



NG EXPRESS

THE OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE PORT ELIZABETH APPLE EXPRESS

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A SAD LOSS

It was a sad day for the Apple Express when Clive Nel the company coach builder passed away recently. Clive's woodworking expertise and knowledge of coach building will be sorely missed. His fussiness over detail and pride of workmanship showed in every passenger coach that he has worked on over the years. He always made a point when showing visitors his latest project, the fine details that needed to be attended to. Details that the layman and most passengers would never even have noticed. Very few people would disagree that possibly one of his finest achievements was the conversion of coach no.50 into the lounge car. From a derelict skeletal frame he converted the coach into something that the Apple Express can really be proud of. Also another recent achievement was the interior conversion of coach no.85 which from a very cramped and uncomfortable third class seating arrangement, he converted it into a coach that is now a pleasure to ride in. He will be long remembered as someone from the old school who took great pride in his work.



LOCOMOTIVE NEWS

The rebuilding of NG 15 no. 124 has commenced with a further inspection of the stripped down locomotive. The inspection has revealed that the loco is basically in very good shape. The frame, wheels, rods and cylinders are still in good condition. The main work will be the replacing of the boiler tubes and the making of a new ash pan. It was first thought that a new smoke box would have to be rolled but after a thickness test it was found that the metal was only thin in a small area where the spark arrestor rests. A section of the metal here will be cut out and new metal will be welded in.



Loco 124

An exciting development with loco 124 is that an investigation is currently underway as to the possibility of converting her to an oil burner. If the conversion is approved and carried out, it would mean that steam traction on the line will become much more common than at present. The threat of veld fires and their spreading to the farms adjacent to the railway line has been the main reason why the use of steam for the Apple Express has been kept to a minimum. Let us hope that a positive decision will come from the investigation.

On a recent visit to Avontuur, Apple Express personnel did an inspection of the plinthed NG 15 No.147 and found her to be in excellent condition and with virtually no signs of vandalism. Reports suggest that she was plinthed quite soon after a major overhaul which means that she would need minimal

work done to get her steaming again. If all goes well she could be the next loco to be restored after No. 124.



Loco 147 Plinthed at Avontuur

Photo: Alan Buttrum

Regarding the Garratt NGG16 no.131, it seems that negotiations are still underway with Sandstone Estates to have her sent to their workshops in Bloemfontein for a major overhaul. The heavy duty machinery that is needed to do this type of work is not available at the Humewood Diesel Depot.

COACHING NEWS

The rebuilding of coach 82 is progressing slowly. With the recent death of Clive Nel this major rebuild has fallen onto the shoulders of Piet Van Rooyen. Fortunately Piet has, over the past year or so, been able to gain plenty of coach building experience under the guidance of Clive Nel to effectively carry on with the work. Once finished this coach has been earmarked as a special coach to be used mainly on steam safaris for overseas steam enthusiasts. As such it will be painted in the old SAR colours of red/brown with a grey middle stripe like the recently completed composite guards van no.2813.



Coach No. 82

WEEKEND AWAY-ASSEGAIBOSCH

FRIDAY 5 June:

Once again steam reigned supreme with NG 15 No.119 running out to Assegaibosch at the lower end of the Langkloof, a distance of 163km. (or in, old terms 100 miles.) This trip

was organised to take passengers out for the weekend to the Kareedouw "Boerewors Festival".

The 8.00am scheduled departure from Humewood Road Diesel Depot was delayed because two passengers from Johannesburg only arrived at 8.00am at the Port Elizabeth airport.

119 ran like a dream all the way to Van Stadens, where it had earlier been decided, because of the delayed start, that there would not be the customary 'Bridge Crossing' for the passengers. At the last moment though, because the passengers had requested it, the 'walk' was done. Then on to Thornhill with a short stop for a crossing with an incoming timber train and then on down to Loerie for the lunch stop.

After lunch it was on to Humansdorp where the loco was serviced and local passengers who would be attending the Festival, boarded the train. It was then on to Assegaibosch where we arrived by late afternoon. Here we were all taken to our overnight accommodation for a good rest, while the night crew saw to the coaling, and servicing of the loco for the next day's run and looked after the loco during the night.

SATURDAY 6 June:

It had originally been arranged that there would be a morning and afternoon run back to Two Streams (22km) but this was changed to enable a longer run back to Humansdorp (50km.), for the local passengers. The weather was unfortunately not pleasant at all, being cold and windy with the odd shower of rain. On our return by mid afternoon, it was found that the Boerewors Festival had closed and no sausage was available for the working crew. Luckily a stock of boerewors was obtained from the local butchery to satisfy the tired and hungry crew.

SUNDAY 7 June:

A slight coal supply problem was overcome by bringing some of our spare coal from Patensie then all was well for the return trip. The scheduled departure time of 08h.00 was not possible due to passengers not being returned from their accommodation by their hosts in time. Once away the first stop was Humansdorp for a loco service etc, then on to Loerie for lunch. The run back to Port Elizabeth was uneventful. Our two Johannesburg passengers were dropped off right at the Port Elizabeth Airport, their remark being 'This is the first time that passengers have arrived at an Airport by steam train'

All in all a wonderful three day trip covering in all of 426km.

Report by Peter Burton.