

steamsounds in Scotland

1. Although I had been to Scotland many times before my first visit with a recorder was back in 1980 for a run to Aberdeen and back, the loco on that occasion being the ex LNER A4 Pacific 60009 *Union of South Africa*.

That first recording visit was memorable for all sorts of reasons not least the length of the day (2am start from home, 3am finish!) and the decidedly off-beat exhaust of the locomotive!

The occasion of this recording of the same loco in January 1984 was also memorable.

The train was the Fair Maid running to Perth which had started in the south in reasonably fine weather but, once north of the border ran into blizzard conditions. The weather had been bad enough to bring the wires down over Beattock and at times we seemed unlikely to have any steam haulage at all that day.

Despite the difficulties we did make it to Mossend where Number 9 was attached for the run to Perth then Edinburgh and not long after we started north the weather changed to clear and sunny, an amazing contrast to the conditions we had experienced earlier.

In this recording the A4 is heard recovering from the speed restriction through the short tunnel at Dunblane and beginning to accelerate through the station and on the 1 in 88 gradient beyond.

2. After that first run with No. 9 my next encounter with steam in Scotland was for a ride behind the North British Railway Class C Goods 0-6-0 673 *Maude*. After a first trip in 1980 to Perth with the loco I tried to make sure that I had at least one ride behind 'Maude' each year and they always proved entertaining!

In December 1984 *Maude* worked a train on a route, part of which, over the next few years became a regular both for the loco and the Scottish Railway Preservation Society who organised this train, the Suburban Centenarian.

We started from Falkirk, the SRPS's base, ran to the outskirts of Glasgow then joined the main line for a 'fast' run to Edinburgh. With this loco which, if my memory serves, was restricted to a maximum speed of 30mph, our fast run involved visiting every loop on the Edinburgh - Glasgow main line.

At Edinburgh, instead of running straight into Waverley station we were routed around the Edinburgh Suburban line the Centenary of which was the whole point of running the train.

As this recording begins *Maude* is heard on the 1 in 70 gradient near Craiglockhart. Eventually the top of the climb is reached at Morningside Road and the regulator can be closed.

In the following years the SRPS organised Santa trains round the Edinburgh 'Sub' on a number of December weekends when it was possible to do the circuit a dozen or more times, something I did more than once! What a shame that these trains no longer run.

3. As I said earlier, outings with *Maude* could always be guaranteed entertaining although not always for the right reasons!

In September 1986 the SRPS ran a train from Falkirk to Perth and back, out via the Forth Bridge, returning via Stirling.



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Quite early in the proceedings we realised that all was not well with the loco as we staggered eastward along the Glasgow - Edinburgh main line.

Although we had stopped for a 'blow up' before joining the line over the Forth Bridge this can't have helped much as we stopped short of steam in the middle of the bridge. Most embarrassing!

Eventually a following loco hauled service train pushed us to Inverkeithing where we waited while a procession of delayed service trains passed and for another diesel which was summoned to assist us as far as Ladybank from where 'Maude' continued alone and, after a few more stops to regain pressure, we eventually reached Perth.

At this point, being rather more than somewhat late and with an ailing engine, a steam hauled run back to Falkirk seemed most unlikely, however, the problem with *Maude* proved to be with the blower and support crew members were able to make repairs so we did get steam hauled after all.

During the return journey, although still running rather late, we stopped at Gleneagles for photographs.

The top of the climb from Perth isn't far beyond here and in this recording *Maude* makes a fine sound departing and reaching the summit.

4. Once preserved steam locos returned to the main line, getting steam haulage across the border from England into Scotland took some years to achieve and the first line to see use was the Glasgow & South Western route from Carlisle via Dumfries to Kilmarnock.

The best run I ever had on this route was in March 1987 behind LMS Black 5 4-6-0 5305.

From Carlisle we had to have a diesel pilot as, at that time, steam locos were not permitted to work under the wires as far as Gretna Jc., the pilot being removed at Annan.

After a short stop at Dumfries my favourite Black 5 produced an excellent performance on the long climb to Drumlanrig Tunnel.

The Black 5 with 11 coaches behind the tender was worked hard on the initial easy gradients and soon reached a little over 60 mph before the climb commenced and, although the gradient is never steeper than 1 in 148, 5305 continued to be worked hard. For the most part speed remained in the mid 50's throughout the climb only dipping to 49 mph at the very top.

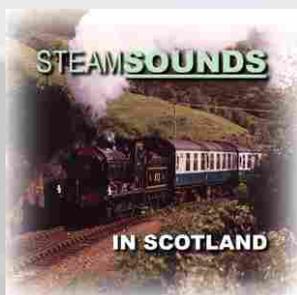
Truly excellent!

This recording is of the final part of the climb and ends as the train enters Drumlanrig Tunnel.

5. It proved even more difficult to get steam over the other Anglo-Scottish West Coast route but we did eventually get steam haulage over Beattock.

The first steam hauled trains on this route travelled south over Beattock which, while avoiding the steep northbound climb does include the longer climb through the Clyde Valley.

My first steam hauled ride over Beattock was in July 1996 behind the ex LMS Coronation Pacific 46229 *Duchess of Hamilton*, a member of the class that regularly hauled heavy express passenger trains on this same route.



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Early in the southbound journey 46229 is passing Braidwood at 50 mph and completes the climb to Craigenhill, where the initial steep gradient eases, accelerating to 55 mph in the process.

6. On 16th November 1936 the LMS Princess Royal Pacific 6201 *Princess Elizabeth* completed a record breaking non-stop run from London Euston to Glasgow and, seventy years to the day the same locomotive was back on the West Coast Main Line working a train to commemorate the anniversary.

Organised by Kingfisher, The Mid-Day Scot, an all dining train, ran on 16th November 2006 steam hauled from Preston to Glasgow returning south, again steam hauled, the next day.

We had already made a recording of the train on Shap but, as the train had turned up 45 minutes early due to missing out a pathing stop, we had a problem at Beattock.

As might be expected, running a train on this busy route on a weekday meant that, as well as water stops, the timetable included visits to many of the loops en-route, however, as we had already seen, just because there is a booked stop in the timetable.....

6201 had stops booked at Penrith, Carlisle and Lockerbie but as the train had already missed out stops we couldn't be sure if it would actually make any of them. And it was already running 45 minutes early!

We decided to play safe and assumed that it would only make one stop of about 30 minutes somewhere for water and we could expect it to be perhaps an hour or more early on Beattock.

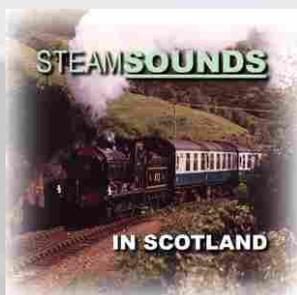
Guess what? When the train passed us at Greskine, about half way up the bank, it was only about 15 minutes early! It had made a water stop at Penrith and had been held there for right time.

The problem with recording on Beattock is that the railway and the very busy A74(M) occupy the very narrow valley of the Evan Water and it is impossible to get away from the incessant noise of the road. We chose the spot at Greskine as, at that point the railway is on an embankment and it is possible to get to the west side of the line, the opposite side to the road, and by recording from low down hide a little of the road noise. Unfortunately, as the line here is on a curve, the embankment also hid the sound of train's approach to a certain extent so this recording of 6201 going very well on the 1 in 76 gradient isn't quite as long as I had hoped.

But at least the RAF waited until the train was just out of earshot before performing a fly past!

7. Continuing north beyond Glasgow takes us to Perth and the Highland Main Line to Inverness. On 6th November 1993 the SRPS ran a railtour to take ex LMS Black5 4-6-0 44871 from Stirling to Inverness.

Although steam hauled trains had run on the Highland Main Line in the past this was the first passenger train to be steam hauled beyond Aviemore since steam haulage finished in Scotland in the 1960's.



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The Autumn main line steam programme had up to this point been far from trouble free with problems encountered with bad rail conditions amongst other things and running a train on this route, it seemed unlikely that we would be free of problems.

Between Stirling and Perth we had already encountered problems with bad rail conditions and when 44871 departed from Perth we were already running a little late.

8. After 35 miles of undulating track we eventually reached Blair Atholl.

Here the main climb begins with over 17 miles, much of it at a gradient of 1 in 70, to the summit at Druimuachdar at an altitude of 1484 feet.

Soon after departure 44871 began to have problems with bad rail conditions which were not made any easier by the damp weather and our speed fell to around 10 mph at times. The bad rail conditions continued for most of the first part of the climb and it was over 25 minutes before the last slip was encountered and rail conditions began to improve on the more open sections of the line higher up.

In this part of what was a 50 minute recording, 44871 is making steady progress on the last of the 1 in 70 gradient approaching Dalnaspidal where the gradient begins to ease and the Black 5 is able to accelerate the 6 coach train before tackling the final gradient to Britain's highest main line summit.

Perhaps not a heroic performance but at least we made it!

9. Travelling further north beyond Inverness takes us on to the Far North line to Wick & Thurso.

By 1986 experiments with Radio Electronic Tokenless Block (RETB) in Suffolk had proved successful and the system had been installed on the lines north of Inverness to Wick & Thurso and Kyle of Lochalsh.

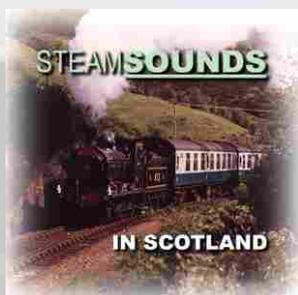
By allowing the closure of the majority of signal boxes on these routes large savings in manpower and infrastructure costs had been made. In view of this the West Highland lines were to be the next to 'benefit' from the introduction of RETB.

This would, of course, have an impact on the steam hauled services running between Fort William and Mallaig so Scotrail decided to carry out an experiment to see if there were any inherent problems in using RETB with a steam loco by running Black 5 4-6-0 44767, which had been in use that summer from Fort William, on the Far North Line from Inverness to Helmsdale and back on Sunday 31st August 1986.

The main climb on the route to Helmsdale is that from Culrain, through Lairg and to the summit beyond.

Having reached Lairg without difficulty 44767 is heard departing and starting on the 1 in 70 gradient to the summit a little over 2 miles beyond.

10. The route that most people would associate with steam in Scotland would probably be the spectacularly scenic line from Fort William to the west coast fishing village of Mallaig so let's take a ride along the Road to the Isles to Mallaig and back.



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Steam returned to this route in the early summer of 1984 and the preceding weeks had been notable for being remarkably dry. This had led to a number of problems with steam locos starting lineside fires which had resulted in a steam ban. In view of this steam ban we were rather concerned that this would affect the forthcoming and long awaited steam operation on the West Highland line.

As a prelude to this first year of regular steam operation on the route Steam Locomotive Operators Association had arranged a three day visit over the Spring Bank Holiday weekend based in Fort William to include the first public trains. Looking back it seems remarkable that the total cost of this weekend, including three steam hauled runs on the West Highland Extension and two nights dinner, bed and breakfast was just £67.50!

Despite the continuing fine weather and high fire risk Bernard Staite of S.L.O.A. had assured us that everything would be Ok and the trains would run. He was proved right, but it wasn't as straightforward as that!

The first public train (there had been a press run during the previous week), hauled by LMS Black 5 4-6-0 5407 left Fort William at 9.00 am on Sunday 27th May 1984.

11. Also involved in working trains during that first weekend was the NBR Class C Goods 0-6-0 673 *Maude* although it very nearly didn't make it at all!

The original intention had been to use 'Maude' on just 4 coaches for the Sunday afternoon run to Mallaig and back. Half the passengers would travel on the train one way while the other half travelled by bus to get some lineside photographs with passengers swapping over at Mallaig.

There had been some doubt over *Maude* reaching Fort William because of shortage of coal supplies due to the continuing miners strike. The engine had made it but had run hot during the journey north and was not available.

So, on the Sunday afternoon 5407 did another round trip and as it had the full 6 coach set this meant that, unless we really wanted to, there was no need to travel by bus!

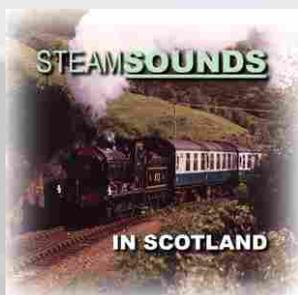
Those of us who's accommodation was in the Milton Hotel, which is quite close to Fort William depot, could have got up in the early hours to view *Maude* being driven gently up and down the yard had we so wished. The SRPS support crew had burnt the midnight oil re-metalling the offending axlebox and then gently bedding it in. The result of this effort was that 'Maude' was available to run to Mallaig on the Monday morning.

The stock used was part of the S.L.O.A. first class stock which had brought us up from the south as the B.R. stock which we had used the previous day was required for the public steam hauled train later that day.

So, with just 4 coaches it was a short but very well filled train that left Fort William at 8.30 am on 28th May 1984.

Although I said above that the Monday morning train was going to Mallaig this wasn't exactly the case. The intention was to go to Mallaig but there were no guarantees that we would get there.

If things didn't go well we could expect to be turned back earlier.



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In the early stages of the run, after a short pause at *Banavie Maude* sounds to be going very well rattling across the swing bridge over the Caledonian Canal and tackling the rising gradient beyond.

If only *Maude* had been able to carry on going so well! As the journey west proceeded it soon became apparent that the loco was not doing well and, having already lost quite a bit of time, we were turned back at *Arisaig*. Arrival back into Fort William was very late indeed and the train still had to return south to London. We were all late home that day!

12. The steam operation on the West Highland line that started in 1984 continues to this day and is now such a success that trains run on 6 days a week from May to October, on all 7 days at the height of the season, and a 7 coach train is often full with intending passengers who haven't booked in advance being turned away.

For the first few years the locomotives working these trains were almost exclusively Black 5s and on 29th August 1994 it was the ex LMS Black 5 4-6-0 44767 that was in charge of the train. Heard at *Corpach*, where the Caledonian Canal ends, 44767 passes over the level crossing before accelerating west alongside Loch Eil.

13. A little later on the same day, after running alongside the length of Loch Eil on easy gradients the first really serious climbing is reached soon after passing *Kinlocheil* and 44767 is soon at work on the climb to *Glenfinnan*.

14. After frequent appearances on television and more recently in the cinema in the Harry Potter movies, if there is one single image of Scotland that would be most often recognised all over the world it could easily be that of a steam hauled train passing over *Glenfinnan Viaduct*!

If the view of a train on the viaduct is spectacular, the view from the train is no less so.

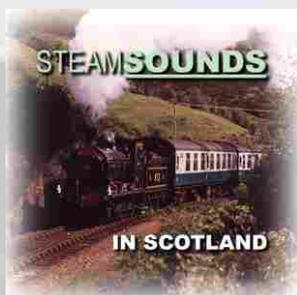
Seen on a fine day, the view down Loch Shiel with high mountains to either side and the monument to the 1745 Jacobite Rising on the shore below, is superb. Can there be a more dramatic view from a train in Scotland?

Thanks to there being a speed restriction across the viaduct, passengers on the train have plenty of time to take in the view but, for the loco crew, this restriction denies the chance of getting a run at the steep gradients that take the line up to *Glenfinnan* station.

In this recording the LNER K1 2-6-0 2005 is crossing *Glenfinnan Viaduct*. Once off the viaduct the loco has to climb gradients of 1 in 50 and 1 in 45 before stopping in the station.

15. Trains usually stop at *Glenfinnan* so that passengers can stretch their legs, have a look at the loco or perhaps have a brief visit to the museum on the station. In addition there is a passing loop here where other trains going the other way can pass on this single track route. Beyond *Glenfinnan* the line continues to climb before making an equally steep descent to the shores of Loch Eil.

As this recording begins 44767 can just be heard departing from *Glenfinnan* before passing on the steep gradients heading for *Mallaig*.



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16. With the gradients through Glenfinnan surmounted the climbing is far from over and perhaps the most difficult is that which follows Loch nan Uamh Viaduct, the 1 in 48 gradient of Beasdale Bank. Not only is the gradient steep but the line is sharply curved and passes through a number of short tunnels before reaching the tiny station at Beasdale which marks the top of the climb.

Over the years many locos have stalled on this climb but, in this recording made between the top two tunnels, 44767 sounds to be in no danger.

17. Further down the line, at Arisaig there is another passing loop and trains usually stop there to exchange the single line token for the one giving access to the final section of the line to Mallaig.

In this recording LMS Black 5 4-6-0 5305 is heard restarting on the short rising gradient.

18. Not far from Mallaig ex LMS Black 5 4-6-0 44932 slows on the steep gradient approaching Morar where there is a level crossing.

When I first visited the line in the 1970's trains had to stop here while the crew operated the level crossing gates but now, as you can hear in this recording, the gates have been replaced by something more modern.

19. As there is no turntable there, locos returning from the fishing port of Mallaig usually run tender first.

Heard in this recording, 5305 has no difficulty with its heavy train on the initial 1 in 75 gradient which begins not far from the platform end.

20. After the first climb from Mallaig, the next is encountered on the approach to Arisaig after crossing Keppoch Moss.

Recorded at Kinloids part way up the climb 44767's whistle echoes around the hills before the loco tackles the 1 in 50 gradient.

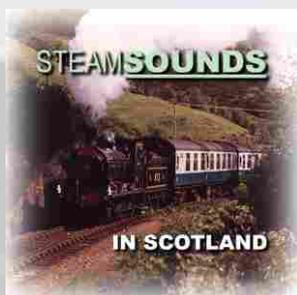
21. The longest continuous climb encountered during the return from Mallaig and is from the shores of Loch Eilt heading towards Glenfinnan.

Perhaps the most impressive part of this ascent is the passage through the two short tunnels towards the top of the climb.

From the level of the loch the line has to climb to a summit before descending to Glenfinnan. The gradient is generally at 1 in 50 and the climb a little over 2 miles long.

Heard from the front vestibule of the first coach the microphone is just a matter of feet away from the locomotive's chimney and to say that the sound of the exhaust is loud is something of an understatement particularly when passing through the two short tunnels near the top of the climb.

I recall on one occasion when recording here that a young child with his father wandered through into the vestibule just as we entered the first of these tunnels. Obviously the child was frightened by the noise, darkness and the rain of sparks just outside the window but his terrified screams didn't spoil my recording, they were quite inaudible over the noise of the loco!



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In this recording 5305 is heard passing through those two tunnels and reaching easier gradients not far beyond.

22. In 1987 the signal boxes on this line were closed and signalling system employing single line tokens was replaced by Radio Electronic Tokenless Block signalling with both the line to Mallaig and that south towards Glasgow being controlled from a new signalling centre specially built at Banavie.

With this system, instead of a physical token being handed to the driver, he receives an electronic token by radio. This system allows long single line sections to be broken up into shorter sections without the need for a physical presence at the point of division. This has allowed the long block section from Glenfinnan to Corpach to be divided and, in this recording, 5305 has been stopped at the short platform at Locheilside Outward Bound, built to serve the nearby outdoor activity centre. You can hear the radio in use and the electronic squeals as the token is received before 5305 is allowed to proceed.

23. There is not far to go to complete the journey back to Fort William as 44767 passes Corpach station and climbs the short 1 in 50 gradient towards Banavie.

24. I can still recall when I first travelled the route back in the 1970s thinking that the West Highland line would be a wonderful route to have steam haulage over, not just the line to Mallaig, but also the line south towards Glasgow and, having reached Mallaig behind steam in 1984, I couldn't help wonder if my other dream would also come true!

They say that everything comes to him who waits and, after waiting just three years, I was delighted to discover in 1987 that the SRPS had at last got permission to run a steam hauled train back from Fort William at the end of the season.

That first run south was hauled by 5305 and the part of the journey that I was particularly looking forward to was the spectacular climb from Tulloch, alongside and high above Loch Treig to Corroun on Rannoch Moor. During the 10 mile climb, the steepest gradient is 1 in 59 but, aside from two short easings, the remainder of the climb is at 1 in 67. And the scenery is superb too!

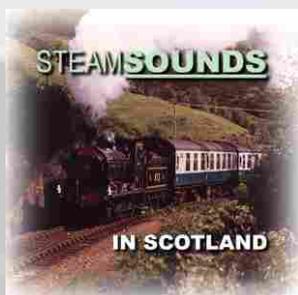
On this first public southbound run we had for company that sound recordist's nightmare; a helicopter. It was there to film our progress and it was on this part of the journey where the line is far away from any roads where it came into it's own and we had a number of fly pasts as we climbed high above Loch Treig.

At one point the helicopter appeared to be hovering right above the line and must have been close enough to have been peppered by cinders as we passed beneath. Although there would have been no complaints from the passengers it would have been most unfortunate had we shot it down!

With 6 coaches behind the tender 5305 did well to maintain speed in the mid 20's for most of the 25 minute climb and in due course we reached the remote station and passing loop at Corroun and the falling gradients beyond.

And, yes, it was as good as I had hoped!

This recording is of the final part of the climb as we pass Curroun.



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25. Over the years I've heard 5305 worked hard on more than one occasion but never as hard as it was worked on another journey south from Fort William in 1990.

Our driver was Mick Welch who had been a driver at Saltley but moved from Birmingham to Fort William simply because he wanted to have the chance to drive steam locos more often! Mick had already proved what a good engineman he was earlier in the journey when we encountered extremely bad rail conditions in the Monessie Gorge near Roy Bridge. Slipping brought our speed down to a crawl but with gentle handling Mick managed to keep us moving and we made it through this very difficult section.

As well as being gentle with a loco, Mick wasn't afraid to work a loco really hard when it was safe and appropriate to do so and, on the climb from the Horseshoe Curve after Bridge of Orchy to the County March summit Mick certainly worked 5305 hard!

On the final 1 in 55 gradient to the summit Mick later told us that he had the regulator fully open and had gradually extended the cut-off until approaching the summit he had the engine working in full forward gear. This was sufficient to maintain a speed little over 30 mph passing the top of the climb.

This recording is of the final few minutes of the climb, turn the volume up and enjoy it!

26. After that very first public train in 1987, the SRPS ran a second train to get the LNER K1 2-6-0 2005 back south.

This train ran on 14th November 1987 and, aside from the weather, which for the time of year was absolutely superb, the highlight of the run for me was the climb from just beyond Arrochar & Tarbet to the summit after the Glen Douglas passing place.

It was late in the afternoon and the sun had set some time before but there was still a little light in the sky over the mountains to the west. As we climbed high above Loch Long it was one of those occasions when I wished I could have been in two places at once. Seen in the dusk from the road at the other side of the loch we must have made a superb sight with the smoke and steam hanging in the still November air.

But then, if I had been at the other side of Loch Long I would have missed an excellent recording!

The best part of the recording for me came when, after slowing through the loop at Glen Douglas, the K1's exhaust echoes back from the trees as the loco climbs the final 1 in 56 gradient to the summit.

This is what steam in Scotland is all about!

