

## Steam up for SI excursion

By BOBBIE NICHOLLS - Feilding Herald    Last updated 14:07 19/01/2010

Those enthusiastic steam train travellers are off again.

Despite not advertising their next trip, Feilding Steam Rail has managed to sell all but half a dozen seats for a 13-day trip around the South Island.

"We had people phoning from Gisborne to New Plymouth eager to join us," general manager and trip organiser Russell Wiseman said.

"A lot are people who have never travelled with us before. We even have Christchurch people joining us in Picton for the rest of the trip."

The first South Island trip with the restored Wab locomotive was three years ago. Since then they have taken short trips and also taken travellers to Gisborne.

The organisation of the journey is extensive and is largely dependent on contacts made by Mr Wiseman and other members of the Feilding and District Steam Rail Society plus the closeness of the rail enthusiasts community throughout the country. Mr Wiseman said finding beds for 90 people is sometimes a problem in smaller towns.

"We are taking the Wab 794 engine with four of the newly restored red carriages. That gives us about 90 seats, but we need to allow seats for the service crew," he said.

The first hurdle is getting the steam engine across Cook Strait. The passengers will leave Feilding at 9am on April 12, and disembark in Wellington. They will cross on the afternoon ferry and stay in Picton while the engine is cooled to cross later at night.

As soon as they land in Picton the crew will have to build up the fire and raise the steam pressure for the trip to Christchurch.

Among the highlights of the trip will be visiting the Weka Pass private railway just out of Christchurch and, after crossing the Southern Alps, it will be the first steam passenger train for 18 years to travel between Greymouth and Hokitika. The passengers will also be the first since 1964 to travel the line to Ngakawau, north of Granity, where the coal that fires the Wab's boiler comes from.

"We have had great co-operation from all sorts of people," Mr Wiseman said. Anyone interested in this trip can phone Mr Wiseman on 063235493 or email [secretary@steamrail.org.nz](mailto:secretary@steamrail.org.nz).