



NG EXPRESS

THE OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF

THE APPLE EXPRESS STEAM ASSOCIATION PORT ELIZABETH -
SOUTH AFRICA

Postnet Suite 124, Private Bag 13130, Humewood, Port Elizabeth

www.apple-express.co.za

January 2005

WEATHER STOPS THE TRAIN

The December holiday season is always looked forward to as the financial highlight of the year. Unfortunately this year, the weather dealt a cruel blow to the revenue earning potential of the Apple Express. December 22nd dawned grey and overcast with a forecast of rain. This did not deter the nearly full load of excited passengers as the train pulled out of Humewood Road station. As the train progressed toward Thornhill the rain which started as a light drizzle got progressively worse. Strangely enough though, it stopped long enough to allow passengers to “walk” the Van Stadens Bridge. But by the time the train reached Thornhill station, the weather took centre stage with an awe-inspiring display of non stop lightning and thunder accompanied by a curtain of monsoon type rain. The train stopped and not a passenger moved. After about twenty minutes or so, one or two brave souls whose empty tummies forced them to venture into the midst of the meteorological display, aimed for the hotel. A little later and not wanting to lose out on a lucrative number of customers, the hotel via a pair of intrepid youngsters who did not mind but actually enjoyed being drenched, tempted the passengers to disembark by issuing them with makeshift raincoats. Many accepted the offer much to the delight of the hotel manager.

A short while later word came through from the Section Manager that there was a possibility that the track may be in danger of being washed away and a decision was taken to drop the fire. Arrangements were then made for buses to transport the passengers back to Port Elizabeth.

A track inspection the next day proved that this was the right decision as it was found that the track ballast had indeed been washed away in several places.

Meanwhile inside the hotel, passengers who thought that they would enjoy a meal in the sheltered confines of the dining area, found themselves dodging rain water that was flowing through the light fittings and ceiling panels. With the good humor only found in people on holiday, they happily ate their way through the menu while their children playfully splashed their way around the shallow lake that was the floor area.

As the buses arrived, yours truly found himself knee deep in water on more than one occasion wading toward a bus to direct the driver to the station area to pick up the passengers. Eventually with the last bus loaded with its wet cargo, we left Thornhill with the stranded, wet and cold train looking rather forlorn standing in the rain.

The trip back to P.E. also had its moments with the bus driver struggling to see the road ahead in the rain because of a broken windscreen wiper and an inoperative windscreen demister. All the same through all this the passengers still remained in high spirits bursting into song every now and then and also giving the Apple Express the thumbs up and an enthusiastic, three cheers.

It was an exciting and unusual event that has only happened once in the ten years that I have been with the Apple Express but it was enough to keep the train stranded at Thornhill for two weeks thus effectively denying a much need boost for the Apple Express coffers. On top of the loss of revenue the Company has also had to pay a security company to have someone keep an eye on the stranded train to prevent any vandalism.



Looking towards the Thornhill Hotel from the train during the rain storm.

It was reported that a farmer in the Thornhill area recorded 300mm of rain in three hours.

COACHING NEWS

If it is not the rain, it is the sun that is taking its toll on the train. For various reasons the passenger coaches have to stand in the open under the blazing South African sun. Because of this blistering and peeling of the paintwork is taking place. The best quality paint was used to paint the coaches but even the best is not good enough to prevent the slow deterioration of the paintwork.



Sun damage

Paint experts were called in but could not offer a solution except that the coaches be stored indoors or the exterior wood be replaced with metal sheeting. They seemed to think that painting over metal sheeting would last longer than paint on wood. Seeing that the coaches were originally built of wood it was felt that to keep the coaches looking as original as possible restoration using wood paneling on the outside would be the way to go. The experts also said that the wood paneling that is available these days is probably not as good as the wood that was used in the original construction. So do we spend more on paint or remove the wood and replace it with metal sheeting ? Of course a storage shed would be the ideal solution.

LOCO NEWS

The train of the 29 January was probably the last steam hauled train for quite a few weeks. The only working locomotive, the Garratt, is due for another boiler inspection. This is a major strip down job for the small loco shed staff but they are confident that the boiler will pass the test.

LANGKLOOF TRIP

The Apple Express Company is busy planning a 5 day return trip to Avontuur, the terminus point of the narrow gauge line through the Langkloof valley. There have been numerous requests, especially from overseas steam enthusiasts, for another one of these long trips. The last run to Avontuur took place 8 years ago. The trip will hopefully take place during June this year. Overseas marketing is already underway.

Sandstone Estates who are based in the Free State are enthusiastic about becoming involved and would be keen to send down one of their NG 15 class Kalahari locomotives as well as a Lawley to be part of the Avontuur trip.

Clive Fife Hon. Secretary/Treasurer

cfife@absamail.co.za