

India's First Commercial Passenger Train Journey

Editor's note: This story is India's first commercial train journey. However, according to <http://www.irfca.org/docs/history/india-first-railways.html> trains were used prior to this for hauling cargo.

The Indian Government has released two postage stamps that commemorate this event.



The above stamp was issued in 1953. It purports to show the engine used in 1853, but this is contested here http://webspaces.webring.com/people/md/dakshina_kan_pa/art15/railstamp.htm



The above stamp was issued in 1976. The term GIP refers to the Great Indian Peninsula Railway Company, which owned and operated the train. The postage stamp shows the engine used in 1853.

The following report is from an [Australian newspaper](#), apparently relying on a newspaper published from Mumbai called Bombay Gazette. A detailed search failed to find a news report in the Times, London, and the New York Times.

INAUGURATION OF THE GREAT INDIAN PENINSULA RAILWAY.
(Bombay Gazette, April 16.)

Saturday, the 16th of April, 1853, must be a memorable day henceforth forever in the annals of India, memorable as the greatest of battles, and surely more glorious, for peace hath its triumphs as well as war, and this is of them. The Great Indian Peninsula Rail way was this day inaugurated!

At about two o'clock, the preparations for their reception being perfect, those who had accepted invitations to proceed in the train began to assemble, and by three o'clock the platform, three hundred feet long, with a continuation, was occupied as closely as it could be by European Ladies and European and Native Gentlemen.

The platform was neatly matted, and, opportunely for the company, carefully screened on the western side not only from the rays of the sun, but from the high north wind which was blowing all the afternoon and carrying with it immense clouds of dust. The whiteness of the screen and the ceiling of the platform were tastefully relieved by festoons formed by flags and cloth of many colors. In front of the platform we counted eighteen flags: prominent among those in the early part of the afternoon, floated the ensign of St George of England, but it was soon displaced by the Union Jack.

Captain Barr, and Mr. Roche, Traffic Manager, acted as Master of Ceremonies. At about three o'clock they began to allot places to the ladies, and they having been accommodated, the gentlemen were recommended to secure places for themselves, which they did very speedily, so that by a quarter past three few could be seen on the platform.

The State Carriage was occupied by Sir William and Lady Yardley, Sir Charles and Lady Jackton, the Hon. A. Bell and Lady, the Hon. D. A. Blane, Sir Henry and Lady Locke, and others whom, in the anxiety of our reporters to provide for themselves, they were unable to recognise.

At half past three o'clock in the afternoon a royal salute was fired from the ramparts of Fort St. George, immediately after which the well-filled train, consisting of fourteen first, second, and third class carriages, drawn by three locomotive engines, and containing in all, it was said, about five hundred persons, started from the Terminus at Boree Bunder.

Tens of thousands of persons surrounded the spot and as the moving mass swept along the way, still there were tens of thousands looking on, - men, women, and children, - perched on wall tops, on the branches of trees, even in the masts of Arab buglus along the harbor, from windows, and from the tops of temples and of houses, from every eminence around the town; finally, when the train had passed the most densely populated parts, still the surrounding fields were studded with spectators.

“The thronging multitudes increase
 * * * * *
 But still, above the noisy crowd,
 The engine's cry is shrill and loud.”

Besides the inhabitants of Bombay Proper, and the neighboring country, there were in those crowds people from Scinde, from Cabul, from Afghanistan, from Central Asia, from the Persian Gulf, from Arabia, from the East Coast of Africa, and one might say literally from all the ends of the earth. Who shall attempt to describe the emotions which filled and animated those vast throngs of human beings! A passenger in the train looking out upon them, as it swept along still faster and faster, could only notice the vivid gestures of some, the silent amazement and awe of others, and the loudly expressed wonder and applause of the greater number. Every Englishman must have congratulated himself on being one of the dominant race that day. The scene was worth to England the addition of many regiments to its army. It has added sensibly to the power of the empire, and will undoubtedly prolong it. It is not merely the inauguration of a railway thirty miles long. It is the commencement of a new era, and while time and history last, the memory of this day can never pass away.

There is little to describe - particularly to the great majority of our readers - in an ordinary railway trip. It is due, however, to those who had the task of maturing all the arrangements for the occasion to say, that everything went on smoothly. The train stopped at Sion, going out, to allow of the engines being watered and wheels greased, - all still new and of course stiff. At no time was the speed above five and

thirty miles an hour, and generally it was much under that. The time taken to reach Tannah (24 miles), (*Editor's note: Tannah is the old spelling for Thane*) including the stoppage at Sion, was fifty-five minutes. The return trip occupied only forty.

Arrived at Tannah, the party found, under an immense tent, at once a cool retreat and a splendid tiffin. Everything was very well arranged; nor were the wants of any overlooked.

Major Swanson, the senior Director present, took the Chair, supported by the Honorable Sir William Yardley, Chief Justice; by Sir Henry Leeke, R N., Commander-in-Chief Indian Navy; also immediately surrounded by the Honorable Messrs. Bell and Blane, Members of Council; Sir Charles Jackson, Puisne Judge H. M. Supreme Court; Colonel F. P. Lester; Surgeon-General Taylor; Superintending Surgeon Boyd; Colonel Woodburn, C.B., Commandant of the Garrison; Mr. Le Messurier, Advocate General; Colonel Hale, Adjutant-General; Messrs. A. D. and E. F. Robertson, C. S.; Colonels Willoughby and Blood; Lieutenant-Colonel Lyons, Mr. Le Geyt, Major Parr, Major Trevylian, Capt. Cruickshank, Capt. Crawford; Doctors Stovell, Morehead, Girand, Coles, Campbell, Yuill, Bremner and Ballingall; Captains W. F. Leeson, and A. Price; Mr. G. Grant; Messrs West and Johnson, Puisne Judges Small Cause Court; Mr William Howard, Barrister at Law; Mr. Berkley, Chief Engineer of the Railway; Mr. Scott, Secretary; Mr. Roche, Traffic Manager; Mr. J. A. Russell, Mr. Gilmour, Mr. Binny, Mr. H. Scott, Mr. W. Scott, Mr. Graham and many other European merchants, Professor Green; Mr. R. X. Murphy, Captain Porter, I. N., Mr. F. Hutchinson, Mr. A. W. Elliott, Mr. G. S. Judge, Mr. S. Compton, Mr. C. Kingcome, Mr. R. H. Thomas, Mr. W. Sanderson, N. Spencer, jun., J. Flynn, W. G. Allan, Rev. Dr. John Wilson, Mr. R. W. Bone, Mr. C. M. J. Pollock, Mr. F. Durby, Mr. J. G. H. Brown, Mr. J. T. Cuvellier, Mr. N. Fernandes, Mr. S. S. Dickinson, Mr. W. F. Faviell, Mr. P. M. Dalzell, Mr. A. Anderson, Mr. J. Riach, Mr. W. B. Tristram, Mr. John Fleming, Mr. John Stuart, &c. &c.

At a separate table laid out for the Parsee passengers, we noticed Messrs. Cursetjee Jamsetjee, Bomanjee Hormusjee, Manockjee Nusserwanjee, Merwanjee Jeejeebhoy, Sorabjee Jamsetjee, Limjee Manockjee, Furdoonjee Hormasjee, Nowrojee Furdoonjee, Nowrojee Dorabjee Chabookwalla. Sitting quietly looking on, we observed Mr Ali Jan and a few Marwarrie gentlemen.

On the train approaching Tannah, the crowds lined the sides thickly for more than a mile, and were kept in order by the Ghat police, under the command of Capt. Walker and Soobedar Major Moosajee Ballajee Bahadoor. Captain Walker appeared to be ubiquitous while the train remained at Tannah, having been seen by the agents of the *Gazette* in every part of the crowd at about the same time.

From the mass of pleasant compliments and glowing sentiments in the speeches of the gentlemen at the tiffin, we cull a few facts interspersed, which are interesting:-

Sir W. Yardley stated, that the original estimate for constructing the experimental line to Callian was half a million sterling, but it would be completed in the most solid and substantial manner for 20 per cent. less than that sum, and this would include permanent way, engines, carriages, machinery of every description, and in ample quantities; in short, everything properly chargeable to capital. He was informed, moreover, that this first section of the line to Callian had been constructed for £10,000 less than the estimate, and almost the whole of this great work had been completed in one fair season; he had heard a good deal of Indian dilatoriness, but here was an instant of despatch and promptitude in a country in which such undertakings were entirely new that would have done credit to all the parties concerned, if it had happened in England or any other country in the world. It was also most gratifying to be informed by the highest authorities in these matters that the native workmen employed on the line, to the number of 10,000 at a time, had proved most docile, intelligent, and industrious, and the future progress of this great under-taking would be immensely facilitated by the abundant supply of skilled labor which, under English superintendence, had been formed out of the raw material of the country. There were youths who had not reached the age of manhood now at work on the line, who were earning wages four or five times as high as those which they would have obtained for their rude and un instructed labor; and this, not on

account of the increased demand for labor, but entirely owing to the skill and dexterity which they had acquired under competent instructors.

Mr. Berkley, the Engineer, said, I rise to acknowledge for the Engineering Staff and myself the great honor that has been conferred upon us by Sir Henry Leeke, and this large and distinguished assembly. We accept it as the greatest compliment that could have been paid to us, because it is an approval of our past exertions, and we return you our best and warmest thanks. (Cheers.) I know that nothing which I can say will add to the effect of this great public event, when 500 people have been conveyed together from Bombay to Tannah, by locomotive power, within the short time of our journey, -a fact that must speak eloquently to the people of this nation, that has spoken to the teeming crowds along our route, and in tones that must penetrate the remotest recesses of India. (Loud cheers.) But there are observations connected with our past operations, which are calculated to inspire public confidence in similar undertakings in this country, and therefore I feel it to be an incumbent duty to make mention of them. (Cheers.) Ladies and Gentlemen, the materials of this country have proved to be abundant and suitable for the construction of a railway. We have found, too, that, notwithstanding the severity of the climate, we have been able to maintain the constant and vigilant European superintendence of the works, which is so essential to their proper execution. The native labors have far exceeded our expectations. To the many commanding officers of native troops here present it would be vain of me to speak of their docility, their endurance, and their discipline. (Hear, hear.) To the civilians who have conducted the business of their large efficient offices in Bombay, it would be vain to speak of their talent and their industry; but, ladies and gentlemen, there is a fresh source of encouragement to be derived from the construction of the railway, that the very lowest caste of natives, upon whose members we must mainly rely for executing the works upon our extensions, are capable of becoming skillful and handy artisans, and that, notwithstanding those superstitions which so many affirmed to be indomitable, they have readily adopted the use of new mechanical appliances. (Hear, hear, and cheers.)

It is needless to add, that the presence of so many beautiful ladies enlivened the scene, which was closed in the tents about six o'clock. The party having got into the carriages, the train moved off and reached the Boree Bunder Terminus at seven, "all right,"-some of the gentlemen, indeed, quite jolly, but pleasant, and cheering the people who still thronged the line all along; the people returning the same with a heartiness and enthusiasm which we must have all thought new and strange in natives of these parts.

The greatest praise is due to Mr. Roche, traffic manager, for the excellence of all the arrangements; they were complete in every respect, and we may safely say that all Bombay went to sleep on Saturday night filled with agreeable emotion, and all wishing success to the Great Indian Peninsula Railway - the first railway opened in all Asia.❖
