

Apple Express & Diaz Express News

THE APPLE EXPRESS SOCIETY



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NEWSLETTER – DECEMBER 2002

The APPLE EXPRESS SOCIETY who have been responsible for running the train since late 1993 have been through a difficult financial period. The Spoornet "Steam Exit Plan" which has been running for two years came into its final period in March of this year. It is now up to all Steam Clubs around the country to conform to the new regulations and have to be run on business lines by the formation of a Section 21 Company (Not for Profit)

The Society had been seeking funds for restoration work of the coaches and locomotives, through the assistance from Spoornet, by advertising on the Humewood Narrow Gauge rail bridge for advertising purposes. While this was in operation the funds generated were put to good use and enabled 10 of the coaches to be restored. It is unfortunate to record that the Society was misled by a potential advertiser and funds generated from this source of income dried up. Spoornet then agreed to operate the advertising programme, but again this did not materialize.

As a result of the Society not complying with the "Steam Exit Plan" the license to operate the train was withdrawn. This was despite there having organized Charter trains during the winter months and the final running being the 2002 Great Train Race at the end of August.

With the shut down of the Train, and the lack of funds to protect the assets, the Humewood Road Station and surrounds were left unguarded resulting in 'break-in's' at the Humewood Depot and tools and equipment were stolen. The future of the APPLE EXPRESS at this stage looked very bleak, with rumours doing the rounds that the whole train was in danger of being taken away from its historical site and that the City would loose this valuable asset.

Concerned Port Elizabeth residents, together with the Metropolitan Municipality and Port Elizabeth Tourism formed a Committee to "SAVE THE APPLE EXPRESS". This Committee has been very active. raising funds for restoration and creating public awareness amongst the

local residents with the mediate being fully co-operative.

One of the requirements of Spoornet's 'Steam Exit Plan' was that a Section 21 Company be formed as the business arm to oversee the running of the Train and that the Society should be re-formed in a new role.

The "Save the Apple Committee" has undertaken a great deal of work behind the scenes. The necessary funds have been raised for restoration work. Members have traveled to Johannesburg on numerous trips to discuss steps to have the license reinstated. These discussions have brought about the formal establishment of a Section 21 Company acceptable to Spoornet. The APPLE EXPRESS SOCIETY has agreed to disband and to be re-established with new aims and objectives. A new constitution has been adopted and the new entity will be known as THE APPLE EXPRESS STEAM ASSOCIATION.

The Section 21 Company, with seven Directors, will oversee the business side of the operation and will be known as the Port Elizabeth Apple Express. The Association (formerly the Society) will still cater for the world wide steam enthusiast, and also offer its Members the opportunity to assist with manning the train and assisting with Charter and normal Tourist trips.

In the meantime restoration work has been proceeding apace. NGG 16 No.131 has been repaired and undergone the annual boiler inspection and certified for service. Ten of the carriages have been serviced (brakes and springs have been repaired or replaced) and have received a clean bill of health. It is unfortunate that the coaches have to stand outside, open to all the weather and sea air. When time and finances are on our side a project will be launched and major restoration will be undertaken on all the coaches. Some of the older coaches that have not received attention will be included in this project. It had been said right from the start in 1993/4 that it would be ideal for all the coaching stock to be under cover, and this will also receive attention.

With offers of assistance it has been agreed that NG 15 No.124 will be brought up for a close inspection. The lagging is currently being stripped from the boiler so that the metal thickness can be checked. If found to be in reasonable order No.124 will be brought back into steam and used as a backup to No.131, or alternate on trips.

There is also the possibility that NGG 11 No.54, (1925) which needs a small amount of work done, basically a number of small boiler tubes, together with a set of superheater tubes. Then the, at present, oldest NG Garratt in the world, in original condition, would be out on the road (until overtaken by the restoration of K 1 [1909] in Wales, to run on the Welsh Highland Railway), then reverting to the 2nd oldest NG Garratt.

Research has recently been undertaken to trace all the Narrow Gauge locomotives brought out to South Africa from the numerous manufacturers in Europe. All the NG 15's have been traced, it was then felt that the Garratts should be traced, some being found from Australia, through Europe and to the USA.

With aggressive marketing being undertaken by Port Elizabeth Tourism it is felt that the "APPLE EXPRESS" will have turned the corner and once again be heard out on the tracks on the various day trips to Chelsea, Van Staden's Bridge, Thornhill Station and even further afield with various trins to Patensie with the spectacular run up the branch line. and / or back

to the Langkloof with the beautiful scenery that is found there.

The Port Elizabeth Apple Express (Section 21 Company) have appointed an Operations Manager to assist with putting the final requirements together in order to comply with the "Steam Exit Plan. Mr. Bobby Louw has had 33 years experience working on passenger trains.

One of the biggest obstacles facing the new company is the lack of certified drivers and firemen. One of the first hurdles facing the Operations Manager is to identify and arrange for training of these essential members of the staff. As it stands at present due to the non operation of the train we are in the position of not having one driver or fireman available to run the train. The "Steam Exit Plan" does not allow Spoornet staff to be used in this essential service.

The first General Members Meeting of 2003 will be held on Saturday, 25 January at the offices of the 1820 Settlers Association, 1 Mackay Street, Richmond Hill, Port Elizabeth at 2.00pm. Please make an effort to attend.

If you have an e-mail address and are not on our mailing list, please send your details to tintagel@worldonline.co.za This will assist us in making sure you receive newsletters, etc with no delays.

Finally, may we wish you all a prosperous New Year.