

Railway History Group

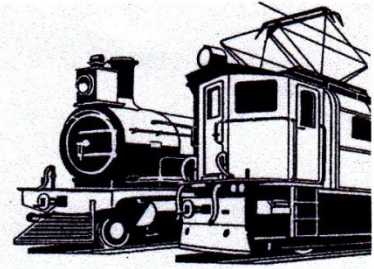
of Southern Africa,

10029 Howard's End, Pinelands 7405

Tel. (021) 531-1388

E-mail: wgreig@mweb.co.za

Editor: Wally Greig



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Class GD on the up Caledon train entering Houwhoek Pass c1935.

Eric Manken

Editorial

In Bulletin No. 120 we published an article titled “The last ninety years”. The end of that article was left out. You will find it below.

“The ninetieth anniversary of the introduction of the Union trains has prompted the RHG to produce a book detailing the history of luxury trains in Southern Africa. That story starts in 1901, when Rhodesian Railways Train De Luxe coaches arrived, from England, and were assembled at Salt River Works. Due to the Boer War, this train could not enter service until 10 August 1902.

In producing this book, we aim that it should be as accurate and complete as possible. Numerous members are working on this project. Currently, we are concentrating on the pre – 1910 period. Research has been done in the Cape Archives and that phase is complete. We continue to work in the National Library of South Africa, in Cape Town. Finding the information that we are looking for has not been easy. The book will be published as soon as we are satisfied that we have acquired all the information that is available.”

Early manganese mining in the northern Cape

By Richard Sabatini with additional notes by

John Middleton

The 1920's must have been an exciting time in the Northern Cape. Diamonds were already being mined in the Postmasburg area but several colourful individuals were beginning to take an interest in local manganese deposits. The main difficulty in exploiting these deposits was the lack of transport infrastructure with the nearest railhead being Koopmansfontein near Kimberley. The early history is covered well in the book “Kaias and Cocopans” by Anthony Hocking which describes the mining industry of the northern Cape.

Undeterred by the transport difficulties, a number of companies were set up including, in 1926, Union Manganese Ltd and South African Manganese Ltd. These were highly speculative ventures and produced small amounts of ore which were transported to Koopmansfontein on donkey carts, a round trip taking 4-6 days. Both companies lobbied the Government over the need for a railway but financing the line proved problematic.

With no resolution of the transport issue, the fledgling manganese producers found their cash resources running low and thus they welcomed approaches by various British, American, German and Dutch entrepreneurs. One of these was the British Swiss International Corporation, which had interests in mines in France and Spain. The chairman of British Swiss was a certain Norman Pickett and he negotiated with Union Manganese to lease its mining rights. To work these, in 1929, Pickett formed a new company, Manganese Corporation Ltd and it underwrote the new railway by promising it would rail at least 200 000 tons of ore in its first year and 350 000 tons every year for the following nine years. There was a significant financial penalty for failing to meet these targets.

By the time the railway arrived in Postmasburg in November 1930, Manganese Corporation had started operations on the farm Beeshoek, about 9 km west of Postmasburg. The company also had deposits on the nearby farms Doornfontein and Paling. However, the manganese customers were only interested in high grade ore and this turned out to be very scattered. One of Manganese Corporations first employees was Syd Brownrigg who had come from the Gold Coast. In “Kaiaas and Cocopans” he relates *“We had plenty of lower grade ore too but at that time you couldn’t give it away – nobody wanted it. We even opened up Paling and laid a narrow gauge railway to link it with Beeshoek but that didn’t work either – there was lots of ore but the grade was too patchy”*.

The narrow gauge railway was the Beeshoek Light Railway which was laid to a gauge of 2’6” and ran 9 km from Beeshoek to the mines at Doornfontein and Paling. To operate it in the harsh arid environment, an order was placed with Kerr Stuart for four 90 HP diesel locos. The Beeshoek Light Railway thus became the first diesel operated railway in South Africa.

Just as it seemed that the manganese industry might be about to take off, the New York stock market crash of October 1929, followed by the great depression, quickly created new difficulties. The manganese industry suffered and by October 1931, Manganese Corporation was ready to give up the fight. Nearly all staff had been laid off and the mines were practically dormant.

Eventually, the manganese markets began to pick up and by 1934, Doornfontein and Paling were being worked as well as the Mancorp mine at Beeshoek. It is not known how long the Beeshoek Light Railway operated but Manganese Corporation were still in difficulty due to the shadow of the SAR tonnage penalty and the huge debts this created.

SA Manganese were in a better position, because although they had produced little, they were debt free and started to develop new deposits further north at Lohatla, eventually they went on to become SAMANCOR and still operate today.

In the meantime, manganese deposits had also been found some 27 km north of Postmasburg on the farm Gloucester, between Postmasburg and Sishen. In 1926, Guido Sacco of Johannesburg had acquired the farm and formed The Gloucester Manganese Mines (Postmasburg) Limited. However, by 1933 these had still not been worked.

As the markets picked up, extensions of the SAR line north from Postmasburg had been proposed and it so happened that Gloucester lay on the proposed extension which was opened in 1934. Sacco approached the new Anglo-Vaal mining house (formed in 1933) and persuaded them to back a large scale manganese operation. In 1935 The Associated Manganese Mines of South Africa Limited (“Assmang”) was formed and acquired Manganese Corporation and Gloucester Manganese Mines. Its first shipment of manganese ore left Durban harbour in March 1936. With Gloucester open, Assmang ceased manganese mining at Beeshoek but later opened a large iron ore mine there which is still known as the Mancorp mine and survives to the present day.

To operate the new Gloucester mine (now known as Glosam) which had better high grade deposits than Doornfontein, Paling or Beeshoek, the entire Beeshoek Light Railway was uplifted and transferred to Gloucester. The exact date when it restarted operations at Gloucester is unknown but spares were ordered for the locos in September 1936. The railway was used to haul ore from the pits to a loading point located on a siding of about 500 m which diverged from the SAR line. A photo in “Kaiaas and Cocopans” shows a train on the narrow gauge line with a Class 23 hauled freight on the SAR line behind.

The 2'6" gauge line at Gloucester then seems to have settled into an uneventful existence for around 40 years until it closed in 1976. A visit in 1965 found two of the Kerr Stuarts in use which are presumably the same two that have survived. Although they were by now some 46 years old, after closure of Glosam these two Kerr Stuarts were transferred to Assmang's Black Rock Mine north west of Hotazel. Little is known about the Black Rock line which was electrified and also used at least three electric locos. The amount of use the Kerr Stuarts saw at Black Rock is unknown but the line is thought to have closed in about 1980. The two Kerr Stuarts survived complete in the Salvage Yard until 1992 when they were rescued for preservation.

In 1953 the SAR railway line was extended northwards from Postmasburg to Lohatlha, to serve SA Manganese operations there. Thereafter, in 1961 the line was further extended to Hotazel serving another SA Manganese mine. Hotazel is so named because the temperature in summer is said to be as hot as hell! Later still the line continued to Assmang's Black Rock mine, but the extension from Hotazel is not an SAR line but is operated jointly by Assmang and SAMANCOR which also has mines in the area.

Four Industrial Diesel Locomotives in the Northern Cape

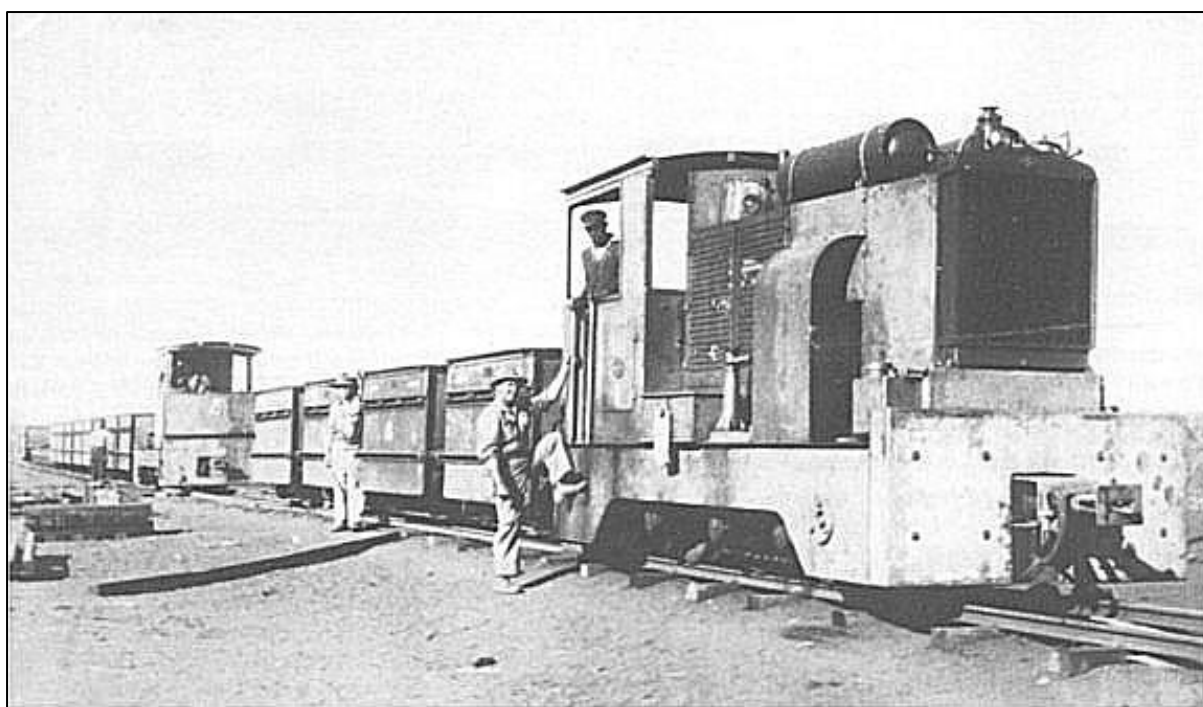
In 1930, an order was placed with Kerr Stuart for four 90 Horse Power six-wheel diesel locomotives. It was placed by Robert Hudson Limited on 8 April 1930 and these locomotives were among the last ever produced at the Kerr Stuart California Works at Stoke on Trent in England, before closure. The Kerr Stuart Order Book shows them as destined 'for Johannesburg' but they were actually shipped via Algoa Bay to the Manganese Corporation's Beeshoek Light Railway.

However, about the time they were moved to Gloucester, in September 1936, spare parts were ordered from Hunslet, who had acquired the former assets of Kerr Stuart in 1930. The Associated Manganese Mines of South Africa Ltd, initially placed an order for spare parts for 4473, 4474 and 4476, and then later for 4475, in February 1937. The order for 4475 was also placed by the Associated Manganese Mines of South Africa Ltd, but the address, as stipulated, was Glosam, Postmasburg.

DETAILS OF THE FOUR DIESEL MECHANICAL LOCOMOTIVES

Works number	Date of delivery	Gauge	Wheel arrangement	Engine and horse power	Weight in service
4473	7 June 1930	30 inch	6-wheel Diesel	90 HP diesel Mclaren	15 tons

			mechanical	Benz	
4474	17 June 1930	30 inch	6-wheel Diesel mechanical	90 HP diesel McLaren Benz	15 tons
4475	5 July 1930	30 inch	6-wheel Diesel mechanical	90 HP diesel McLaren Benz	15 tons
4476	5 July 1930	30 inch	6-wheel Diesel mechanical	90 HP diesel McLaren Benz	15 tons



Kerr Stuart 6-wheel diesels 1 (right) and 2 (left). The photo is thought to have been taken in the period 1930-34 on the Manganese Corporation, Beeshoek Light Railway. The engine compartment ventilation grille was a feature on certain Kerr Stuart diesels. Notice the air reservoir for the air brakes. (Photograph by kind courtesy Hunslet Engine Co Ltd)

At some unknown date, the surviving locos, KS 4473 and 4476 were re-engined with Caterpillar engines which altered their appearance somewhat. There appear to be no surviving traces of the original Beeshoek Light Railway and it is thought that the SAR extension to Gloucester utilized most of the trackbed. Google Earth images of the area show tracks leading into the old pits on gentle curves which could have been part of the Light Railway. However, a visit to Gloucester in February 1986 found plenty of evidence surviving. Although the track had mostly been lifted, the loco shed survived complete with track and inspection pit. Outside dumped were quite a number of ore wagons plus the dismantled remains of one Kerr Stuart (either KS 4474 or 4475), an original McLaren Benz engine and various other parts plus large quantities of track. By 1992 all

of this equipment had been removed, presumably for scrap. The second loco of the pair KS 4474 and 4475 had presumably been withdrawn prior to 1965 and scrapped.



Black Rock Kerr Stuart 4476 plinthed 2 March 1993.

John Middleton

In 1992, Anglo-Vaal and Assmang management were convinced of the importance of the two surviving locomotives and they were restored in the workshops at Black Rock. However, during this process the worksplates got swopped over so that KS 4473 which only had one surviving plate went on KS 4476, while the two plates on KS 4476 were put on KS 4473. The apprentices who did the work also added go-faster stripes and prominent CAT engine lettering !



Glosam Funkey.

John Middleton

The Pretoria-Pieterseburg Railway

By Wally Greig

The Pretoria-Pietersburg Railway was located in the South African Republic. On 30 October 1895 the government of the South African Republic granted a concession to Hendrik Jacobus Schoeman for the construction of a railway, running from a station in Pretoria West, via Warmbaths and Nylstroom to Pietersburg, a distance of 176 miles.

On 13 May 1896, the Pretoria-Pietersburg Railway Company was incorporated, in London, with a capital of £500 000. Construction began in 1897 and by 1 July 1898 the first eighty miles to Nylstroom were opened to traffic, and the remaining 96 miles to Pietersburg, were opened on 31 May 1899. The Anglo Boer War commenced in October 1899 and the Transvaal government seized the railway and all of its possessions. ZASM took over the running of the line and later it became part of the Imperial Military Railways. The name Pretoria-Pietersburg Railway was retained through to 1910, when it became part of the SAR.

In 1896 three 0-6-0 saddle-tank locos were ordered from Hawthorn-Leslie & Co. These locos were named Pretoria, Pietersburg and Nylstroom and were works numbers 2346, 2369 and 2370, respectively. Nylstroom and Pietersburg have survived and are plinthed on Nylstroom and Pietersburg stations.



Hawthorn & Leslie loco Pietersburg, at Pietersburg station.

Piet Conradie Collection

In 1897 the PPR a 4-6-0 tank loco was purchased from the Lourenco Marques, Delagoa Bay and East African Railway, for construction and general service. It was named Portuguese and became known as "The Portuguese Tank". This loco hauled the first train from Pretoria to Nylstroom. The loco was built by Nasmith-Wilson, works number 324.

Traffic, on the PPR, increased rapidly and the Company acquired a 46 tonner named Prinsloo from NZASM. It is not known if this loco was purchased or leased. The PPR had quite a mix of locos and it acquired an 0-4-0 saddle tank loco from the NGR for shunting purposes. This was works numbers 4482/1892, one of five built for the NGR, by Neilson & Co.



Neilson & Co. 0-4-0 saddle tank loco, No 4482/1892, acquired from the NGR.

Transnet

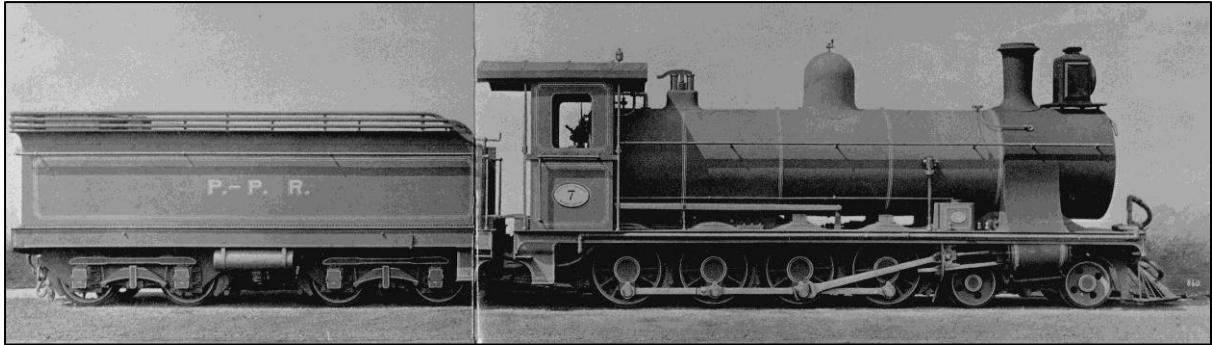


PPR No. 1 President Kruger. Locos were painted emerald green and lined out in yellow and black. Numbers were in gold leaf.

Sandy Buchanan Collection

In 1897 the PPR placed an order with Beyer, Peacock & Co for six 2-6-4 tank locomotives, with Belpaire fireboxes and Walschaert valve gear. They were numbered 1 to 6 , by PPR, with works numbers 3943 to 3948 but No. 5 was lost at sea. No. 6 was renumbered as 5 and the replacement for No. 6, works number 4127 arrived in 1900. No. 1 was the only one to be named.

Three further locos were ordered before the PPR ceased to exist. They were built by Neilson, Reid & Co. They went into service in 1900, numbered 7 to 9, works numbers 5904 to 5906, and were built to the same design as the second order of Cape 7th Class on the CGR.



PPR No. 7, later CSAR No. 398 and SAR Class 7B No. 1052.

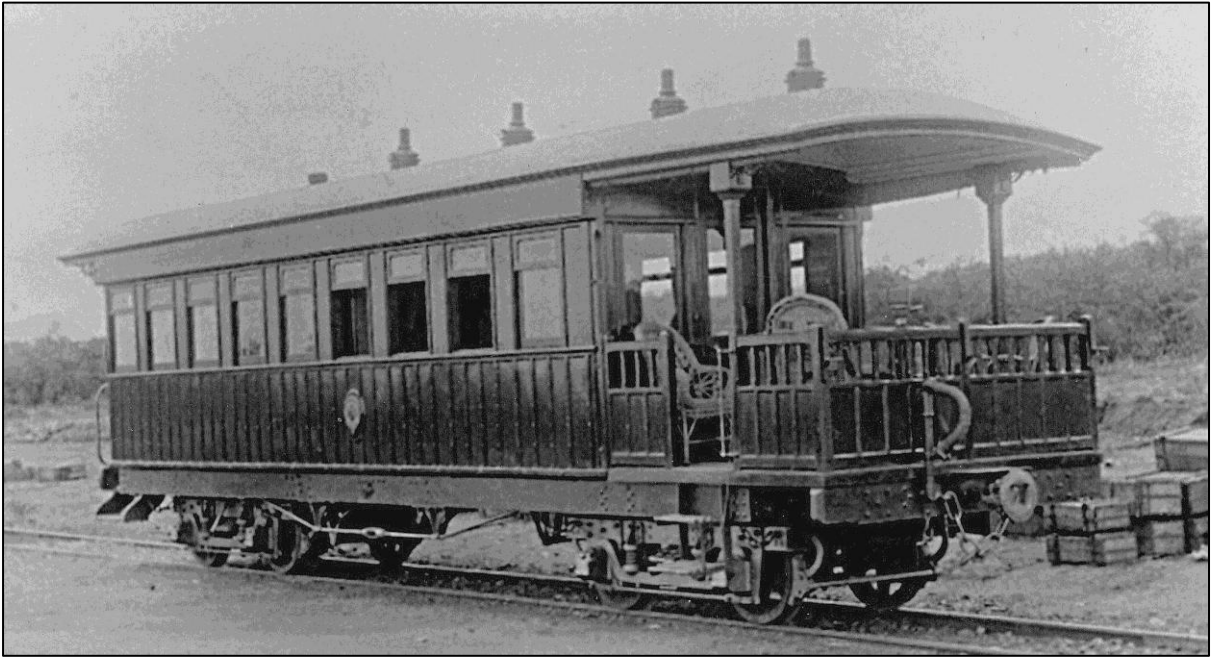
NBL works photo.

Although the PPR had sufficient locos to meet its needs, it is possible, that with the chaos brought about by the Anglo Boer War, locos of ZASM, IMR and CSAR worked on the PPR line.

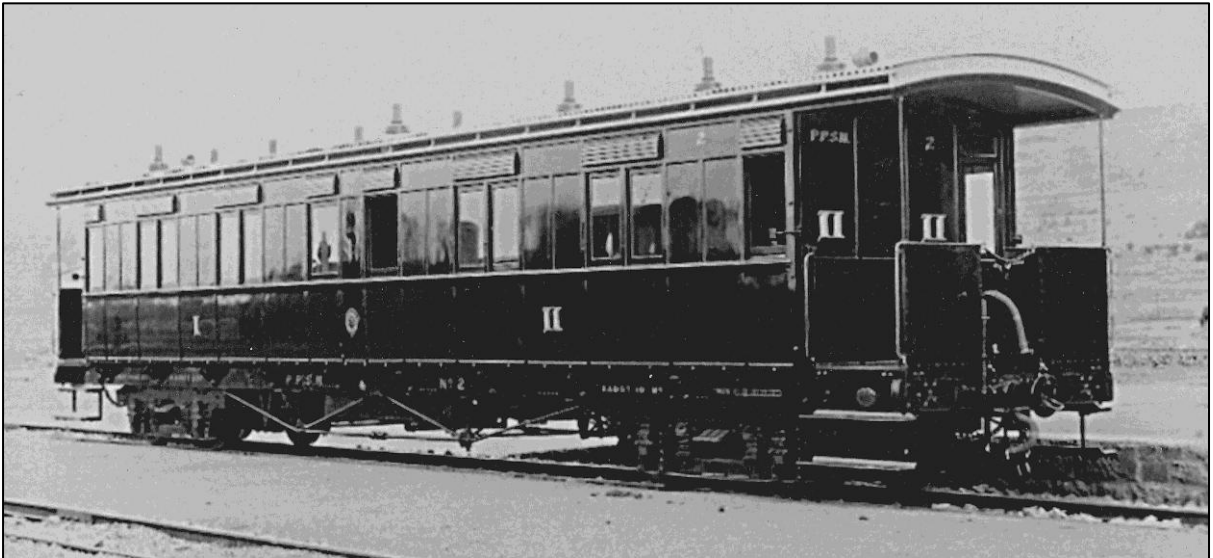


President Kruger's coach, with the curved roof, is part of this train, photographed in 1899. Sandy Buchanan Collection.

Little is known about the coaches of the PPR. The following two photos are from Sandy Buchanan's Collection.



This elegant coach was known as the "Officers Coach". Note the chairs on the balcony.



Coach No. 2 was a composite 4 wheel bogie coach. Note roof and builders plate above step.
