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News in brief

- The most significant news of winter 2000/2001 was the acquisition of our sixth locomotive – Votkinsk works 0-8-0 class VP4 machine of 1958. Though planned for December, the transportation of the locomotive to Talitsy took place only after the New Year and was a real challenge.
- The tourist season of the previous year, officially closed on November 12, actually lasted into the New Millennium, ending in early January 2001. As museum staff began to face problems with snow fighting, due to heavy snowfalls, it was decided to shut down the traffic on the Museum branch and close the Museum for visitors until spring. Because of the snow and lack of requests the New Year Special was cancelled this year.
- The sad news of the winter and one of the cases of stopping of snow ploughing was the braking down of our workhorse – light diesel Bo-Bo MD54-4-1547 locomotive of 1963. The locomotive suffered from the failure of one of the bearings in the gearbox, which also caused extensive wear of the clutch. As the clutch on the locomotive comes from 1950-es agricultural tractor, some time will be needed to find spares. At the moment of printing this issue the gearbox is already repaired. All efforts will be made to return the locomotive to traffic before the end of April.
- Work on restoration of class 157 0-8-0 continued all winter. The isolation of cylinders and cylinder lubricating system were assembled, the exhaust and regulator pipes repaired and assembled, as were many various fittings on the boiler. Finally, the problem of crafting of the missing rod seems to be solved. Bryansk diesel locomotive repairs plant agreed to make the new rod for us. We hope to get the locomotive ready for the first steam test at the time when the rod is ready.
- The restoration of wooden winch trolley, brought several years ago from the network of Vyksa Metal Works as a set of metal parts, is nearing completion. Only wheel sets, gears, bearings and handles remained from 1920-es vehicle. Many metal and all wooden parts, including the frames, were crafted new according to sketches,

provided by one of the veterans. The trolley seats three passengers while four (or at least two) people have to winch the driving gear by hand. The vehicle can reach quite high speeds, provided that the

operators are physically strong enough. The trolley was first tried in November. After the restoration is complete, the trolley will be used for tourist rides over museum branch.

Pereslavl in Winter

Snowfalls in Russia can hardly frighten anybody. However, this year's winter showed that there can be too much snow even for this country. The winter started as usual, with light snowfalls in late November. In the end of December we complained that there was too little snow and prepared to mark New Year in rain. However, Millennium had different ideas, and the coming of 2001 was marked by heavy repeated snowfalls all over Central Russia. As snowdrifts became deeper, snowplough workings on Pereslavl Narrow Gauge railway began to draw more efforts. January saw repeated changes of weather accompanied by more snow. On several occasions the plough train to Kubrinsk had to be double headed by two 250 h. p. TY4 Bo-Bo diesel hydraulic locomotives.

The electrically operated rail mounted snow-sweeping machine, lying abandoned from socialist times, was hastily repaired, as drifts grew deeper and it became more and more difficult to clean points by hand. The sweeper is propelled by ESU-2a 100 h. p. Bo-Bo diesel-mechanical locomotive, which also has a powerful generator.

February brought no relief. In addition, the only remaining bulldozer in the area broke down in the middle of the month. Minor roads with little traffic, including the three-kilometer road through the forest to Talitsy, soon were completely blocked with snow. In the end of February the Museum team had to shovel through snow to get to civilisation, as even our jeep could not cope with the drifts.

Rapid warming of the weather in March provided for hopes for early spring, but in vain – frosts returned, and melted snow froze again, blocking Kubrinsk branch. The passenger traffic to Kubrinsk was discontinued until warm weather, causing much anger and disappointment of Kubrinsk residents. The traffic on town branch to Pereslavl continued throughout all winter without delays, the train consisting of TY4 locomotive and one heated coach.

Snowfalls in late February were so heavy, that the roofs of several structures in the area gave way under the weight of snow and collapsed. One of these buildings was the farm in Talitsy. Fortunately, the farmer and the cows were out at the moment of disaster, so nobody was hurt.

As rail access to Talitsy became impossible after the Museum's diesel broke down in December, and the road through the forest was impassable for standard vehicles, the Museum remained closed for visitors all winter. However, several groups of tourists came to see the snow buried exposition on foot or on skies. The

Talitsy station looked strange this year, with no tracks seen, switch stands poking out of the drifts, and all rolling stock covered with huge fur hats of snow.

Foxes were more frequent visitors of the station than people, and on one occasion bears were seen crossing the tracks.

Long winter evenings, when everything for the day was already done and it was too early to go to sleep, gave wonderful opportunity for lengthy discussions and thoughts on future projects and museum development...

Votkinsk Locomotives

To provide our readers with more information on the newly acquired steam locomotive, we decided to include into this issue a chapter on the history of Votkinsk Locomotives.

The standard Soviet narrow gauge 0-8-0 was developed for industry and military use by Kolomna works in 1940 – 1941. The new P24 locomotive weighted 16 tons in working order, was very versatile, convenient in operation and maintenance, could run on lightly laid tracks and steamed easily on virtually any fuel. Military connections of the design were thoroughly concealed, the locomotive was said to be designed exclusively for industrial use. However, the date of designing and close supervision of the project from R.K.K.A. (Red Army) Railway Corps suggested that P24 had to become the main workhorse on the trench railways of the coming war. Unexpectedly, the war started too early, and Kolomna managed to outshop only nine machines of the new class. They never made their way to the battlefields, being sent for trials to several industrial narrow gauge railways, including the railway of Shatura Peat Trust.

During the years of the WW2 it became apparent that the new locomotives completely answered the expectations.

As Kolomna works after the war were too busy with orders for broad gauge railways, the production of P24 locomotives was given over to Chrzanov of Poland, MAVAG of Hungary, Skoda of Czechoslovakia, Tampella and Locomo of Finland and domestic Votkinsk works in Ural Mountains.

The military no longer needed the locomotives, so all P24s were sent to industry.

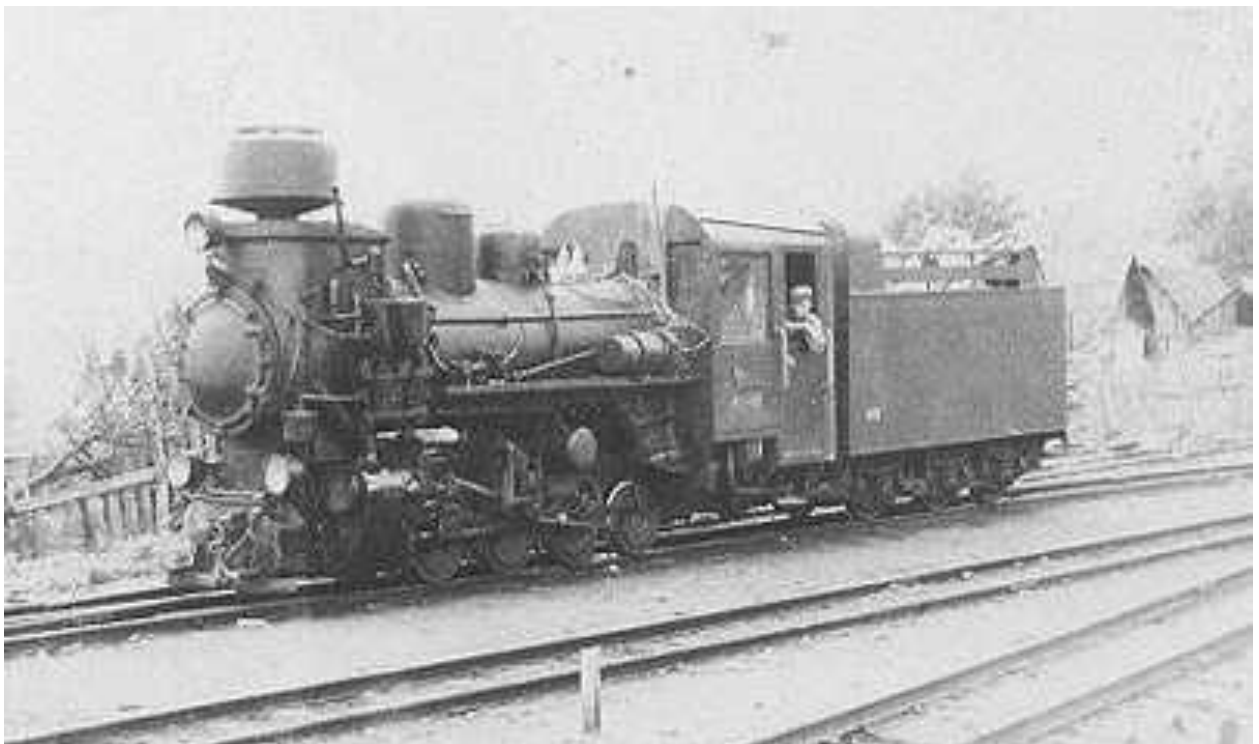
Votkinsk started production of P24s in 1947. First locomotives, named VP1 – (“Votkinskiy Promyshlenniy” – Votkinsk Industrial – first version), were assembled directly to Kolomna drawings and did not differ from pre-war P24s. However, starting from the second dozen, the sandbox was moved closer to the cab, receiving separate cover. (On P24 the steam dome and the sandbox were covered by one cover).

The quality of first Votkinsk locomotives was very high, rivaling the famous quality of Finnish PT4 version of P24. Some locomotive drivers were even convinced that Votkinsk, Tampella and Locomo machines were more powerful than their Czechoslovak, Polish and Hungarian counterparts.

However, as mass production of locomotives developed, the quality began to decline.

In 1951 Votkinsk introduced VP2, with improved and simplified boiler with corrugated firebox wrapper plate, but otherwise the same as VP1. As numeration of boilers and locomotives at Votkinsk did not quite coincide, the locomotive with VP1 designation on the cab's side could often turn to really be a VP2.

At some moment between 1951 and 1954 Votkinsk works built eleven VP3s, the 610 mm gauge VP2's versions, ordered by several iron works in the Urals to replace their aging fleet of foreign locomotives.



VP4 at Apsheronk forestry

In 1955 the final VP4 version was introduced, with the same boiler, but equipped with gas steam drier in the smoke box. This helped to raise the degree of superheat and, together with accompanying spark arrester ensured complete absence of sparks in the exhaust – a very valuable feature for the peat and timber industries. In addition, as continuous braking was being introduced on industrial lines, all VP4s were equipped with standard Westinghouse air pump and air brakes. The VP4s differed externally from their earlier and foreign sisters by huge square box between the smoke box and spark arrester, which housed the gas steam drier.

VP4s became final Soviet steam narrow gauge design and remained in production until 1960, four years after the official cease of steam production in the country. From 1947 to 1960 Votkinsk built more than 2500 VPs, making them by far the most numerous narrow gauge class in the country.

Sadly, the age of VPs appeared to be short, as massive dieselisation stroke narrow gauge railways in 1962, when Kambarka works introduced TY4 diesel-hydraulic locomotive. Most VPs were scrapped nearly new, and to the moment only four made their way into preservation. VP1-899 (with VP2 boiler) of 1951 is preserved at Lavassaare in Estonia; VP4-1425 of 1956 and VP4-1699 of 1957 are plinthed at Shatura and Radovitsy in Moscow region. VP4-2120 of 1958 was brought from Vysha forestry in Mordovia to Talitsy Museum in January 2001.

VP4 goes to Talitsy

When in winter 1996 Vadim Mironov received an evening telephone call from a railway enthusiast from St. Petersburg, little he knew of the events to follow in five years' time. The enthusiast offered to sell information of a location where a narrow gauge locomotive could be found. The quoted price was \$2000 – by far too high even for such valuable information.

As further talk brought no additional data, Vadim started his own investigation. As the world of railway enthusiasts in Russia is rather small, and virtually everybody knows each other, it soon became known where the greedy lad had traveled prior to his phone call. It had been Kustarevka – Vernadovka broad gauge branch line, running through god-forsaken woods of the Southern part of Mordovia, some 600 kilometers East from Moscow. Investigation of different maps revealed that there once had been three logging narrow gauge lines in the area.

However, it was already 1999 when an expedition to check the place out was organised. All three narrow gauge lines were long since dismantled, and their equipment scrapped, but one locomotive of Vysha forestry somehow escaped scrapping. The loco was discovered lying on its side in the ditch, her tender standing several hundred yards away. This was VP4 0-8-0. The number and year of construction of the locomotive were impossible to find out, as all works plates were missing.

The locomotive was mostly complete, though cab and running boards were badly damaged. It appeared that some 15 years earlier two drunken tractor drivers set a bet if a logging tractor could bump the locomotive sideways. After several attempts when the cab and boards were smashed, the locomotive fell into the ditch and the happy winner got his bottle of vodka. Several years later somebody needed big metal sheets and these were cut out of the tender walls with gas torch.



Tender of VP4-2120



Loading of VP4-2120

During 1999 and 2000 additional information was collected and several expeditions organised in search of other steam locomotives. But the only other VP4 found was in much worse condition, lacking even wheels, and in a much more remote location. So the decision was taken to collect the Mordovian locomotive to the Museum. As we already had a spare VP4 tender in our collection, it was decided not to take the tender.

Initial idea to transport the loco by rail failed, as Ministry of Ways of Communications refused to switch wagons onto Vysha forestry's branch, as the forestry was bankrupt. So, we turned to road transport. The locomotive, weighting in its condition around 12 tons, could fit into road clearances, if loaded onto standard heavy trailer. The remaining problem was presented by complete absence of powerful enough cranes in the area. This was finally solved after lengthy discussions with local authorities and forestry management. It was decided to pull the locomotive by tractor on a sheet of metal under the big gantry timber crane.

As 30 kilometers of dirt road to Vysha were passable for standard vehicles only in December when the mud froze and there was still little snow, it was decided to transport the locomotive in December 2000. Meanwhile, the loco was bought from the forestry for scrap metal price, all negotiations and preparations carried out.

As usual, everything went not as planned. We did not manage to fulfil the task in 2000 and the operation was moved to January 2001. After the New Year holidays the manager of Vysha forestry phoned Vadim and confirmed that the locomotive was already under the crane and awaited loading. Vadim Mironov and Arthur Berzin went to Vysha to organise loading, while Sergei Dorozhkov in Pereslavl had to find a crane, powerful enough to unload the locomotive.

When arriving in Vysha with the trailer, Vadim and Arthur found all management of the forestry at the table in the headquarters, drinking vodka for the success of the operation. The worst thing soon discovered was that somebody had stolen several hundred meters of electric cable, feeding the crane. The whole day was lost while looking for spare cable and connecting it to the crane. Heavy rain started and the weather began to spoil rapidly. When the hook of the crane finally moved, Vadim and Arthur could hardly believe that.

Meanwhile, in Pereslavl, more than 600 kilometers to the North, rain turned into wet snow, and Sergei Dorozhkov also had to overcome difficulties. The 16 ton crane was more or less easily discovered on a sixth attempt at a small mechanical firm on the very outskirts of Pereslavl.

The locomotive had to be unloaded directly onto the tracks of Talitsy station, as the condition of her bearings was very poor and did not allow pulling her by rail. The forestry road to Talitsy was being rapidly blocked by snow and branches, braking off the fur trees under the weight of wet snow. In addition, the territory in front of the shed at Talitsy also needed cleaning of snow to allow trailer and crane access. Sergei's attempts to order the bulldozer failed, as village authorities completely refused to release the only remaining in working order machine. So, Sergei called his friends for help. Sergei and Sergei Ivanovich Zakharov cleaned the territory in front of the shed by hand shovels. Igor Telenkov, the local contractor, suggested pulling the trailer with locomotive through snow by his tractor. Finally, Sergei cleaned the forestry road of branches, pulling them sideways by his jeep.

January 12 saw considerable improvement of the weather, moods and course of events. The trailer with VP4 got through the drifts to Talitsy without the help of the tractor, and soon was followed by the crane from Pereslavl. The locomotive was unloaded to the second track in front of the shed and for the first time in 20 years returned to upright position. Igor's tractor pulled the trailer out of the station, and while the lorry and crane left Talitsy, the operation came to an end.

The close investigation of the locomotive did not reveal its number. The left valve bracket had "2126" stamped on it, but VP4-2126 was known to have worked in Igrinskiy forestry, several thousand kilometers from Mordovia. The right bracket had "2115" stamp, so, as statistics showed no information on VP4-2115, it was decided that ours was VP4-2115. Only when spring came and the locomotive dried, we discovered painted figures, barely visible through rust on the left wall of the cab. They read "VP4-2120". Judging from the markings on wheel centers and the number, the locomotive had been built in 1958.

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