

POSTCARDS FROM....

# FIJI - FROM STEAM TO DIESEL



Lynn Zelmer

While the sweet-stemmed tropical grass, sugar cane, may have originated in the Pacific islands, and Australia's CSR built a major sugar cane industry in Fiji, internal strife and weaknesses in the international sugar market are helping to eliminate sugar as an agricultural commodity in modern Fiji.

The Colonial Sugar Refining Company (CSR) was the major player in the Fijian sugar industry from the establishment of its first mill (Nausori) in 1880 until nationalisation in 1973. Its Fijian subsidiary, South Pacific Sugar Mills Limited, operated equipment and followed procedures similar to those in Australia, practices that continued under the Fiji Sugar Corporation Limited. By the mid-1950s there were over 400 miles of permanent cane tramway serving the several mills and river punt transhipment points, but portable track was also likely still in use, and bullocks still routinely pulled cane trucks to and from the main lines well into the 1960s. Diesels replaced steam between 1956 and 1970, with wholestick trucks remaining in use to the present day.

One of the more interesting aspects of the Fiji tramways was the operation of pas-

senger services, often on lines constructed on or beside public roads where CSR had built the roads and bridges in return for the tramway easement. Some were special excursion services, but most were regular (monthly, weekly or twice-weekly) timetable operations.

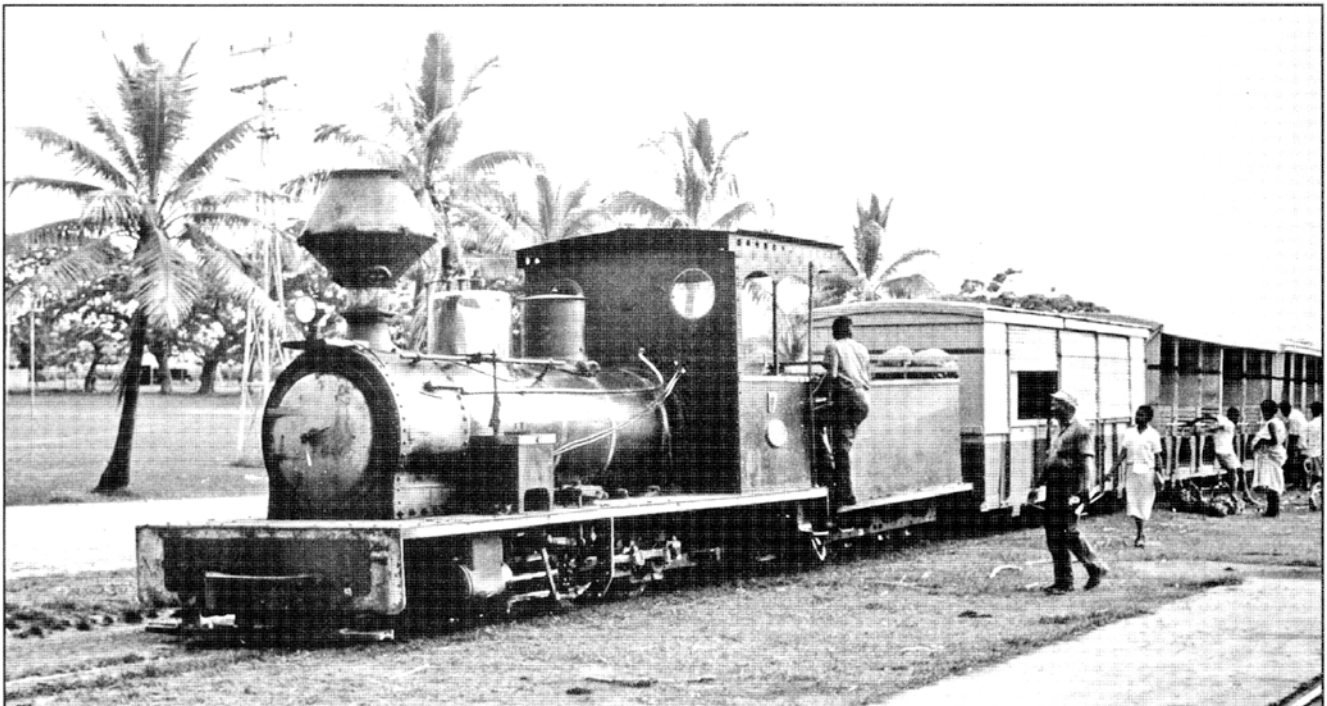
The CSR collection in the Noel Butlin Archives at ANU documents the construction, operation and administration of these tramways, often with incidents that are quite amusing to modern researchers. General references, unfortunately now likely only accessible through good libraries or second hand bookstores, are listed at the end of this article.

Railfans have visited Fiji on a number of occasions and this article follows the change from steam to diesel, and the limited move from wholestick to chopped billet, through their photographs. These photos, taken between 1963 and 2004 and generally from the Lautoka area, demonstrate the potential for modellers to construct a modern cane railway using both wholestick trucks and chopped cane bins, albeit situated in an island context.

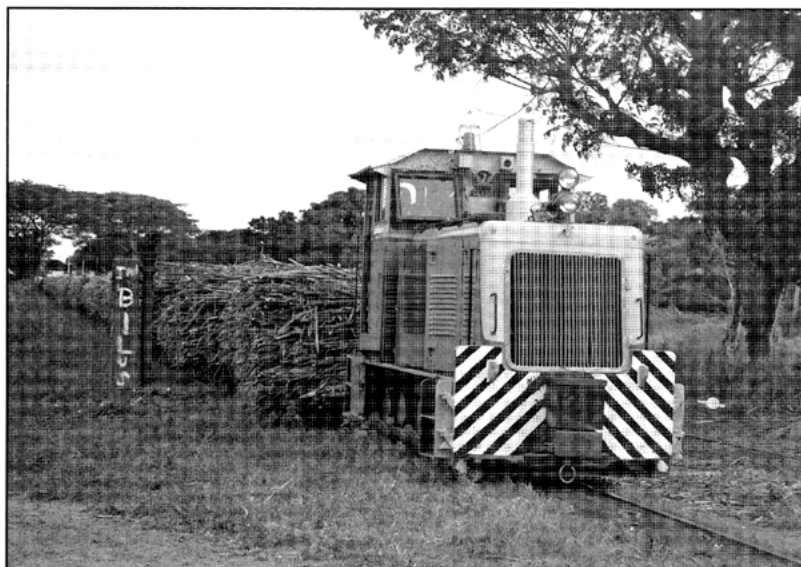
Scratch-building may be difficult for many modellers but kit-bashing can result in reasonable representations, as is shown by my On30 box wagon built on a commercial wholestick truck. The Fijian modeller has the same selection and problems as a Queensland prototype modeller in sourcing commercial models and kits. The variety of locomotive manufacturers (steam, petrol and diesel) represented in Fiji provides some possibilities in the smaller gauges, both locally (Far North Hobbies, RJ Models and Wuiske Promotions) and in 009 or 7mm scales using UK sources. There is also the probability of Australian-produced On30 0-6-0 and bogie diesel models in the near future.

However the relatively wide-spread use of Clyde-built 0-6-0 diesels means that Fiji-inspired garden layouts can use SM32 locomotives from Tootle Engineering. Scaled at 16mm = 1' (1:19) these models run on 32mm track for true 2' gauge modelling but can also be gauged for the more common 45mm garden railway track. Tootle also supplies a number of wagons that can be kit-bashed to represent Fijian practice.

BELOW: SPSM 0-6-0 Hudswell Clarke #17 (b/n 1072 of 1914) in Lautoka with the passenger train from Sigatoka, 6 November 1963. The first car would appear to be the SPSM 24' Private Car (drawing in Dwer, p 137), followed by several 26' passenger coaches. John Teichmoeller photo.



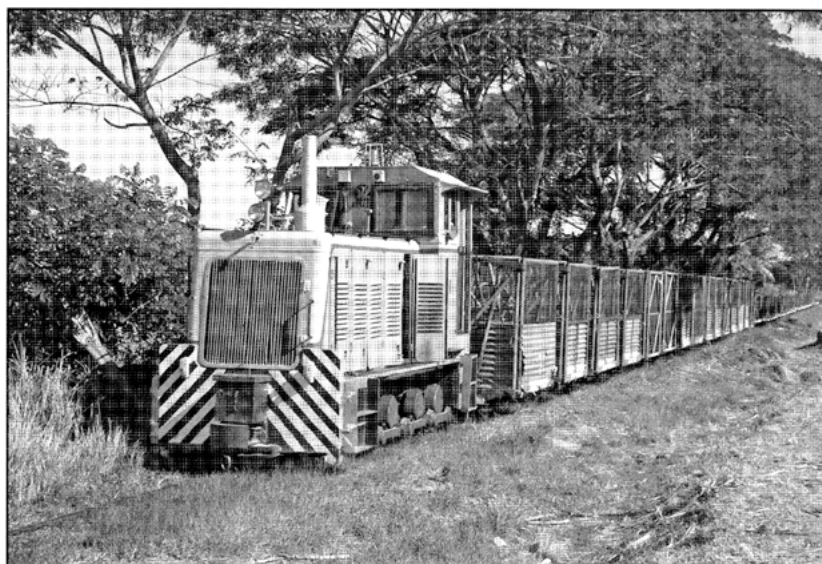
# FIJIAN DIESEL ACTION...



LEFT: 0-6-0 Clyde #13 (b/n 449 of 1965) with a rake of wholestick trucks on the Nadi back road, July 2004. Ian Dunn photo.

MIDDLE: 0-6-0 Clyde #11 (b/n 432 of 1965) with a rake of chopped cane bins near Lomo Lomo, July 2004. Ian Dunn photo.

BOTTOM: 0-6-0D Clyde #9 (b/n 380 of 1964) near Lautoka, 1994. Malcolm J Brown photo.



## Acknowledgments and References

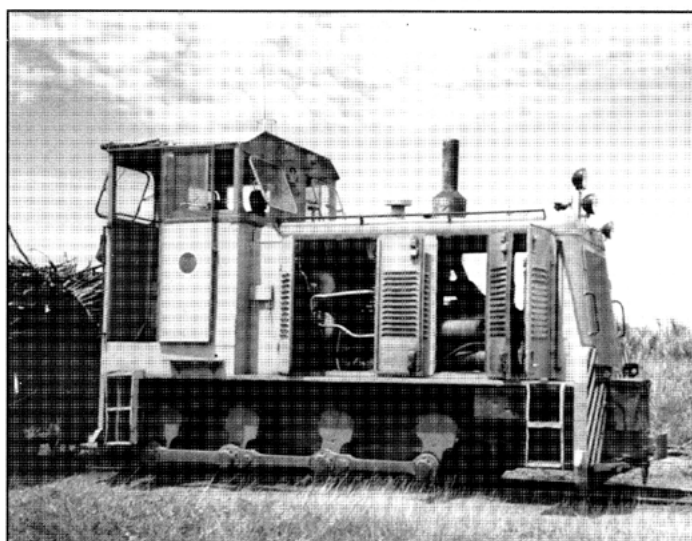
My sincere thanks to John Teichmoeller, Ross Evans, Malcolm J Brown, Greg McHugh and Ian Dunn for making their photographs available to modellers through the CaneSIG collection ([www.zelmeroz.com/canesig](http://www.zelmeroz.com/canesig)).

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

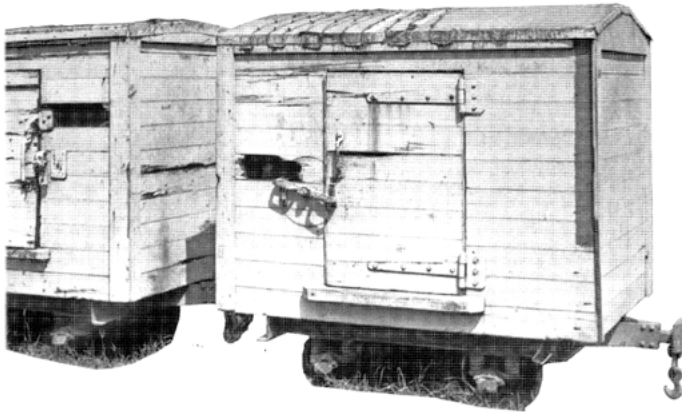
Lowndes, AG (1956). *South Pacific Enterprise: The Colonial Sugar Refining Company Limited*, Sydney: Angus and Robertson.

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

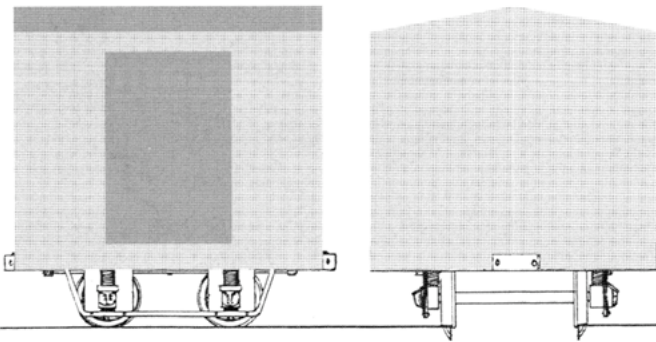
[www.zelmeroz.com/canesig/cntry/fiji/fiji.htm](http://www.zelmeroz.com/canesig/cntry/fiji/fiji.htm). Approximately 200 images taken in the Lautoka area from 1963 to 2004; includes locomotives, rolling stock and some facilities. ➔



# ...AND SOME MODELLING IDEAS

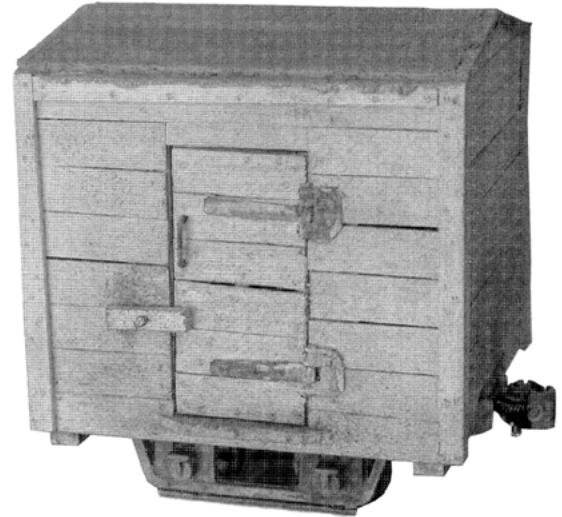


LEFT: Two SPSM box wagons, likely built on wholestick cane trucks or similar chassis. Lautoka, 6 November 1963. While they don't look insulated, they may be Lautoka Mill's two ice-box wagons rather than navy wagons. Note the different roof shapes. It's not clear whether the lines on the roof are barbed wire or knotted ropes, or their purpose. John Teichmoeller photo.



ABOVE: Conceptual design for Fijian-style wooden box adapted to On30 using a Moreton Mill wholestick truck as the chassis. Dimensions 'guesstimated' from John Teichmoeller's 1963 photograph. Side: 6' 6" x 5'; 6' to peak. Drawing approx size for 1:48 scale.

BELOW: Limited run 0-6-0 Clyde DH locomotive in SM32 from Tim Boulton's Tootle ([www.tootleng.com](http://www.tootleng.com)). Scaled at 16mm = 1" (1:19 scale) and using 32mm track this provides a true to scale 2' gauge.



ABOVE: This On30 (1:48) scratch-built wooden box on a RJ Models wholestick pewter chassis follows the general design of the SPSM wagon photographed by John Teichmoeller in 1963. The box is fully framed with Mt Albert 4x2s and dimension lumber as per standard building practice. The operating hinges, complete with bolt representations, have been fabricated from Evergreen 0.005" (0.13mm) styrene sheet and wire. If I was building another I'd probably use 6x1 timber, rather than 8x1, and a metal roof.

