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DREDGING by PETER WARE.

One of the few jobs left to steam ploughing engines that still remains economical is dredging. Towards the end of September, I had a week of my annual holiday to help with a dredging job on an estate in Northill, owned by Mr. Manning. The pond to be dredged, as shown on an O.S. map, has an area of a quarter of an acre. In reality its existence was marked only by a semi-circle of trees, the nearest suggestion of a bank and a clump of reeds. The two engines involved were, Alec Ibbott's BB1 no 15336 and Ron Ruff's BB No 14383 Prince.

We left Roxton on the Monday morning, where the two engines had been giving a demonstration of steam cultivating at Roxton Rally over the weekend and steamed off down the A.428 road. Prince led the way with George Ruff driving and John Williams steering. Hooked up behind was the living van and the water cart. Alec's engine followed, driven by Jim Wooding and steered by myself. The only mechanical mishap we had was when Prince lost a cross head wedge in the middle of Barford Bridge.

After about two-thirds of the trip the tenders were topped up from the water cart, just to be on the safe side. When we arrived at the estate gate, the leading engine went through with its load first time, I as usual, made a muck of it. One obstacle which had to be got over was a cattle grid, this we reinforced with timber.

The scoop which had been hired was already there, so, having parked the van we set about finding out how this particular scoop worked. It had been made before the war by Walter Gower of Bedford for J. Northern & Sons of Harrold. It was of the roll-over type, constructed as half a cylinder, with its ends filled in and two feet standing clear of the open side.

When dredging it was pulled forward feet first, by four chains, the top two being adjustable so as to give the scoop more, or less, bite. At the end of the pull, the two return chains tipped it over on to its feet, thus returning it upside-down.

After trying a few dry runs in an open field to make sure we had the chains right George Ruff drove Prince into the woods on the far side of the pond. This was to be the returning engine. Jim set Alec's engine, which was to do the actual dredging, about 250 yards, away from the pond edge, to provide plenty of room to deposit the mud. The front pulls were kept short, just to cut a run up the bank. We had difficulty at first when the adjustment on the top two chains kept slipping. This was cured by putting a bolt through the chain!

Work progressed very well over the next few days with no mishaps, apart from the broken chains and shackles, which entailed clambering around in some particularly clinging mud. It was suggested that we packaged it for sale as Ladies' mud packs! George couldn't set his engine so as to enable the scoop to reach all of the pond because of trees and ditches, so we had a snatch block which was chained to the base of various trees. More broken chains. There were two dead trees which had to come out, one large oak which, when George pulled it out had a root diameter of 12 feet!

Bill Ruff was in charge of the mud paddling party and directed the dredging. Alec was only able to come in the evenings and at the weekends. The whole job took just a week including getting there, cleaning up afterwards, and trimming the banks with a digger.

The owner of the estate, an architect, calculated that we had removed 3,000 tons of mud, we reckoned that it seemed a bit high, but then, he should know! For my part, a most enjoyable holiday, doing something different, and seeing steam plough engines in their proper setting, doing a useful job of work.