

THE DAVIDSON BUSH TRAIN

As most would know, much of New Zealand was originally covered in thick lush native bush ranging from ferns to tall timber. Our pioneers had the onerous task of clearing the land so it could be farmed and inhabited. They also felled the trees for much needed timber.



The small locomotive engine used for hauling logs on tramways was known as a lokey (also spelt as 'loci') or loco. Steam had been used on some bush

tramways since 1871, but in the early 1900s there was a revolution; the advent of steel rails, and geared lokeys. These locomotives were designed for the extremely steep grades, sharp curves, and uneven tracks in the bush.

The first geared lokeys were imported from the USA in 1903, but local engineering works from Whangarei to Invercargill soon offered alternative designs that captured the New Zealand market. Some were very innovative and unique in the world and they cost half the US price. One of these was the Davidson Bush Locomotive, full of character and built by **G & D Davidson of Hokitika** between 1907 and 1925.

Inland from Greymouth and nestled east of the Grey River, there is a small town named Ngahere. Not far away is small location known as Red Jacks, situated on the banks of the Red Jacks Creek, which flows, into the Grey River. It is here, alongside the road, that in 2001, the Department of Conservation set up a static display of the last remaining patent Davidson Bush Locomotive.

This engine is the 25th of 26 locos built and was used for tramping logs from the bush to the mill near Red Jacks Creek until 1942. Simply constructed and sturdy, it features chain and sprocket driven bogie wheels that gave maximum traction while spreading the engine's weight on often-flimsy bush rails and bridges. The chain drive also eliminated the costly universal joint and shafts and gears could be repaired on a forge and anvil rather than a lathe. The Davidson locomotives were built using boilers from the New Zealand Railways trains and were designed to work on both wooden and steel rails. Obviously, the Scottish traditions of economy and keeping things simple were alive in Hokitika!

<http://www.trainweb.org/nzgearedlocomotives/davidson.html>
