

Snapshot of the Dornoch branch

As we briefly reported last month, the British Railways scene has been swept clear of another locomotive family by the withdrawal of the last Highland Railway survivor, 0-4-4 tank No. 55053, one of four "25" Class 0-4-4 tanks built at Lochgorm Works in 1905-6 during the Peter Drummond regime. The last haunt of the two final survivors of the type and of Highland motive power in general, H.R. Nos. 25 *Sirathpeffer* and 45 (B.R. Nos. 55051/3) was the delightful 7½-mile branch from The Mound, on the Highland main line from Dingwall to Wick, to Dornoch, which was opened on June 2, 1902, as the Dornoch Light Railway. It was worked from the beginning by the Highland, which built its own hotel at Dornoch in 1904, and absorbed into the L.M.S. at the grouping. It is operated on a "one-engine-in-steam" basis.

The Dornoch train, usually composed of a corridor composite brake (of latter-day Great Western origin in one picture in our files) and probably a handful of goods

wagons and brake-van, has its own platform at The Mound. From the junction the branch falls steeply away at 1 in 50 to the shore of Loch Fleet, which it crosses in company with the road on a long causeway, although there is a short viaduct over the mouth of the River Fleet at The Mound end of it. At the other side of the causeway the train has to pull up for the guard to climb down and operate the first of six sets of level crossings on the branch, all of which have to be opened and shut by the train crew.

The journey from The Mound to Dornoch takes about 45 minutes and for much of the way the train skirts the shore of Loch Fleet, offering some superb views of the Sutherland mountains. Apart from the Loch Fleet causeway, the branch earthworks were obviously kept to the minimum, and consequently there are some steep gradients, especially beyond the approximate halfway mark of Skelbo, after which the engine faces slopes of the order of 1 in 50. There is a small one-road engine shed at Dornoch, the county town of Sutherland, where the branch engine spends the night, as the weekdays only service of two trains each way begins and ends at Dornoch.

MOTIVE POWER MISCELLANY

LONDON MIDLAND REGION

Western Division

At length one of the two dual-fitted "Britannias" has received its name. This is No. 70044, which on February 25 was outside the Crewe Erecting Shop with its Westinghouse equipment removed and fitted with smoke deflectors bearing the name of *Earl Haig*. On the same date No. 92125 was the latest 2-10-0 to be completed at Crewe, while construction was in progress up to No. 92133. The sender of this information expresses surprise that in a recent article "Toram Beg" should have commented on "the lovely riding qualities" of the rebuilt "Royal Scots," since on the L.M.R. these engines have a reputation for rough riding; many drivers, asserts our correspondent, prefer a rebuilt "Patriot," although the latter requires a little more "pushing." As with every class, some "Scots" are stronger than others and strength seems to go hand in hand with roughness; for example, No. 46170 is reputedly one of the strongest in the class and is also regarded as the roughest. Our reader tells us that a special report is made on each "Scot" passing through Crewe Works in an effort to get to the root of the trouble, which received special attention when No. 46165 was recently on the Test Plant at Rugby.

The latest arrival at the Test Plant, "Jubilee" No. 45722, was noted outside the building on February 22 with its chimney removed and apparently replaced by a species of double stovepipe. This was noted from the 2 p.m. Manchester-Euston, which that day made an electrifying run. It rolled into Rugby 6 min. early (and ahead of the 2.10 p.m. from Liverpool) behind Class "5" 4-6-0 No. 44983 and Pacific No. 70031. Departure from Rugby was made on schedule and the pair then hurried their 15-coach load over the 82½ miles to Euston in 72 min., arriving 12 min. early; the 46½ miles from passing Bletchley to the Euston stop occupied no more than 38 min. In the London area 2-10-0s Nos. 92048/55 (18A) worked engineers' trains over the electric lines on February 10; No. 92048 was seen on the up electric line at South Kenton and its sister in the Willesden New Line bay.

A W.R. "Grange" 4-6-0 found itself at Acton Grange Junction on February 24. Heading a train of tank wagons from Saltney to Stanlow, No. 6806 discovered at Helsby that occupation of the layout made it impossible to reverse from the up Chester line on to the down Hooton road. The "Grange" therefore continued in the Warrington direction as far as Frodsham Junction, left its train standing there and proceeded light to Acton Grange Junction,



THE
DORNOCH
BRANCH



★ Three memories of the last Highland Railway locomotives to survive, at work on the Dornoch branch. In the top picture 0-4-4T No. 55053 heads the 1 p.m. service from Dornoch out of Skelbo; in the centre picture No. 55051 takes the same train across the causeway to The Mound; and in the bottom picture is No. 55051 at Dornoch.

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