



Fiji Over the Years



South Pacific Sugar Mill's Hudswell Clarke #1 (0-6-0) ready to depart with a rake of cane trucks at Lautoka, Fiji, October 1963. John Teichmoeller photo.

Introduction

The images in this Note come from the CaneSIG collection (full collection on the web) and show four decades of Fiji's cane train operations.

The earliest shots were taken by John Teichmoeller at Lautoka, Fiji, in 1963 when he was in the US military. He befriended some of the folks at the South Pacific Sugar Mill (SPSM) there and was able to tour the sugar mill and the railroad shops. His mill plan is based on this site visit.

Times change and mill ownership moved from CSR to the government (Fiji Sugar Corporation).

Diesels were the order of the day when Brisbane modeller Ross Evans was in Lautoka (1988) playing a test with Queensland State Bowlers. Auckland's Malcolm Brown photographed the then-new Diema in 1994. He also shot cane trucks, maintenance trains, simplex winches, molasses and bulk sugar trains from Ba to Lautoka terminal and the old disused sugar store and molasses tanks at Ellington.

When Greg McHugh visited in 1999 on his honeymoon even the tourist trains were diesel operated, although one had a steam profile. Ian Dunn's photos from 2004 showed some cane

hailed in bins, but wholestick cane trucks were still in use in most areas. Mid-2006 John Browning noted that SPSM had discontinued the use of chopped cane bins due to maintenance problems.

Since much of the cane is really carried by road transport there is still a mix of wholestick and chopped cane entering the mills, with the road transport carrying all of the chopped cane. Newspaper reports in 2007-8 suggested that drivers were waiting up to 12 hours in line at the mill to unload their cane.

Some welcome rail maintenance occurred during 1008, seemingly in response to frequent mill breakdowns and the long waiting times experienced by truck drivers delivering cane by road. As in Australia, the mill rail system is needed as a cane storage system to ensure the smooth delivery of cane into the mill.

International sugar prices have fluctuated over the years, but social and political changes within Fiji have resulted in a withdrawal from cane production, leading to poor rail/mill maintenance and a lack of investment in infrastructure.

While Fiji is very accessible to tourists, security concerns have restricted access to mills, etc., in

recent months. A group tour organised by a railfan-oriented tour provider may be the easiest way to visit the mills and their railway system but advance planning and communication with the mills should also be possible.

Mill system employees are usually very friendly and a cab ride is not impossible. Whether one wants to undertake a 6-12 hour trip in the cab of a noisy diesel travelling at ~20 km per hour under a hot sun is another matter.



SPSM 0-6-0T Fowler No 7 outside the Lautoka Shops, October 1963. John Teichmoeller, photographer.

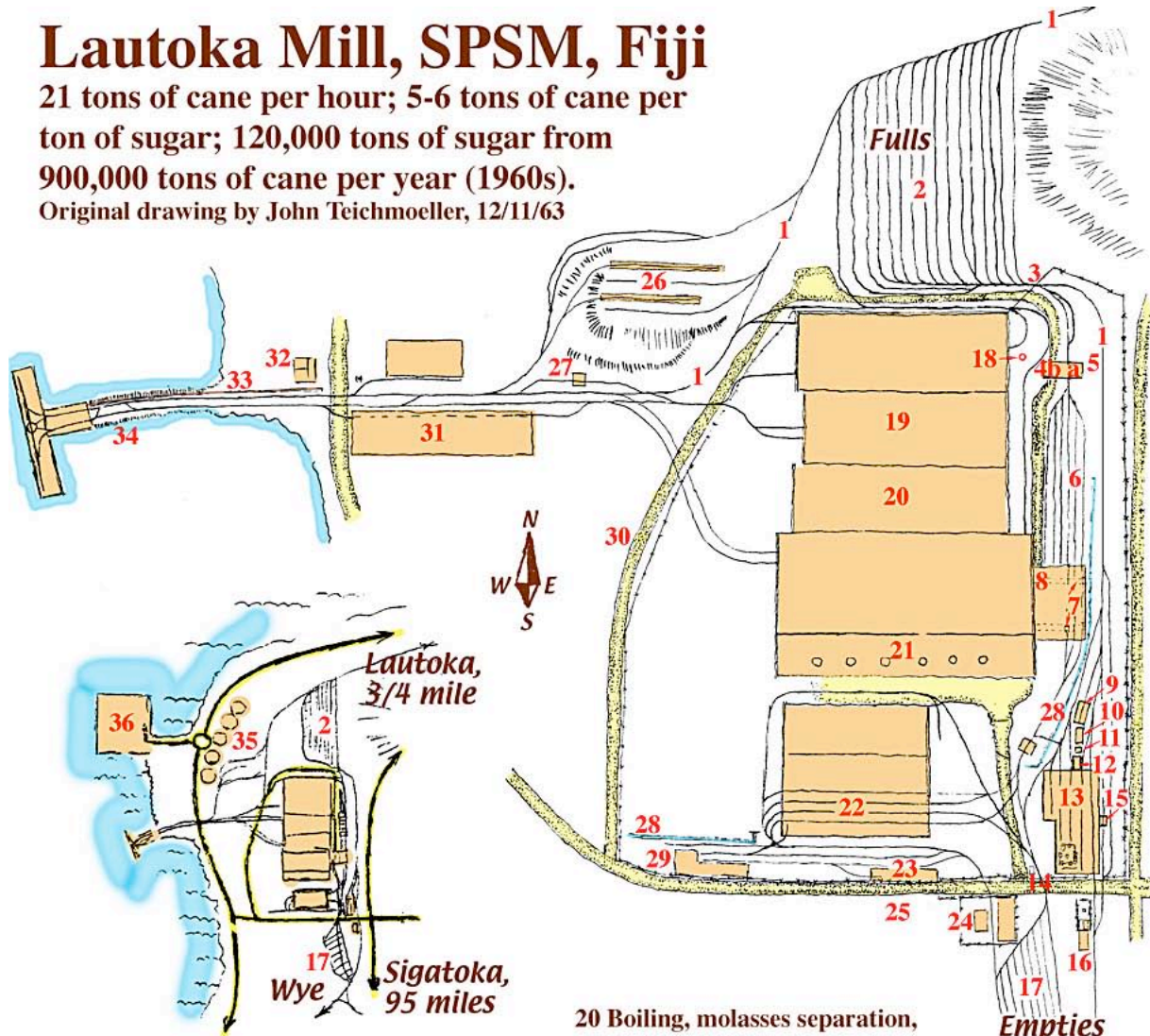


SPSM passenger train with diesel locomotive No 8 (Drewry 0-4-0D 2676 of 1960). According to John Teichmoeller, in 1963 this passenger train ran daily up the line to Sigatoka, making a two-day round trip. Date of original photograph and photographer unknown; scanned from a slide purchased by John from a souvenir stand in Lautoka, 1963. Drawings of the 26' passenger wagons are in Dyer, p 137.

Lautoka Mill, SPSM, Fiji

21 tons of cane per hour; 5-6 tons of cane per ton of sugar; 120,000 tons of sugar from 900,000 tons of cane per year (1960s).

Original drawing by John Teichmoeller, 12/11/63



- 1 Main lines
- 2 Cane receiving and holding
- 3 Delivery gate for cane (rail and motor)
- 4 Weighbridge, a) rail, b) motor
- 5 Train control
- 6 Pre-dump holding
- 7 Cane truck delivery tips
- 8 Motor truck delivery
- 9 Coal dock and water columns
- 10 Sand storage
- 11 Sand drying
- 12 Water tower
- 13 Engine house
- 14 Main gate and gate house
- 15 Inspection pit
- 16 Diesel fuel depot
- 17 Empty cane truck, holding & departure
- 18 Locomotive No 19 display
- 19 Storage

- 20 Boiling, molasses separation, drying, sacking
- 21 Crushing, mud removal
- 22 Cane truck repairs
- 23 Portable track repairs
- 24 Bridge & track department
- 25 Lumber storage
- 26 Coal delivery trestles
- 27 Sugar weighbridge to ship
- 28 Used water drain
- 29 Derelict locomotive storage
- 30 Mill Road
- 31 H. M. Customs
- 32 Shipping Office
- 33 Molasses pipeline
- 34 Causeway
- 35 Molasses tanks
- 36 Comm. dock

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John's sketches are not to scale and show the rail system running fairly straight through the mill. Dyer's mill plan (p 52) shows the main mill building set at an angle with the track making a jog around the buildings. There are some changes to the mill buildings, including new sugar storage, but much of the mill in 2008 remains the same as it was in the 1960s.



Derailed wholestick trucks are common, this one shows the underframe construction and the square wheel bearing blocks. Lautoka, 1988. Ross Evans, photographer.



Lautoka #19 (Diema 6wD) with rake of wholestick cane wagons, 1994. Malcolm J Brown, photographer



Lautoka #17 (Hunslet 4wD) with metal frame labour truck, 1994. Malcolm J Brown, photographer.



Tourist Operations near Nandi, Simplex locomotive (left), Hudswell Clarke w diesel powered tender (right), November 1999 (camera date on images is incorrect). Greg McHugh, photographer.

Additional Information Sources

CaneSIG: www.zelmeroz.com/canesig

Dyer, Peter and Hodge, Peter (1988). *Cane Train: The sugar-cane railways of Fiji*, Wellington: The New Zealand Railway and Locomotive Society.

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McKillop, Bob, and Dyer, Peter (1982). *Fiji's Sugar Tramways: 1882-1982*, Surry Hills, VIC: Light Railway Research Society of Australia.

Peterson, John (1997). 'The Early History of the Penang Sugar Mill, Fiji: A case study in the social implications of rail transport', *Light Railways*: 138, October, pp 18-26.

Zelmer, Lynn (2006). 'Fiji - From Steam to Diesel', *Narrow Gauge Down Under #23* (Spring), pp 17-19.

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Wholestick and chopped cane being moved by rail, 2004. Ian Dunn, photographer.



Cuvu Depot, December 2004. Ian Dunn, photographer.



Cuvu depot on the southern part of the Lautoka Mill network. Linecar 6 (probably of Wickham ancestry), with empty cane trucks and a labour truck parked on one leg of the turning triangle. The large water tank was a necessity in steam days. 5 October 2006. John Browning, photographer.



Lautoka Mill, 2007, with fuel depot (centre) and loco shed (centre right). Lynn Zelmer, photographer.



Lautoka Mill buildings, 2007 (below and previous page). Note the variety of building styles and materials. Lynn Zelmer, photographer.



Baldwin #16 being refueled at the Lautoka Mill, 2007. The loco shed is the relatively new building on the right. Note the long narrow containment barrier around the fuel tanks, it's located between two parallel tracks and presumably needs the length for sufficient capacity in case of a spill. Lynn Zelmer, photographer.



Baldwin #16 being refueled at the Lautoka Mill, 2007. Lynn Zelmer, photographer.



FSC #10 on the Malele Curve, 2008. Ian Dunn, photographer.

Modelling

Fiji remains one of the best guides to what Australian mill operations looked like during the middle of the 20th century. The variety of mill buildings exemplify the construction standards of

various eras and provide a guide to early diesel era modelling.

Finally, Fiji's use of both wholestick and chopped cane transport in the modern era provides a rationale for such mixed use in a model setting.



Sugar (likely raw sugar) being transported through Lautoka's streets, 2007. Lynn Zelmer photographer.



Road transport queuing outside the Rarawai Mill, September 2007. The mill was operating when this photo was taken, thus there were only 20 or so trucks waiting at any one time to deliver their cane. Some would be from local farms but others would have travelled more than 20 kilometres to the mill, with longer distances to some of the other mills. Lynn Zelmer photographer.