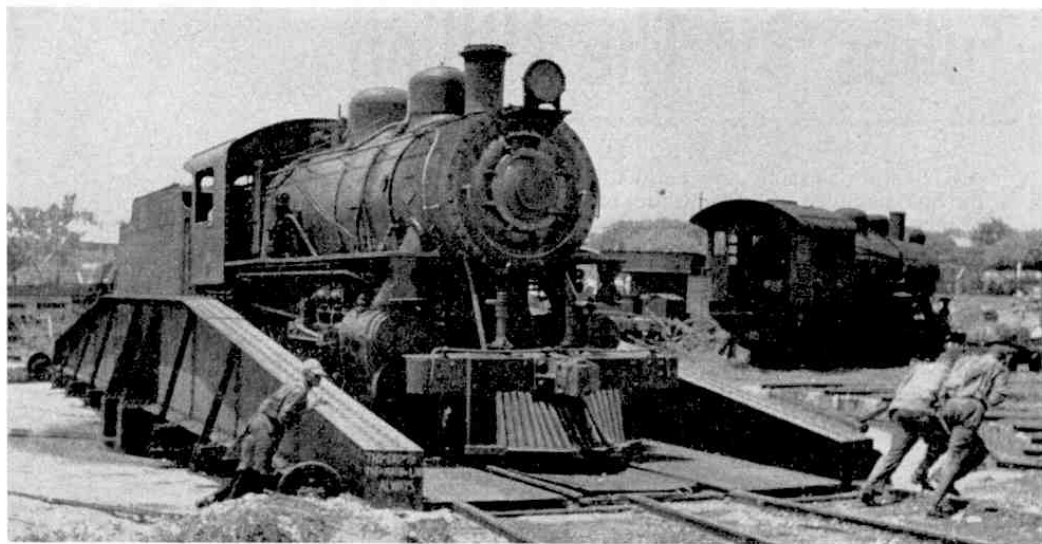


H. G. FORSYTHE
DESCRIBES THE
RAILWAYS OF
JAMAICA. HE
CALLS THEM . . .



“THE FRIENDLIEST LINE IN THE WORLD”

THE Port Antonio train was, as usual, late—very late, but nobody seemed to mind. At Darling Spring Halt, in the heart of Jamaica’s lush green countryside, the friendly crossing keeper told me, “The afternoon train goes through anytime between four and six”. I was there to photograph that train. I hoped it would arrive while the light was still good; luckily, it did. With a rumble and a roar and an ear-splitting whistle it thundered out of a tunnel, a fine old Canadian-built 4-8-0 at its head. The train consisted of two box cars and three coaches, two

second class, one composite 1st and 2nd. They were old coaches—built at least 60 years ago—made of wood with platforms and steps in the American Old West style.

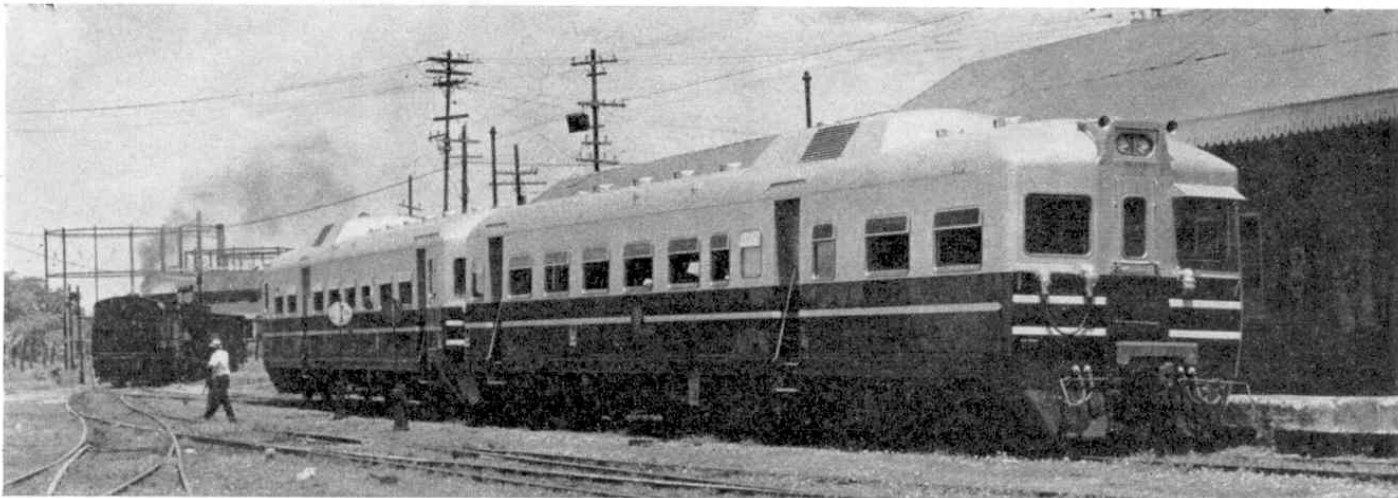
Those elderly coaches are not the only aspect of Jamaican railways reminiscent of one-time American practice. Train control on the single track main lines, is on the block telegraph system. All trains are controlled by the dispatcher at Jamaica Railway Corporation’s headquarters at Kingston Station. The dispatcher is in contact by means of the telegraph with all the stations along the line. To allow a train to proceed from one station to another — Maggoty to Appleton, for instance, on the Kingston-Montego Bay line—the stationmaster at Maggoty telegraphs through to Appleton to see if the line is clear and whether the stationmaster there will accept the train. If Appleton accepts the train, the stationmaster at Maggoty telegraphs the dispatcher for his permission to send on the train. If all is well, the stationmaster then makes out a clearance card to give the driver of the train. Trains are not allowed to move without appropriate cards.

Signalling at stations is done by hand-held flags or lamps. Often, trains are held up outside stations while stationmaster, staff and a boy or two round up and chase away various livestock which are grazing near the line or may have strayed on to it.

At busy stations there is an additional safety precaution—the Pilotman. There is only one Pilotman at each centre and trains are not allowed to move in the station area unless he is



At Kingston Motive Power Depot steam locomotive No. 55 (above) is turned by hand outside the Roundhouse. Left: View from the cab of an English Electric diesel-electric locomotive, looking back along the train in the mountain section of the Kingston-Montego Bay line. All the illustrations are by the author



aboard. He is, in fact, a living "staff". This practice originated in England many years ago. As traffic increased the live member of the railway staff who acted as Pilotman was replaced by the token, or "staff", for single-line working, hence the origin of the name.

Other responsibilities of the Pilotman include setting and locking the points for incoming trains before walking up the line to meet them.

The Jamaica Railway Corporation, like most other railways, is in the process of dieselisation. Latest additions to stock include some specially-designed Metropolitan-Cammell diesel-hydraulic railcars powered by Rolls-Royce engines. There is also a small stud of very efficient 750 h.p. English Electric mixed traffic Bo-Bo diesel-electrics.

I made an exciting footplate trip on one of these on the 113-mile Kingston to Montego Bay line, passing through some of the most difficult mountain sections in the world. The summit of the line at Greenvale is only 1,705 feet, but to get there the line has been literally hacked out of the mountain side. With incredibly sharp curves and 1 in 30 gradients the line is a challenge even to the best motive power.

We had approximately 200 tons behind us, and once or twice the diesel almost ground to a stop on the sharp curves as she climbed, with the ammeter reading close to overload limit. On through the hills we struggled not far from the mysterious district of "Look Behind". It was hot work, too. On several occasions along the route the water for the cooling system had to be replenished.

Goods traffic on the J.R.C.

Top: The diesel train from Montego Bay arrives at Kingston Station. These Metropolitan-Cammell railcars are the latest thing on Jamaican railways. Right: At Kingston, the Jamaica Railway Corporation has well-equipped workshops. Here two steam locomotives are undergoing heavy overhaul.

includes bananas, sugar cane, alumina, jute, oil and a host of other commodities. Forming a unique feature of mixed trains on market days are the special market cars—modified box cars fitted with seats and windows. These dual-purpose vehicles carry passengers as well as the goods, such as farm produce and poultry, they are taking to market.

Let us imagine we are on the 2 p.m. Port Antonio mixed train a few minutes before leaving Kingston Station. The oil-fired 4-8-0 has just backed down from the shed and is coupled on to the box cars up front. A shriek on the whistle, lots of shouting from the guard and station staff, and we're off!

Through the yards we go, but almost at once we slow for a stop at Greenwich Farm Halt. Here, it seems, there is a

little delay. Someone rushes past carrying an iron bedstead to load into one of the box cars; there is a lot more shouting. Off again and soon we come to open country and at 40 m.p.h. are passing through the great Caymanus Estate, where we see sugar cane growing up on either side.

Next stop is Gregory Park. On the passing loop is the diesel railcar from Montego Bay. Here we see the stationmaster hand the clearance card to our guard who, in turn, passes it to our driver.

Further on we come to Spanish Town. One time Jamaica's capital, the town is now an important railway junction. Here we branch off northwards along the Rio Cobre Gorge towards Bog Walk. Now the scenery becomes truly magnificent as

(Continued on page 217)

