



## **Sandstone News 08.02.2013**

### **Press Release**

The Ffestiniog and Welsh Highland Railway in North Wales has taken delivery of six more B Wagons, originally used on the Port Shepstone-Harding line in Natal, which have been fully refurbished by Sandstone Heritage Trust's wagon shop.

They were loaded at Durban on December 15th and arrived at Immingham Docks earlier this month, being delivered to Dinas yard on Thursday January 24th. Their purchase was funded by a specific donation from a supporter through the FR Trust.

The F&WHR already owns eight similar B Wagons, which are in daily use on both the Ffestiniog and Welsh Highland lines for transporting coal, ballast, ash and brash from lineside clearance work. The six new wagons will be put to work as soon as F&WHR engineers fit them with their standard chopper couplings.

The Welsh Highland Railway and the Sandstone Heritage Trust in the Eastern Free State have enjoyed a relationship which goes almost as far back as the inception of Sandstone's 2-ft Narrow Gauge railway in the Eastern Free State of South Africa which was constructed in the late 1990s.

"The Welsh Highland Railway already makes extensive use of railway technology sourced from South Africa, including its NG/G16 Garratt locomotives, as well as freight rolling stock," says Sandstone's Wilf Mole.

"Our guys put an inordinate amount of work into it. We asked them to do a good job and they took it seriously. We had an independent railway professional come in and check them for flaws before they went out and he was very happy with them."

South Africa had a rich heritage of 2-ft Narrow Gauge railways which formed the backbone of the rural lines in Natal and the Eastern Cape in particular. Iconic names like the Banana Express in Natal and the Apple Express in Port Elizabeth caught the attention of Narrow Gauge enthusiasts for many years and were popular photographic destinations for railway enthusiasts.

Some years ago the Banana Express closed and the Apple Express has been inoperative as a railway for some time due to political issues, lack of finance, and disruption to the line through weather related activities.

By contrast, the Sandstone Heritage Trust, which operates a 26-km 2-ft Narrow Gauge railway on a private agricultural estate in a fairly remote part of South Africa adjacent to the Lesotho border, had continued to grow and to expand.

The South African National Railway authority, Transnet, has been issuing tenders over a number of years relating to the disposal of narrow gauge assets. Sandstone, in order to build its own collection of the iconic South African narrow gauge rolling stock, bid on many of these tenders and was successful.

Sandstone also reached agreement with South Africa's largest reclamation company, Reclam, to acquire wagons and spares parts for items that they have purchased from the railways. The result is a very large collection of freight wagons, arguably far too many to ever be used by Sandstone itself.

"The logistics of getting them to Durban was not easy," adds Wilf. "We transported the wagons ourselves using our Freightliner and my own personal Kenworth, which our General Manager drove to Durban and back twice.

"We believe these wagons will make a very useful contribution to Welsh Highland Railway's operational efficiency and will provide an added attraction for the many supporters and followers who enjoy visiting this world class railway in North Wales."

The WHR now has the potential to run a Garratt-hauled recreation of a full length train of SAR bogie freight stock, together with the newly-restored SAR brake van – a piece of South African railway history in the mountains of Snowdonia.

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