



NG EXPRESS

THE OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE PORT ELIZABETH APPLE EXPRESS

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ON THE RAILS

More than a quarter of the year 2009 has already passed and the busy summer season is now but a distant memory.

Usually, once the holiday season has come to an end, passenger numbers drop off dramatically but this year, so far, things have been different. There is the usual fewer number of scheduled train trips than during the holiday season but each time the train has gone out, passenger numbers are near capacity. A good trend for the year ahead.

The summer holiday season from the 1st December until 14th January saw sixteen fully booked trains take to the rails. In total more than two thousand eight hundred passengers travelled on the Apple Express over this period. It was a very busy time for all those involved with the running of the train. Appreciation for a job well done go to the train crew, booking staff and volunteers.



Passengers alighting at Loerie Station

Theft and vandalism is still an ongoing problem on the narrow gauge line. The latest being the theft of many fishplates from the tracks on the Patensie branch line. With the loss of all freight working on this section, it seems that the criminal has seen fit to start plundering the line for scrap (?) metal. The news of the damage came as a shock to the Apple Express Company especially in view of the fact that the up-coming Geoff Cook Tour for steam enthusiasts is due to take place next week. The Company was worried that the railway authorities would not be prepared to invest

money in repairing the line due to the fact that the branch does not generate any income. Recent reports seem to indicate though, that the authorities will be replacing the fishplates. Hopefully this will be seen to before the Geoff Cook Tour Steam Tour takes place.

Another victim of vandalism and decay is the Humewood Road Station complex. The area is becoming a real eyesore and almost an embarrassment to the Apple Express staff. Because of this it has been suggested that the "Baakens River" area near the P.E. Harbour entrance be used as a departure point. The area is grassed, has secure parking for vehicles and has some restaurants close by for the benefit of passengers. There is however the usual problem with officialdom that has to be sorted out first before the scheme can be implemented.

A recent positive change that the AE Company has introduced is a dedicated train ticket and booking office. Previously this was done at the tourist information office where the staff there had to do train bookings as an extra to their normal office duties. This was never a satisfactory arrangement which, on few occasions, resulted in booking problems that had to be sorted out at the last minute before the train departed.



New booking office

COACH NEWS

The rebuild of coach No.50 is now complete and the coach is once again plying its way along the track. Originally built as a third class passenger coach it has been redesigned as a first class lounge car. The coach builders under the guidance of Clive Nell have done a marvellous job with the rebuild and the lounge car is attracting much attention from passengers. It can seat 18 passengers at six tables with two chairs per table and one bench seat.

All the tables and chairs were individually made by Clive Nell. A magnificent job.

To fit everything in nicely, it was found that a small space was left into which only a small table could be fitted. A bowl of flowers is placed on this table to complete the luxury effect. The small bar counter at the one end is fitted with a gas fired fridge and a small antique wash basin. The coach is also fitted with a toilet for the convenience of passengers.



Lounge car

Because the Apple Express consist is made up of individual non walk through coaches, the lounge car has been connected between two balcony coaches thus making it easier to serve drinks to the adjoining coaches.

The year 2008 was a very busy year for the coach building crew. In total eight coaches were attended to, ranging from major overhauls, to just a new coat of paint. Coach No.58 received a major overhaul while her sisters Nos. 57 and 59 received a welcome facelift.

Other coaches that received attention during the year were Nos. 105, 73, 78 and 94 (Apple Tavern) each having had a new coat of paint. Besides the paint job, the Apple Tavern also had a few internal modifications done. Coach No. 2813 (the wheel chair friendly ex goods/guards van) has had a colour change from apple green to the old SAR brown livery in preparation for the up coming Geoff Cook Steam Safari.



No. 2813

Most recent is the complete rebuild of ex third class passenger coach No. 85. Complaints were often received from passengers who rode in this coach that the seating arrangement was very cramped and uncomfortable. Our expert coach builder stripped the interior and completely redesigned the seating from traditional suburban coach type seating into bench type seating making for more legroom. One of the original two toilets was also removed making for extra seating capacity.

Next on the job list for the coach building crew is the repair and rebuild of passenger coaches No. 82 and 113 which are in a sorry state at the moment.

LOCOMOTIVE NEWS

The recently rebuilt Kalahari NG15 No. 119, has, understandably, been plagued by numerous minor faults. These have now been finally sorted out and she is just waiting for the final test of a long distance run. Unfortunately the weather has not played along in recent weeks, with dry, windy conditions putting paid to any steam hauled train to Loerie. The authorities will not allow a steam locomotive to be used if there is any possibility of sparks starting veld fires. The locomotive has been taken on short runs to Chelsea Junction and now seems to be free of the niggling problems that have been troubling her.

Next on the list of locomotive restoration is the rebuild of another Kalahari, NG15 No. 124. This loco and NG 15 No. 117 were both looked at to see which of the two were in the better condition. After the boilers of the two locomotives were inspected it was found that the boiler on 124 was in a better condition than the one on 117. It was then decided to scrap 117 and use her parts in the rebuild of 124.

No. 124 is currently in the workshop being prepared for its rebuild.

Editor: Clive Fife