

National Coal Board steam 1971-5

The NCB operations continued using steam locomotives in several areas of the country after British Railways ceased using this form of traction in 1968 – their fuel source was cheap and close at hand!

A particular attraction to us was South Wales, where some ex-Great Western Railway pannier tank locomotives remained at work until at least 1975. A delightful more rural location was at Kilmersdon Colliery, Somerset, which was using just one small saddle-tank loco in 1972, but the drivers and staff were always friendly. Here is a selection of photographs taken in those years.....

Firstly to Merthyr Vale Colliery, Aberfan, where ugly 0-6-0T “Area 4 no. 1” was at work on 25th June 1971....



The following year, on 25th June there was more variety to be seen.....



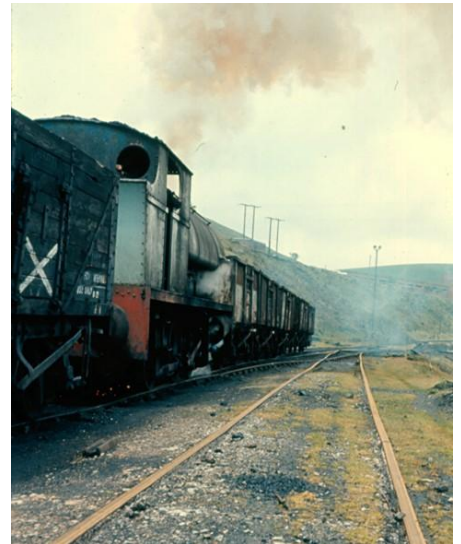
Ex GW pannier 9600 is leaking steam at several places but still retains its British Railways logo and front number plate. The other engine engaged in shunting that day is NCB no.6, large Peckett 0-60ST works no.

2061 dating from 1945.

Moving over to Maerdy Colliery in the Rhondda valley, we found pannier tank 9792 out of use on 25th June 1971, and its shed seems to have fallen down around it; Tony Parkins inspects the cab, but there was no gleaming brassware here.....



The duty shunter that day was another large Peckett saddle-tank, sister to the one later well known in preservation circles as the “Maerdy Monster”, works no. 2151, the plates of which showed that it had been rebuilt as late as 1968.....



It was still pounding away there on the occasion of our 22nd June 1972 visit.....



Further west, the previous day we saw yet another Peckett, this time no. 2114 of 1951, working at Brynlliw Colliery, Grovesend near Gorseinon.....



....and this little 1907-built Barclay tank “Glan Dulais” (works no. 1119) was dumped along with some condemned wooden-bodied wagons at Pontardulais exchange sidings. It looks as though it has had a nasty accident; not very enticing as a preservation prospect, though I believe it eventually was....



The system around Maesteg was extensive and busy, connecting several outlying collieries to a central washery, thence to exchange sidings with the BR Bridgend – Cymmer Afan branch. We visited on Thursday 22nd June 1972; firstly Hunslet “austerity” locomotive “Maureen” is at Coegnant Colliery; note the ex-GWR wooden signal. It then worked down to the exchange yard at Caerau, where it is seen with the BR line at left. We were offered footplate rides on this section, and Ian Jones is on the engine.....



Bringing down a second run of loaded wagons, “Maureen” had unhitched and backed into a spur, while the wagons are allowed to trundle past slowly under gravity. Meanwhile a BR diesel locomotive sets out from the exchange sidings with the train shown in the previous picture. The village buildings in the background are at Nantyfyllon.....



Down at the washery complex , Hunslet “Pamela” shunts a train from Cwmsdu Colliery, while Bagnall loco no. 2 runs out to assist.....



Then both locomotives work flat out to shove the heavy train up to the washery tipplers, a fine sight as their exhaust noise echoed around the valley

Later the same day we visited that other interesting NCB centre of operations, at Mountain Ash, but we must have arrived about the same time as a shift change (2.00pm?) as there seemed to be very little going on. Saddle tank locomotives “Sir John” and “Llantarnum Abbey” were run into the locomotive shed area and left to stand simmering together. Parked up out of use in the back of the shed we found the main objective of our visit, ex GWR pannier tank no. 7754.....

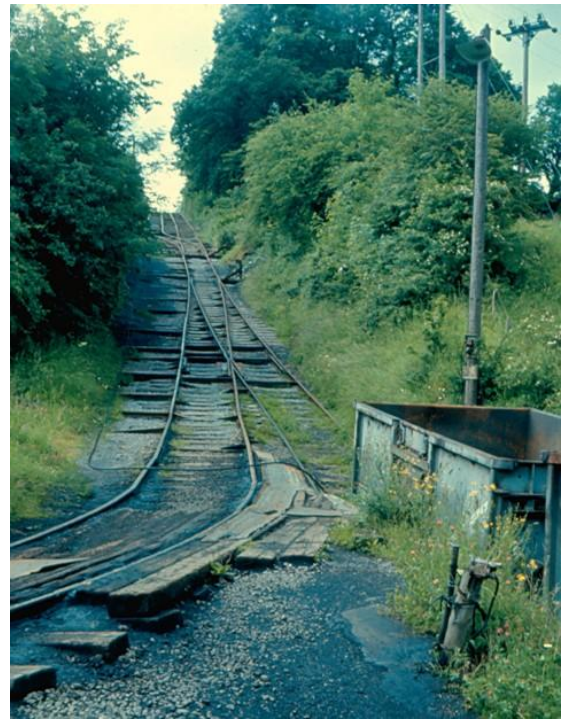


To see this one working we had to wait until 1975, when we called in on 23rd June.....



Meanwhile down in deepest Somerset, our first encounter with the Kilmersdon system was on 27th June 1971, a Sunday, when exploring the GWR and Somerset & Dorset Joint Railway stations and layout around Radstock. Here is the standard-gauge inclined plane leading from the colliery yard down the hillside to a triangular junction and exchange point with the ex GW Bristol to Frome branch east of Radstock station.....

This just had to be explored further, especially as we were told that a steam locomotive operated at the colliery on most weekdays. Our next opportunity to visit was on Wednesday 29th March 1972, where we were offered footplate rides and even the opportunity to drive the smart little Peckett saddle tank (works no. 1788) up and down the yard. Here is a selection of pictures from that day, also showing the gravity incline in use.....





In the right hand view above, note that the operator appears to be about to release the brake to allow the loaded wagon to descend the incline, but the slack cable is looped around his right foot!



Another one where we were just in time – the Kilmersdon system ceased operation later in 1972.