

The International Steam Pages

[Home](#) [Africa](#) [Americas](#) [Asia \(East\)](#) [Asia \(West\)](#) [Europe](#) [Stationary Steam](#) [Railway Museums](#) [Narrow Gauge](#) [Tales](#) [Road Steam](#) [Our DVDs](#) [CD-ROMs](#) [About us](#)

Once upon a time, long ago, Another Journey on the Indian 2ft 6in gauge, Bhavnagar, January 1985

Wilson Lythgoe has been circulating friends with some steam pictures taken some time back and with his permission and encouragement they are reproduced on these pages and will be added to from time to time. [Click here for the index.](#)

The city of Bhavnagar lies in the Western Indian province of Gujarat. Heading south from there a 2ft 6in gauge line ran 109km to Mahuva. The service consisted of four trains daily: three each way the entire length of the line plus a fourth going only as far as Talaja, approximately half way.

Motive power were a number of elegant little 0-6-2 W class locomotives. Over a twenty six year period, starting in 1912, twenty one had been built by W.G Bagnall for the Gaekwar's Baroda State Railway; a series of narrow gauge lines in what had now become the Western Railway of India. Those still remaining in service, at the time of my January 1985 visit, were sole motive power on four narrow gauge lines and it seemed that the line based on Bhavnagar had the largest allocation.

I arrived in Bhavnagar mid afternoon, initial impressions weren't good and in fact I took an instant dislike to the place. It seemed to be even dirtier than usual for an Indian city, a late lunch wasn't to my taste and the only redeeming feature seemed to be my accommodation: a bed in the station's retiring room for the equivalent of NZ\$2. My dislike was so strong that immediately after lunch I booked a sleeping berth out of town for the following night!

I later headed off trackside to find a spot to photograph the late afternoon departure to Talaja. It was listed in the timetable as either 494 Railcar or 494RC which I thought would mean railcar: my memory fails on exactly which. Either way I wasn't expecting much and the mudflats leading out of town only confirmed this. Imagine my surprise then when the train turned up consisting of W589, built in 1922, pulling a four wheel wagon containing its auxiliary water supply, a bogie carriage and a four wheel van. So much for the expected railcar plus as a bonus: smoke!



Next morning I joined W583 which would take most of the day to work the daylight service down to Mahuva. First stop was a few miles out at Krishnanagar where we crossed W589, complete with passengers on the roof and water wagon, heading into town with the early morning 'railcar' working. The station stop was leisurely as water need to be taken and the locomotive attended to.

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A lot of whistling mid morning and the train came to a rapid halt. I looked out to see what was happening and there was the driver chasing after, and yelling at, an old bloke running across a field.....I found out later he'd been asleep between the rails! Whilst the firemen (yes, these little engines had two) cleaned the fire I took the opportunity for a photo.

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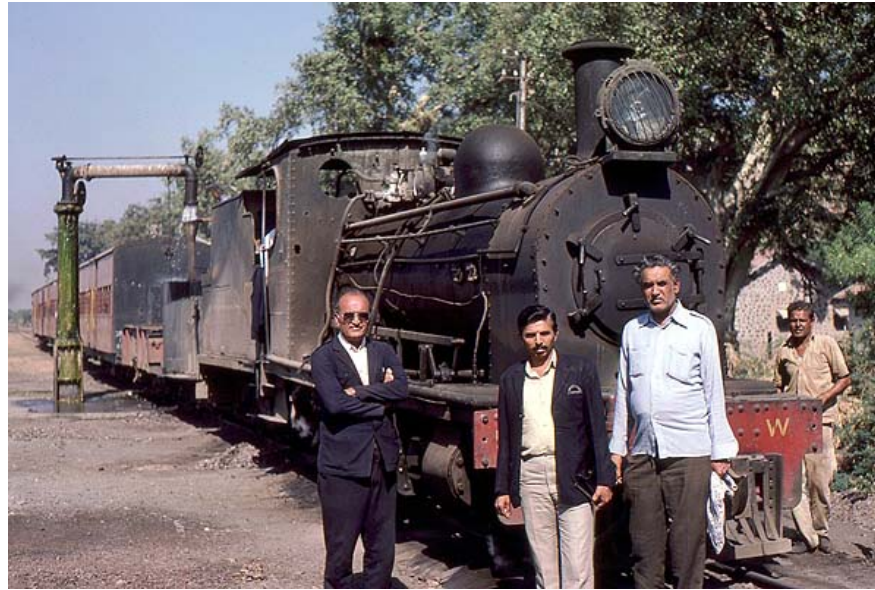
Half way point at Talaja and while the engine took water I took a crew shot: from the left the two guards, then the driver and one of the firemen. By now the guards and myself were getting on well: this was one of the few narrow gauge lines that had a first class car on some of the trains and the three of us were sole occupants. I can't recall ever having seen a ticket check done on the Indian narrow gauge so apart from waving their flags to get the train underway I'm really not sure what their duties consisted of.



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W583, built in 1920, departs Talaja with hill top temples making for an attractive backdrop. I then joined the northbound service to return to Bhavnagar.



Late afternoon and back at Krishnanagar W578, built in 1914 and heading the train I was travelling on, waits to cross W589 arriving with the evening 'railcar' to Talaja.



And that was my sole experience of the W class engines and the narrow gauge at Bhavnagar. That evening, after a most welcome shower and another mediocre meal, I joined the night passenger train on the metre gauge: top and tailed out of town by steam. I travelled in the second car from the rear and it was a great noise.

CRJ reported that by early 1986 there were strong rumours of the lines impending closure although it took until July 1987 for this to actually happen.

Engine and line details were taken from 'Steam Locomotives in India Part 1 - Narrow Gauge' by Hugh Hughes and Frank Jux published by The Continental Railway Circle in 1980..

The IRFCA site has a report of a visit here in 1975 - http://irfca.org/apps/trip_reports/show/354.

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