

# NG EXPRESS

THE OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE PORT ELIZABETH APPLE EXPRESS Postnet Suite 124, Private Bag 13130, Humewood, Port Elizabeth

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THE FIRST TWO ARTICLES OF THIS NEWSLETTER ARE A BIT OF A CONTRADICTION BUT HOPEFULLY IT MAKES FOR SOME INTERESTING READING.

## 150 YEARS OF RAILWAY IN SOUTH AFRICA.



Wes Kruger CEO of PE Apple Express Company and Mandlakazi Skefile CEO Nelson Mandela Bay Tourism at the Humewood Road Station before departure for Witteklip.

During September this year, the Apple Express along with other heritage railway organisations around the country celebrated 150 years of railway working in South Africa.

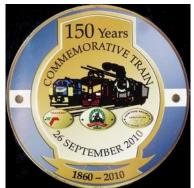
A special train headed by steam locomotive NG15 No.119 left Port Elizabeth on its way to a celebratory function that was to be held on a farm near Witteklip station. Aboard the train were specially invited guests and dignitaries from both the tourism industry and Transnet.Rail.

Guest speaker for the day at the function was Ms Mandlakazi Skefile CEO of Nelson Mandela Bay Tourism who stressed the importance of the Apple Express train as a prime tourist attraction for the Port Elizabeth region. "The P.E. Apple Express, like the Bayworld Oceanarium, are very important heritage icons that we as tourism authorities have to protect." she said.

On 26 June 1860 South Africa steamed into the railway era with its first train service headed by a locomotive named "Natal". It ran between Market Place and Point stations in Durban, Natal, a journey of three miles. Although Cape Town had turned the first sod for a railway track in 1859 it was Natal that managed to take

the honour of being the first city in the country to start a rail service. This was the start of what was to become one of the largest railway organisations in Africa.

Cape Town followed nearly two years later with a thirty four mile track between Cape Town and Eerste Rivier Stations.



Detail of the commemorative plaque on the front of the

# THE APPLE EXPRESS GRINDS TO A HALT.

It was a shock announcement that greeted everyone connected with the train that financial reserves were fast running out and all restoration work at the depot would stop with immediate effect. It is a fact, as with all heritage railways, that major restoration work cannot function without big financial support. The same can be said of the Apple Express. A few years ago representation was made to the Government for help and in 2008 the Department of Transport agreed to support the AE Company with funds that would be spread over a number of years. The funding suddenly stopped during February this year and after numerous queries by the AE Company the Government eventually declared the original fund procurement documents (contracts) were not legal and no more funding would be allocated to the Apple Express.

In response to a recent media report on the matter, Transport Department spokesman Ncedo Kumbaca said "Various contracts were reviewed, including the undertaking by the department to donate to the operator, of which a legal opinion was solicited, with a response that made it impossible for the department to continue giving financial assistance to the organisation."

It is just unfortunate that this has had to happen in the face of the summer holiday season which historically is the train's most lucrative month for fattening the bank balance. Because of the shortage of funds scheduled train trips have had to be curtailed from about ten trips to just six with the final run taking place on the 29<sup>th</sup> December.

Everyone connected with the train are very saddened by this situation but we are all still confident of a positive outcome, be it soon or in the not too distant future.

### **LATEST - The Herald Newspaper -**

Dacre Haddon (Opposition MPL) said...

"The DA (Political Opposition Party) will be campaigning to save the Apple Express train from extinction by having its operational subsidy reinstated by the Department Of Transport. ,,,,,,,,The withdrawing of the subsidy by the Dept. Of Transport is contradictory to its 2008 'Back To Rail' policy introduced in the province."

Are the wheels starting to turn again? It would be nice if they do.

#### IN THE WORKSHOP

The rebuilding of passenger coach no. 83 is now complete and she is taking her place with pride on the regular consist that travels to Loerie Station. The interior of the coach was completely redesigned for a more comfortable seating arrangement. Thanks to Piet van Rooyen and his team who managed to finish her just in time, before all restoration work was suspended.



Before



After

Unfortunately all restoration work on loco NG15 No.124 has also now been suspended until further notice. Let us hope it will not be for long. Luckily loco No.119 is in working condition and will be used once or twice before the end of December for specially requested steam trips. All other trains will be headed by Diesel loco power mainly because of the shortage of water due to the ongoing drought in the Eastern Cape.



Loco No.124

### **THE CROSSING**

When last did two trains cross each other on the P.E. – Avontuur line? Not very often these days but it did happen recently when a scheduled Apple Express train to Loerie had to stop at Thornhill station and wait for an inbound wood loaded freight train to pass. This unusual event was photographed at Thornhill station.



The crossing Editor: Clive Fife.