



Friends of the Choo-Tjoe

*The Loop*

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58 Fraser Street, Sedgefield, 6573, South Africa

## **NEWSLETTER NUMBER 7 - OCTOBER 2012**

Now we have abandoned the heat of a Cyprus summer for a more pleasant South African spring. It is nice to be home again!

The big news this quarter is of course, the completion of the trolley. Most of the work has been completed. There are just a few snagging details to sort out and then we would be in a position to run. We will not be able to run of course, but the fact that we would be able to is an achievement in itself. The trolley was delivered to the Waterfront on Thursday, 9<sup>th</sup> August by our old friends, Knysna Motor Strippers. It all went without a hitch and even the weather was kind. Since the trolley has been on display, it has generated quite a bit of interest. It has certainly helped with the petition which is very near the 9000 mark. Remember, it is only by showing those in authority that there is a genuine desire to see the trains running again that we stand any chance of making it happen. So if you have not yet completed your petition form, please make the effort; and a big thank you to all those of you who have.

Below, you will see a piece that appeared in Railways Africa about tourism in Namibia. It speaks for itself.

Finally, do not forget the Leisure Isle Festival on the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> of October and our stand. If you can spare a few hours to help out, please get in touch with me, Julie, on 072 075 0057; your help will be greatly appreciated.

It is with sadness that we record the passing yesterday (04 October) of Mr. Jock Falconer. Jock and his wife Brenda have always been staunch supporters of the Friends.

Sincere condolences are extended to Brenda.

### **TRAIN TOURS IN NAMIBIA**

7<sup>th</sup> August 2012

In June 2012, JB Train Tours offered opportunities for tourists to join one of four, 44-passenger, seven-day train tours in Namibia during August. All were fully booked in a short space of time. Arrangements were then made for further use of the Desert Express train and three additional tours were scheduled. Again, all were fully booked

The popularity of tours by train have never been better demonstrated –an object lesson for South Africa whose tourism industry (and railway) appear to take minimal interest in this type of activity.

The company subsequently organised three more tours by train in Namibia– one from 15<sup>th</sup> to 21<sup>st</sup> September, the second from 22<sup>nd</sup> to 28<sup>th</sup> September and the third from 29<sup>th</sup> September to 5<sup>th</sup> October.

The first of these is already fully booked but at the time of writing, there were still a few places on the other two.

Passengers join the Desert Express at Windhoek, most flying from Johannesburg or Cape Town (though air fare is not included in the tour price). The train journey includes Karibib, Kranzberg, Usakos and Swakopmund. Off-train trips are provided to Omaruru, the Moon Landscape, the Namib Desert, Henties Bay, Dune 7 and Walvis Bay. The bargain tour price of R15,200 per couple (normal price is R14,990 per person) includes the return train trip between Windhoek and Swakopmund, accommodation on the train for six nights, meals and excursions, transfers between the Windhoek airport and railway station, as well as bus transport in Namibia and the services of a tour guide

## **THE GREAT ARP&P TRAIN EXCURSION**

Anyone passing the Sedgefield Station on Friday 7th November must surely have wondered why well over a hundred and fifty cars were parked in and around the station for 9 1/2 hours with not a soul in sight. Nothing can motivate a crowd of retirees into action faster than the mere mention of a train excursion! ARP&P members from as far afield as Plettenberg Bay, Knysna, Wilderness and George joined a large Sedgefield contingent on what was to be a memorable day's outing to Mossel Bay on a perfect Summer's day.

Thanks to months of planning and negotiating by Steve Kriel, Chairman of the Sedgefield Branch of the ARP&P, and John Rogers, all was finally in place, the appointed day dawned, champagne

corks popped and some 450 passengers settled back to enjoy the journey, browse around the museums, take to the high seas on the 'Ramonza' for a cruise around Seal Island, swim in the Indian Ocean, picnic on the beach and enjoy the most delicious fish and chips at the 'Santos Express Restaurant'.

A group of German visitors who joined the outing announced that the excursion was the best value for money they had ever had, and a remark by one of the members, licking her fingers after enjoying one of Joe & Louisa's famous pies and blissfully remarking that 'she was having the most marvellous time and the train hadn't even left the station yet', set the tone for the entire day!

On a similar theme, I came across this press cutting amongst the possessions of the late John Rogers. John was a well-known figure in Sedgefield and organised a number of these rail excursions until the red tape became too onerous!

Colin Jenkins

### **PRESS STATEMENT**

Eugene Von Brandis 13<sup>th</sup> September 2012

DA Western Cape Spokesperson Development, Tourism and Public Works and Member of Provincial Legislature

**“Outeniqua Choo Tjoe – the steam engine that can”**

The month of September is celebrated as both Tourism Month and Heritage Month, and the month of October as Transport Month. The Outeniqua Choo Tjoe, as an embodiment of all of these, formed part of the presentation by the Department of Economic Development and Tourism to the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Development on Wednesday, 12<sup>th</sup> September 2012, at the Western Cape Provincial Parliament.

As the last remaining scheduled steam train in South Africa, the Choo Tjoe has always been a beloved icon by locals, a feature of Garden Route Tourism and has enjoyed the vehement support of the now Western Cape Minister of Economic Development and Tourism, Alan Winde.

The Outeniqua Choo Tjoe has not been in operation since floods in August 2006 severely damaged the tracks. The current cost to repair the damaged tracks are estimated at R250 million. Despite the train not being operational over the last six years, the Choo Tjoe still features on tourism signage both physically and online. This is understandable, as the Choo Tjoe departed from the Outeniqua

Transport/Railway Museum in George and its route included the Kaaimans River Bridge – the most-photographed railway bridge in the world.

As DA spokesperson on Economic Development and Tourism in the Western Cape I support the continuous deliberation with Transnet to see this jewel of the Garden Route reinstated. Despite a cancelled stakeholder meeting in George (5<sup>th</sup> February 2012), Transnet CEO, Brian Molefe, did confirm in a letter to Min Winde (12<sup>th</sup> June 2012) that it was still the intention of Transnet SOC Ltd to transfer the Outeniqua Choo Tjoe rolling stock to a successful operator. Unfortunately, no suitable candidate was identified to operate the train to date.

I welcome the recommendations made by both Min Winde and his department for investigating the optimal use of the railway line and the Choo Tjoe. Their innovative suggestion includes options for its use as a tourist attraction, learner commute transport and even a carrier for the refuse removal of Plettenberg Bay, Knysna and George. I thank the Minister and his department for their commitment towards finding workable solutions and implore Transnet and the National Department of Tourism assist in realising this dream.



Scenes you will never see again!



When Knysna had a station to be proud of

### MEMBERSHIP

Membership stands at 112 ordinary members, 10 family members and 11 overseas members.

Colin Jenkins

### CHAIRMAN'S NOTES

The 8<sup>th</sup> September 2012 marked the second anniversary of the inauguration of the Friends of the Choo-Tjoe (FoCT). Apart from the purchase and renovation of our rail inspection trolley and its recent display in the Knysna Waterfront what progress has been made to get the George to Knysna line reopened in these past two years?

Shortly after our inaugural meeting in 2010 we were able to speak informally with the Minister of Economic Development and Tourism in the Provincial Government of Western Cape (PGWC), Mr. Alan Winde.

At this meeting Minister Winde informed us that he expected that the transfer of the George to Knysna railway line to PGWC would be formalised "...within the next 3 to 4 weeks..." viz before the end of October 2010.

The expected transfer did not happen and in early 2011 Transnet announced that it was considering reopening the line itself. They said they would confirm their decision by end October 2011. As far as we are aware no such announcement has yet been made.

In a letter received in August 2012 from Transnet we were informed that the George to Knysna line may be concessioned sometime in the future.

Knysna entrepreneur Mr. Alan McVitty's business plan for the George to Knysna reopening includes assessments of likely costs of repair to the line caused by the floods of 2006 and 2007. It has been estimated that between R12m to R15m would suffice to carry out flood damage repairs for the Knysna to Sedgefield section which could be a viable first stage to an eventual full reopening.

However, to enable potential investors to supply finance for the reinstatement of the line, we believe it is essential that an independent engineering survey be made to ascertain the costs of repair.

McVitty's assessment is that it would cost between R80 to R100m to resuscitate the complete line and this figure includes funds for the renovation and transport of several locomotives and coaches together with new facilities for maintenance / repair. This huge disparity of repair costs between Transnet and McVitty makes the need for an independent engineering survey absolutely essential in order to capture a reliable cost figure. FoCT have applied to PGWC for funds to carry out such a survey and have also considered raising funds privately but this engineering survey would only be able to logically proceed after a transfer of the assets had been agreed.

Early August this year saw the completion of the renovation of our Wickham trolley and its delivery to the Knysna Waterfront. It has shown itself to be a good platform to publicise the aims and aspirations of FoCT and when we are in attendance it does draw a steady stream of visitors, most of whom enquire "when are you going to run"! That question is not easy to answer!

There is almost universal support from all population groups for a reopening of the line. When asked to sign our Petition most of the 8500+ signatories to the Petition, who may or may not be supporters of the heritage aspect of steam railways, are certainly very aware of the potential benefits to the Garden Route of increased heritage tourism and employment.

The pump trolley, obtained earlier this year, will also need some TLC before it can be displayed.

A temporary lock-up has been organised with kind permission of the Knysna Municipality.

A gate, kindly supplied and erected by Garden Route Steel Works, has been erected at the Cleansing Department's 'Waste by Rail' facility. The gate needs to be painted and a concrete threshold cast to prevent access being gained beneath the gate.

A press report dated 1<sup>st</sup> October 2012 in the 'Business Day' stated that Provincial Government of Western Cape (PGWC) "...was in talks with the national Department of Tourism and the Industrial Development Corporation about setting up a partnership with Transnet to get the Outeniqua Choo-Tjoe back on track". We trust this latest initiative will propel the reopening to reality.

It is more than six years since the line was closed due to flood damage. FoCT believe that if Transnet is unable or unwilling to reopen the line, either fully or in part, they should transfer the line and other assets to PGWC who have stated consistently that they are willing to oversee the resuscitation of the railway. Enough obfuscation and wasted time. Surely it is now time for action.

We can always use additional help with our projects. Contact any committee member for details.

Fraser Howell



**Looking for a place to park**



**Gavin Cooper and family (Knysna Motor Strippers)**



**Stop and examine.**



**Our Ambassador**



**The team. l to r**

**Bernd Rohloff, Ricky Cooper (Knysna Motor Strippers), Ron Hollis (Bodge Engineering), Alistair Gibb, John Webb, kneeling Allan Waterston and Fraser Howell**