



NG EXPRESS

THE OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE PORT ELIZABETH APPLE EXPRESS

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R10 MILLION FOR THE NARROW GAUGE

After many years of uncertainty it now appears that Government has recognised the importance of the Langkloof narrow gauge line as a tourist attraction.

The Department of Transport has committed itself to an amount of R10million for the upgrade of the line and selected Stations. This is indeed good news for the Apple Express, that has for many years teetered on the brink of extinction. At a recent feedback meeting a feasibility study of the line and business plan entitled "Taking the Apple Express to 2010 and Beyond" was presented to the representatives of the Department of Transport and the four Municipalities through which the railway line runs.

The R62 Langkloof Tourism Association is the driving force behind the establishment of a regular tourist passenger train service in the Langkloof. It envisages four trains running simultaneously on the Langkloof line. The Apple Express would operate a steam hauled service between Port Elizabeth and Humansdorp, including the branch line to Patensie. Other trains in the Langkloof would be hauled by diesel locomotives until restored steam locos become available for steam safaris.

Because of the scale of the operation the Apple Express Company as it now stands will have to be restructured from being a virtual volunteer run organisation to a more professional one. Funding to achieve this has been included in the budget. Volunteers, though, will still play an important role as at present.

Once funding has been obtained the plan is to accelerate restoration of passenger wagons and locomotives to bring enough rolling stock into service to initially have at least two train sets operating by mid 2008. Thus the importance of employing more skilled coach builders and steam locomotive personnel.

It all sounds very exciting and after so many past disappointments, let us hope that this new venture will succeed.

END OF AN ERA

In contrast to the above article, Spoornet have decided to demolish nearly all of the buildings and workshops at the Humewood Road steam depot.

This was deemed necessary because of the extreme vandalism that is taking place. These buildings have

long been vacated by the Apple Express who have moved workshop operations to the safer Humewood Diesel Depot. It is sad that it has come to this but even with the installation of armed response security equipment the slow destruction of the area could not be prevented.

The Humewood Road station buildings will be saved as well as the male and female toilets – although these have also been vandalised. The buildings will be refurbished and a much improved security system will be put in place. At the moment the station garden and grassed parking area is being kept in good shape by member Fred Pennels. We are truly thankful for all his efforts.

One small plus to all this vandalism is that the AE Company is now receiving more revenue from the advertising board on the rail over road bridge at Humewood. A portion of the income from the advertisement went to pay rates and taxes on the buildings that we had occupied at the Depot, now with our reduced occupation, more money will come to the Company.

Recently The Transnet Heritage Foundation who own all the narrow gauge rolling stock had an on site meeting at the Humewood Depot to look at all the old and derelict locomotives and workshop equipment lying around the depot. It was decided that most of the rusting locomotives could never be resurrected and tenders would be called for, to cut up and dispose of all the rusting hulks. The Apple Express was asked to mark with paint anything that the Company thought it could make use of in the future. Everything else in the area would be cut up and scrapped.

LOCOMOTIVE NEWS

Although all the required boiler tubes for the two Kalahari locomotives No. 119 and 124 have arrived, work has come to a temporary halt on the restoration of the locos due to the recent sad death of our stalwart fitter and steam enthusiast Sydney Terblanche. Sydney had been with the Apple Express for as many years as I can remember and his expertise in maintaining and repairing our locomotives will be sorely missed. He was well

liked not only by the Apple Express staff but also by the Spoornet personnel that he regularly came in contact with. Many years ago he had a heart by-pass operation which enabled him to return to work on his beloved steam locomotives with renewed vigour. Recently though he once again started to suffer from chest pains. He nevertheless continued to work on restoring the Kalahari No. 119 right up until his death.



Sydney Terblanche (In white shirt)

Because the boiler tubes have to be swaged which can only be done at The Heritage Foundation steam workshops at Voorbaai these tubes will have to be sent to workshops in the near future.

THE PATENSIE WANDERER

Geoff Cooke of "Geoff's Trains" UK, booked the train for a group of UK tourists, diesel hauled accepted, for a two day run from Port Elizabeth to Patensie return. Here is a report of the trip by Peter Burton.

Sunday 23rd – Two passenger coaches, the historically original first class coach No.58 and the "open" coach No. 99, were selected for the trip. Making up the set were the two guards vans No. 73 and No. 78 and the 'Apple Tavern'. The motive power was diesel unit N.G. 91-007. The train departed Humewood Road at 9.30am on a cloudy overcast day. The first stop was Chelsea junction for morning tea. It was then on to Van Stadens and included a number of run-by's for the benefit of the photographers amongst the passengers. The next stop was Thornhill Station for lunch at the Hotel.

After lunch it was on to Summit siding for a brief stop to take in the magnificent view over what is locally known as the East Cape's "Valley of a Thousand Hills". The train then wound its way slowly down the 12km of bends to the small town of Loerie in the valley. Time was taken to show our guests the first of three turntables to be found on the Avontuur line. This one being the Cowan Sheldon turntable built in Carlisle UK in 1883. After inspection, it was felt that this turntable had been adapted for this line from a possible 'Cape Gauge' table from another section, as it pre dated the construction of the P.E.- Avontuur line by at least 20 years.

At Gamtoos Junction, the train branched northwards for the run up to Patensie. Here the line takes us along the scenic section which skirts the Gamtoos river bank passing the 'Red Cliffs' and on to Hankey for afternoon tea. Just after leaving Hankey the train was brought to a sudden stop. A mud slide lay across the track blocking our path. It appeared that the slide was caused by a burst water pipe high up on the bank. It was then a matter of all available hands at work to try and remove the mud and bush from the track. Luckily a short while later some locals appeared and armed with spades they managed to clear the obstruction away in no time at all.



Clearing the mud slide.

Photo: P. Burton

It was then on to Centerton and the Lion Farm where a number of possible photo run-by sites were noted. We finally arrived in Patensie slightly late due to the unforeseen mud slide. Patensie station and surrounds is still neat and well cared for despite there being no more citrus traffic on the line. This year saw a brief return to fruit on the rail from the packing shed at Patensie but it did not last long before road transport took over once again.

On arrival our hosts for the overnight stay in Patensie were on hand to greet the passengers. Everyone then departed to a local restaurant for the evening meal and then to their respective accommodation in nearby B&B's with the train crew retiring to the local Hotel for the night.

The next morning saw us checking the second Cowan Sheldon turntable, this one dated 1897. Here NG 91-007 had to be turned for the run home. Not a difficult task as there were many willing hands to assist while the rest of the passengers photographically recorded the exercise.

Monday 24th – Today with a 9.00am start the weather once again did not look good, being overcast with the odd rain shower. The run back to Gamtoos was uneventful. The Ganger and his staff were in attendance to check on the mud slide at Hankey. At Gamtoos junction we had our first refreshment stop of the day after which we pushed back onto the 'three part' Gamtoos River Bridge for a run-by. It was then on to Loerie and up the 12km climb to Summit and through to Thornhill for lunch at the local restaurant, the "Lazy Lizard". More rain fell on the run to Chelsea Junction for the last stop

before arriving back in Port Elizabeth. On arriving back at Humewood we pushed back directly into the Diesel Depot where we took our guests on a tour of the Diesel Workshops where the Kahalari NG 15no. 119 and coach NG 143 are being refurbished.

MAY 2008 TOUR

Geoff Cooke has reserved the train for a four day trip from Port Elizabeth to Avontuur during May 2008.

The suggested schedule for the trip is as follows:-

Day 1. May 17th Port Elizabeth – Patensie

Day 2 May 18th Patensie – Assegaaibos

Day 3 May 19th Assegaaibos – Joubertina

Day 4 May 20th Joubertina – Avontuur

The up trip passengers would disembark at Avontuur and continue on to other destinations.

Day 5 May 21st Avontuur – Assegaaibos

Day 6 May 22nd Assegaaibos – Patensie

Day 7 May 23rd Patensie – Port Elizabeth

24 INCHES APART

There are only a few copies left of this popular and informative book on the history of the narrow gauge rail system in Southern Africa.

The cost of the book is :-

South Africa – R260.00 incl. Post and Packing

Overseas – R320.00 incl. Airmail Post and Packing

For further information contact Peter Burton email – peter.burton@absamail.co.za or write to P.O. Box 203, Addo, 6105, South Africa.

TWO UNUSUAL IDEAS

Overheard on a recent trip were two ideas concerning the Apple Express that bear mentioning. The first one was rather bizarre. The person wondered why a diesel engine could not be fitted inside a boiler of a steam locomotive that had had all its tubes removed. This would solve the problem of running steam during dry weather conditions. To the man in the street it would still look like a steam locomotive with moving connecting rods and all. Dry ice for simulated steam?

The other idea is perhaps not so way out. One of the Spoornet staff of the day asked if the AE Company could not request from Spoornet to set aside a diesel locomotive for the specific use of the Apple Express. This locomotive could then be painted green to fit in with the Apple Express colours. Maybe not a bad idea and would probably look better, at the head of the train, than the bright orange locos that are used at present.

NEW MEMBERS

We have great pleasure in welcoming new members Andrew Drake and Theo Drinkrow who have joined the merry band of helpers who work so diligently on the train giving up so much of their time. To Peter Burton, Fred Pennels, John Peace, Rob Lewis and

Clive Fife our greatfull thanks. In addition, we are still trying to get Clive Fife and Kobus Geyser certificated as Train Managers. The wheels within Transnet Training Department seem to be churning very slow these days since the sudden death of Andre Steyn. To Fred Pennels who has taken over the organisation of the Tavern once again our grateful thanks.

NEXT ISSUE

Have you heard of the South Western Railway Company Ltd? See the next issue of the NG Express newsletter for more about this now long gone 2ft gauge South African railway.