

A GRAND TOUR

THE BEST OF CHINA'S REMAINING
STEAM LINES

16 NOVEMBER - 8 DECEMBER 2013

REPORT BY DUNCAN COTTERILL

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RAILOGRAPHY
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cover photo :

JS8081 accelerated a loaded coal train along the main line through the opencast pit at Sandaoling, passing JS8197 setting off for the loader with the next train of empties. 23 November 2013

INTRODUCTION

Another grand tour of China by the usual suspects (Peter Breeze, Sun Xiaolan and myself) in search of working steam, good food and half-drinkable beer. We had planned a three week trip to the opencast mine at Sandaoling, in the far west of China, the coal operations at Fuxin and Pingzhuang, in the north-east, and the Rongshan narrow gauge line, in Sichuan, but had to rearrange things shortly before departure. Information that Rongshan had ceased operating, prompted a rethink, as did the news that dieselisation at Pingzhuang was imminent.

In the end we settled on an itinerary with a high degree of flexibility. After a week at Sandaoling, we would have two nights at Fuxin and two at Pingzhuang, as originally planned, leaving the final week flexible to spend at Pingzhuang, Fuxin, Tiefu or Fushun as required. If Pingzhuang had gone diesel, we'd only have wasted a day, if it was still steam we could stay much longer.

We set out with very low expectations, particularly of the beer.

Fuxin's SY1395 "Zhu De Hao" set off from the tippermen's bothy on Wulong tip with an empty spoil train on 3 December. Could this be the last decorated steam loco in normal service anywhere in China?



LONDON TO BEIJING

Friday 15 – Saturday 16 November

"Due to the threat of industrial action your flight has been cancelled." It wasn't the most encouraging thing to read a couple of days before departure, especially when the next bit read "During the dispute reroutes will be extremely difficult". Rongshan, Pingzhuang and now this. Was it shaping up to be the trip from Hell?

Fortunately the dire prediction proved unfounded and the reroute was quite straightforward. By the time I'd logged on to Finnair's website, I discovered that I'd already been transferred to British Airways' direct BA1039 from London to Beijing, departing 45 minutes after the Finnair flight and arriving almost three hours earlier. Thank you Finnair, that'll do nicely!

The journey to Heathrow was unremarkable, apart from the surreal experience of being the only passenger on a London bus during the rush hour.

The flight itself was also boringly uneventful. BA's Boeing 777 departed from Heathrow a few minutes late but arrived at Capital Airport on time at 05:00. For once, it would have been good to arrive a couple of hours late but it was not to be.

Beijing Airport was quiet at five in the morning but by the time we'd gone through immigration, collected our bags and changed money, there were a few catering establishments open where we could while away a couple of hours, fighting the jetlag over a coffee until Xiaolan arrived.



DF4D.3010 left Beijing with K1301, the 10:17 to Manzhouli, 2260km and 34 hours away. Despite running under the wires for the first 1040km, the train was diesel hauled.

BEIJING

16 November

After dropping our bags at the Airport Hotel, we made our way into town by taxi. We'd intended to take the Airport Express and subway but just missed the shuttle bus to the airport and had to find a taxi to take us to Terminal 2. The driver offered to take us into the centre for a little more than the Airport Express fare and by 10:00 we were at the Dongnan Jialou, the old watchtower overlooking the approach to Beijing station.

The next two hours were busy with arriving and departing trains, empty stock moves and light engine movements. Locos of classes DF4BD, DF4C, DF4D, DF7C, DF10F, DF11, DF11G, HXD3C, SS8, SS9 and SS9G were seen. There were no high-speed EMUs, the morning departures had gone before we arrived and we left before the first of the afternoon arrivals.

There were noticeably more HXD3C than last year but still plenty of other classes. The DF10F twin unit worked in on the same train it was seen on last year, a local passenger from Tianjin Bei, so it's probably a regular working. The continued use of diesels on so many long distance trains

was surprising, especially as most of the workings involved ran over the electrified routes via Tangshan Bei or Tianjin.

None of the old classes that used to work empty stock around Beijing were seen. No BJ or NY7 were seen and, another surprise, there weren't any standard green DF4B either.

The rest of the day was spent on a leisurely walk through Beijing to Tian'anmen Square

and back via a coffee bar, a model shop and the obligatory duck restaurant. We, eventually returned by bus to our hotel near the airport.

DF10F.2001 backed the empty stock of train 6452 out of Beijing towards the nearby carriage sidings on 16 November. A cold northerly wind brought clear skies to the capital and helped to keep a severely jet-lagged photographer awake.

The two parts of the loco were numbered DF10F.2001A and DF10F.2001B



BEIJING TO SANDAOLING

Sunday 17 November

Sandaoling used to be a very difficult place to reach, involving an extremely long, 28 hour, 2560km train ride from Beijing. The alternative was a flight to the fog trap of Wulumuqi followed by several hours on a train to Hami. After being fogged in at Wulumuqi airport for two days on each of two separate occasions, we weren't going to try that again.

Fortunately, we didn't have to. A new development this year is the introduction of direct flights between Beijing and Kuerla via Hami on three days a week. This makes it possible to spend the night in a Beijing hotel and still be at the lineside at Sandaoling by lunchtime, a vast improvement on anything available before.

We took the Sunday morning Air China flight, a Boeing 737, departing from Beijing punctually at 07:30 and arriving at Hami shortly after 11:00. We were met at the airport by Gu Li and a driver and taken to Sandaoling, arriving around 13:00.

JS8076 returned to Xibolizhan after dumping its load of spoil on the tip. The afternoon of 17 November was very hazy, making silhouettes an option much earlier than usual.

After the epic multi-day journeys required to reach Sandaoling in previous years, it was difficult to believe that we'd started the day in Beijing and still managed five hours by the lineside at Sandaoling before sundown.



SANDAOLING MINING RAILWAY

Sunday 17 – Sunday 24 November



What can you say about this place? It's simply the best steam location on the planet.

Coal operations were very similar to last year. There were three dedicated 13-wagon sets carrying coal from the loader in the big pit to the washery at Xuanmeichang. As before, loaded trains were hauled, chimney first, out of the pit and empties propelled back down. At quieter times there were only two rakes in service. Locomotives remained fairly constant

previous page : JS6209 worked a loaded spoil train towards the surface on 21 November. The lines visible in this picture, plus another just out of shot on the right, are all that's left of the once extensive spoil loading operation in the big pit.

below : JS8081 trundled away from Dongbolizhan with the morning passenger on 24 November.

with JS8081, 8190 and 8197 all seen at work on most days. JS8173 also put in a short appearance one day before going back to spoil duties. One, or occasionally two, spoil train sets could be found on coal duties on most days. These 11-wagon sets were also hauled out of the pit but by tender first locos. The spoil train sets were always loaded by mechanical shovels, while the coal train sets usually loaded under the main hopper but were sometimes loaded by shovel.

It usually took a long time for things to start moving after the morning shift change. Locomotives would often leave Dongbolizhan with their trains and run to Xibolizhan to take coal before returning to the loader to start work. Most of these trains ran out and back via the line through the pit but a few trains

took the direct route to Xibolizhan then returned the same way to Dongbolizhan so they were facing the right way for loading. The earliest we saw a loaded coal train come out of the pit was 10:30 but on some days it was 12:00 before trains started running. By 13:30, things would already be winding down for lunch, with little traffic before 15:00. At best, trains ran every half hour or so on average but occasionally they could follow each other at intervals as short as 10 minutes. This would usually occur when trains finished loading at the hopper and shovel at around the same time. There were also plenty of longer gaps.

We saw a lot of spirited running with trains flying along at very impressive speeds for a mining system, all excellent material for





JS8078 pushed a loaded spoil train out of the pit on 24 November. The pile of spoil that now fills the west end of the pit can be seen steaming gently behind the train.

the camera, of course, and the crews seemed to enjoy it as well.

On 22 November there was light snow during the day and the rails became quite slippery. It was fascinating to watch the trains climbing the final section out of the pit in a controlled slip. Their drivers managed, somehow, to work them right on the limit of adhesion without losing control, an impressive display of enginemanship if ever there was one. Any more than 13 wagons and they'd have struggled.

The rail-based spoil operation is clearly winding down and the supervisor at Xibolizhan indicated that spoil removal and tipping would cease by October 2014. Several redundant wagons with control cabs were parked up in the sidings at Xibolizhan, an indication that traffic levels have already dropped significantly. There were a total of seven spoil trains in use on 23 November, when we spent the whole afternoon at Xibolizhan, and each train took around four hours to do a complete circuit. This usually included a lengthy

break at Xibolizhan, waiting to be sent into the pit for the next load.

The morning gathering at Xibolizhan was still impressive, with nine locos present at Xibolizhan at 09:30 on 22 November. Two of the locos were on coal sets, one on a crane train and one on the spreader so there were only five locos lined up on spoil trains. Like the coal operation, it took a long time for trains to start running after the shift change. The first empties left Xibolizhan at 10:35 on 22 November and it was 11:10 before the first loads came out of the pit, worked by a loco that hadn't been present at the shift change. The spoil operation was also subject to the same long lunch breaks with few trains between 13:30 and 15:00.

In the pit, spoil was only being loaded onto trains at four different points. There appeared to be a couple of additional locations that were probably still usable but weren't active while we were there. All the spoil from the lower levels is now removed by dump truck with most of it being tipped in a huge pile within the western end of the

Sandaoling is at its best around dawn and dusk. Although grubby engines don't produce many glints, they make fine silhouettes. JS8080 was photographed pushing its spoil train onto the Xibolizhan tips on the afternoon of 23 November. There was even the hint of a rainbow to complete the scene.

pit. At the uppermost levels the rail operation is also coming to an end with a crane train progressively removing one of the redundant spoil loading lines while we were there.

Five of the spoil tipping lines are still available at Xibolizhan. Starting from the inside of the curve, lines 1, 4, 5, 6 and the long ramp to the west are still in use but the vast majority of trains used lines 1, 5 or 6. A few trains used line 4 but there were none at all on the ramp. Tipping staff referred to the same lines by different numbers on different occasions – Line 6 was line 4 to some and line 1 to others. Traffic levels were down on previous years but still averaged around two trains an hour out of the pit on the afternoons we spent at Xibolizhan.

In addition to the spoil trains there were two crane trains in operation at the west end of the pit, both worked by JS coupled chimney to the train. The spreader continued to be worked by JS6224.



The "passenger" continues to run from Dongbolizhan to Xibolizhan and back every morning at shift change but seemed to carry less passengers than before. Locos used were drawn from the coal train fleet on more than half the mornings but spoil train and crane train engines were also seen on occasion.

Operations at Nanzhan continue much as before with the DF8B diesels only seeing

use on trains to or from the CR interchange at Liushuquan. The four Nanzhan based JS handled all the shunting around Nanzhan and the washery as well as the trips to the Beiquan mines. We didn't spend much time at this end of the system but did see a number of trains to and from Beiquan.

The new deep mine, located about 10km north-west of Xibolizhan, is already in production with a steady stream of huge

lorries taking coal to Beiquan Yijing where it is loaded into rail wagons.

Some said it would never be built but a rail link to the new mine is due to start operation in October 2014, around the same time that spoil trains finally stop running. It's going to connect to the existing network at or near Xibolizhan but there was no sign of earthworks in the area at the time of our visit. Several different people told us that the new line would be steam worked.

We visited the workshops on 21 Nov and found five locos present including JS8195, coming to the end of an overhaul. Most of the locos were in for minor attention and were subsequently seen in use.



Locos :

Coal trains : JS8081, 8190, 8197

Spoil Trains : JS6209, 8027, 8076, 8077, 8078, 8080, 8173, 8194, 8225, 8368

Crane Trains : JS8040, 8167

Spreader : JS6224

Nanzhan : JS6204, 8314, 8358, 8366

Overhaul : JS8195

All the locos listed above were in steam. No SYs were seen, dead or alive.

JS8197 worked a loaded coal train through the most scenic section of the pit on 20 November.

SANDAOLING TO FUXIN

Sunday 24 – Monday 25 November

The first part of the journey was the same as the outward trip but in reverse. After a morning's photography, we were taken to Hami airport in good time to catch the Sunday afternoon Air China flight back to Beijing.

From Capital Airport we took a bus to Beijing main station and then train K39, departing at 23:00 to Qiqihaer. We were only going as far as Jinzhou and couldn't get soft sleepers on this, or any of the other overnight trains. So we had to rough it in hard sleeper, tolerable for a seven hour overnight journey. Motive power from Beijing was an SS9G.

Fuxin based photographer and steam enthusiast, Gu Manchun met us at Jinzhou and drove us to Fuxin.

JS8195 was in the final stages of an overhaul when we visited the works at Sandaoling on 21 November. Unfortunately overhauls here don't extend to a repaint and the locos get scruffier every year.



FUXIN MINING RAILWAY

Monday 25 - Wednesday 27 November,
Monday 02 - Tuesday 03 December &
Thursday 05 - Saturday 07 December



The second part of the trip was centred around Fuxin, where our driver and vehicle were based. As noted in the introduction, we needed a flexible itinerary in case Pingzhuang had gone diesel before we

arrived. It was also useful to avoid clashing with a large group that was in the area at the same time as us. In the event, we had three separate visits to Fuxin over a period of almost two weeks, totalling around seven

days overall. In between, we visited Pingzhuang and Fushun.

There appeared to be less steam activity on the Fuxin system than in previous years with all three of the DF5D diesels in daily use. The most noticeable change was the regular use of diesels on heavy coal trains from Wulong Mine to the CR interchange, most of which had been steam last year. There was still a lot of steam activity around Wulong Mine with spoil trains and local coal trains, such as those to the Fuxin and Chengnan power stations, remaining SY worked.

There were some steam workings on the line to the east, although not as many as in the Wulong area. Coal trains to the Chengnan Power Stations and ash trains in the other direction were all steam but a diesel was used on trains of CR wagons sent for loading further east. We only saw diesels on the line to the west.

previous page: SY1195 had returned from overhaul facing the wrong way round but by 7 December it had been turned. The cleanest loco at Fuxin accelerated away from the tippermans' bothy on Wulong Tip with spoil empties as the sun broke through the morning fog.

left: Decorated SY1395 "Zhu De Hao" left Wulong Mine with a loaded spoil train on the morning of 3 December, passing between a couple of redundant electrification masts.



Wulong Tip remained the preserve of steam and could be fairly busy, with about one train an hour at times. Some days were much quieter and, on the day we returned from Fushun, there had only been three trains all day. The following day was better and produced no fewer than ten trains between 07:10 and 16:40.

Ash trains from the Chengnan power stations continue to run to Wulong Tip despite some reports to the contrary. One station generates ash that tips with little dust, while ash from the other produces spectacular results, particularly if there isn't a strong wind blowing it all sideways.

The lower tipping line, the one closest to the city, was out of use during our visit and, from the state of the rails, appeared to have been out of use for weeks, at least, and probably months. However, we were told it will be upgraded, so it can take diesels, and returned to service during 2014. A new siding has been laid on the top level, allowing two trains to dump simultaneously if required. The majority of trains used the original, longer, line but the spectacular ash was usually tipped on the new siding, presumably as it's relatively remote from the town.



The line from Taiping through the old opencast washery yard is now rusty and overgrown following the end of the former opencast rail operation earlier in the year. As a consequence, it's no longer possible to

Ash tipping produces some of the most spectacular sights at Fuxin but the effects vary a lot from load to load. One of the best displays was on 2 December when SY1396 added some black smoke to the mix.

turn engines by running them round the triangle. A brand new turntable has been installed on waste ground between the works and the junction at Ping'an. Unfortunately it's been fenced in, making it difficult to photograph.

A total of 10 different SYs were seen in use, including SY1395 "Zhu De Hao", the last loco in the former opencast fleet, which is now used interchangeably with the rest of the main fleet. SY0988 was said to be due for withdrawal in 2014 as it is approaching 40 years old, which appears to be a statutory limit for industrial locos in Liaoning. SY0770, another 40 year veteran that was in service last year is already out of service. All the other locos are much younger, having been built after the Tangshan earthquake interrupted production in the late 1970s.

Two locos that we had expected to see, SY1378 and SY1397, didn't appear at any time and may have been in works. We did ask if a works visit was possible but were told that it wasn't.

The gathering of locos at Ping'an for shift change generally attracted around five or six SYs but one had often left for Wulong Mine before the last stragglers arrived, so there were rarely more than four or five SYs



present at the same time. Most of the engines were parked in the shadow of the works so photography was difficult anyway.

The three diesels usually attended the morning gathering but stabled close to the offices and away from the SYs, allowing the purists to take their photos without worrying about a diesel contaminating the view. On a

SY1460 pushed a loaded spoil train onto the tip behind Wulong Mine, twenty minutes after sunset on 6 December.

couple of occasions a road tanker was seen refuelling one or more diesels via a hose threaded through the office fence.

Fuxin Locos :

SY0988,

SY1195,

SY1210,

SY1319,

SY1320,

SY1359,

SY1395,

SY1396,

SY1414(1818),

SY1460 ,

DF5D.0067

DF5D.0068

DF5D.0080 (all in use)



above: SY1320 backed a loaded ash train past Ping'an Mine, en-route to Wulong Tip, just before sunset on 26 November. This was the second of two five wagon loads the loco had collected from the power stations at Chengnan during the morning. Both loads were combined for the run to Wulong Yard then split again and worked to the tip as separate five wagon trains. This was the second load.

left: Wulong Mine has a narrow gauge electric railway, thought to be 900mm gauge, operated by a number of small, green, steeple-cab locos. No.4 trundled back to the mine on 25 November.

FUXIN – PINGZHUANG

Wednesday 27 November

We left Fuxin by road in the late morning, after the sky had clouded up, and travelled to Pingzhuang over a nearly deserted expressway. The 260km journey took about three and a half hours and it was still cloudy when we arrived.

The new Chifeng - Jinzhou coal line looked close to completion, with trackwork, stations and signalling in place, but no trains of any sort were seen. The line is not electrified and will, presumably, be diesel worked.

Red stars used to be quite a common sight on Chinese locomotives but not anymore. Fuxin's SY1320 is one of only a handful to retain this attractive feature. It was photographed tipping ash on Wulong Tip on 26 November.



PINGZHUANG MINING RAILWAY

Wednesday 27 November – Sunday 01 December



Would Pingzhuang still be steam worked by the time we got there? It was a big concern during the early part of the trip and even for the first half hour after we arrived.

Unusually, there were no locos at the stabling point at Zhuangmeizhan when we first arrived, not a good sign. We then found a convoy of seven locos en-route from the works to Zhuangmeizhan, four of them in steam but only the leading and trailing locos working. Was this the final clearout of steam we were witnessing? Fortunately it wasn't, but it was another significant step on the road to dieselisation. Five locos were being prepared to be taken to Shenyang where, we were told, they would be exchanged for a couple of second hand diesels. The locos left from Pingzhuang Nan early the next morning behind a CR diesel. Nobody we spoke to knew what their fate would be.

Fortunately, no diesels arrived on the system while we were there but they were expected imminently. We were told that the active SYs would be kept in working order as a back-up for the diesels. However, it's doubtful if they would ever find much work, even if a diesel failed. A single loco could have handled most of the work on offer during our visit.



Four SYs were available for traffic with three locos in use on any given day. Surprisingly, the locos seen didn't include the newest locos at Pingzhuang, SY1487 and SY1764.

Traffic levels varied a lot during our visit. Activity depended on the availability of empty coal wagons. Whenever CR delivered

above: SY1025 and SY1425 sandwiched the five withdrawn locos being prepared for their journey to Shenyang, in order: SY0943, SY1052, JS8246, SY1084 and JS6246. The convoy was approaching Zhuangmeizhan on the afternoon of 27 November.

previous page: The loader at Gushan Yijing provided a degree of shelter from the northerly wind when SY1017 passed with empties on the morning of 28 November.

empties to Pingzhuang Nan, they were quickly collected, worked to the washery and the Gushan mines, filled and returned to Pingzhuang Nan. At other times the locos just sat around, waiting for the call to collect more empties from CR.

When the CR diesel left a complete train of around 60 empty wagons at Pingzhuang Nan, the SY would take them all to Wufeng, leaving 30 or so there, before taking the rest to Zhuangmei or beyond. The stop at Wufeng provided just enough time to get ahead of the train for a second shot, with a third possible north of Zhuangmei if it was going through to Gushan. The wagons left at Wufeng would be collected and worked to Zhuangmei and/or Gushan within a couple of hours. Sometimes CR would only leave part of a train at Nan and this would be worked through to Zhuangmei non-stop.

There didn't seem to be much of a daily pattern to operations but busy and quiet days seemed to alternate. Busy days might see three trains in daylight while quiet days

It took the combined efforts of SY1025 and SY1425 to lift this loaded train into Zhuangmeizhan on the morning of 28 November. SY1025 had attempted the move on its own but stalled on the bank and had to wait for SY1425 to arrive and give a shove at the back.



might only see one. The one predictable event was the 08:00 gathering of locos for shift change and servicing at Zhuangmeizhan every morning.

The line from Wufeng to Wujia was out of use and obviously hadn't seen a train for

several months. However, there appeared to be a new mine under construction near the west end of the spoil tips, not too far from Wujia but higher up the hillside. On one afternoon we saw a moving trail of steam on the far side of the spoil tips, undoubtedly a train, heading west towards the mine.

Unfortunately, we didn't have time to check this out or to visit the closed opencast mine system to check if there was any rail activity there. There's no sign of the new mine on Google Maps yet but the preparatory works do appear on the Apple Maps app although there's no sign of a rail connection visible.



Pingzhuang Locos :

SY1017,

SY1025,

SY1425,

SY1441 (all in use)

Withdrawn Locos

Dispatched to Shenyang

JS6246,

JS8246,

SY0943,

SY1052,

SY1084

SY1017 set off from Zhuangmeizhan with a long rake of empty wagons for the Gushan mines shortly after shift change on 1 December. On the left SY1425 and 1441 prepared for their next duties.



PINGZHUANG – FUXIN

Sunday 01 December

After a busy start to the morning, everything went very quiet for the rest of the day. With nothing happening and nothing expected to happen, we left for Fuxin in the early afternoon. The journey was very similar to the outward one with nothing new to report.

FUXIN – FUSHUN

Tuesday 03 December

We left Fuxin by road early on the afternoon of Tuesday 03 December and took about three and a half hours to reach Fushun. Nothing of interest was seen en-route.

SY1425 neared Pingzhuang Nan with a loaded train on the morning of 29 November.

Although it is uphill from Wufeng to Pingzhuang Nan, most southbound trains gain enough momentum to roll all the way without the loco having to work. In this case a helpful signal check worked in our favour.

FUSHUN OLD STEELWORKS & MINING RAILWAY

Wednesday 04 – Thursday 05 December



FUSHUN OLD STEELWORKS

Wednesday 04 December

This was our second visit to the steelworks stabling point and probably our last. Five SYs were present, three in steam, one cold spare and one under overhaul. Dumped DFH5.0408 was also seen in exactly the same position as two years ago.

We arrived as the shift change was in progress and spent around 20 minutes photographing the SYs being serviced and

coaled before officialdom intervened and we were unceremoniously kicked out, being chased along the electric line for some distance before our evictors gave up.

The change of heart at this previously relaxed location appears to be due to a change of management and the ridiculous concern that steam enthusiasts will report them to the government for infringing pollution limits.

There didn't seem to be a problem photographing the locos near the level crossing at the west end of the site, around 500m due south of Jixiu station, terminus of the former electric passenger line, but we weren't inclined to hang around for long.

Old Steelworks Locos :

SY1630,

SY1632,

SY1634 (all in use)

SY1633 (cold serviceable)

SY1050 (overhaul)

DFH5.0408 (dumped)



left: SY1632 was shunting at Fushun Old Steelworks on 4 December.

previous page: The Japanese built ED-85 electrics on the Fushun Mining Railway pre-date any of the steam locos seen on our trip. No.1213 (Mitsubishi 1942) sported the orange livery carried by most of the locos working in the opencast pit. It was photographed with a train of wooden sleepers at Donggang on 5 December.

FUSHUN MINING RAILWAY

Wednesday 04 – Thursday 05 December

After all the excitement at the old steelworks, we retired to Kuangwuju station, on the 1500V DC electrified mining railway in the centre of Fushun, hoping to see some electric locos. After two hours when nothing more exciting than a p-way railbus passed, a real train finally turned up behind DF5.1160, carrying the mining railway's logos. A member of staff then confirmed that there was little traffic there during the day but the line would be busy during the late afternoon, by which time the light would have been very wrong.

Next stop was the washery at Guchengzi, at the west end of the opencast pit, where there was much more activity. The electric fleet was repainted into a smart blue livery a few years ago, and most of the locos seen still carried these colours, however, a number of locos appeared to have been

Skoda built 3-section electric loco No.1512 pushed a rake of spoil empties around the back of the washery at Guchengzi on 4 December. The green ED-85 can just be glimpsed in front of the large blue mine building on the left.

repainted recently in the traditional green. Four of the old Japanese built ED-85 electrics were seen, three blue ones, 608, 1206, 1211, and a green one that didn't come close enough to be identified. Most trains were worked by Skoda class 37E 3-

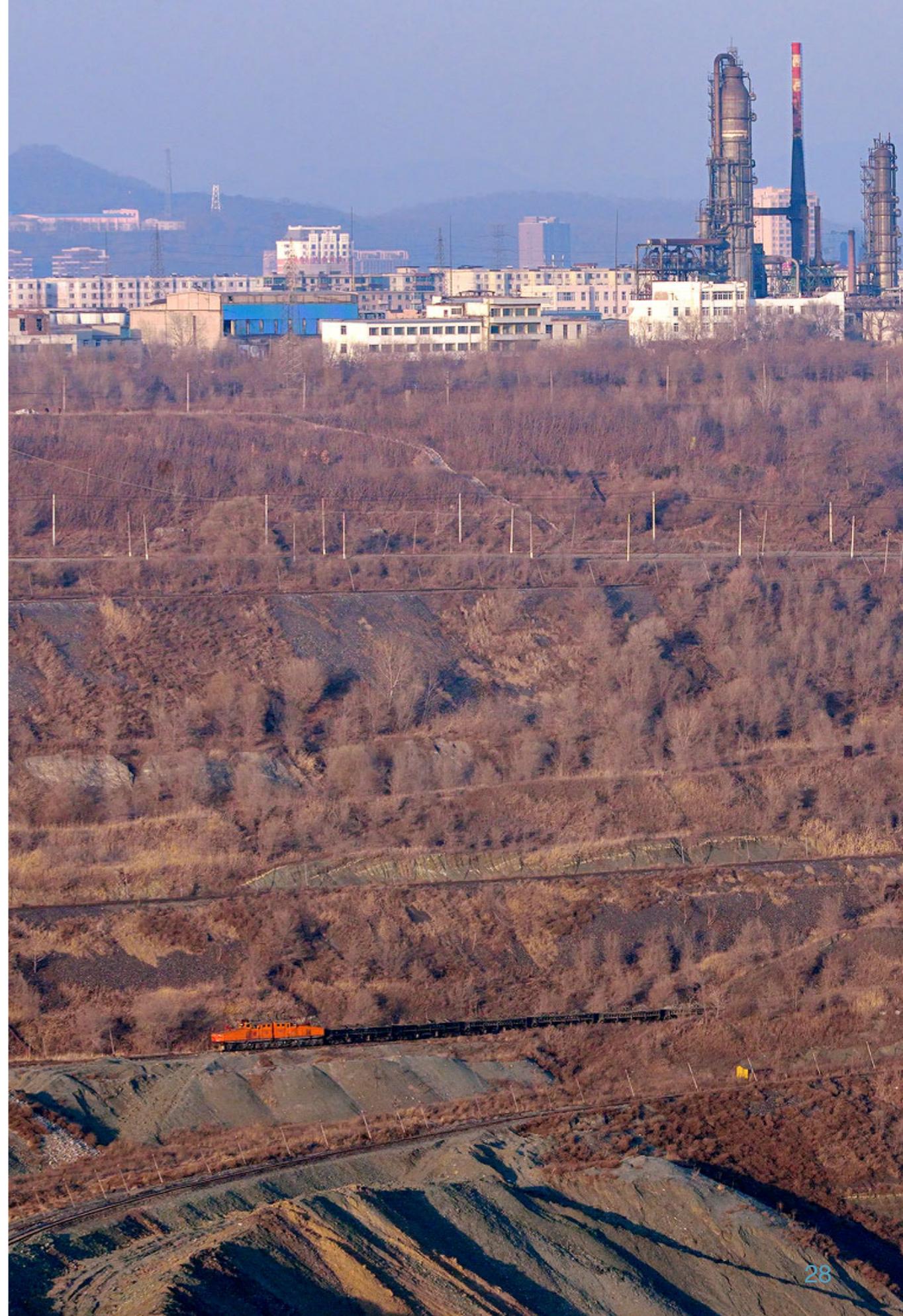
section locos or the articulated ZG150-1500 Bo-Bo-Bos. The Skodas were usually on trains of side tippers and the ZG150-1500s on trains of outbound coal. None of the LEW EL1s were seen and the class is presumed to be extinct at Fushun, despite being decades younger than the ED-85s and slightly newer than the Skodas.



Guchengzi is also the site of a mining museum and an overlook with views into the big pit. Several locos are preserved there including an ED-85, a 37E, an EL1, a ZG150-1500 and two SYs, as well as a selection of diggers, dump trucks and other mining machinery. All the exhibits are kept in very good condition. At the overlook it was possible to see 37E and ZG150-1500 locos taking spoil trains to a site within the west end of the pit for dumping. Much to my surprise, most of the locos carried an orange livery, although one of the Skodas was green.

The following morning we went looking for spots to the east of the big pit and found a yard at Donggang where there was quite a lot of activity. Most of the traffic seen was spoil trains worked by 37E and ZG150-1500 locos, most of them in the orange colours seen the day before. An ex-works Skoda, freshly painted green and carrying the number 1702, was seen being hauled south by a ZG150. The 17XX numbers were previously allocated to LEW EL1s. Three ED-85s were seen, although one of them had been at Guchengzi the day before. Orange liveried 1213 went through on a train of wooden sleepers and, more surprisingly, 1211 appeared from the south on a couple of passenger coaches just before 09:15. After a dozen or so staff had disembarked, the coaches were left in the yard and the loco scuttled off. The third ED-85, 612, was seen at Nantai, just to the north of Donggang, as we left. DF5.1160 was seen again, shunting a factory to the south of Donggang yard.

An unidentified ZG150-1500 approached the tipping area below the Guchengzi overlook with a loaded spoil train on 4 December. There is no overhead at this point and the locos use their side-contact apparatus to take power from a conductor that runs alongside at cab height. The supporting poles for the side-contact wire on the line below are easier to see.





Gleaming SY0628 and 0715 are among the locos preserved at Guchengzi.

Fushun Mining Railway Locos :

ED-85: 608, 612, 1206, 1211, 1213

37E: 1512, 1517, 1519, 1528, 1548, 1702

ZG150-1500 : 035, 131, 133, 148, 153,

ZG100-1500 : 617

DF5 : 1160 (all in use)

Preserved at Guchengzi :

SY0628, SY0715,

ZG150-1500: 027,

EL1: 1707,

37E: 1526,

ED-85: 1137.

FUSHUN – FUXIN

Thursday 05 December

After spending the morning at Donggang, we returned to Fuxin via a slightly different route that ran parallel to the Shenyang northern freight bypass for some distance. A number of freights were seen, all worked by HXD3B electrics.

FUXIN – BEIJING – LONDON

Saturday 07 – Sunday 08 December

After a final session on the Wulong spoil tip, we left Fuxin mid-morning by road to Jinzhou, taking a couple of hours to reach Jinzhou Nan station on the Shenyang - Shanhaiguan high speed line. From there we travelled on train D6, formed of a pair of CRH5 high-speed EMUs, to Beijing, arriving around 15 minutes late after delays east of Tangshan Bei.

Nothing of interest was seen until the end of the high speed line at Shanhaiguan. HXD2B predominated on freights west of Shanhaiguan but a few HXD3B and DF8B were also seen. A couple of SS4B twin units were also seen but this once ubiquitous class appears to be on the way out. An HXD1 twin unit was noted in the middle of a Datong line coal train near Qinhuangdao but the head end power wasn't seen. Most shunting and tripping appeared to be in the hands of DF7C but, highlight of the journey, a DF4B was seen on a short freight at Luanxian, the only standard green DF4 seen all trip!

Most passengers seemed to be worked by SS9G or HXD3C electrics, despite the latter class having the surprisingly low maximum speed of 120km/h. Quite a few passengers were still hauled by DF11 or DF4D diesels, probably because of their ability to go considerably faster than the pedestrian HXD3Cs.

The practice of working the empty stock of overnight arrivals to locations outside Beijing continues. Nevertheless, it was a surprise to find DF11.0128 on the stock of a Beijing - Nanjing train as far out as Qinhuangdao. The same loco had been seen working the stock of the same train out of Beijing three weeks earlier, so it's probably a



Zhengyang Gate in Tian'anmen Square by night

regular occurrence. Another interesting train was seen a few stations east of Tangshan Bei but it's not known whether this was a passenger looped to let us overtake or a stabled train of empty stock. The motive power was one of the green DF11Z twin units, the first I've seen for several years.

After arrival we found our hotel, close to the station, before getting out for a duck but not in the cricketing sense.

Next morning it was off to the airport on the bus, a very quick journey in the light Sunday morning traffic. Finnair appeared to have settled their industrial dispute and graciously provided an Airbus A330-300 to take us to Helsinki for our onward connections to the UK. Another uneventful journey, apart from my train home being substituted by a bus, adding the best part of an hour to the journey.

COMMENTS & CONCLUSIONS

For a trip that started with so many enforced changes and so much uncertainty, things turned out surprisingly well. Planes and trains were generally punctual, there were no unexpected diesels and the sun shone most of the time.

You can easily forget just how good Sandaoling is. It's a great place to take photos and videos but the real joy is just

being there, surrounded by the sound of multiple loco exhausts echoing off the rockfaces, watching big engines being worked hard up steep gradients on heavy trains. It's not Jingpeng or Tianzhu but it's as good as it gets these days and was definitely worth the effort and expense to visit. The availability of direct flights from Beijing (as well as Xi'an and Zhengzhou)

makes the journey there and back much easier than it ever has been before.

The end of spoil operations at Xibolizhan will be a blow but the line to the new mine should open up alternative photographic opportunities with a haul of near 20km from the mine to Nanzhan, plenty of gradients and, apparently, a significant bridge en-route. If the volume of coal lorries coming from the mine is an indication, there should be plenty of traffic on offer. Let's just hope that it is steam worked, as everyone told us it would be, and the locos run the right way round.

A week seemed a long time to spend at Fuxin but we required that long to get the shots we wanted. For instance, there was only one occasion when the ash train ran, the ash was of the right sort and the wind didn't blow it sideways. Similarly, SY1395 only appeared on a few occasions and it took a long time to get a reasonable selection of shots of the loco.

JS8197 set off from Dongbolizhan on the Sandaoling system with the morning passenger on 22 November. Heavy cloud cover and minimal early morning light produced a pleasing blue effect.



Like the mining industry, steam at Fuxin appears to be in a managed and gradual decline with locos being withdrawn as they approach the 40 year limit. We got the impression that the diesels would gradually take over more of the work but that a sudden change was unlikely. The continuation of overhauls and the installation of the new turntable are good signs as is the fact that SY1195, the next candidate for withdrawal, won't pass the 40 year mark until 2022.

Visiting Pingzhuang was a gamble but, fortunately, it was one that paid off handsomely. Again it took a long time to get the shots as there were long periods with no traffic and we needed all the four days we spent there. I'm very glad we went as the shots are probably unrepeatable now and certainly will be before long.

Our visit to Fushun wasn't as successful, not that we'd expected any great steam shots there anyway. However it does illustrate how seriously pollution is being taken these days. The vast majority of urban pollution comes from sources other than steam locomotives, as we saw clearly at Fuxin on 2 December. When the wind dropped, a cloud of smog quickly developed over the town



while the area to the south, where the railway runs, remained clear. Unfortunately it's likely that the remaining steam locomotives will get a lot of the blame. We did hear that this was a factor in the decision to fully dieselise the Pingzhuang, Hongmiao and Yuanbaoshan systems.

Another theme that came up on a couple of occasions is that some groups seem to think that Chinese people can't count. It appears that several groups have gone to locations with more visitors than they'd paid for. That's apparently why the management at Beitai suddenly got upset and closed its doors to

SY1025 waited its turn while SY1425 was cooled at the Zhuangmeizhan servicing point at Pingzhuang on 29 November.

foreign visitors in 2012. It's also why groups are followed round by a minder at Sandaoling. There's far more internal politics within the management at these places than most people realise. Visitors who cause problems play into the hands of those who want to further their own interests by showing up the failings of the current regime. If the management thinks the risks of having groups of foreign photographers on the premises outweigh the benefits then



JS8197 got ready to leave Dongbolizhan, on the Sandaoling system, with an empty coal train as the sun rose on 24 November.

Elsewhere, things aren't looking too bright. Discounting Shibanzi, which has gone toytown in my opinion, there hardly seems to be anywhere that steams more than a couple of engines at any time. Operations with any amount of line work are also getting rare but fortunately there are still a few left, some of which are quite scenic, although none are very busy.

Despite the small number of locations remaining, there weren't many photographers anywhere that we visited. We timed our visit to avoid clashing with another large group as much as possible but didn't see any other westerners around. There were three Japanese photographers visiting Fuxin for the weekend and a few Chinese at Pingzhuang but that was it. Where was everybody else? As I hope the small selection of pictures here show, China still has enough interesting sights to offer and it's not time to give up yet!

back page : An unidentified JS pushed another load of spoil onto the Xibolizhan tips shortly after sunset on 23 November. The steam worked spoil operation at Sandaoling is due to finish during 2014.

access will be withdrawn, not only to those who have caused the problems but to everybody, just like at Beitai. Please behave responsibly for everyone's sake.

Back at Fushun, the opportunity was taken to have another look at the electric railway. It was good to see the old ED-85s were still going strong and there was still a reasonable level of activity around Guchengzi and Donggang. The presence of the DF5 probably ends any hope that there

might still be any steam working on the mining railway.

The omens for the future are mixed. Steam looks like continuing at Sandaoling and Fuxin for a few years yet and Sandaoling could even get better with the opening of the new line. The next year might not be the best time to visit Sandaoling though. With declining spoil activity at Xibolizhan and uncertainty over when trains will start running to the new mine, it could be a quiet year out in Xinjiang.

