



## The honour of driving class NG10 no 61 from Mark Ruddy. Stars of Sandstone 2019

On 5 April 2019, I was in the privileged position to be booked as the driver for the first trip of NG10 no 61. She was withdrawn from service in the early 60's and restored to operating status by Sandstone fitters for the Stars of Sandstone 2019 event.

It was early on the Friday morning when I walked down to the shed at Sandstone loco depot and workshop. In the dark I could see number 61 standing outside the shed. The fireman booked on shift with me was Gerhard du Preez, a large bloke. We set off to get the 10 class ready for the trip. It was a sight to behold, the small cab and the big fireman. Standing next to us was NGG16 no 153, also being prepared for the day's work. The space between the two locos was very small and that made lubricating number 61 very uncomfortable on fireman's side



Oiling round



A cab full of coal!

With the cab and lubrications done, we needed to get fresh coal and clean the fire, so we moved off to the coaling area. The 10 class had a "Johnson bar" for the reverser and that was something new to me. The regulator was also something I'm not use to. It opened up horizontally. I battled to get her moving and found the tender brakes being a bit of a problem. Gert, the steam fitter, quickly sorted that out and off we steamed to the ash-pit and water column on the section of line where the coal is loaded. The coaling was a messy business, coal all over the floor. The wood partition separating the coal from the cab was missing and thus there was nothing to prevent the coal from falling into the cab.

Gerhard cleaned up as best he could. Coal dust was not a problem seeing that it was raining. Fire cleaning was something else. First the shaker for the bars was not evident immediately. I soon found out it was this piece of metal tubing hanging down from a vertical round bar extending from the floor. The only reason why I stumbled upon this is because none of the other locos I worked on, had one. We tried to move it from side to side, but it was tight. The second mystery was the ash-pan. There was no handle in the cab and also no ash-pan slide. On the side of the ash-pan was a lid that had to be lifted up, as it hinged from the top. Upon opening the side lid, I found the ash-pan blocked solid. There was no room for the bars to shake. I took a fire-iron and began digging the ash out. What a task. Eventually the bars could be moved as the ash became less in the pan. After a huge lesson in NG10's operations, we're done. Fire cleaned, water topped up and coal replenished.



Entering the station for coupling to the train at Hoekfontein

We left the loco area and started the incline towards Hoekfontein station. The sand was not working and she slipped all the way to the top. Someone remarked that it was because of the "big" fireman I had that the slipping occurred. Once we reached the top and levelled off she sounded better. Because it was 61's "Maiden trip", I had to arrive at Hoekfontein station with smoke, steam and whistle. My first trip was towards Mooihoek loop, chimney first and return tender first. Through Hoekfontein towards Grootdraai and return to Hoekfontein. A straight forward trip it looks like, but wait, there's a twist..... We set off towards Mooihoek in pouring rain. Some of the carriages were "open plan" with no windows, just drop down canvases. Setting the cut off to a shorter stroke was a slight mission. As soon as you release the catch of the Johnson bar and pull it back, the movement of the valves tends to pull the bar forward again and it takes some effort to pull the bar back. Through the shunting yard, out the gates and down the hill. Just before we reached the gates I applied minimum brake to keep the train stretched and not have a run-in after I closed the regulator. In the meantime, the regulator gland in the "stuffing box" started to leak. Every time the regulator is opened, steam comes out into the cab. As the trip continued it got worse and worse. At Mooihoek we

uncoupled and ran around the train to hook up on the opposite side and haul the lot back to Grootdraai, through Hoekfontein.



Returning from Mooihoek tender first and heading for Grootdraai.

By now it was pouring with rain. We left Mooihoek and drifted down to the pond on the left before the climb to Hoekfontein begins. Pulling tender first on wet rails is tricky, so I had to gather some speed for the climb. The regulator was not a smooth operation, you had to put some effort into it. If you sat on your seat and try to pull the regulator open, your swing-seat will move first, so control on the regulator was limited, unless you stood on the footplate for stability. This means "rocking on your knees" the whole trip. By the end of the day my knees knew about the day we had. We steamed through Hoekfontein and just past, I shut the regulator and drifted over the crossing towards the semaphore signal on the Grootdraai line. There's another dirt crossing and then the regulator gets opened again for the incline ahead. We are sopping wet in the cab. This is caused by the rain and the leaking regulator. At Grootdraai the points gets changed to go left and slowly we steam around the balloon. Past the last section of trees and it's time to gather speed for the climb out Grootdraai. Still in the balloon she starts to slip. I cannot apply more steam because it's only going to waste due to the slipping. Halfway up the straight we stall. Tender first and wet rails, not a good combination. I push the train back to the trees again for the second attempt. This time we went a little further, but stalled again. I got my fireman and the guard, Mr. C. Brooks to take the coffee mugs, fill them with sand and sand the rails out in front of the train. Again we push back and rush the hill for a 3rd time. We made good progress until suddenly it felt like someone was applying the brakes. The beats were strong, but we were going nowhere slowly. We stalled again, but each time a little further up the hill. Upon inspection we found a vacuum pipe came off. As I was doing the inspection down the train, I could see the drenched passengers, wondering what's going on. To lighten the mood I told them not to worry, they won't be charged extra for staying longer on the train.

As a precaution I had the rails sanded again. Over the two-ways radio came the voice of the train controller at Hoekfontein, asking if they should send a diesel to come help. No ways that's going to happen. I brought the train here, I'll take it back, and I refused their help. The leak on the regulator got so bad that at times I could not see my fireman on the other side of the footplate. We charged the hill again for the 4th time and made it. Over the top and now it's a long downhill to just before the station. As we entered the station there was a lot of steam, but from the cab, not the cylinders. We uncoupled and took 61 down to the loco for repairs.

What an experience. Thrilled to have been part of her first trip with lots to tell, and the photos to proof it. Our final video shows the steamy arrival back at Hoekfontein.

**Return to the homepage and click on the video to view the final piece of the story.**

All pictures and video courtesy of Mark Ruddy.