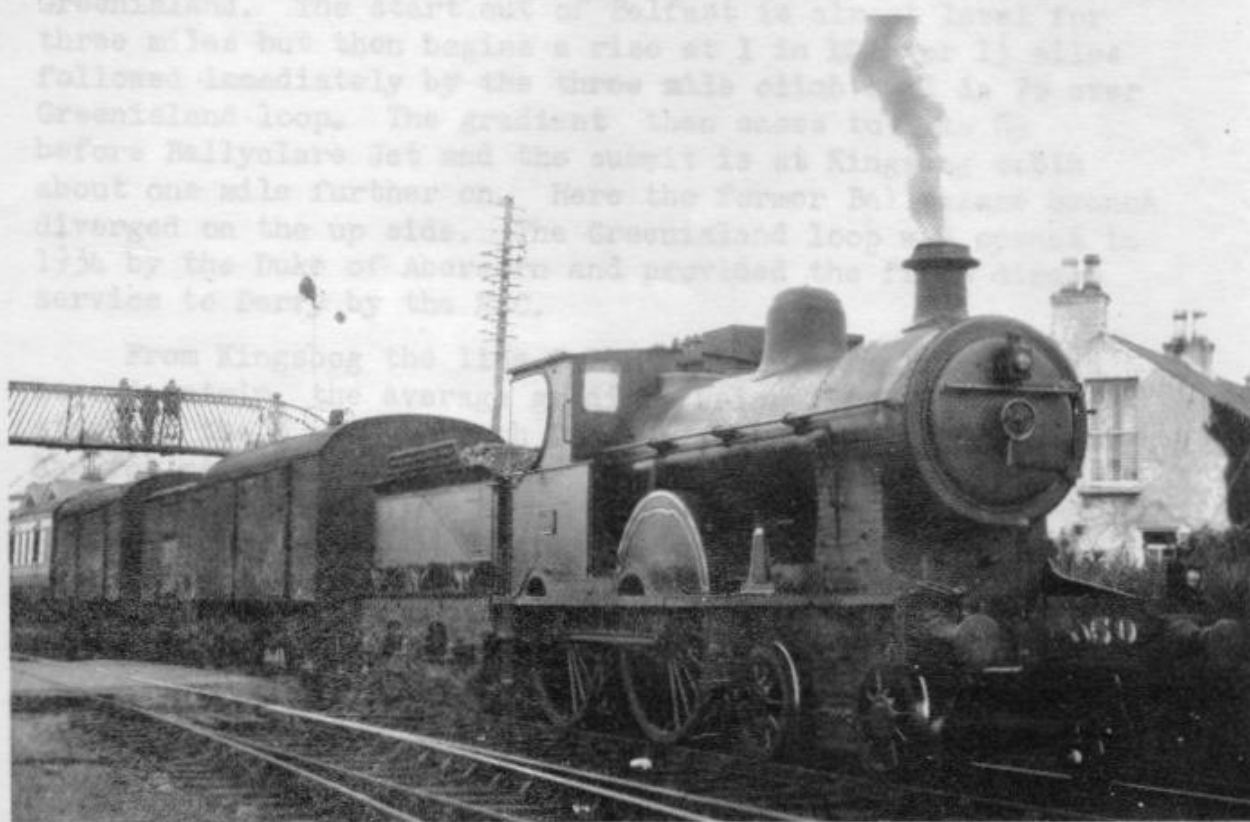


THE RAILWAY PRESERVATION SOCIETY OF IRELAND

Colmcille RAILTOUR

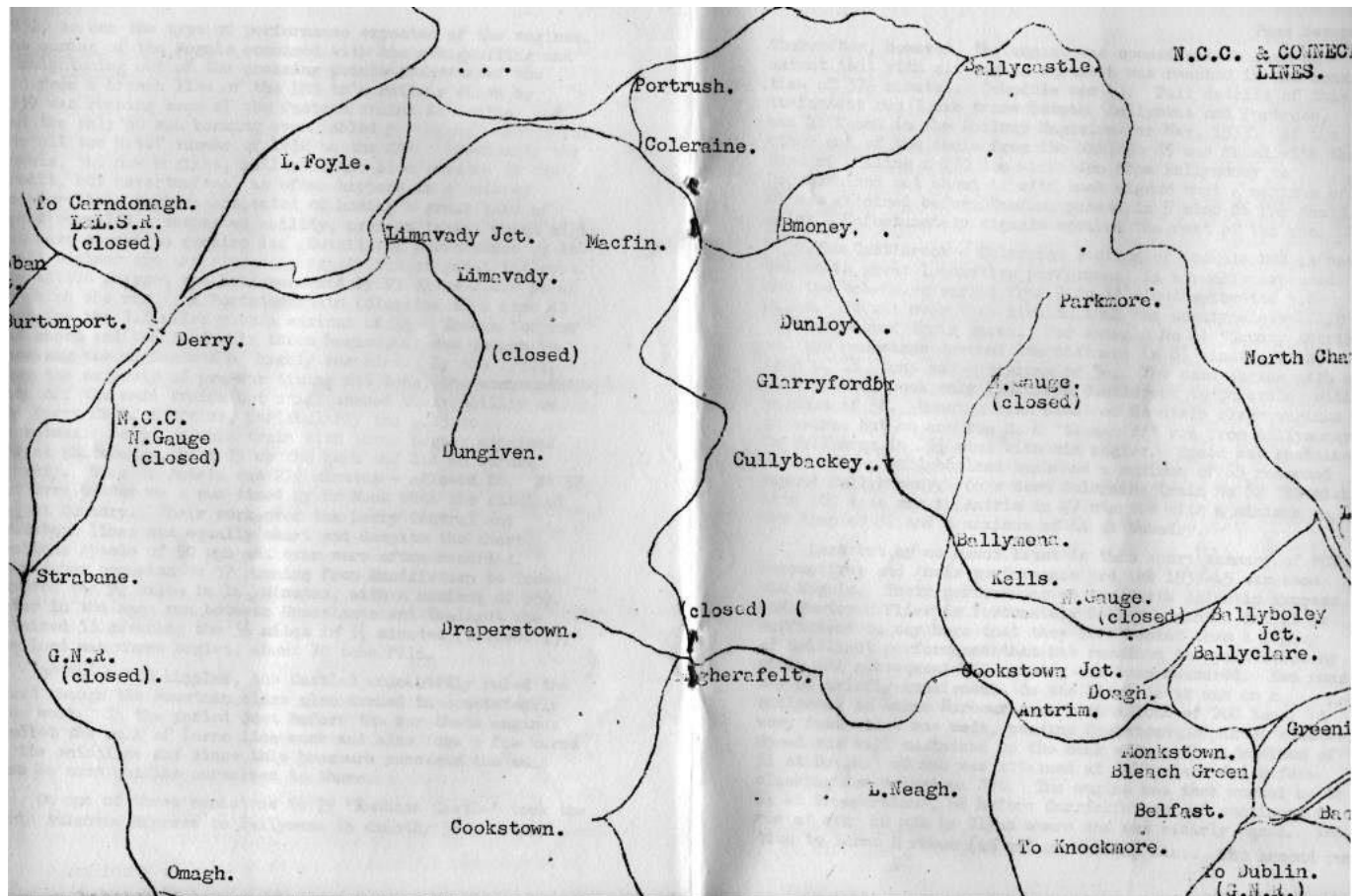


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COLMCILLE RAILTOUR

The Society's fourth tour of 1968 is over the old NCC main line. The NCC first came into being in 1903 when the Belfast and Northern Counties Railway, itself an amalgamation of three much older companies, was purchased by the Midland Railway Company. In 1923 the MR NCC became the LMS NCC in consequence of the grouping in England.

We commence our journey from York Road terminus - extensively damaged in 1941 in the blitz - along the line of the Belfast and Ballymena railway. This railway was completed in 1848 and from then until 1933 all trains had to reverse at Greenisland. The start out of Belfast is almost level for three miles but then begins a rise at 1 in 102 for 1¼ miles followed immediately by the three mile climb at 1 in 76 over Greenisland loop. The gradient then eases to 1 in 89 before Ballyclare Junction and the summit is at Kingsbog cabin about one mile further on. Here the former Ballyclare branch diverged on the Up side. The Greenisland loop was opened in 1934 by the Duke of Abercorn and provided the first direct service to Derry by the NCC.

From Kingsbog the line falls for eleven miles to just beyond Antrim, the average gradient being 1 in 180 and the steepest the ¾ mile through Dunadry at 1 in 119. This stretch has for many years formed one of Ireland's finest racing grounds. At Antrim the former GNR branch from Lisburn, now open only for goods traffic, comes in on the Down side. In pre-war days through coaches from Dublin were worked by this route to connect with the Golfers Express. Shortly after Antrim the line rises to Cookstown Junction, at one time called Drumsough Junction and still given the code DS in working timetables. Here the former Cookstown line diverged on the Down side. Cookstown Junction had at one time the longest relief siding on the NCC - Shannonstown, 1,157 yards long - and an engine shed. BCDR No.30 was one of the last inhabitants of this. After Cookstown Junction the line falls from post 27 to Kellswater and rises to Ballymena which means "middle town".

Ballymena was at one time the headquarters of a narrow gauge empire with an engine shed, small works and extensive siding accomodation. The narrow gauge platform was the other face of the main Up platform. A relic of the narrow gauge is the double water column at the Belfast end of the station. Two narrow gauge lines met at Ballymena, one from Parkmore and the other from Larne, the latter running parallel with the broad gauge for some distance, a fact which gave rise to racing between rival trains and called forth censure from BNCR engineer Mr Bowman Malcolm. The Larne line diverged from the broad gauge at Harryville near the site of the broad gauge goods yard (now the sleeper depot).

On leaving Ballymena the line climbs sharply through damp cuttings to Cullybackey and reaches a summit at post 37½ where Drumona siding diverged on the Down side. From here the line undulates to Dunloy before commencing the descent of Ballyboyland bank to Ballymoney. This bank provides a severe test for Up trains with one short length as steep as 1 in 97. On the Up side after MP50 can be seen Ballyboyland quarry formerly the NCC ballast pit; the cabin on the Down side is a recent structure erected when Killagan lost its passing loop. At Ballymoney ("a shrubby place") yet another narrow gauge railway, this time from Ballycastle, joined the NCC. This line, in 1947, provided one of the few cases in Ireland of a train being snowbound for any

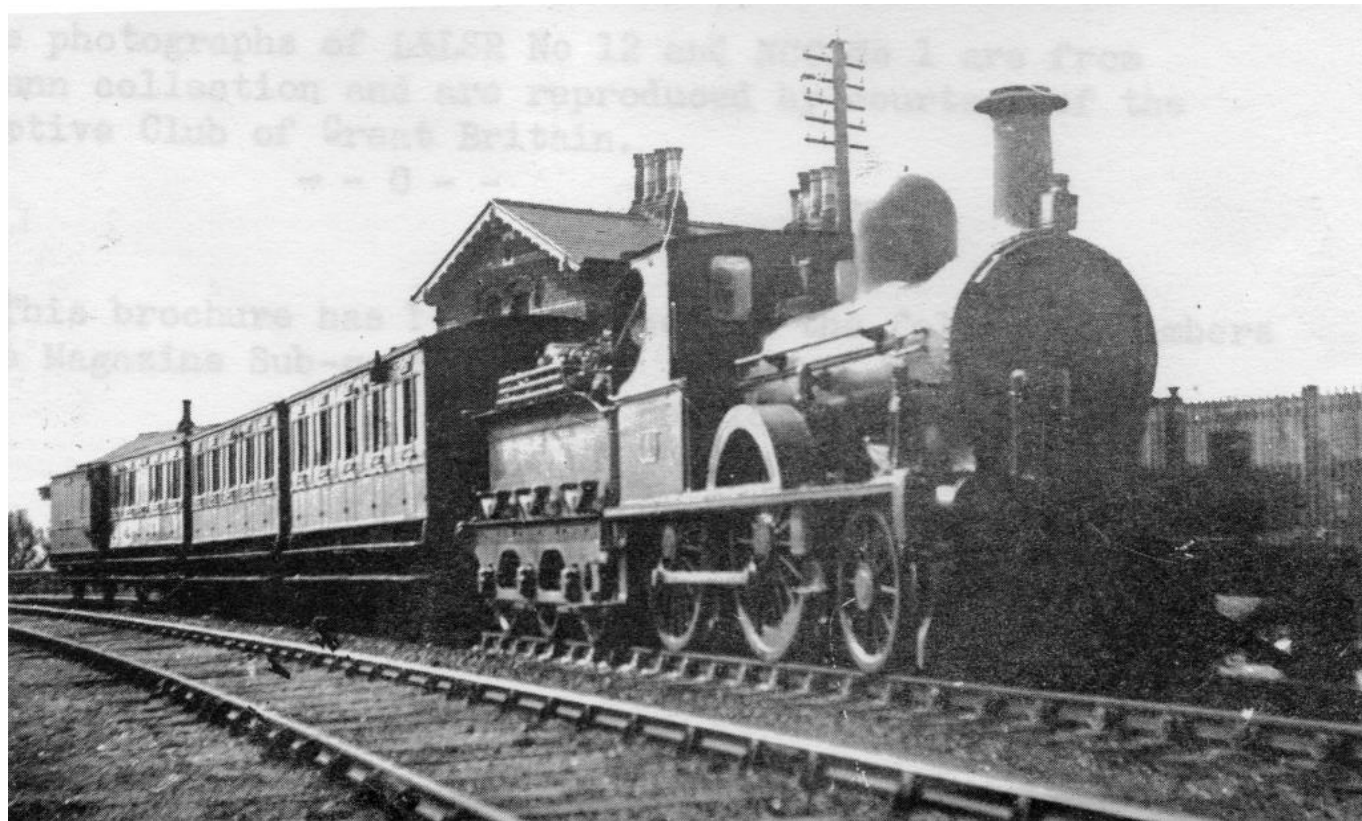
appreciable length of time. On leaving Ballymoney the line first falls and then rises through Macfin, former junction of the Derry Central branch, which came in on the Down side, and finally falls to Coleraine, said to be named Cuil-rathain (recess of the ferns) by St. Patrick.



No.91 on the 1:10pm ex Derry at Drumona on 19th October 1957.
(A. Donaldson)

The NCC here bifurcates, the left hand road to Derry and the right to Portrush. We make a short trip up to University on the Portrush branch - Ireland's newest station - before leaving the metals of the Belfast, Ballymena, Coleraine and Portrush Junction Railway to set out for Derry along the route of the Londonderry and Coleraine Railway. The present Bann viaduct was opened in 1924 and replaced an original structure built in 1860 further up the river and reached by a line which left Coleraine along the route of the recently lifted Coleraine Harbour Railway. The new bridge has eleven spans, the sixth from the Coleraine side being the counterweight bascule span which is opened by hydraulic gear, with provision for hand-working.

On leaving the Bann bridge the line curves sharply to follow the river to Castlerock. The entire line from Coleraine to Derry is almost dead level. Between Castlerock and Downhill are two tunnels under the grounds of the Downhill castle which at one time belonged to the Earl of Bristol, Bishop of Derry, 1768 to 1803. The Bishop was a well known figure in Ireland who favoured complete religious equality. The 'temple' which can be seen above the Downhill end of the tunnel was built by him in honour of a relation. On leaving Downhill the line skirts the base of the cliffs as far as Magilligan station and then proceeds over very flat country through Bellarena to Limavady Junction. This stretch of line is perhaps the most attractive on the NCC as on the Down side there are views of Benevenagh (beautiful mountain) and on the Up side the Donegal coast. Limavady Junction was the junction for Limavady and Dungiven though the latter place lost its passenger service in 1933. The junction is situated on a sharp curve with a 25mph restriction through it. Limavady town was the place where the famous "Londonderry Air" was collected from a local fiddler.



NCC No.1 at Limavady Junction on 6th May 1920. No.1 was built by Beyer Peacock in 1868, reboilered in 1892 and rebuilt once again in 1911. She was finally withdrawn in 1924 after a useful life of 56 years. (Nunn collection, courtesy of the Locomotive Club of Great Britain)

Just beyond Limavady Junction the railway crosses the runway of Coastal Command's Ballykelly Airfield. Special signalling ensures safety of both aircraft and trains. At Eglinton the railway passes the former Royal Naval Air Service base on the Down side and then crosses the Faughan Estuary to Culmore where the fort can be seen on the opposite bank of the Foyle. Half a mile further on comes Lisahally only a crossing point on the railway but a major naval base during World War II. After the German surrender more than fifty U-boats were anchored here as well as many British and American vessels. For the remaining four miles into Derry the line skirts the right bank of the Foyle. On the left bank can be seen a mark indicating the site of the boom during the siege of Derry in 1689. This was forced by the Mountjoy under Captain Michael Browne to bring supplies to the city.

At one time the NCC station in Derry was only one of four in the city; the others being the Victoria Road terminus of the Strabane narrow gauge and on the other side of the river, the GNR terminus at Foyle Road and the Lough Swilly's at Graving Dock. Connection between the termini was extremely tenuous. A broad gauge siding ran from the NCC to the narrow gauge at Victoria Road and the GNR and Lough Swilly were joined by the Londonderry Port and Harbour Commissioners' mixed gauge line. Traffic from one side of the river to the other was over a mixed gauge line, with wagon turntables at either end, which ran on the lower deck of the Craigavon bridge. Difficulty in transfer was further added to because the buffer heights of Lough Swilly and CDRJC rolling stock differed. Latterly the shunting on the quays was performed by tractors but the LP&HC possessed two 0-6-0 saddle tank locomotives.

The NCC station at Derry is built on a rather restricted site on the bank of the Foyle and the goods yard is located between the passenger station and the river. The engine shed is beside the passenger station on the Down side and the turntable and coaling bank are also on the Down side slightly beyond the platform ends. Originally, because engines turning fouled the main line, the turntable was interlocked with the signalling.



Londonderry & Lough Swilly No.12 on the 8:20am ex Burtonport near Pennyburn on 8th May 1920. These engines were the only narrow gauge tender engines in Ireland. The sister engine, No.11, was scrapped in 1933. No.12 had a tender cab fitted for working to Gweedore after the lifing of the Burtonport section. When built in 1905 they were among the most powerful engines in the country. (Nunn collection, courtesy of the Locomotive Club of Great Britain)

Derry city, the venue of our tour on this occasion, has a history stretching back to the sixth century when St. Colmcille (Columba) founded a little monastery on top of a hill near the city. From here he moved to Iona and founded the colony which brought Christianity to Scotland. A cross can still be seen at a small bay near Innishowen head where he and his men called on their way to Scotland.

The name "Derry" means the oak grove and "London" was not added to it until the seventeenth century when the plantation of Ulster took place. In 1689 the city withstood a siege of 105 days, helped by the walls which still stand in their entirety. Many relics of the siege are contained in the Cathedral.

Locomotives and Performance

In a brief brochure of this type full justice cannot be done to the locomotives of the NCC and its predecessors. Basically they can be divided into two periods - pre and post Mogul. Before the coming of No.90 in 1932 the NCC had been served by a most heterogenous selection of engines, yet all had vanished by 1952 save for the V class goods

and the surviving "Castle" class engines. The trains from 1952 up till the end of steam were run almost entirely by the Moguls and the tank variant, the "Jeeps". Of the more interesting engines which vanished in this period, the two cylinder compounds on the Borries principle were a major loss to the enthusiast. From their introduction in 1892 up until the coming of the U class 4-4-0s in 1914 this type of engine had borne the brunt of NCC passenger working. Even in the 1920s they could be found on many important turns and the last one, No.55 "Parkmount", did not go until 1944. Her sister engine, No.50 "Jubilee", was rebuilt as a two cylinder simple in 1928. These two engines had the largest driving wheels in Ireland - seven foot. As a class the NCC two cylinder compounds, both light and heavy, 2-4-0 and 4-4-0 were economical, free steaming engines with rapid acceleration and a fine turn of speed, but needed skilled handling when starting a heavy train.

In addition to the passenger compounds, there were the two goods engines of class E Nos. 53 and 54. The latter spent her last days shunting in Belfast. A special class of two cylinder compound was designed for the narrow gauge and these lasted until the closure of the lines. They were of the 2-4-2T type with outside Walchaerts motion.

Other than the compounds the NCC engines were a very mixed bunch averaging about three engines per class. The best known and most successful of them was the F class 2-4-0s - at one time the pride of the BNCR - and of the later engines the three very fine V class goods engines which received new boilers after the war. The V class had a fine turn of speed having been "clocked" up to 64mph on the level near Greenisland and were equally at home on goods or passenger work.

The 1930s on the NCC saw, in addition to the Moguls, the gradual rebuilding of the compounds into "Glen", "Castle", "Mountain" and "County" class engines. The latter two classes presented a most unusual spectacle of a small boiler pitched very high. Despite their odd appearance the Mountains were strong and fast and worked the Larne boat expresses with complete competence though perhaps not with the ease of the Castles. NCC locomotive stock was completed by the L and K class goods engines and the "Donkey" - Belfast's 0-4-0ST pilot.

Performance

Just as the NCC engines can be divided into pre and post 1932, so can the type of performance expected of the engines. The coming of the Moguls combined with the resignalling and straightening out of the crossing points transformed the NCC from a branch line of the LMS to a railway which by 1939 was running some of the fastest trains in Ireland and had the only 60mph booking ever tabled for steam except for the all too brief summer of 1932 on the GNR. Inevitably the Moguls, the new engines, collected the lion's share of the credit, but nevertheless, as often happens in a railway acceleration, engines suspected of having a great turn of speed revealed unsuspected ability, even on trains which might not have seemed to require it. Details of performance by the small engines are unfortunately scanty, but of great interest. One little snippet has been recorded by F1 class 2-4-0 No.46 in which she ran from Portstewart to Coleraine in 4 minutes 43 seconds for the 3.1 miles with a maximum of 55. Though the run was short and the load only three bogies, it was enough to show

why the engine was highly regarded. By the 1930s, when the majority of pre-war timing was done, the compounds were off the main trains but still showed their ability on the Derry Central trains, particularly the 4:25 to Cookstown. No.56 on this train with three bogies attained 48½ at Whitehouse, held 29 up the bank and did 60 before Dunadry. Time to Antrim was 27¾ minutes - allowed 28. No.57 did even better on a run timed by Mr Nock when she attained 64½ at Dunadry. Their work over the Derry Central and Cookstown lines was equally smart and despite the short sections speeds of 50mph and over were often recorded. On another occasion No.57 running from Randalstown to Toome covered the 9¼ miles in 14¼ minutes, with a maximum of 55½. Later in the same run between Upperlands and Tamlaght she attained 53 covering the 3½ miles in 5½ minutes (allowed 7); the load was three bogies, about 70 tons full.

Of the 4-4-0 simples, the Castles undoubtedly ruled the roost though the Mountain class also turned in consistently fine work. In the period just before the war these engines handled the bulk of Larne line work and also took a few turns on the main line and since this brochure concerns the main line we must confine ourselves to there.

On one of these occasions No.79 "Kenbaan Castle" took the North Atlantic Express to Ballymena in exactly 35 minutes. Thereafter, however, the engine was opened out to such an extent that with six bogies Portrush was reached in the amazing time of 37½ minutes. Schedule was 43. Full details of this, the fastest run I can trace between Ballymena and Portrush, can be found in the Railway Magazine for May 1937. At the other end of the scale from the North Atlantic Express, No.85 was faced with the task of hauling a 270 ton excursion from Ballymoney to Portrush and set about it with such vigour that a maximum of 61 was attained before Macfin, passed in 5 minutes 26 seconds for the 3.9 miles. Unfortunately signals spoiled the rest of the run.

The Castlerock - Coleraine section of the old NCC is not one where great locomotive performance is normally expected and the schedules varied from 9 to 11 minutes for the 5.8 miles. It was over this stretch that the County class 4-4-0 engines showed their paces. For example, No.61 "County Antrim" on two occasions covered the distance in 8¼ minutes with a load of 150 tons and a maximum of 56. The same engine with a lighter load took only 7.51 from Castlerock to Coleraine with a maximum of 58. Running with Glen and Mountain class engines is scarce but on one run No.4 "Glenariff" ran from Ballymoney to Ballymena in 25¼ minutes with six bogies. Speed was sustained at 45mph up Ballyboyland bank and a maximum of 68 recorded beyond Cullybackey. On a Down Coleraine train No.62 "Slemish" with 100 tons ran to Antrim in 27 minutes with a minimum on the loop of 32 and a maximum of 64 at Dunadry.

Last but by no means least in this short summary of NCC locomotives and their performance pre the 1939-45 war come the Moguls. Their performance on the North Atlantic Express and Portrush Flyer is fortunately well documented and it is sufficient to say here that they left behind them a legacy of brilliant performance that has remained the yardstick by which all subsequent NCC running has been measured. Two runs may be briefly mentioned. On the first No.92 was on a Ballymena to Larne Harbour turn with a load of 200 tons. A very fast

start was made, passing Cookstown Junction in 9½ minutes. Speed was well sustained up the bank with a final minimum of 51 at Doagh. 60mph was attained at Ballyclare Junction before slacking for Monkstown Junction. The engine was then worked up to 61 at Trooperslane, 68 before Carrickfergus and continued to run at over 60mph to Glynn where she was clearly eased. The time to Larne Harbour (45 miles) was 48½ minutes. The second run shows the capabilities of the Moguls on a really heavy train.

No.91 was faced with the task of taking eleven bogies - almost 350 tons full - to PortStewart on the Portrush Flyer schedule of 75 minutes to the restart. With this vast load the engine made a game start, accelerating to 48 before Whitehouse but on the 1 in 76 the load told and the speed fell to 23 at Mossley though the engine then accelerated to 30 on the 1 in 89 to Ballyclare Junction. To this point a minute had been dropped, but from here a fine sprint down the bank was made with 68½ after Doagh, 74½ at Dunadry and 73 through Antrim. Cookstown "hump" was cleared at 60mph and Ballymena, passed exactly on the 38 allowed, at 45mph. More fine work followed with 54 after Cullybackey, 58 by Glarryford, 64 by Dunloy and after a maximum of 73 down Ballyboyland, the engine was stopped by signals in Ballymoney in 58½ minutes - allowed 59 to pass.

During the war the NCC engines of all classes were worked almost into the ground hauling troop and ambulance trains far beyond their nominal capacity. After 1946 the need for new engines became urgent and so the Mogul Tanks or Jeeps arrived. Unfortunately the NCC timetables never recovered their pre-war magnificence, but despite this the new engines, as can be seen from the following runs, showed that when opportunity arose they could turn in performances up to the standard of their tender cousins.

Over the last few years, conditions have been unfavourable to fast steam running. Major overhauls ceased in 1965 with the shopping of 4, 6 and 54 and although steam is now back in daily use on the stone traffic, only minor repairs have since been undertaken. Also the gradual disappearance of the automatic tablet exchangers have made it impossible to maintain high speed averages over long stretches of single line. Despite all this, however, recent locomotive work has been good.

Almost the typical main line train today is the heavily loaded Portrush excursion, and the particularly good examples were timed in summer 1967 when engine 55 was first choice at York Road.

After picking up a party at Doagh on a 9:50 Sunday School special, the run with ten bogies to Ballymena in 21 minutes 22, with a 72 maximum before Muckamore, 56 minimum over Cookstown Junction and 69 at Kellswater. On restart we took 7 minutes 57 seconds to pass Cullybackey at 43, then attained 60 at Glarryford and ran the ensuing nine miles to Ballyboyland in 8 minutes 51 seconds, where a tablet drop finally arrested our brisk progress. A week later, the same engine again showed how easy it was to keep time with 330 tons; as with no checks at all we ran from Ballymena to Coleraine in 36¼ minutes, including 16 minutes 59 seconds for the 17 miles from Post 42; the maximum was 66.

As far as service trains go, a most entertaining run was provided by No.52 on the 8:50 Derry in summer 1965. Although bad stops prevented

any good sectional times, splendid work was done with eight bogies - notably 60 between Cullybackey and Glarryford (start to stop) and on restart 64 through Dunloy and 70 down Ballyboyland. From Ballymoney to Coleraine, however, one of the best recent runs was with No.51 on the 8:35 Derry. With a load of only six bogies, she was able to make a breathtaking start (67 at Macfin, passed in 4 minutes 55 seconds) and this was enough to ensure a 9½ minutes time to Coleraine.

A fairly typical example of the days of automatic tablet exchanging is provided in the other direction by No.1 and a seven coach Up Portrush relief. Time from Ballymoney to Ballymena was 24 minutes 27 seconds, with a 42 minimum up Ballyboyland, 67 at Glarryford, and after easing for Dunminning, 69 maximum down Cullybackey.

The Ballymena - Belfast section resolutely defies compression and a few examples must suffice. One of the best recent climbs of the bank was made, this year, with engine 51 and ten bogies. Despite a gate check at Cookstown Junction and after passing Antrim at 53, we accelerated to 58 and fell only to 51½ on the climb. Even with two more signal checks, actual time was only 36 minutes 28 seconds or just under 35 nett. Most interesting of all, the maximum was only 62!

Three years ago, the 2:10 pm ex Derry provided the last regular non-stop booking from Ballymena to Belfast and since time was often lost through out of course crossing stops, etc., the lateness at Ballymena inspired some first class pieces of enginemanship. On one such run, No.4 and nine bogies ran to Belfast in 34 minutes 3 seconds, including even time over the 17½ miles from Kellswater to Kingsbog summit.

Really sparkling work between Coleraine and Derry is fairly infrequent today, due to the fact that most steam trains now tend to be heavily loaded excursions. But one bright run with 56 and ten bogies out of Derry produced 60 before Limavady Junction, passed in 23 minutes 45 seconds, 47 before Bellarena, 60 between there and Castlerock and 62 before stopping in Coleraine. However, a herculean effort with No.51 and no less than eleven bogies bettered this run, with a 21½ minute time to Limavady Junction (maximum 62).

The last regular light steam train on this section was the summer 1:05 ex Derry, which rarely exceeded four bogies but trailed a long string of vans, some of which were attached intermediately at Coleraine and Antrim. With four bogies and three vans, No.3 made a good showing on this train a few years ago. Times were 10 minutes 34 seconds to stop in Eglinton (maximum 64), 10 minutes 17 seconds thence to the Junction (maximum 68) and 6 minutes 42 seconds to Bellarena (maximum 56). And with the same load a few weeks later No.53 ran from Bellarena to Castlerock in 9 minutes 5 seconds (maximum 64).

Other examples of recent NCC main line performance will be found in "Five Foot Three" issue No.3 and in the "Killultagh" and "Cúchulainn" railtour brochures.

THANKS

Once again our best thanks go to Northern Ireland Railways without whose continuing co-operation today's railtour would not be possible.

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