



Lanka Railway Digest

SRI LANKA'S FIRST RAILFAN MAGAZINE

VOLUME 2 - ISSUE 2 / AUG - NOV 2013



- + Nawalapitiya - A Once Prosperous Railway Town
- + Stopover in Sri Lanka
- + මහ රූ සිදු වූ දුම්රිය ගැටුම
- + දුම්රිය මගෙහි විශේෂත බිම්ගෙවල්
- + and more

FEATURING
Nawalapitiya
AND STEAM OPERATIONS IN THE 1970'S

LKR 200/=



USD 6.00 | AUD 5.00 | GBP 3.50

I am happy to present our 5th. edition -- Issue #2 of Volume 2. Our readership now includes train travellers on the suburban lines. A colleague of mine had seen two magazines being read in the same carriage.

This issue has accounts about the final days of steam operations in Sri Lanka, as in Victor Melder's and Robert Kingsford-Smith's articles, the latter of which is profusely illustrated with rare colour photographs.

I have received many inquiries as to how a simple outfit like ours manages to produce such a quality publication. Some thought a sizeable publishing house was behind it, until Iftihar Rizvi gave an outline in our last issue on our production team.

It is with profound sadness that we at LRD note the passing away in July of retired Locomotive Driver, Mr. Anton de Silva, about whom an article appears in this issue.

Best wishes to all our readers.

Vinodh L. J. Wickremeratne

Editor,

August 2013.

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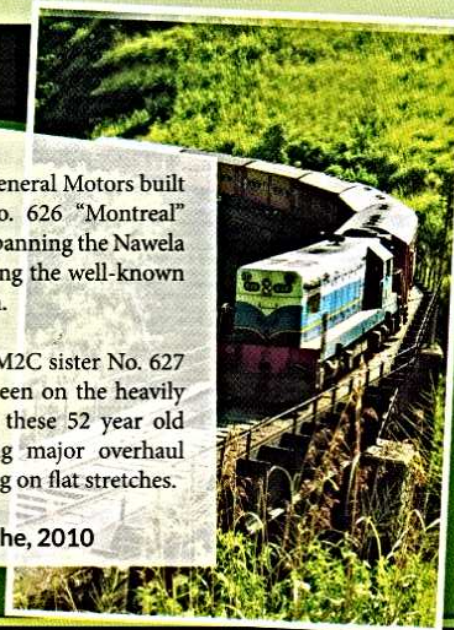
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Cover Photo

The Colombo-bound "Podi Menike" hauled by General Motors built Class M2C locomotive No. 626 "Montreal" negotiates the steel bridge spanning the Nawela Oya river just before entering the well-known Demodera helix and station.

"Montreal" and her Class M2C sister No. 627 "Vancouver" are now not seen on the heavily graded up-country line as these 52 year old workhorses are undergoing major overhaul and are restricted to running on flat stretches.

Photo: Lahiru Weerasinghe, 2010



THIS ISSUE OF "LANKA RAILWAY DIGEST" HAS BEEN BROUGHT TO YOU BY

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සාධකයින් සහ පළකිරීම් ලබාදෙන අය සැලකිය යුතුය -

රචකයින්ගේ භාෂා වැසිරවීම හෝ පළකිරීම වල නිරවද්‍යතාව පිළිබඳව ලංකා දුම්රිය ගවේෂකයින්ගේ සංගමය කිසිදු වගකීමක් නොදරයි. තවද ලංකා දුම්රිය ගවේෂකයින්ගේ සංගමය මෙම ලිපි සහ දැන්වීම් පළකිරීම සිදු කරන්නේ ඒවායින් බුද්ධිමය දේපල හිමිකම් කඩවීමක් සිදු නොවේය යන විශ්වාසය මතය. මෙහි ඇති සියළුම පළකිරීම් වල අයිතිය ලංකා දුම්රිය ගවේෂකයින්ගේ සංගමය හෝ අදාළ කතෘවරයා සතුවේ. අනවසරයෙන් උපුටා ගැනීම හෝ කිසිදු මාධ්‍යයකින් නැවත පළකිරීම සපුරා තහනම් වේ.

සියළුම හිමිකම් ඇවිරිණි

A LEOPARD STALKS ALONG YAKADA YAKA'S TRAIL

by Lalith Seneviratne

Note: The term *Yakada Yaka*, meaning *Iron Demon* in Sinhalese, was coined by the local folk as they saw the first steam railway engines in amazement, and it has been a part of our vocabulary ever since. In fact, it comes from the verse "Anguru kaka, wathura bibi, Colomba duwana *Yakada Yaka*" translating to "Coal-eating, water-drinking, *Iron Demon* running to Colombo."

This is a story from the early 1920s – the era of the extension of the railway to the East Coast. With it came more or less the fulfillment of a dream begun with the floating of the 'The Ceylon Railway Company' in London in 1845 and the inauguration of the first train service between Colombo and Kandy in 1867.

The Batticaloa and Trincomalee Line connected the two main East Coast cities to the commercial capital, Colombo. Batticaloa is perched on the edge of an extensive mangrove-rich lagoon stretching over a distance of thirty odd miles carving out the land in random form. It is the gateway to the pristine beaches and other lures of the East Coast, and here too lives the last substantial Portuguese speaking community of Burghers. Trincomalee is one of the finest natural harbours in the world and consequently of immense strategic value. There are records of it being used as a port since the 5th century BC. The Chinese sailing ships known as *Baochuan* called at Trincomalee in the 15th century during the time of Emperor Zheng He. Four hundred feet in length, they were by far the largest ships of the time, with Trincomalee a regular port of

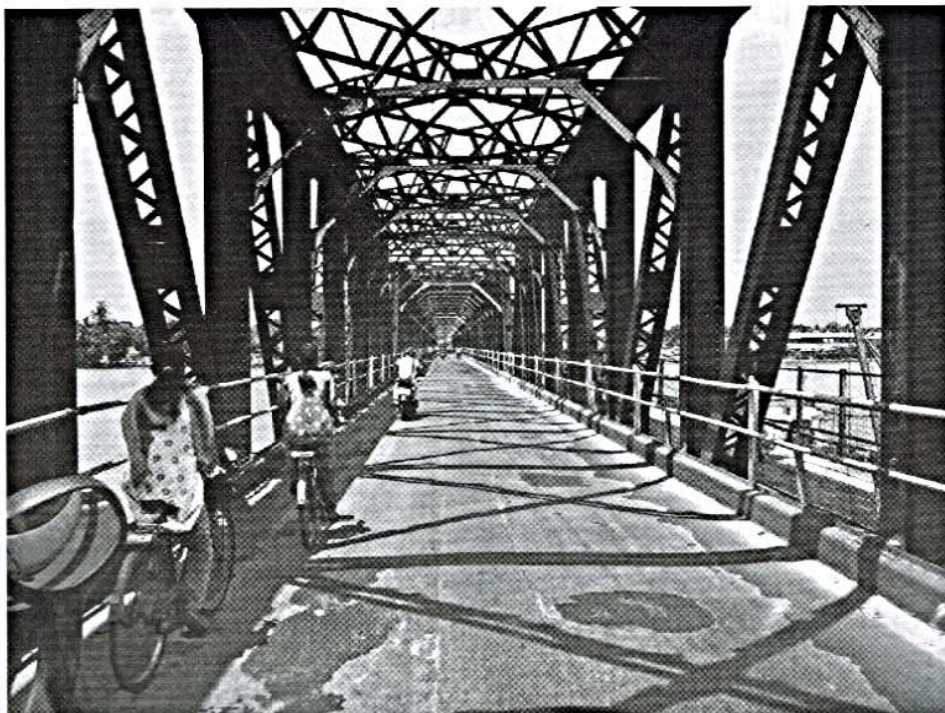
call. It is said that the oil storage tanks built here by the British just prior to the First World War held reserves amounting to six months of consumption of Asia during the Second World War. After the fall of Singapore, Trincomalee became the home port of the Eastern Fleet of the Royal Navy, and today forms the most extensive base of the Sri Lanka Navy.

Today, from the 12th century capital of Polonnaruwa, the road and the railway run skirting each other doing a beeline along rolling country to Valachchenai in the Eastern Province, on its way to Batticaloa. In between, the demography of the land changes from majority Sinhalese to a mix of Tamil and Muslim. The train going east has therefore always, except in the days of the past turmoil, served as a catalyst for all communities to mix together in travellers' camaraderie, exchanging pleasantries, sweets and sometimes forming lifelong friendships. The Eastern Province is our 'land of the rising sun.' Pastureland, farms and paddy fields dot the countryside having long displaced the semi-deciduous dry monsoon forest that stretched endlessly at the time of the

construction of the railway line. Then the road was only a cart track. The village of Punani (referred to also as Punanai in the past) emerged in between the two main towns of Welikanda and Valachchenai as a convenient hub for railway logistics and construction workers. The railway station there came into being as a consequence. The line beyond Polonnaruwa required the construction of two major bridges, namely at Manampitiya, before Punani, to cross the River Mahaweli (at 210 miles in length, our longest river), and at Oddaimavadi, just before Valachchenai, to cross the lagoon inlet. The Manampitiya Bridge, a steel truss bridge 900 feet in length, is the longest railway bridge in Sri Lanka. Until the recent completion of a concrete span road bridge, the Manampitiya Bridge served as a dual road and rail bridge. Originally, the line was built using light rail and hence it was called the Batticaloa and Trincomalee Light Railway (BTLR). Later it was relaid with normal rails.

Just south of Batticaloa town itself, the 900 feet long Lady Manning (or Kalladi) Bridge was also constructed to function as a dual road and rail bridge in 1924, as it was anticipated that the line would be extended south of Batticaloa towards Nintavur. But after the initial survey a decision was made in 1926 not to proceed. The Lady Manning Bridge served the public while becoming synonymous with the city until it was superseded by a concrete span bridge in 2013. It is underneath the Lady Manning Bridge that one can experience the famous 'singing' fish of Batticaloa on many a moonlit night, that has made the town known all over the world. Both Manampitiya Bridge and Lady Manning Bridge serve as icons of British colonial engineering excellence and should remain as part of our heritage for the future.

The Leopard Stalks In the early 1920s, while construction of the railway was taking place around Punani, news began circulating about a leopard that was devouring people travelling the

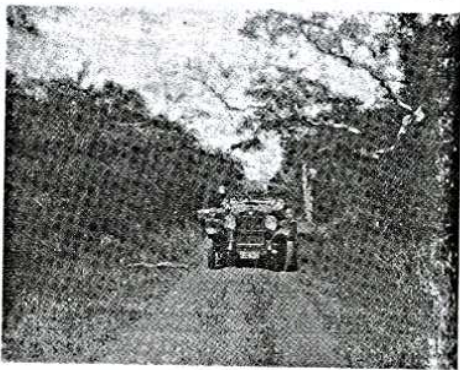


Kalladi Bridge, the icon of Batticaloa



Railway track at Punani looking towards Valachchenai

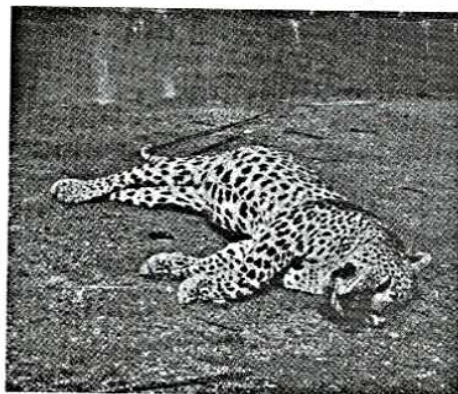
jungle track and the rail track under construction running side by side towards Valachchenai. This leopard had been most unusual in attacking even groups of three or four people and carts by stalking along the side of the road under cover of the forest and springing up from behind on the unsuspecting and unfortunate victims. At the time, A. H. Altendorf was working in Punani as the Inspector of Railways in charge of construction of the BTLR. He could witness the carnage



Captain Agar's car parked along the Punani Track

of the leopard and the terrifying effect it had on the construction workers and traders plying the route. But no one could trap the elusive leopard. His plea to the Government Agent at Batticaloa resulted in a telegram to Captain R. Shelton Agar, which he received at noon on 22nd May 1924. Captain Agar was a prosperous British tea planter in the Hatton district with long family connections to the country and was a respected sportsman called upon regularly to fell rogue elephants. The request excited him as he had not heard of such a leopard before. In fact, records of proven and identified man-

eating leopards, except in this case, are to this date nonexistent in Sri Lanka. Before midnight he was on the way in his Bentley car with guns oiled, reaching Badulla by 3 am and the Valachchenai ferry by 9 am, a distance of 175 miles from Hatton. Once there, he collected all the information he could, which was not much, as no one seemed to have seen the "beast." Only the signs of the unfortunate victims such as blood stains, flesh, torn bits of clothing, etc. remained to show what a terrible fight for life had taken place. He then carefully plotted his strategies to patrol the road day and night, to set out goats as bait, to use local hunters and their dogs, or even to make a trap with human bait inside. But all these efforts to lure the elusive animal were in vain, and this valiant sportsman



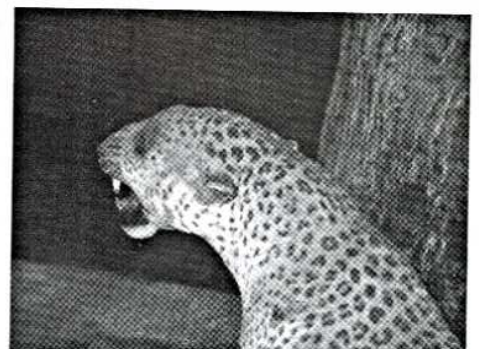
The man-eater was finally felled by Captain Agar on Monday 18th August 1924

called it quits after a few days and nights of continuous toil, with the definite hope of a return.

Several months later, on Saturday, the 16th of August 1924, Railway Inspector, Mr. Altendorf, was out with his men working on the track

close to the 28th mile post. The railway *tappal* (postal) runner, Manickam, was supposed to have gone past by 11:30 am on the way to Kalkudah, having been warned to arm himself. But he had replied that as people were working on the track, he was not afraid, and set off without a knife or a club. Mr. Altendorf, at noon returning to Punani for his midday meal, noticed the *tappal* bag lying on the side of the road and a small piece of cloth hanging on the shrubs. He immediately informed his men in the hope of leading a team along the trail but they all scooted off as fast as they could in fear. Another plea from the Government Agent brought back Captain Agar who luckily happened to be in Batticaloa the next day on a rogue elephant hunt. Following the trail, he located the half-eaten body of Manickam and he was determined to lay in vigil day and night until the leopard returned sooner or later to consume the rest. He got his men to construct a *machan* (a temporary platform) up a suitable tree. But during a moment of inattention the fearless leopard managed to sneak in and drag the body further away. The next day, Monday 18th August 1924, he again located what remained of the body and took no further chances. Finally, at 3 pm that day he bagged the leopard, and a heroes welcome awaited Captain Agar back at Punani. A post-mortem on the leopard was held. The man-eater was not a very large leopard. He had a great number of knife wounds, old and new, showing that some of his victims had fought for their lives. As to how this leopard became a most rare man-eater could not be speculated on. Today, this leopard survives as a still exhibit at the National Museum, Colombo.

Now the story jumps to another most interesting connotation. Christopher Ondaatje, the eldest son of the then well-known planter Philip Mervyn Ondaatje, left our shores as a 12 year old boy ostensibly never to return. He ended up being a highly successful financier, later devoting himself to writing and philanthropy. He could be described as



The stuffed and mounted body of the man-eater was donated by Captain Agar to the National Museum in Colombo.



Sir Christopher Ondaatje, illustrious son of Lanka who put the man-eater on the map

one of the first truly Global Ceylonese. Before he left Ceylon, his father had taken him on a trip around the island that left a lasting impression in him. He would later coin the phrase "You can take the boy out of Ceylon but it is not easy to take Ceylon out of the boy." During this tour he saw a

leopard for the first time and developed his life-long curiosity about it. Listening to the story of the man-eating leopard of Punani as told by trackers while in the Yala jungles had terrified him as a 12 year old, out of his wits. After leaving the corporate life and while visiting East Africa, the yearning to return to the land of his birth got ignited. He wanted to visit his sister Gillian but as he says, he most of all wanted to go to Punani to learn about the man-eater. Finally, forty years later, in the late 1980s, he returned to Sri Lanka for a visit that took him to Punani in spite of it then being in no-man's land. Most remarkably, the visit made him retrace his father's footsteps and get to know his true self for the first time. Out of that was born remorse, for he realised how much his father had loved him and cared for him although he never saw him again. Through this, a most enlightening work of literature on the father-son relationship "The Man-eater of Punanai" was born, selling over 100,000 copies worldwide. The book is a personal journey filled with



Mr. Rupasinghe, Station Master, Punani before retiring in 2012 after nearly 40 years of service in the railways. His first posting incidentally was Punani. He has knowledge of the story and has met 'Mendis' the last living person to have been around at the time the saga took place

unmatched life experiences with the man-eater as the backdrop. The book equally brought the man-eater back again into the limelight, long after it and Captain Agar were forgotten. The story of the man-eater has now become part of the colourful history of this island, thanks in no small part to Ondaatje.

Acknowledgment:

Information gathered from 'The Man-eating Leopard of Punana' by R.S. Agar, appearing in 'Loris,' the journal of the Wildlife & Nature Protection Society of Ceylon and 'The Man Eater of Punana' by Christopher Ondaatje is gratefully acknowledged.

QUIZ RESULT

And the Winner is ...

Readers would not have found our last Quiz too difficult judging by the many correct entries received. For the record, the correct answer is 25.

Congratulations to **Amila Nuwan Lokuge** of **Hunupitiya, Wattala** who was favoured by the luck of the draw, and you would have already received your prize of a Gift Voucher for Rs. 1,000/-.

New QUIZ

We invite readers to take part in our latest Quiz by answering the question on the Coupon attached to the magazine, and sending it by post to: **CREC - Quiz, No. 28 Stubbs Place, Off Dickmans Road, Colombo 5**, by 31st October 2013. Good luck with your entries! The winner will receive a prize to the value of Rs. 1,000/-.

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1916 මැයි මස දී ඇති වූ අධික ජලගැලීම් තත්ත්වයන් සහ සුළං සහිත අයහපත් කාලගුණ තත්ත්වය හේතුවෙන් 1916 මැයි 19 වන දින සම්පූර්ණ හලාවන මාර්ගයේ දුම්රිය සේවාව අතරමඟ නවතාලීමට සිදුවිය. එහිදී ජා ඇල සහ මාදම්පේ අතර 1916 මැයි 24 දින දක්වා ද 1916 ජූනි 2 තෙක් හලාවන දක්වා ද ගමනාගමන කටයුතු තාවකාලිකව අත්හිටුවිය. මැයි 19 වන දින කඳන සහ හලාවන සමීපයේ ජලගැලීම් සිදු වූ අතර 20, 21 යන දිනයන්හි මීගමුවෙන් උතුරට මාර්ගයෙහි තවදුරටත් ජලගැලීම් තත්ත්වයන් පැවති බව ද වාර්තා විය.

මෙම ගංවතුර හේතුවෙන් පමිබල වැව බැම්ම පුපුරා දම්වැල් කිහිපයක් දිගට ඉවුර සම්පූර්ණයෙන්ම සෝදා ගියේ ය. මෙහිදී අඩි 20 ක පරායනයක් සහිත වූ පාලම ද සෝදාගෙන ගියේය. පාලම අඳුන්වැඩියා කරන තෙක් මෙම කෙටස තාවකාලිකව ධාවනයෙන් ඉවත් කරන ලදී. මෙම ස්වභාවික විපත් මත දුම්රිය මාර්ගය විනාශවීමත් ගමනාගමන කටයුතු අධාල වීමත්

නිසා සහේතුක ලෙස පාඩු ලැබීමට සිදුවිය.

1926 මැයි මස බෝලවත්ත සහ ලුණුවිල අතර දුම්රිය අනතුරක් සිදුවිය. භාණ්ඩ ප්‍රවාහන දුම්රියක් එමගින් බරපතල ලෙස හානි සිදුවිය.

කාර්මික පුරාවිද්‍යා විෂයට අදාලව ගතහොත් පුත්තලම දුම්රිය මාර්ගය ඉදිවීමේ අතීතකතාව මෙසේ ය. මෙම ආරම්භය ඔස්සේ යමින් කාර්මිකරණ ක්‍රියාවලියේ බලපෑම තුළ මෙරට පැවති සමාජ, ආර්ථික ව්‍යුහයේ මුහුණුවර විවිධපැතිකඩ තුළින් අවබෝධ කොට ගැනීමෙහිලා මෙම මාර්ගය මහඟු දායකත්වයක් සපයනු ලබයි. මෙහි අතීතකතාව තුළ පමණක් නොව අතීතයෙන් ලද වර්තමානය තුළ පරිහරණය වන අවශේෂයන් සම්බන්ධයෙන් ද එය එසේමය. ඒ සඳහා වන ප්‍රවීණයෙහි මූලාරම්භය මෙයයි

කාර්මික පුරාවිද්‍යා විෂය සම්බන්ධව සමාජය තුළ ඇත්තේ අල්ප දැනුමකි. එබැවින් එයට අදාළ අවශේෂ විනාශ වී යමින් පවතී. ඒ අනුව දුම්රිය සේවය ආශ්‍රිතව පවතින කාර්මික පුරාවිද්‍යා අවශේෂයන්ට ද අත්ව

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නිබෙන්තේ එම අවාසනාවන්ත තත්ත්වයමය. දුම්රිය සේවය ආශ්‍රිත කාර්මික පුරාවිද්‍යා අවශේෂ පිළිබඳ අධ්‍යයනය කරන විටදී එය පුරාවිද්‍යා විෂයට අදාළත්වයක් තිබෙන බව දන්නා පිරිස අනුමානව වන අතර බහුතරයකගේ නොදැනුවත්කම හේතුවෙන් බොහෝමයක් අවශේෂ විනාශව ගොස් තිබීමත් ඒ සම්බන්ධයෙන් බොහෝ දෙනා තුළ අල්ප හෝ දැනුමක් නොතිබීමත් මෙම අධ්‍යයනයන් අතරතුර දුම්රිය සේවය ආශ්‍රිත කාර්මික පුරාවිද්‍යා විෂයය හදාරණු ලබන ශිෂ්‍යයන් ලෙස අපට එල්ල වී ඇති ප්‍රධානතම අභියෝගයන් ය. එබැවින් සාම්ප්‍රදායික පුරාවිද්‍යාව තුළින් ඔබ්බට ගිය මෙවන් නව මු විෂයය පර්යක් සම්බන්ධයෙන් සමාජමය ආකල්පයන් යාවත්කාලීන කරවීම මෙම ක්ෂේත්‍රය තුළ සිටින සැමගේන් අධ්‍යයනය කරන්නා වූ අපගේන් සමාජමය වගකීම ය.

(මතු සම්බන්ධයි)