

Linesiding with John May 2019 Update

People probably associate me and 'Linesiding with John' with 'real working industrial steam' in Bosnia, China and Indonesia but with the approaching end of this, what will I do with myself and what does 'Linesiding with John' still have to offer?



The new steam tourist train at Huanan

Firstly, in case anyone is not keeping up, real working industrial steam is limited to Sandaoling, China (around 9 JS in steam daily), Dubrave & Sikulje Coal Loaders in Bosnia (1 kriegslok shunting at each) and Purwodadi, Java, Indonesia with 2 narrow gauge tank locos on transfer work between the truck yard and mill yard during the sugar season. If you like, you could add Shibaxi, China where the local passenger train is still steam if the 'pretender' diesel doesn't take that turn; the Oskova washery shunt, Bosnia which may see narrow gauge steam at times and fireless locos in various countries including Indonesia. Apart from Sandaoling, none of these surviving operations really justify a long-haul flight on their own. Bosnia requires permissions and charters to make a visit worthwhile and a Java visit means that diesel field-work and stationary steam inside the mills has to compensate for the lack of steam loco action.

The tours I offer are evolving with the approaching end of 'real steam'. I like industrial narrow gauge and I am interested in the many preserved or tourist

operations around the world that use steam. I am not greatly attracted by charters that try to recreate how things used to be although I don't dismiss a charter if that is the only way to see a loco in action or travel over a stretch of line. You will see this reflected in the tours below. They represent, I think, a compromise between individual travel and large group tours. Small 'Linesiding with John' tours aim for friendly, small groups where being in a group can provide the transport, guiding, accommodation and food and leave you to concentrate on enjoying the railways with a small band of like-minded enthusiasts. Small group tours can arrange access to sites which might otherwise be difficult - either in advance or at the time of the visits using the local guide's contacts, local language skills (and charm) and small groups can also afford charters in some circumstances.

These are my next tours:

Planned Tours



Viseu de Sus, Romania - this photo taken at the entrance to the yard compound shows (l-r) a diesel shunter, Cozia-1 (Reghin 1986) and a road vehicle converted for use as a rail taxi

Romania Narrow Gauge Tourist Trains

9 - 20 August 2019

Working with a local Romanian travel company based in Sibiu, I now have a revised tour itinerary that takes account of the operating plans of the

Romanian narrow gauge tourist lines which have now been published. Five of the lines plan to use steam and will have trains operating on the day(s) we plan to visit:

Criscior - Brad
Abrud - Campeni
Viseu de Sus - Paltin
Moldovita - Argel
Sovata - Campu Cetatii

Teaca - Raci and Sibiu - Agnita are not operating regular trains but will both give us a trolley/draisine ride.

We will also travel from Sibiu to Rasnari on the 'Cheese Tram' and visit the railway museum in Sibiu.

Covasna - Comandau is not operating steam at the time of our visit and has been omitted - a target for a future trip?

There are now 6 people signed up for the tour. There is space for a few more but you will need to sign up by the time that the full tour price is due to be sent to Romania in late June.

This tour should appeal to those who would like to see a variety of local narrow gauge lines offering train rides for local tourists and who will enjoy the local food and wine and chance experiences along the way. We plan to ride and lineside all of the steam lines and hope to be able to secure depot visits at those lines. This is a dedicated railway tour with no visits to non-railway tourist sites planned. There will be railway interest every day (if you include the Cluj trams on the arrival and departure day). However, there should be some free time to explore the attractive towns and villages we visit.

Join this tour in Cluj on 9 August arriving by plane or by train (from Bucharest, Budapest or from further afield). If you are interested, please get in touch now. Apart from the itinerary, the details on this web page are still broadly correct:

http://rabylee.uk/romania_2019_tour_proposal.pdf

If you are interested, please ask me for the revised itinerary.

China NG III

September - October 2020 (finishing in Chengdu after the 10/10 holiday period around 13-14 October)

China NG II went well and we covered much more of China and many more lines than on China NG I. There was an immediate request from the participants for China NG III and I plan that this will visit or revisit the best lines known to survive.



Matian Coal Railway

The following lines are on our wish list for this tour. I'm sure this tour will be popular with those who participated in China NG I and II but anyone joining for the first time would also be welcome to see the best of the surviving Chinese narrow gauge lines which are:

Coal

Yongchuan Honglu
Matian

Cement/Limestone

Mengxi
Haolianghe*
Laohekou +
Kongshan (Nanjing)+
Cishan (Nanjing)+

Reed

Shengtai Paper*
Jincheng (yard only)

Salt

Wudao
Fuzhouwan Jincheng

Iron Ore

Hungjiang+
Shaoxing Lizhu+

Tourist

Jiayang Shibaxi
Yujian Chaoyanggou
Huanan

- + additional lines, not previously visited on NG I or II
- * visited but not seen in operation on NG I or II

You can research all these lines here:

http://www.kii762mm.com/modules/pico/index.php?cat_id=251

I propose that China NG III should take place sometime in September-October 2020 - a time chosen to catch both seasonal reed and cement railways in action and at a time when other lines should also be working. The general direction of travel would be from east to west. Up to 3 ng steam lines may be included. All use C2 locos and all are now tourist lines. The tour will probably finish in Chengdu with an optional visit to the Jiayang Tourist Railway (formerly Jiayang Coal Railway) at Shibaxi for those who want to stay on for a few days more.

I plan to put a limit of 10 on the participants for this tour. If you would like to be one of those 10, please let me know (without commitment at this point). No deposit will be required until much later in 2019 or early in 2020.

Tours that can be arranged if there is sufficient interest

Sandaoling

I have agreed two slots with Jun for 2019 winter steam. Sandaoling plans to end steam in September 2020 although I believe the mine company has asked for permission to work the open cast mine for a bit longer which could see steam last until it closes (whenever that is). You are probably aware that Xinjiang now has a very high level of security and Sandaoling is now in its own security zone. I think the decision to visit or not is morally similar to deciding if you want to visit North Korea to see the railways there. So, if you would like to pay a last (or first) visit to Sandaoling - truly the last great steam show in the world - let me know along with your choice of dates and I will see if I can put a group of 6-8 together for a winter 2019 visit.

Dates available - we need to choose one of these slots:

17 - 25 November

9 - 17 December

The itinerary:

Day 1 arrive Beijing

Day 2 early morning flight to Hami, afternoon at Sandaoling

Day 3 - 7 five full days at Sandaoling

Day 8 morning at Sandaoling, afternoon flight Hami - Beijing

Day 9 fly home



Leaving the coal yard with the locos stored at Sandaoling behind

Bosnia



Augmented shunting at Sikulje

The last Bosnia tour worked out so much better than anyone expected. It will be difficult to cap that. We had beautiful weather, everything worked OK including all our charters and we benefitted by accidentally clashing with a larger tour group. Their size and clout meant we had to re-arrange our itinerary at the last minute to avoid them but the result was more locos in steam and railway management that was almost 100% willing to try to make up for messing us around. (The boss at Dubrave at the time of our first

visit was the odd man out.) A future Bosnian tour could offer, on the standard gauge, real, working industrial steam at Sikulje and Dubrave (with a bit of augmented shunting thrown in - this works best at Sikulje), a visit to Bukinje works and standard gauge steam shunting at Oskova. On the narrow gauge, steam shunting at Oskova, a visit to Banovici works and 2 line charters would also be possible. We could also have another go at Mokra Gora with the most attractive option there being charters on the cross-border line between Visegrad and Mokra Gora which does not see regular use. This would be instead of competing with the tourist trains and other challenges on the Sargan 8 (trees obscuring the line, shadows in the deep valleys).

Is anyone interested in Bosnia in 2020 and would you prefer a spring or autumn visit? My preference would be for spring as I plan an autumn China narrow gauge tour in 2020.

Java

The last two times that I have offered an August visit to Java to see diesel field work, real conventional and fireless steam shunting and the stationary steam inside the mills, I have had zero or no committed interest. I still have contacts who can arrange transport, accommodation and sugar mill access permissions and we know all the roads and tracks to chase the field trains. However, I would need several people to tell me that they are interested in a Java Sugar Mill tour in 2020 or beyond before I work up an itinerary and a tour proposal.



Fireless No. 6 - one of 3 fireless locos at Pagottan Mill, nr. Madiun

Reports

Please see <http://rabylee.uk/malaychina2019.html> for reports on my recent trip to Malaysia to see the oil palm railways and to China for China NG II.



MotorRail Simplex loco at Jenderata Mill near Teluk Intan, Malaysia



Baishui Coal Mine near Guangyuan

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John Raby
6 May 2019