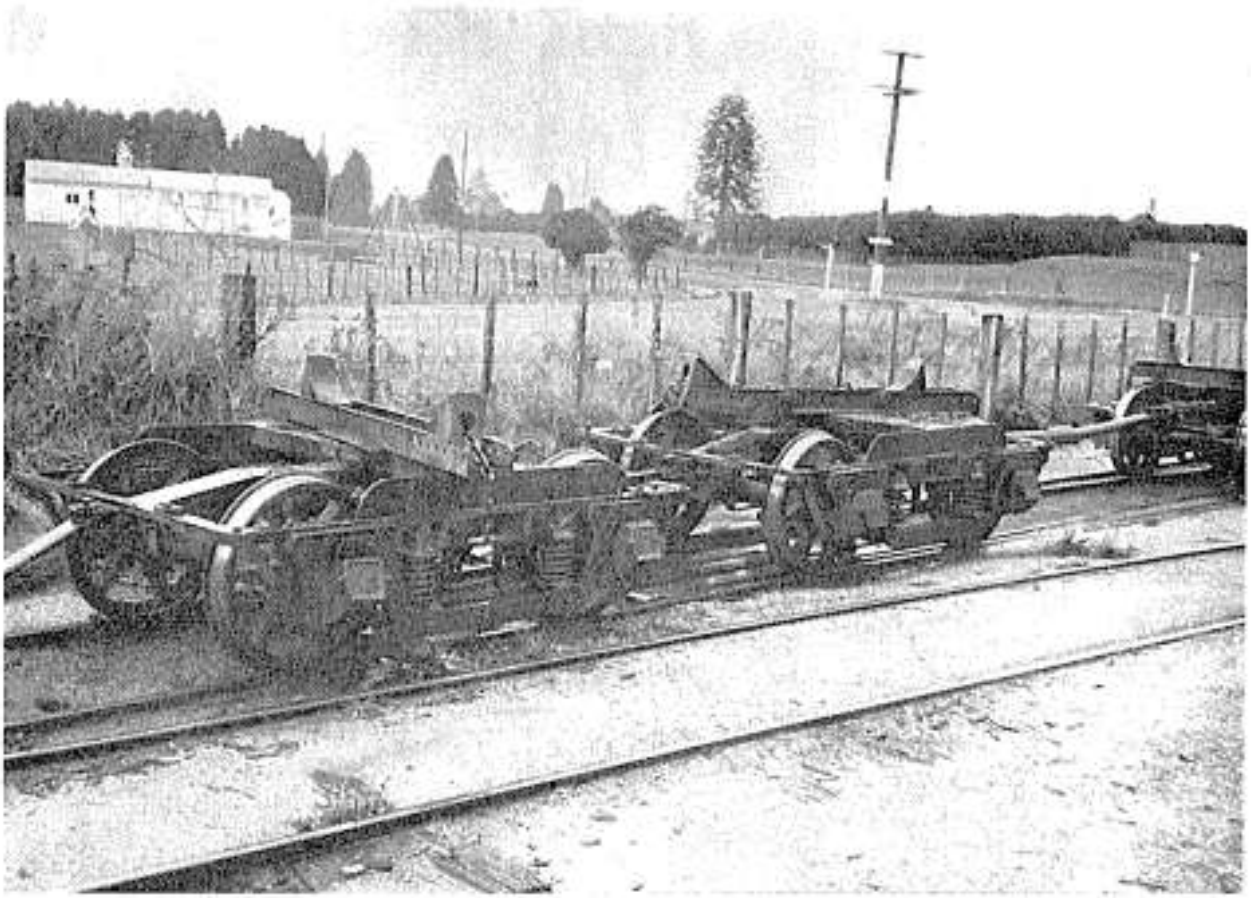
On 25 March 1948 a Heisler geared logging locomotive arrived by road at Mamaku. This was the Taupo Totara Timber Company's No. 8, which had been used by that firm on its 51-mile railway between Putaruru and Mokai (near Lake Taupo) until it changed over to road haulage. It was one of two supplied by the Heisler Locomotive Works, Erie, Pennsylvania, U.S.A., in 1921.

A brief report prepared about 1951 on the Mamaku Tramway said that all log loads were then being carried over a 3 ft. 6 in. gauge line running 10½ miles from Mamaku out to the then bush terminal stand. Branch lines were run off the main as required to connect up to log hauler stands. Each working day two log trains and four staff vehicles travelled over the first 7¼ miles of the line, which had been purchased in 1948 from a private sawmilling company, all running being safeguarded by telephone control from the sawmill office.

Railway log trains were then being hauled by the 28½-ton Heisler "geared steam unit" designed to do its work on a light rail, on uneven track, over steep grades and around sharp curves. Its speed was said to average six miles an hour. Log trains varied in size but usually did not exceed 30,000 superficial feet round measurement distributed over six sets of trucks.

Some sections of the original line were laid with rails of only 28 or 30 lb per yard laid on 6x4-inch native timber sleepers, but renewals were being made with heavier rails on 8x5-inch sleepers. Beyond the 7¼-mile peg, heavier rail was standard. On one short stretch a grade of 1 in 11 was encountered.

In September 1952 the Heisler had to be withdrawn from service. It was found uneconomic to attempt the necessary major overhaul, so arrangements were made for a contractor, Mr Oliver Smith, to undertake the log haulage to the mill using "ingenious



Photograph: R. M. Collins

These logging sets in use on the Mamaku bush tramway serving the NZR sawmill there were adapted from old passenger-car bogies. They were photographed on 20 April 1975.

rail tractors consisting of motor trucks each mounted on two powered bogies." It is this arrangement which has now ceased, bringing to an end the unique sight of log trains crossing the NZR main line on the level near Mamaku station.

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