

Java Mill Tour 2017 Feedback 3 & Tour Concluding Remarks

Feedback

Chris says:

I mentioned to John R that I'd come across a Flickr album with a lot of very good photographs of many mill operations in the 1980's and 90's which gives an interesting comparison with what is still extant.

I've copied a link below and the Java stuff is on pages 14 and 13. Some very good albums on other locations as well such as China and Cuba.

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/42309484@N03/albums/page14>

Hopefully our respective paths may cross on another tour or elsewhere.

The Bosnian-Reunion group post tour as reported by John K:



On leaving the Hotel Merdeka in Madiun, they found no taxis available and ended up in cycle rickshaws for the transfer to the station.

Train to Yogyakarta went fine, albeit 15 mins late due to track being doubled. Met by guides as planned and then to Hotel Melia Purosani. Very swish.

Saturday to Borobodour half day and relax in afternoon.

Sunday to Pranbanam Temple and then to Gondang Baru. We were able to get inside the mill which is mothballed due to low supplies of cane the last two years. All the stationary steam equipment is virtually the same as 2010. They have had the pistons removed, greased, wrapped and placed on stillages in

order to be preserved until next required. Our guide thinks it will run again next year.

Visited the depot where O&K 0-8-0 8 is vaguely complete and serviceable. It doesn't look to have been in steam lately, however. The remaining steam locos are as 2010 all dumped off the tracks around the depot and yard. There were 6 diesels, 3 Shoema centre cabs of which D11 (2) is the only working one being used for the tourist train. The others are small Shoemas in various stages of dereliction.

The museum holds sectioned 0-8-0 no 5 and the tram loco Simba. There is a plinthed O&K 0-4-0 from Ceper at the entrance as in 2010.

Bagus commented on Kanigoro:

Last year some of my friends visited Kanigoro and found some locomotives had been moved outside, including the rare Vulcan no.5 I've lobbied the PTPN XI management to rescue no. 5 and 6 and relocate them to Olean for preservation. But so far I haven't heard anything from them.

I hope that next week I can catch up with the management people again, because I plan to submit permit request letter for Geoff's upcoming visit.

Aditya commented on Salak at Rejosari:

When I got there to arrange things, I wasn't sure if the jackshaft loco could still work. Thankfully, the mill manager confirmed that the jackshaft loco boiler is still good to go, it just needed to be steamed at first. Whilst the no.6, although it had troubles, they could still fix it in a day, even though they preferred to steam No.10 Salak.

(His visit was around 12-13 August 2017.)

Aditya also said:

Just a quick stop by to let you gents know that I have written a short compiling reports on what's been going on in Java in terms of its steams. As you both may aware, they are now (mostly) run on charter basis, apart from Purwodadi and Pagottan. My reports are based mostly on what I've arranged this year, one during Steven Jesser's visit, and two of them are for my Japanese friend who now resides in Bogor, West Java. Other sources of reports are from your visit John, I took the one from Olean, since I found it quite interesting. And thanks a lot for allowing me to put up 2 of your photos. And the last one, at Pangkah, was based on Bernd's visit last year (2016), during (what claims to be) Farrail's last visit to Java. Note that I did not travel to each one of the mills considering the amount of steams that have ceased. Anyway, without further I do, here is the link to the blog below:

<http://www.javanarrowgaugerailways.com/p/javas.html>

I should note that Aditya's report focusses on steam charters and as such it's probably not surprising that the tone is negative. My message to Aditya is forget about steam charters and enjoy the remaining diesel field lines, real working steam including fireless and the stationary steam inside the mills. My highlights and lowlights reflect this opinion.

Highlights and Lowlights

My No. 1 best memory was undoubtedly being asked to drive Kyosan Kogyo No. 6 at Wringinanom bringing a short train off fulls off a branch that had been little used in the season so far so the driver could help sand and clear the track with his mate. I managed it slowly and in first gear only but without derailing, splitting the train or stalling. Definitely my tour highlight although it happened pre-tour. Photos of this exist on various crews' mobile phones but I don't have a photo myself. This is the train before we left.



Everyone enjoyed the diesel railcar charter at Jatirito where we took 2 railcars and one trailer down the mainline and into the fields near Rojopolo. A delightful and inexpensive charter 'first' as far as I am aware.

Lowlight

Probably having No. 29 in steam at Semboro but having it fail with injector problems both morning and afternoon. Combo tells me that the loco wasn't available for a Japanese group a couple of days later leaving Semboro with no locos that can be chartered at the moment.



No. 29 in steam but with crews trying to repair the injector. They eventually dropped the fire and lost the pressure so they could work on it properly but to no effect.

End of Tour awards ceremony



I've added this here as it's relevant to the first Tour Award below. This was the Official Post Tour Group at Jatiroto on our last day - Conrad, Ross, Graham, Agus, Wilson and me. Photo © Conrad

For sartorial elegance:

Me for my Hawaii shirt (see above)

For most guest appearances in everyone else' videos:

Ross

Most guest appearances of abandoned tripods in everyone else's videos:

Ross' tripod (although there were a few other contenders)

'Never Ready' award for being last on the bus the most number of times:

Conrad (without a doubt)

'Appreciation of local cuisine' award:

John K (for eating hardly anything and complaining about it being all offal at the Masakan Padang restaurant in Madiun)

'Throwing Toys out of Pram' award:

Chris (2 occasions) beat John K (one occasion) to this award

That's all the awards that I can remember.

Beers

This is a big thank you to the following establishments that were usually able to serve cold large Bintang in sufficient quantity for a thirsty group of 9 tour participants at the end of a hot day (and occasionally at lunch). Without these places, a visit to Java would be much hotter and drier!

RM Nikmat Rasa

On the west side of Pasuruan

RM Sumber Hidup

Near Hotel Ratna, Probolinggo

Hotel Rosali &**RM Malang**

Situbondo

Hotel Bintang Mulia

Jember

Hotel Merdeka

Madiun

Hotel Gajah Mada

Lumajang (when the Bintang ran out, the large bottles of Prost were fine, too.)

Hotel Premier Inn Juanda Surabaya

Near Surabaya Airport but beers were small and pricey

Hotel Transit

T2 Jakarta Airport

Sugar Mill Status

(with added notes from John K)

We visited the following mills. I have noted whether they have a good collection of stationary steam (SS), diesel field work (FW), conventional steam locos active (SA), fireless active (FA) or steam available to charter (SC) or a good collection of dumped steam (DS). The steam charter category is moot - Semboro has 2 locos that are theoretically available for charter but both are currently in need of repair and a charter there is likely to be a waste of time and money. At Olean, Semboro and Rejosari, the track available to steam locos is strictly limited as track maintenance has not been kept up. You will note that additional notes dry up towards the end. I hope I'll receive a fuller loco list from someone in the group.

Kedawung

FW, DS

The field lines have contracted here and they have only 2 large and 2 small diesels for field and yard work. Fields to the west and south east were being cut and trains of empties leave before or after 08:00 and light engines depart either side of 14:00 to collect the fulls. Frustratingly, the crews even if there full train is ready will wait until after dark to move the train. I suspect this is so as not to get back to the mill too soon before their shift ends at 20:00.

7 stored / dumped steam locos, 5 stored / under repair diesels.

Wonolangan,

SS, DS

The Etty graves (a possible follow up blog on that to come?) and the 6 steam locos in the shed, a bit of diesel yard work and a stationary steam engine line that is a challenge to photograph and a couple of smaller steam engines are here .

3 out of 4 engines on crushing line working plus 1 vacuum pump and 1 vertical engine.

Gending,

SS

A reasonable collection of stationary steam but no steam locos remain here.

2 mill engines on crushing line, no other stationary steam.

Pajajaran

SS

A reasonable collection of stationary steam but only 1 steam loco remain here.

The 5 mill engines on the crushed line are working, vacuum pump out of use, no other SS.

2 diesels in yard, I'm told There's 1 dumped steam loco. (any idea which one?)

Wringinanom

SS, FW, DS

An excellent mill for daytime field work with smaller locos 2, 3, 6, 7 working fields especially to the south along with 2 large Keio locos 4 & 5. The Baguley No. 8 Ruhaak is yard pilot. The state of the track is terrible and derailments are very common. Good stationary steam inside the mill and steam locos No. 6 & 7 are slowly deteriorating inside the shed.

5 x mill engines, 1 x vertical high speed engine, 1 x vacuum pump, 1 x large belt engine, 1 x small belt engine, 1 x vertical pump, 1 x duplex pump, all in use. 1 x vertical combined vacuum and standard pump disused.

Olean

SS, FW, SC, DS

Two diesels normally work the fields and lines to the west and north west only were being worked - total 2 fields. The steam loco is now in black and restricted to the main line to Duwet and just slightly beyond the village on the north line due to poor track. The smaller mill engines and pumps are being replaced by electric and hydraulic motors but a few still survive. The mill stationary engine train is still magnificent.

6 x mill engines, 1 x vacuum pump, 2 x duplex pumps, 1 vertical pump, 1 x Tange belt engine, 1 x small belt engine 1891, 1 disused duplex pump



Panji

SS

I didn't join the group for this visit. I understand 3 diesels still used in the yard, the shed stored steam reduced to one loco and the mills with just the main mill train still stationary steam.

2 mill engines and 2 pumps steam.

3 diesels working - 1 x Keio, 2 x Shoema. 3 stored diesels plus 1 stored steam loco 21

Asembagus

SS, FW

Just two of the 4 steam locos remain in the mill train. Two steam locos survive in and outside the shed but the diesel fieldwork now north lines only is still good with around 6 fields being worked. The ancient Brookville is the star diesel and was active in the fields. The big tree 3-way split has a new warung providing drinks and food for workers in the area.

(That's as far as I've got.) Ok

2 x mill engines and 1 disused small pump.

Prajakan

FW (mollases train), DS

3 Luttermollers stored, 1 x 0-8-0 on blocks. No working stationary steam. 1 disused vacuum pump and 1 disused small pump.

Semboro

FW, FA, SC, DS

No stationary steam

Jatiroto

FW

No SS

Just 3 locos left including a sister to No. 29 at Semboro. I think the other 2 survivors are only there because they were behind this loco on the same road in the shed.

Rejoagung

No SS

Pagottan

FA

Disused Bellis and Morcom generator, 3 x vacuum pumps, 1 x pump

Rejosari

SS, SC, DS

4 x mill engines, 2 x vacuum pumps, 3 x pumps and 1 belt engine in use, one

of the best mills for SS

Purwodadi

SS, SA

3 x mill engines, 3 x vacuum pumps (2 stored), 2 vertical high speed engines, 2 x horizontal pumps, all working and 1 disused pump and 1 x disused large 2 cylinder pump

Sodhono

SS, DS

3 x mill engines, 1 vertical pump, 1 x simplex pump and disused Jaffa generator.

Pesantren

DS

Gemplokerep

DS

Totals - 18 Mills visited

good collections of stationary steam (SS) - 10

diesel field work (FW) - 6

conventional steam locos active (SA) - 1

fireless active (FA) - 2

steam locos available to charter (SC) - 3

good collections of dumped steam (DS) - 10

Tour Conclusions & Reflections

Is Java still worth visiting?

Yes, but mainly if you are interested in an eclectic mix of historical industrial buildings, artefacts and traditional practices including narrow gauge diesels engaged in bringing cane from the fields and shunting in the yard and stationary steam engines and pumps inside the mills. Daily life in the fields and along the coast remains fascinating.

The limited real conventional and fireless steam is a bonus to be enjoyed while we can, Indonesia being one of just 4 countries that still offer real conventional (1 mill) and one of a handful of countries with fireless steam locos (2 mills) at work but hardly worth a trip in themselves if you are not also interested in ng diesel and stationary steam as well. I would council against a Java tour dependent on active and charter steam locos. Too much road travel would be required for too few rewards.

Is it getting easier to visit?

In some ways Indonesia is now easier to visit than before using a free 30-day visa free entry. There are a variety of airlines that will get you there and my

'less than £600' fare from the UK on Garuda was good value. Road and rail transport are getting easier but road speeds are slow and trains are infrequent. Motorways are being built but there is still no fast road from east to west as only parts of a motorway system have been built.



The negatives

The overall decline in the traditional mills involving closures, loss of field work, loss of steam action, replacement of stationary steam by electric motors and hydraulic drives means you definitely see less than in the past.

Steam charters while still theoretically available are almost not worth the effort any more. Those only interested in steam locos may disagree with me but in the main all the charter locos are life expired, no longer adequately maintained and have limited suitably-maintained track left to demonstrate on.

The strengthening Gulf Arab and Saudi-influenced 'islamification' of a multi-faith country most noticeable to visiting groups with restrictions (partly self-imposed) limiting alcohol sales to a limited number of hotels and restaurants makes Java less welcoming to western tourists although Bali is largely unaffected. No alcohol of any kind was found in any of the supermarkets or stores that the group checked out.

Sugar mills are hot, humid and dusty environments and not everyone can cope with this or enjoy what they are seeing in the circumstances.

Road travel remains painfully slow and long transfers between towns are best done by plane or train.

Will I organise anymore Java mill tours?

Maybe? There is some interest in a Java Sugar Mill Stationary Steam tour in 2018. I will be happy to co-ordinate this with a local guide for anyone who would like this. The ISSSES (International Stationary Steam Engine Society) has expressed interest and I will let them make the running on this. If they decide to go ahead, others may be able to join this tour. While the mills chosen and the focus of the visit will be on stationary steam, there is always more to see at any mill and will most likely include diesel (and rarely steam) working the mill yard and possibly the fields. Eight people would be an idea number but up to 12 people may be possible. I would put the group in the hands of an excellent local driver and guide and assist with all of the tour preparations prior to the tour but I am unlikely to join this 2018 tour myself.

I will consider another mixed mill railway and stationary steam tour similar to 2017 in 2019. There are certain tour highlights that I would like to repeat and we will have to see if these are still available in 2019. The tour will depend on a sufficient number of these items of interest surviving.

The highlights

Diesels in action on field trains at 6 mills - especially Wringinanom and Asembagus which are the best for day-time loaded cane trains and use smaller, more interesting diesels

Real conventional steam at Purwodadi

Fireless steam at Semboro and Pagottan

Great mill stationary steam in action at Wringinanom, Olean, Rejosari, Purwodadi & Sudhono

A significant proportion of these must remain for the 2019 tour to go ahead.

The 2019 tour can also consider different mills and different ideas. The 2017 tour purposely limited the amount of road travel and involved a railway transfer for the longest leg. At the moment, a repeat of the 2017 program still seems the best option but time will tell.

Let me know if you are interested in a 2018 or 2019 tour.

John Raby
Sutton on Sea
30 August 2017

