Worcester to Mossel Bay Branch Line in South Africa

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1. The Route introduction.

The branch line between Worcester and Voorbaai is still operational to this day. This is a typical South African route and meant to be driven “with your head out of the cab”, hanging out of the window to fully observe the majestic plains, farm land and mountainous country side. For almost 320 km (198 miles), it gives a real feeling for what the drivers had to endure steaming uphill and downhill as the route closely follows the contours of the land. Steam is long gone, but the experience remains almost the same in a fully loaded diesel drawn freight train. Carefully manage the brakes and you end up with a wonderful experience, seldom experienced elsewhere. Quaint, small stations appear around the bend and to this day, you still expect the Station Master to come out of the signal cabin and hand over the ticket for the next section of track.

Singer and song-writer Coenie de Viliers sings about this region “ruik jy katbos en ruik jy kambro, as dit reën in die Klein Karoo” (literally “smell the cat bush and kambro (*a typical Karoo plant*) when it rains in the Small Karoo”). It is impossible to get the “scent” of this region into a simulator. But, if you look out at the rolling plains and observe the rolling landscape against the backdrop of blue mountains in the distance, you can almost, almost smell it!

2. The history of the Route.

This specific route had its origin back in 1883 when some extinguished gentlemen had a meeting in London and convinced by some farmers to set up the Cape Central Railway Company (CCRC). The original idea was to establish a branch line from Worcester to Roodewal (now Ashton). The whole idea behind this venture was to give farmers the opportunity to bring their fresh produce to the lucrative markets in Cape Town.

These extinguished gentlemen negotiated a deal from the Colonial government to subsidise this venture to the amount of £50,000 when the line reached Robertson and a further £25,000 when it reached Roodewal. Trains began running to Robertson in January 1887 and to Ashton in October of that year.

Within two years ox-wagon competition forced the closure of the CCRC and all assets were sold to a new company the New Cape Central Railway Limited (NCCR) registered in England in 1893.

The branch line was extended even further and reached Swellendam in March of 1899. The outbreak of the Boer War delayed the extension even further eastwards to Riversdale which was not opened until 1903.

With economics in mind, 46½ lb rail was used on 3' 6" line and the line closely followed the contours of the land. That included numerous 5-chain reverse curves and short stretches of 1-in-40 uncompensated.

A further extension was negotiated that brought the line eventually to Voorbaai in January of 1906.
One huge obstacle faced the route builders on this last stretch of the line.
The Gouritz River Gorge.

The line builders negotiated the use of the existing road bridge which was adapted to carry the railway line. A sum of £2,000 per annum was paid by the NCCR for the privilege to use the bridge. The present railway bridge was built after government purchased the railway and opened in 1931, marking a range of improvements to bring the 205 mile (329 km) up to main-line standards including laying 80 lb rail.

The final step of this route started in 1923 when the South African Railways (SAR) purchased this route from NCCR and it became part of the SAR in August of 1925.

This line also produced one or two humorous incidents.
The NCCR approached one of the local farmers in 1908 to provide water for the locomotives as the water at Albertinia did not meet the NCCR's standards. Mr Lodewyk de Jager, of the farm Welgevonden, agreed to build a concrete tank next to the line under two conditions.
Firstly all trains must stop at Lodewyk Tank and secondly, he could use the train for life at no cost!
This tank built between 1908 and 1910 is still to be seen to this day.

3. The route in Train Simulator.

The route - difficulties

Due to the fact that most of the infrastructure on the route have either been neglected or extremely vandalised, it is very difficult to create this route with a specific time frame in mind.

We had to make extensive use of photos from different eras to try and depict this route as closely as possible. The end result is rather a mixture of what have been many years ago and as it is seen to this Day.

Of course, it is not possible to exactly catch the “feeling” or “scent” of this historic route in South Africa. We tried our best though.

Enthusiasts can visit the following website to get more detailed information on this route in its former Glory

https://sites.google.com/site/soulorailway/home/system1/part-12-worcester-mossel-bay---the-nccr-c-p-lewis

It is a delightful and informative history of this route from its start till the end of the steam era and the Introduction of Diesel Locomotives.

4. Afrikaans Station names explained.

Langvlei – literally “long marsh”.

Vink – a bird belonging to the “weaver” family.

Klaas Voogdsrivier – a name and surname.

Merwespont – Merwe’s (surname) ferry.

Leeurivier – Lion River.

Voorhuis – originally the first and main room of a house. Visitors were seated there.

Buffeljagsrivier – literally “buffalo hunt river”.

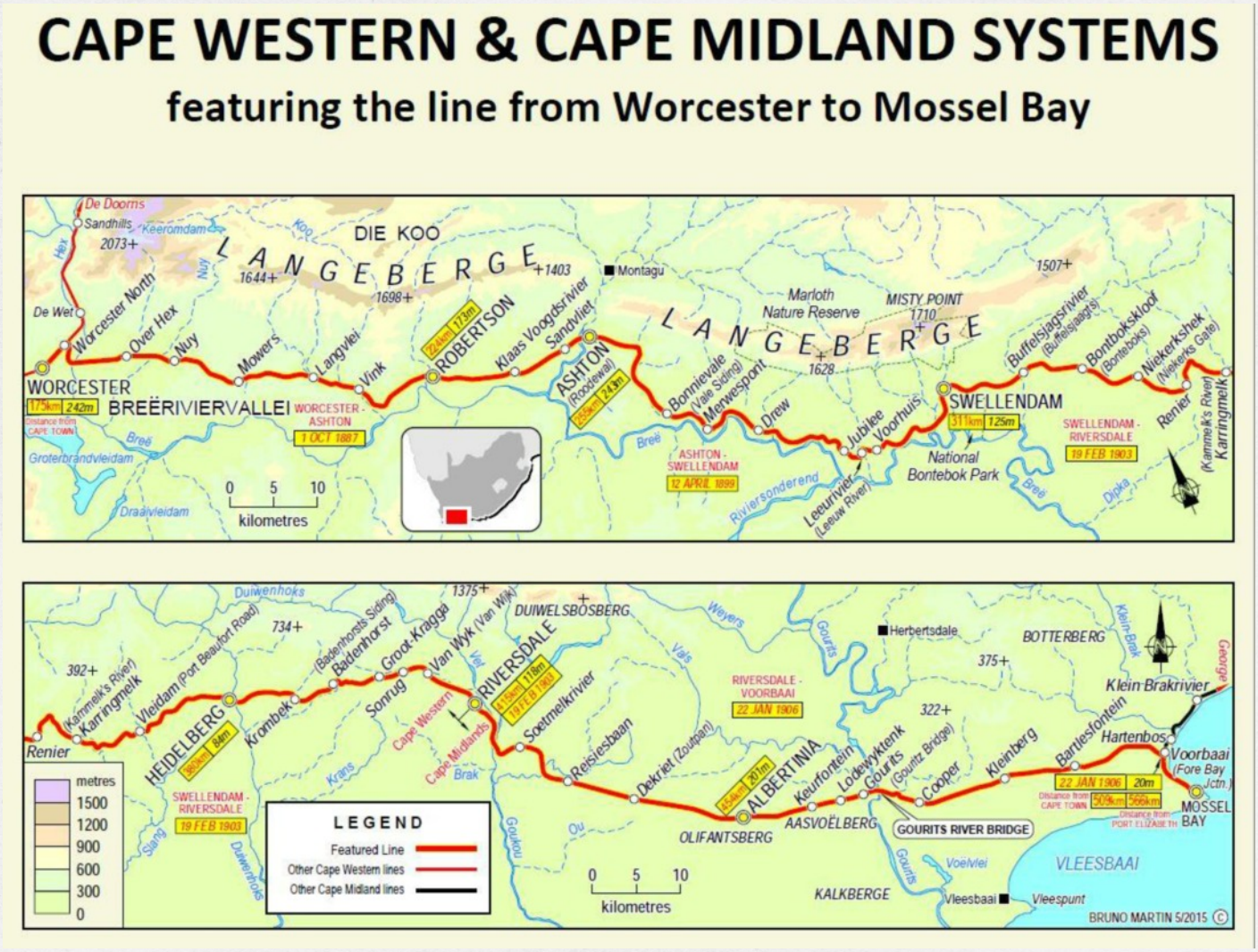
Karringmelk – Afrikaans for buttermilk.

Vleidam – literally “marsh dam”.

Soetmelkrivier – literally “sweet milk river”.

Reisiesbaan – literally “race track”.
Dekriet – named after a popular grass/cane that was used to thatch the roofs of houses.
Kleinberg – literally “small mountain”.
Bartelsfontein – Bartel’s (name) fountain.

Route Maps



Map used with the kind permission of Bruno Martin. 4 August 2018. The map stays Copyrighted however.

Rolling Stock used in this route

1. EMD GT26M2C South African Railways Class 37-000 Diesel Locomotive

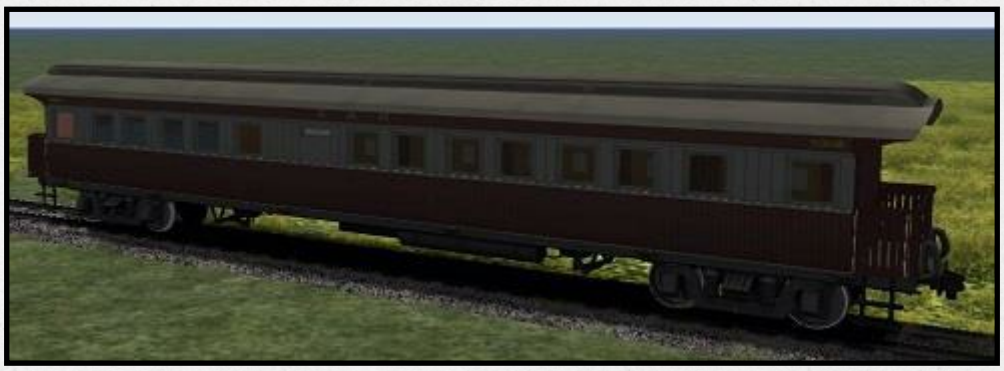
Introduced between 1981 and 1982, General Motors Electro-Motive Diesel (EMD) produced the GT26M2C as a 2,900 horsepower model. The Class 37-000 was designed for the South African Railways (SAR), later to become Spoornet. It was built by General Motors South Africa (GMSA) in Port Elizabeth.

The Class 37-000 are still in active service in 2018 except for those used for rebuilt to the new Class 39-000.

Driving the Class 37-000

On this route, it is of great importance to drive the Class 37-000 with great care. The route has many uphill and downhill sections and the loco can very easily run away with you. Therefore, the correct use of the **dynamic brake** is of the utmost importance. Immediately upon starting a section, I switch to the dynamic brake, and with careful regulating of the dynamic brake, I can easily adhere to speed limits. **NB The dynamic brake only operates with the throttle fully closed. It takes a while to start operating after first initialisation. Start using it early enough in order to avoid over speeding on downhill sections.**

2. SAR C-16 passenger car



3. SAR C-27 passenger car

4. SAR DJ-2 wagon

5. SAR FZ-6 maize wagon

6. SAR K42 baggage car

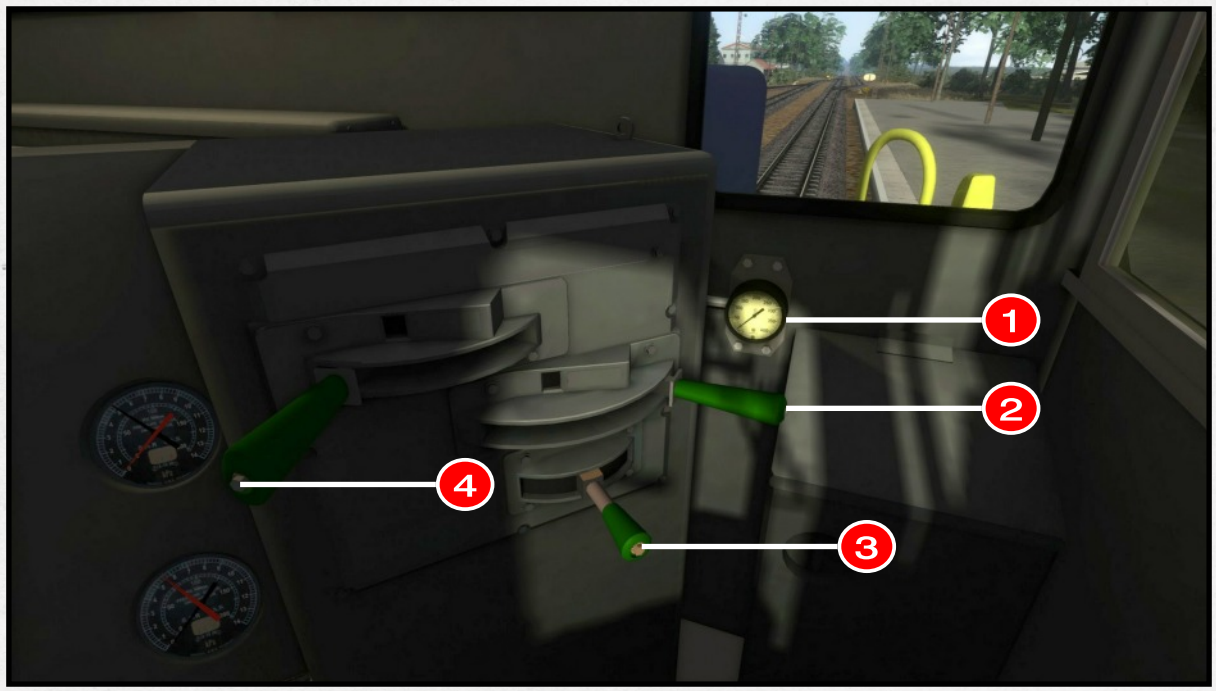
7. SAR Steam heat Wagon

The steam heat wagon was used in conjunction with diesel locos to generate steam for the passenger cars during the winter months in South Africa. The lack of a steam loco necessitated this.

8. SAR A18 Dining Car

Important: This route requires both the European and US Assets packs to be installed to work properly.

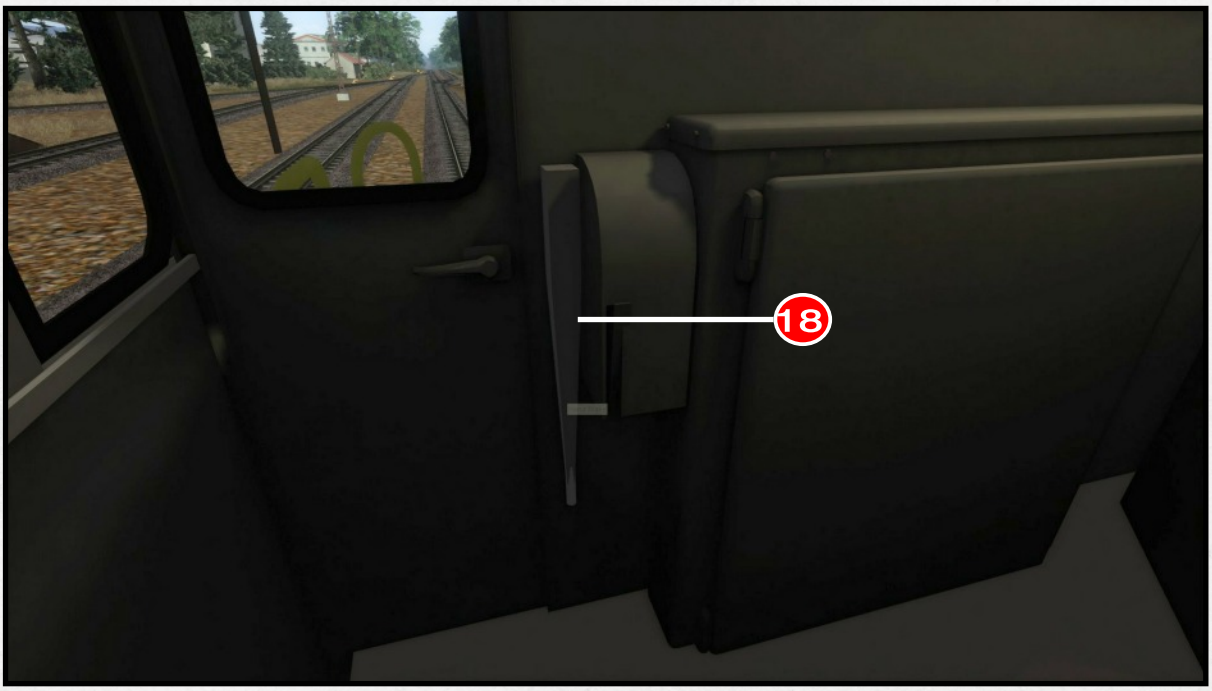
7. The Class 37 Cab controls

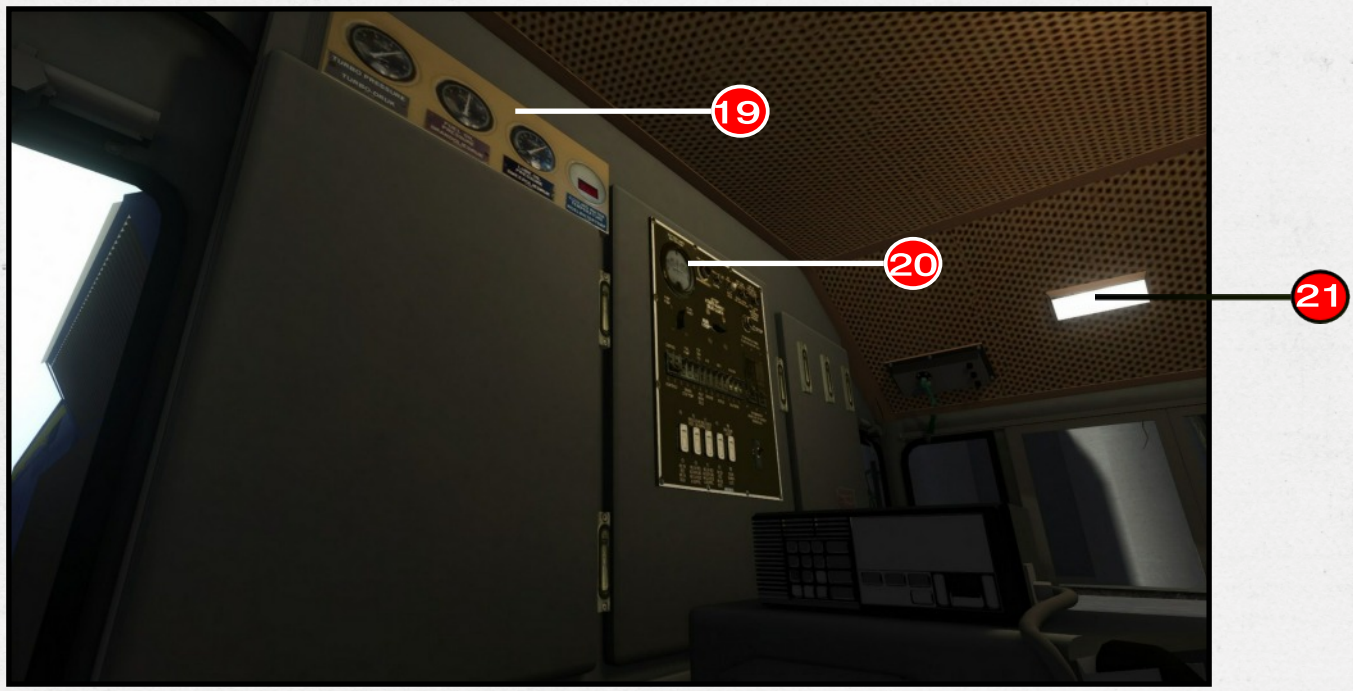


1.) HS4 Control gauge.
2.) Throttle handle.
3.) Reverser handle.
4.) Dynamic brake handle.

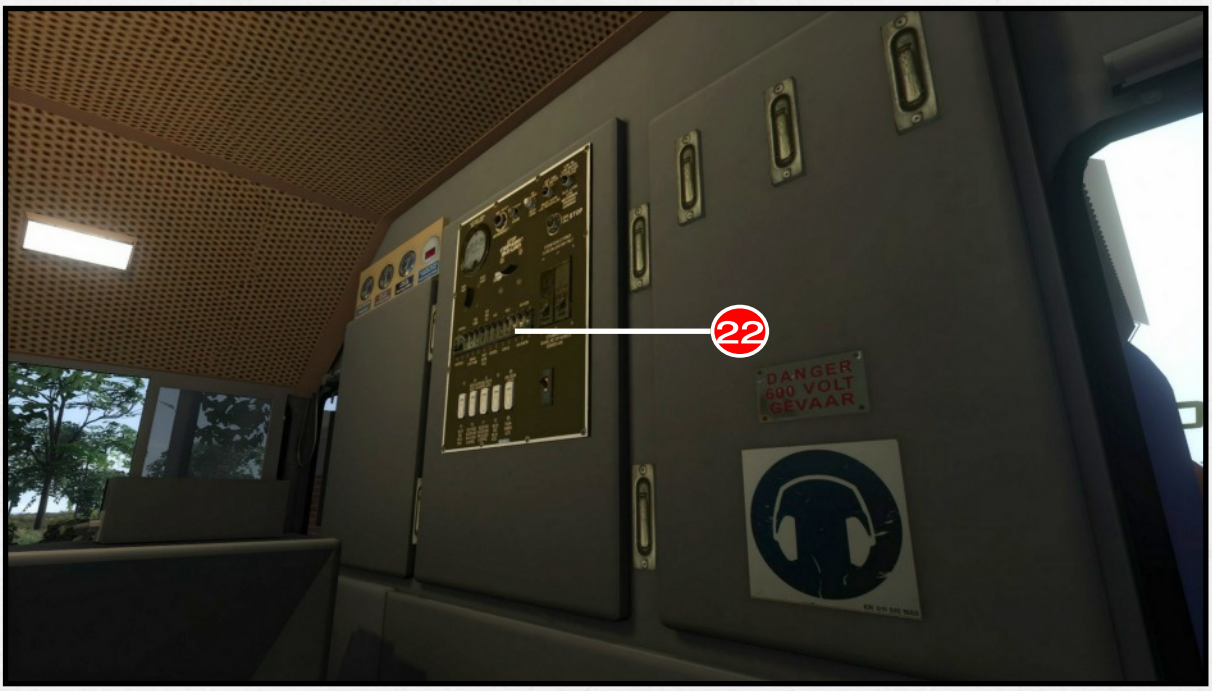
5.) Vacuum brake dual gauge.
6.) Speedometer in km/h.
7.) Main air and brake pipe gauge.
8.) Load meter.
9.) Independent brake cylinder and brake pipe gauge.
10.) Cab light switch.
11.) Sander control switch. Keep pressed in to keep sander working.
12.) Wipers control.
13.) Headlight switch.
14.) Red stop/green start button.
15.) Independent brake handle.
16.) Automatic brake handle.

17.) Hooter.
18.) Handbrake.





19.) Engine gauges, turbo,fuel pressure and turbo.
20.) Ammeter.
21.) Cab light. On and off switch on master driver control.
22.) Breaker switches on back pannel.



Signalling and Signiage.

Originally, the major stations on the route were equipped with semaphore signals, based on their counterparts in the UK. Sadly, these semaphores vanished from the route over the years when the route was used less and less. We put them back again! If semaphore signals do not show the correct aspect as suspected, simply TAB to ask permission to enter.

A distant signal

A home signal at the entrance of a station with one or more sidings

A starting signal at the start of the next section of track

Speed restriction sign

Whistle board at level crossings.

Warning board approximately 600 metres before a station. The driver sounds the loco's whistle/horn to warn the Station Master of an incoming train.

Scenarios on this route

Career Scenarios

Karringmelk is more or less the midway point for the Worcester-Voorbaai section. At Karringmelk the crews from Worcester and Voorbaai respectively swop trains and turn back to their original point of departure. The scenarios try to closely follow this idea.

Scenarios 1A to 2D divides the long, almost four hours trip in shorter, more manageable trips of approximately 60 minutes each.

Out trip from Worcester to Karringmelk

1A Worcester – Robertson Leg. 70 minutes.

1B Robertson – Bonnievale Leg. 60 minutes.

1C Bonnievale – Swellendam Leg. 75 minutes.

1D Swellendam – Karringmelk Leg. 65 minutes.

Out trip from Voorbaai to Karringmelk

2A Voorbaai – Albertinia Leg. 85 minutes.

2B Albertinia – Riversdale Leg. 60 minutes.

2C Riversdale – Heidelberg Leg. 65 minutes.

2D Heidelberg – Karringmelk Leg. 50 minutes.

Other Scenarios

Last Leg: Drive from Voorbaai to Mossel Bay station. App 20 minutes

Quick Drive scenarios

Various Quick Drive scenarios to choose from. More or less 20 minutes each.

Free Roam Scenarios

Free Roam at Worcester.

Video:

https://www.facebook.com/darren.laws.5/videos/2028620000486325/UzpfSTgyNjMxOTE2NjoxMDE1NzcwMTA5ODkwOTE2Nw/

10 .Credits

Johan Campher from Albertinia helping with photos of Lodewykstenk.

Fanie de Bruyn walking around Voorbaai Yard and Mossel Bay station and taking photos.

Marie Snyman-Engelbrecht living in Mossel Bay and driving to Mossel Bay station to take photos.

Benjamin Dell from Heidelberg Tourism Non Profit Company helping with photos form Heidelberg station and surroundings.

Andri Willemse from Bruintjies Primary School near Drew station. He provided me with photos of Drew.

Pierre Poolman from Diaz Express, Mossel Bay, taking photos in and around Voorbaai. https://diazexpress.co.za/

Appreciate it guys!

Hermann Kühne September 2018

The Worcestor to Mossel Bay route!