

Friends of the Choo-Tjoe

*The Loop*

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## **NEWSLETTER NUMBER 3 - OCTOBER 2011**

It is now over a year since we had our first meeting and much has been achieved in that time. The one thing that eludes us is the handing over of the line to Province. That people along the Garden Route, and further afield, are keen to see the line reopen can be gauged by our increasing membership and by the comments we have received at our promotional events at Sedgefield and Knysna.

Fraser Howell has provided an overview of activities during the past year, so there is no need to go into details here.

As promised, we are looking back to the days when Knysna had a station worthy of the name. Our correspondent, Richard Havenga, has provided a number of photographs of the station when his grandfather was in charge. It makes an interesting comparison with the station of today.

We are always interested in articles on railway reminiscences, particularly if they relate to our own line. So if anyone has stories they would like to share, please get in touch.

Quite a lot to get through in this issue

Julie Jenkins

### **FRIENDS OF THE CHOO-TJOE - 1 YEAR ON**

The second week of September marked 1 year since our inauguration as Friend of the Choo-Tjoe and now is an opportune time for us to reflect on the progress made by "Friends" since September 2010.

What have we achieved during this past year and where do we stand at the moment ?

The resolution by the Committee for "Friends" to purchase a rail inspection trolley and transport it to Knysna was the major achievement of early 2010.

**This achievement was possible only by the generosity and commitment of some Members and Corporate Members. You know who you are and we are very grateful for your generosity and commitment.**

**Subsequently other donations and membership subscriptions have allowed the renovation of our trolley to proceed to the point where the rebuilt engine has been refitted to the chassis and most of the mechanical refurbishment completed. The air brake system has been overhauled and reinstalled.**

**As this report was prepared, 22 September 2011, the only remaining significant mechanical renovation task is the stripping, cleaning and examination of the wheel bearings.**

**All the body panels and internal fittings have been removed from the frame and it has been sandblasted and painted.**

**Parts of the frame which were badly rusted have had new sections welded in and new timber has been installed.**

**The work on the body is now concentrating on refitting, with several hundred 4 BA screws, the external panels!**

**Our aim is to have the trolley substantially complete by December 2011 although final internal fitting may extend into the early part of next year.**

**Our original intention was always to showcase the trolley in Knysna and / or Sedgefield in order to attract more Members; this should happen over the Christmas holiday period. Details will be given to Members nearer the time.**

**During the past year the "Friends" have taken part in several events where we have invited the public to join us in our objective to encourage and support the reopening of the George to Knysna line as a steam hauled railway.**

**The "Friends" gazebo was manned by Members over several days at the Sedgefield Slow Festival and at the Knysna Waterfront during the Oyster Festival.**

**At both these events new members were recruited and additional funds raised.**

**Also, it is almost a year since we had that hastily arranged meeting with Alan Winde, Minister of Economic Affairs and Tourism in the Provisional Government of Western Cape, regarding who we were and what we, as a group, could do to promote and support the reopening of the George to Knysna railway line.**

**Those who were present at that meeting held on Heritage Day, 23 September 2010, will remember that Minister Winde thought that the negotiations between PGWC and Transnet to the transfer the line to Province would be concluded by October 2010!**

**Here we are, one year later, and still no public announcement that the arrangements have been completed!**

**Why is this transfer of assets from one State "pocket" to another taking so long?**

**We wish we could be better informed on what the apparent stumbling blocks are.**

**Whilst all this "negotiating" is proceeding the asset becomes more time expired and more of it gets stolen and, more importantly, opportunities to put the asset to work are lost. This would seem to be at odds with the oft stated national policy of the need to get people into jobs and working. The injection of tens of millions of Rands into the local economy would surely be welcomed by many local people and local businesses.**

**Negotiations on the transfer of this asset have been ongoing for several years now.**

Why the apparent reticence to conclude this transfer? It is not as if the transfer is from Central Government to a private purchaser; the "new" owner would still be Government, albeit Provincial Government.

We trust that the negotiations will be concluded soon; many people from the Garden Route, other parts of the country and overseas are eager to see the railway up and running with steam traction, again casting its spell over us!

Our membership now exceeds 100 paid up Members which includes several from overseas.

We would like to further expand our membership so please do what you can to recruit others to join us!

Previous experience not necessary as 'on the job' training can be given!

We are always on the lookout for additional support, both physical and financial, so if you would care to assist, and become directly involved, please contact any Committee Member who will be most pleased to hear from you.

Fraser Howell

## **Membership**

Current membership stands at 103 full members, 4 Family members and 6 Overseas members. There still quite a number of people who have expressed an interest but who have not become members. Membership renewal becomes due on 1<sup>st</sup> January 2012. Anyone joining now will also be considered to be a member for 2012. It is only R50 after all and being a member does give you a voice at the AGM.

Colin Jenkins

## **Old Knysna Don. J. Havenga.**

Station Master of Knysna c 1952 - 1955

Daniel Jacobus Havenga was born to farming folk on 7<sup>th</sup> October 1898. In later years he enlisted twice in the war effort by giving a false age and was twice fetched back from Potchefstroom by his mother. He was then put in as a boarder at Grey College, Bloemfontein where he would be better supervised but he absconded with the collusion of the Headmaster by changing his name and age. As Private Donald James [Don] Havenga, he was mustered at age 16 to the 1<sup>st</sup> South African Battalion, 2<sup>nd</sup> Regiment, D Company. Nothing is known of the explanation offered by the Headmaster when the conspiracy was uncovered or how he talked his way out of the situation.

He took part in the Battle for Delville Wood at age 17 years and 8 months. Although hospitalised 3 times for war injuries, he survived 2 more years of war hell at the Western Front, taking part in a great many of the major battles. In doing so, he beat a 99,99% chance of being killed or maimed. Because of this he considered himself to be the very luckiest of people.

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His most serious injury was being concussed by a mortar shell bursting nearby, being hit by the shrapnel and left for dead, lying unattended for 2 days in the snow near Arras. According to the medics in England where he was hospitalised, he only survived the ordeal because of his youth and fitness. He was again hospitalised for a bayonet thrust to the groin when a comrade shooting the attacker at point blank range saved his life. His war wounds healed completely and they never troubled him in later years.

He was a big strapping man – afraid of nothing and nobody – if the war could not kill him then nothing would! But he never got over the fact that he had killed, both as a sniper and in hand-to-hand [bayonet] combat. The nightmares of these actions would never leave him.

He was a sportsman of note and played Rugby [reportedly representing the Orange Free State] and took part in Inter-provincial athletics. At one particular meeting in Durban he took part in ALL the foot races on one afternoon, winning several including the Mile and was rewarded with the Rosebowl Trophy for his achievements on the day. He played tennis – winning many cups and trophies over the years – and loved cricket. He was a man's man.

Being a farmer's son he loved the land and all animals. His gardens were always the very best and took prizes wherever he was stationed and he moved around a lot! He arose at 3am every day including Sundays and was still in the garden at 9pm.

When he was promoted to Knysna, his immediate and burning ambition was to win the coveted Lady Duncan Trophy for the best station garden in South Africa. If he could win prizes in the arid South West Africa and other drought ravaged towns then surely this was his supreme chance to win the coveted trophy! He worked hard, long hours and in 1954 he indeed won the Trophy for Knysna and the townsfolk who donated towards his project of beautifying the station and surrounds.

He gave excess produce and flowers away to poorer and disabled folk and flowers to the church every week. He planted all flowers in line with the seasons but he cultivated dahlias with a passion – his favourite being Gerry Hoek. He was a humble man with a great compassion for all people irrespective of their colour or creed and his black staff adored him. Newspaper clippings of his retirement a few years later at Uitenhage speak volumes of his compassion for the disadvantaged.

His life was his "luck" and he gave it freely to anyone who needed his assistance and uplifting.



## He leaves gardens behind him wherever he goes

**MR. DANIEL (KLAASIE) HAVENGA**, the station-master of Knysna, is a man with faith in his fingers; a man who would try to turn the dreariest desert into an oasis.

A few weeks ago his green fingers earned him the coveted Lady Duncan floating trophy for the best kept station garden on the railways. There were 999 other stations in the competition.

Not only is stocky, 56-year-old Mr Havenga an artist. He is also a man with unbounded love of flowers and trees; a man with a keen eye for balance and order.

He says: 'When I took over this station towards the end of September, 1952, I immediately set to work to win the Lady Duncan Trophy.

'The station buildings were virtually surrounded by tall

cypress trees through which the wind moaned mournfully. I said to my wife: "This place is like a cemetery. We're not dead yet. Let us live." And I pulled them out, roots and all.'

Knysna station is only 6ft. above sea level and lies within about 45 yards of the lagoon. It was virtually built on sea sand and this for the gardener presents many problems.

Mr. Havenga's main problem was soil to put on top of the shifting white sand. He solved this by carting several bogey loads of top-soil to the station. Once, when hard pressed for more top-dressing, he swapped some old stamps for two lorry loads of soil.

When the flower beds and rockeries were ready and the holes had been dug for shrubs he enlisted the support of the local population.

He told them: 'This is your station. Soon I will pass on to another. Make this garden your garden.'

They responded readily.

The flowers and shrubs in the station garden are too numerous to mention. But here are a few names: Petunias, delphiniums, Iceland poppies, red salvias, dahlias, marigolds, hydrangeas. Among the roses are: Rome Glory, Tahiti, Charlotte Armstrong, Eina Harkness. The shrubs include mock orange, jasmine, bottle-brush, pride of India.

Mr. Havenga has always made gardens where he worked. Before winning the Lady Duncan Trophy he had bagged 26 minor prizes.

'I often pass through a station where I had worked as relief station-master years ago and there would still be a shrub or a tree in the garden to remind me of my temporary

stay. Much credit must go to my wife for I never start to lay out a garden without consulting her,' Mr. Havenga said.

'Here at Knysna I had planned to win the trophy only next year. But the weather and the soil responded magnificently and I won it a year early. If I remain here I think I will keep it next year.'

When Mr. Havenga was station-master at Adelaide (his last station) he wrote gardening notes for the local paper — free.

'In the Kirstenbosch gardens there is a grave on whose headstone these words are written: "If you seek his monument look around."' Mr Havenga says: 'I make gardens not so much to win prizes; I want people to remember me.'

— John Holmes

Arthur Havenga

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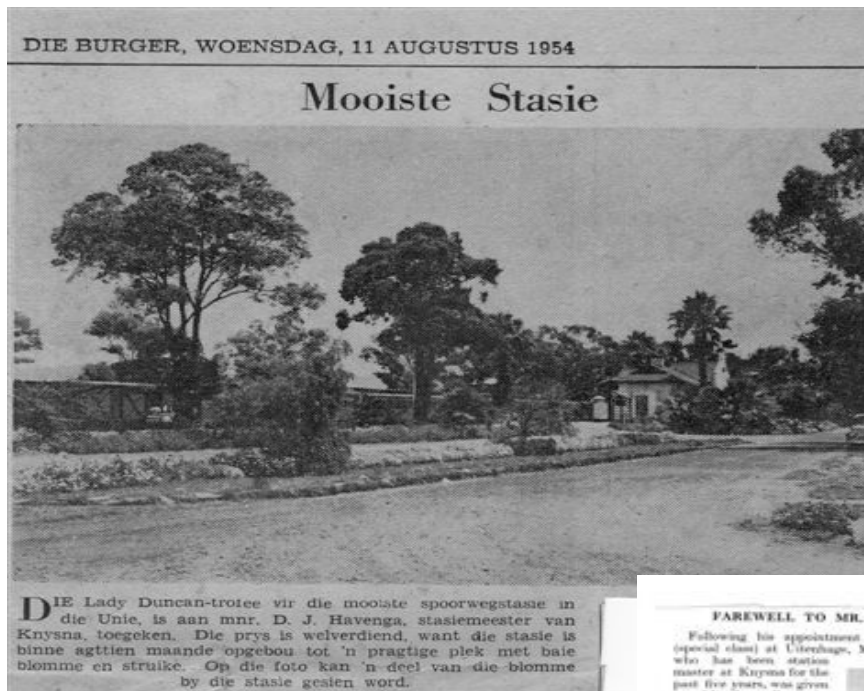
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Die Burger



Railway Magazine



**The pond and the lawn**



**The roses**



**The cupwinners**



**March 1957. A last look around before Uitenhage**

### **MORE PROCRASTINATION?**

An article penned by Pauline Lourens in the 16 September 2011 edition of the George Herald quotes PGWC's Alan Winde as saying that Transnet's CEO, Brian Molefe, will confirm by the end of October this year whether Transnet will be involved in the running of the Choo-Tjoe. Could this be why the Goukamma rent was allegedly increased by 525%?

After years of negotiation, the principle of the transfer of the asset to PGWC is still undecided!

And what happened to the intention that "we are not interested in running Outeniqua Choo-Tjoe because it is not part of our core business"?

More fiddling while Rome burns?

### **REGULAR MONTHLY DONATIONS**

Several members have expressed a willingness to make regular monthly donations in order to ensure that we have adequate funds to complete the renovation of our inspection trolley. An offer by one Member to contribute R50 per month is very much appreciated and, if other members support this appeal, will go a long way to build up funds towards final completion.

Those Members who feel they could also make a regular donation, no matter how large or small, are requested to contact Treasurer Allan Waterston to make the necessary arrangements.

A future big expense is that for the repair and refurbishment of the leather seats.

### **NEW DVD FROM SANDSTONE**

A new twin-pack DVD/CD has been issued by Sandstone Heritage Trust.

The 50 minute DVD features the April 2011 live steam jamboree held on the Free State farm of Sandstone Estates at Ficksburg. The supplementary CD contains over 100 superb photographs taken during the same period.

Both are finely produced, displaying the huge range of working NG locomotives, wagons, coaches that are preserved and nurtured at Sandstone together with cars, military and steam road vehicles.

This production is excellent value for money at a cost of R130 incl post and packing and, I'm sure, will not disappoint even the most avid of steam enthusiasts.

For orders contact Babita Hira by email [babitan@sandstone.co.za](mailto:babitan@sandstone.co.za)

### **IMPERIAL NUTS & BOLTS**

We still require imperial nuts & bolts for the trolley.

Inga Chinnery is the only Member so far to have supplied some of this very hard to come by resource.

Most amateur workshops keep spares of various types. Can you not give us those with imperial threads?

Any spare nuts & bolts that you can allocate us will be gratefully received. If necessary we will separate out the imperial threads and return the metrics.

### **SNIPPETS FROM THE PAST**

In 1977 the Railway Society of Southern Africa organised one of their 14 day rail tours, called the "Sunset LTD", around the southern half of South Africa.

One of the many routes visited was the George to Knysna line and the special train on this day was hauled by a triple header of Class 24 locomotives!



**The picture shows the "Sunset Limited" entering Knysna over the lagoon in April 1979.**

**Fraser Howell**



### **RAFFLE RESULTS**

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**Hi, We are happy to announce we have winner to our fund raising raffle, the prize of which is a visit for four persons (two adults and two children) to the Elephant Sanctuary near the Craggs, Plettenburg Bay.**

**My apologies for the lateness of the draw, I lost all my documentation in my computer! My fault this time and not the computers.**

**The winner is Dannie Louw , congratulations Dannie, he donated R500.00 which gave him 25 chances of a winning number. Our only other donation came from Julie and Colin Jenkins who donated R40.00 and gave them two chances. So for those of you who didn't enter and are a little sad, remember, you have to be in it to win it!**

**The previous draw was won by our membership secretary and the prize was a game drive for two people at Botlierskop Game Reserve. Reports indicate that the drive was a pleasant experience in the afternoon sun and a plentiful supply of animals were present to greet our winners.**

**Thanks to everyone who participated.**

**Colin Burgess Publicity and Fund Raising, Friends of the Choo-Tjoe.**



## **FOR SALE**

**A Member has the following ex SAR and ex Rhodesian Railway unrestored loco cabside numberplates for sale:**

**SAR 4086.....R8400**

**SAR 1946.....R5400**

**SAR 1584.....R5400**

**SAR 368.....R7500**

**SAR 1569..... R5400**

**SAR 3812..... R6000**

**SAR 3257.....R3700**

**RR 382.....R4900**

**RR 726.....R4900**

**Anyone Interested should please contact Geoff Hall on 044 382 4012**