



NG EXPRESS

THE OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE PORT ELIZABETH APPLE EXPRESS
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R.S.R. SUCCESS

The National Rail Safety Regulator (RSR) recently subjected the Apple Express to a two day intensive audit, comprising Safety Management Systems, documentation, safety reporting and safety management.

The audit was conducted by two senior officials from the RSR and was done both at the office premises and on site at the narrow gauge depot.

Mr. Chris Loedolf of the RSR contacted me telephonically earlier this week and congratulated The Port Elizabeth Apple Express Company on receiving a clear audit report.

Both he and his colleague are impressed with the high standard achieved and maintained and stated that they view The Port Elizabeth Apple Express Company as a role model for the other operators and permit holders under their jurisdiction.

My thanks to all concerned who assisted in reaching this achievement.

(Report – Bobby Louw)

BOBBY LOUW

Still flushed with the success of the above RSR report, Bobby Louw, who has been a kingpin in the success of the Apple Express train, has been transferred to Kenya to help resurrect that country's rail system. Bobby who many years

ago took early retirement from Spoornet (Metro Rail) was asked by the Apple Express to assist the struggling company to volunteer his knowledge and help bring the Company up to standard with rail safety regulations. He would also help with rail related problems that arose between the Apple Express and Spoornet. At the time Sheltam Rail had a keen interest in the narrow gauge line so Bobby was given a desk in the Sheltam Rail offices from where he could work. It wasn't long before Roy Puffitt of Sheltam Rail saw his potential as an asset to his own Company and Bobby was soon given a permanent position with the Company. Sheltam which was quickly making inroads into the restructuring of the derelict railways of various African countries started to realise his ability as someone who through his railway knowledge could help Sheltam make things happen in these countries. Soon he was a regular visitor to these countries as the Sheltam representative and has now been appointed as General Manager (Operations)(Kenya and Uganda) in Kenya.

Bobby we of the Apple Express will sorely miss you and the friendly way you do business and we all wish you well in your new venture in Kenya



Bobby Louw accepting his award.

END OF SEASON FUNCTION

On Saturday 20 January about forty volunteers, NG employees, Spoornet employees and other "behind the scenes" people got together for a braai at the home of Bobby Louw and his wife Rosemary to mark both the end of the 2006/2007 season and Bobby's retirement from involvement with the Apple as he shortly moves to Kenya for a five-year contract with the national railway system.

The weather was glorious and there was more than enough food and drink to ensure that everyone had a good time. Bobby was presented with an appropriate reminder of his association with the Apple Express.

While the band, which included Bobby on guitar, played softly in the background groups of people chatted happily and many railway tales were told, long into the evening. A thoroughly enjoyable afternoon.

(Report – Roger Dykes)



The Band in full swing.



A group of "Railwaymen" enjoying a chat.

BIRTH OF A VOLUNTEER

As regular annual visitors to P.E., to escape from the winter in the UK, back in December 2004, Sue and I booked a trip on the Apple Express – the first time we had travelled on it. We had been told by several of our ex-pat English friends here that it would be a wonderful experience. They were certainly right but perhaps not only for the reasons they thought.

The journey went off well for the first hour or so, until we reached the Van Stadens engine stop (we were steam hauled), by which time it had begun to rain. We crossed the bridge on the train in ever increasing heavy rain until, by the time we reached Thornhill; it was as we say in the UK 'tipping it down' (that's the polite version). In fact, in order to make the hotel and the awaiting lunch, we had to wade through a newly formed river running through the hotel grounds. We sat down to lunch and half-way through the meal, realising that my feet were getting wet, I looked down to see that the hotel dining room was under about 50mm of water, with more

dripping from the ceiling – diluting our soup somewhat. The rain continued unabated throughout the remainder of the meal, as we moved our table to escape a large area of ceiling which looked about to drop onto us. Lunch over, we waded back outside to a sight like we had never seen before anywhere in the world – a torrent of water rushing past the hotel entrance and the rain still lashing down.

We waded in 150mm of water back to the train, completely soaked through, to be told that because of the state of the track, the train could not return to P.E. and that buses had been sent for. We eventually journeyed back, perhaps sailed would be more appropriate, via an N2 highway under water in parts, to arrive wet and cold at Humewood.

Undeterred, some might say foolishly, we decided to make the trip again in January. This time the weather was glorious for the whole day and we picnicked in the Thornhill Hotel grounds and had a wonderful day out. We chatted to Lesley at Thornhill and understood that the Apple Express was always in need of volunteers in different capacities and so it was that when I returned to P.E. in December 2005, I decided that I would like to join the merry band of volunteers and travel on the train as one. I was pleased to be awarded my official Apple Express shirt and after purchasing the official baseball cap, felt a fully-fledged member of the team.

I made four trips to Thornhill and one on the half-day excursion to Chelsea in 2005/6 and thoroughly enjoyed each one.

Sue and I came back in early December 2006 and so far I have made two trips to Thornhill.

Apart from the friendly volunteers I have met and

worked with on the train, it has to me, as a foreigner, been a most enjoyable experience to meet the passengers on each trip. Most of them are Afrikaans speaking, so chatting to them has been most delightful and has enriched my knowledge of both the culture and friendliness of South African people. As for the Apple Express itself, I hope that money will be made available to ensure the continued operation of this unique N.G. railway. There are a lot of steam railways in the UK but most are run on disused main lines, i.e. not narrow gauge and do not travel such a long distance as the Apple, so it is no wonder that many British enthusiasts come to South Africa to travel on it.

(Report – Roger Dykes)

COACHING NEWS

A hundred years old but still going strong. That is the bogie system that carries the coaches safely on the road of steel and the success of the unfailing system is all due to regular maintenance.

Note in the picture below, the "drum" on the wheel axle which was once used as a belt drive to charge the coach interior lighting batteries.



On-going bogie maintenance

Together with regular maintenance, major refurbishment will soon have to be done to some of the coaching stock which is showing weather deterioration. As mentioned in the last newsletter, coach NG 58 has just been returned to service in spectacular condition after a

great deal of tender loving care by our coach builder Clive Nel. Clive will be off to hospital next month for an operation and here we wish him the very best and a speedy recovery.

LOCOMOTIVE NEWS

After earlier discussions, it has been agreed that work will be speeded up on the restoration of NG 15 No. 119 (Henschel 1938). As mentioned in the last newsletter, we await a firm quotation from the steam tube manufacturer for the set of boiler tubes. Once these are obtained, they will have to be 'swaged' and where necessary bent, this may be done in Johannesburg or can be undertaken at the Railway 'shops in Mossel Bay.

Then the next best NG 15 to be tackled will be No.124, "Granny Smith" (Anglo Franco Belge 1949) here needing a new smoke box and also a set of tubes. The smoke box can possibly be rolled here in P.E. Then the tube order would be doubled once a favourable quotation has been received. It will then have to be decided what colour she will carry, having been changed from standard black to green, together with NG 15 No.122 which was changed to red and named "Star King" after the two main apple varieties coming from the Langkloof. At the time apples were one of the main seasonal traffic volumes being brought down to the Port Elizabeth harbour.

The baby of this line NGG 11 No.54 (Beyer Peacock 1925) is the oldest N.G. Garratt still in original condition and waiting in the wings to be tackled for refurbishment. Basically all that it needs are new 'Dam Tubes', a few outer copper tubes, that have in recent years been stolen and a good check over and a repainting job.

(Report – Peter Burton)

REQUEST

We have recently had a request from the UK for any information about NG 15 No. 120 (Anglo Franco Belge 1950) which we gather will be changing hands very soon. The buyer is looking for photographs of 120 while working on the Avontuur line or even possibly in South West Africa (Namibia) before she was transferred to the Avontuur line.

Any info can be forwarded to Peter Burton at www.peter.burton@absamail.co.za

FUTURE TOURS

There have recently been three requests for possible lengthy trips for the train.

1) Firstly there has been a tentative request from Dave Rogers for a tour in early June 2007. He would like his group to be picked up in Loerie for a run to Patensie. Here the possibility exists for a sub excursion of passengers from P.E. to Loerie and again on the third day for another group taking the train from Loerie to P.E.

2) Then during September '07, Geoff Cook is looking at taking about 40 enthusiasts from Louterwater to P.E. via Patensie. Here again the train would run empty to Louterwater which could mean a one way group booking from P.E. to Louterwater. (Return by bus?)

3) Khokha Moya Tours from the Cape are looking at a P.E. – Loerie – Patensie – Humansdorp trip for May 2008 for 40-60 passengers. We are still awaiting clarification re. the exact number of passengers and if they wish to overnight in Patensie or to return to P.E. excluding the Humansdorp section.

THANKS

Thanks to all those who submitted articles for this issue of the NG Express and also to Sue Mewis and Clive Fife who supplied the photographs.