

Sandstone update from 03.12.2003

Hi all

Time for a pre Christmas update from Sandstone Heritage Trust.

Work continues on the NGG 11 for Paton Country Narrow Gauge Railway, based in Ixopo.

The boiler has returned at last from the contractors. Following very thorough inspections by a number of different specialists, a further 15 small tubes were renewed, as well as rivets attended to, ashpan repaired and other tasks. It is now fit for many years service and has been reunited with the frames.

The engine units are well advanced but a problem has arisen with the pivot bearings. One was missing altogether which had resulted in corrosion not only in the socket but to the locating casting on the boiler unit and there's a lot of work necessary to restore it. The other end also needs work, but materials have been ordered, at some considerable expense I might add.

Work is now proceeding to fabricate new boiler cladding, the original having corroded beyond repair. Refitting this and all the boiler fittings, piping etc is very time consuming, far more so than it appears from the finished article.

The boiler of the narrow gauge ex Sena Peckett is still with the contractors. When it arrived there was a large amount of weld at the bottom of the fire hole door, covering the casting itself. When this was removed it revealed several cracks, which on further inspection continued down into the inner firebox plate. The renewal of this has resulted in the removal of two lines of rivets and stays, cutting out the cracked piece and welding in a new piece, with renewal of stays, rivets, etc. This is probably one of the biggest private sector railway locomotive firebox repairs in the preservation era. Otherwise the boiler is in good order, and the ashpan assembly has been repaired. Of course we still need to source a set of fittings to replace those stolen during its time stored out of use at Sena. The boiler of Little Bess, on loan from the 2ft Preservation Trust, has now returned. This required a surprising amount of work for such a small boiler but it is now in 100% condition. Charles Viljoen is going to undertake the reassembly of this little loco at his premises in Pretoria. That's one of the attractions of narrow gauge locos, they can easily be moved from place to place and do not need major workshops to restore them.

The boiler of the O & K purchased from the Train Restaurant in Midrand is being removed and will be sent to the boiler contractors in Pretoria for assessment and repair. Unfortunately this loco suffered from theft of its fittings during its time outside the restaurant but being standard O & K parts these should prove easy to replace.

A number of ex Sena Baguley Drewry diesels, Ruston chassis and other various items have arrived at Beira and are awaiting shipping to Durban from where they will be collected by Sandstone's road trucks.

Lukas Nel at Bloemfontein is making good progress with NGG 13 No. 49 and expects to have it finished shortly. This ex Springs hulk has required an awful lot of work and has basically been stripped to a kit of parts and built up again.

The tubes have arrived (at last!) for the NG4 tank locomotive so the boiler can now be finished. It still requires a new set of tanks, bunker and cab, but will see the light of day during 2004.

The Baldwin NG10 no 61, ex Port Elizabeth, has been stripped for

assessment, which has revealed just how worn out it is. There is an enormous amount of work to do, but Lukas is confident that he can handle it. That's what nearly 40 years experience does for you!

The next extension to the narrow gauge line is being pegged out and earthworks are about to commence. This will take it about 5 kms from where it finishes near the Vailima school, skirting the orchards, past the Vailima farm house, round the end of the hill, behind the Pandora feed lot to join the current line near the big dam. About 60% of materials are to hand and provided the rest can be sourced at sensible prices completion will not take long. If all the materials cannot be sourced in time we will just put in a run round loop and operate it as it stands.

A large sectional water tank has been purchased from a hospital in the Eastern Cape and is currently dismantled and awaiting collection, which will happen in the New Year. This will be another period piece and will fit in well with the railway ambience. We are still trying to purchase water tanks, any leads would be welcome.

Wille Construction have also quoted to restore various wagons, including a Guards Van, and cattle trucks and will be starting these shortly. Having seen the job they did on the narrow gauge passenger Guards Van we are sure that we will get a first class restoration job.

The ex ACR Bagnall diesels have been assessed by our diesel magician in Bloemfontein and it appears that it should be possible to rebuild one from the three, with a supply of spares remaining in stock

During November Sandstone was the venue for the shooting of a pop video and there should be some TV coverage shortly. I will advise transmission details etc if I am notified in time.

The main line continues to see no action running trains. Bethlehem Steam Railway, our sister organization, has made an application to Spoornet for an action agreement to run on the Eastern Free State line, but as they are currently working on a new agreement for all operators, taking into account likely Rail Safety Regulator requirements, this has not been forthcoming. We are pursuing this but as it is not a high (or any?) priority within Spoornet this is likely to take some time.

Following an approach from the operators of the Spier Train, they purchased two ex Rhodesia Railways which Sandstone purchased a couple of years ago. These were standing in Cape Town, and required some restoration so rather than haul them to the Free State it seemed sensible to sell them to Spier. They are required to bolster Spier's fleet now they are running weekend trains around the wine lands. Discussions are continuing regarding the possible leasing, rather than sale, of other coaches in Sandstone's fleet until such time as they are required in the Eastern Free State.

Of course there are other developments under way but these will only be talked about when they are confirmed.

Regards

Geoff Pethick (Sandstone Estates)