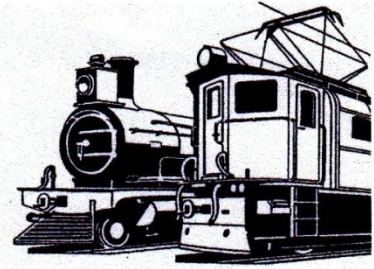


# *Railway History Group*

of Southern Africa,  
10029 Howard's End, Pinelands 7405  
Tel. (021) 531-1388  
E-mail: [wgreig@mweb.co.za](mailto:wgreig@mweb.co.za)  
Editor: Wally Greig



## Bulletin No. 123 April 2014



*Dunns Loco (EX SAR GF) working out of Boomlae to Enyati on 27 September 1982.*

*Allen Duff*

## Editorial

“Bookdealers of Rosebank.

The Mews, Oxford Road, Rosebank - 011 442 4089. PO Box 130717, Bryanston, 2021

Guy Friedman wishes to advise those interested in transport, that he has just acquired an extensive collection of rare and unusual books on many aspects of railways, locomotives, ships and British busses.

Their website is at:

<http://www.bookdealers.co.za/pages/branches>

Sandy Buchan has experience of dealing with Bookdealers and recommends them.

Atlantic Rail acquired Class 16DA No. 879, some time ago. It was due to make a test run from Cape Town to Stellenbosch on Sunday 6April.

Transnet have released details of the successful tenderers for their new locos.

### 465 Diesel Locos

233 to be supplied by General Electric SA Technologies

232 to be supplied by CNR Rolling Stock SA (Pty) Ltd

### 599 Electric Locos

? to be supplied by CSR Zhuzhou Electric Locomotive

? to be supplied by Bombardier Transportation SA

994 to be built (assembled?) by Transnet Engineering Koedoespoort, Pretoria and Durban plants.

70 to be built ? (presumably imported).

TE will share approx 16% of the total build programme of which about a third will be outsourced to local emerging engineering and manufacturing firms.

Idea is for TE to transform into an OEM over time.

Build programme will take 3.5 years (peaking at 480 locos pa).

Majority of locos to be deployed in TFR's general freight business (excluding the heavy haul iron ore and coal lines).

About 30,000 SA jobs will be created and preserved.

## **CAPE GOVERNMENT RAILWAY : WITMOS TO DRENNAN**

### **By Allen Duff**

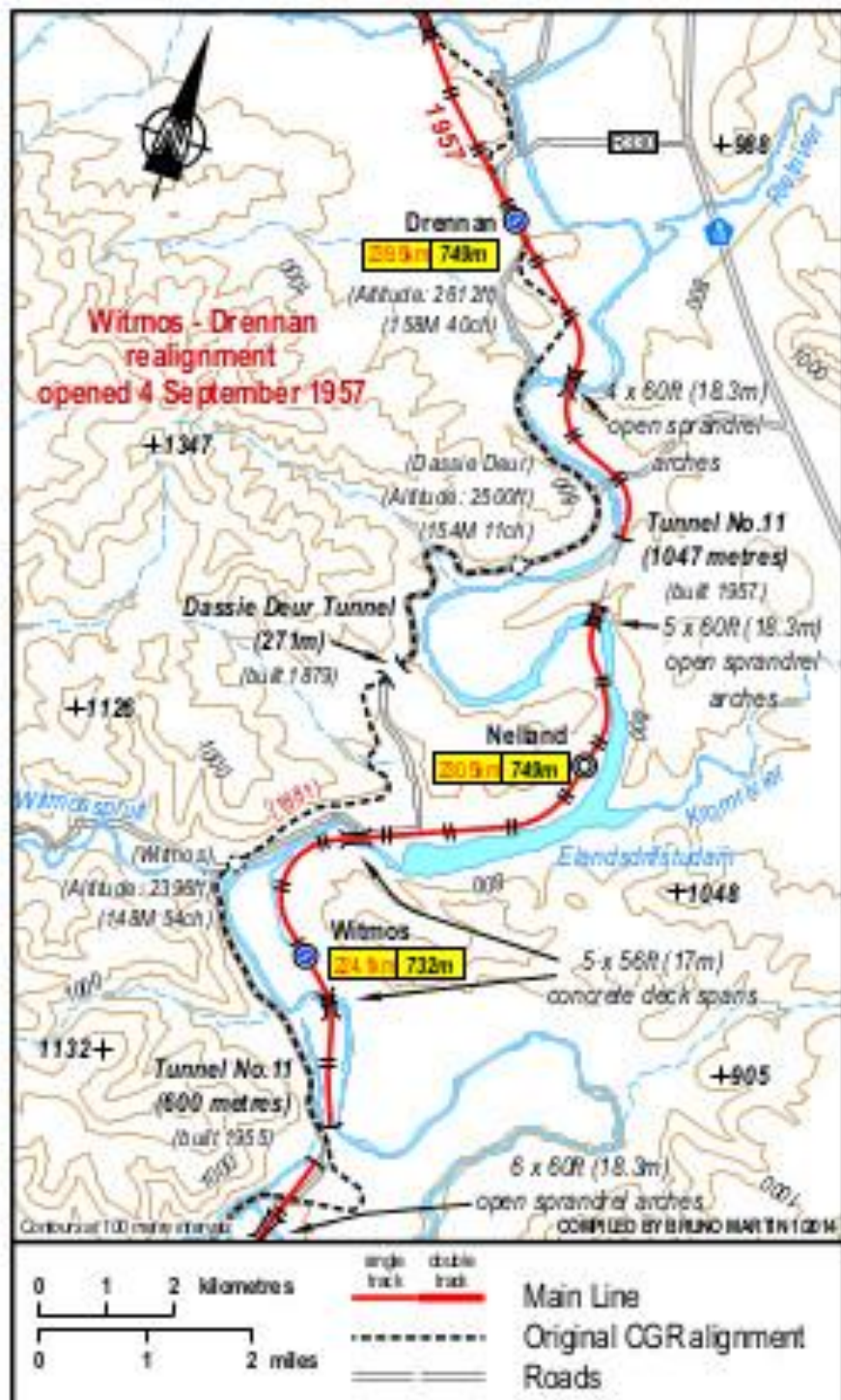
The discovery of diamonds in the north of the Cape Colony in the late 1860s caused the influx of 100 000s of fortune-seekers. This resulted in a demand for huge quantities of provisions and materials which were mostly imported. Ox-wagons being the only transportation from the coast, delivery was slow and restricted. The Cape Colony's new Responsible Government led by Prime Minister John Molteno resolved to construct railways to the interior.

Three systems were planned from the ports of Cape Town, Port Elizabeth and East London into the hinterland. The systems were known as the Western, the Midlands and the Eastern.

The Midlands System started when the Cape Government took over the incomplete line of the Port Elizabeth and Uitenhage Railway Company in 1872. The construction of two railways towards Graaff-Reinet and Grahamstown were then commenced. [For initial differentiation the Graaff-Reinet route was referred to as the Midland Railway and the Grahamstown & Cradock route as the North-Eastern Railway.(1)]

The colony's limited revenue placed financial constraints on the railway's engineering. Bridges, tunnels, deep cuttings and high embankments had to be minimised. The route north from Kommadagga via Cookhouse to Cradock followed the Great Fish River. Any crossing of this river would have necessitated long and high bridges because of potential flooding. Consequently the alignment was restricted to the western side of the Great Fish River - thereby only tributaries had to be bridged. These bridges were economically constructed using stone abutments and pillars and prefabricated flat girder sections imported from the United Kingdom.

By 17.09.1879 the track to Middleton – 109½ miles from Port Elizabeth – had been completed. The opening of this section followed the August 1879 signing of a contract for the completion of the construction of the Cookhouse to Cradock section [by 08.05.1881] (2) between the colonial government and a contractor, Mr Faviell. [Also spelt Farvill.] By this time “the earthwork was almost everywhere broken into, a large number of culverts built, several bridges commenced, and the tunnel at 150th mile well in hand, the upper heading being driven 170 yards, and the main body of the tunnel broken away for a length of 125 yards out of a total length of 300 yards.”(3) In 1879 a correspondent of *The Grahamstown Journal* newspaper traversed the CGR's North-Eastern alignment from Cookhouse (4) to Cradock. This was at the invitation of Mr JA Kendrew the agent in the Cape Colony for Mr WF Faviell. They were accompanied by Mr RT Hall Chief Maintenance Engineer of the North-Eastern and Midland Systems and Mr Howell Traffic Manager. They departed Port Elizabeth by train at 19:30 and arrived at Cookhouse [127½ miles] at 07:00. After breakfast they departed by train at 10:00. They passed through Slagtersnek to Stolkskloof where there was “a very fine bridge of 30 feet span and nearly 70 feet in height above the foundations. It contains nearly 3 000 cubic yards of masonry and is built of very fine stone. This stone is of a bluish colour, and is found in large quantities close by.” After Witmutskloof (later Witmos station) they arrived at the tunnel.



Map of witmos to Drennan.

Bruno Martin

“At 151 miles from Port Elizabeth we come to the *magnum opus* – the work of the line – that is, the tunnel.....the excavation of the tunnel has been taken as a sub-contract by Mr. W Forrest, who has certainly lost no time in pushing on with the work. The length of this tunnel is 300 yards by 16 feet wide, and, when finished and lined with masonry,



will be 19 feet high in the clear. It will be lined throughout with masonry & cement, and is a most substantial piece of work. At present about one-third of it is completed, but the rock is pierced right through, the smallest aperture being seven foot high, through which we scrambled with some difficulty. About 200 men are employed on this work, working night and day in three gangs of eight hours each. All the work is done by candle-light, so that it matters very little whether it is done by night or day.” (5)



*Semi detached platelayers cottage and water reservoir between Dassiedeur and Drennan  
Allen Duff*

“By the end of 1880, the earthworks, bridges, culverts, &c., were almost completed, and the rails had reached the 157th mile, 24 miles from Cradock.” (6) The railway to Cradock was officially opened on 01.06.1881. A newspaper correspondent travelling from Port Elizabeth for the occasion at Cradock reported : “We next gain Witmos station, the first locomotive watering place after Cookhouse, the water being forced by means of a Fulsometer from a well into a large iron tank ..... and at the 152 mile enter the tunnel. The length of this tunnel is 13½ chains. It is lined throughout with 18-in. masonry in cement, the height of the ground above the top of the rock being 80 feet. This is the work of Mr W Forrest, to whom very special praise is due for the first rate excellence to which he has attained in a very difficult undertaking.” (7)

The tunnel today forms part of a secondary road used only by a few locals and 4x4 enthusiasts. This cathedral of early South African tunnel-engineering is still as magnificent as when it was built. One can but marvel that it was carved out of the rock by pick and shovel and black powder – all done by candle-light! The tunnel is a

monument to the vision of the CGR and the endeavours of all who literally had a hand in its construction.

One stands in awe and wonder as one beholds the exactness and harmony of the masonry. In the silence one may hear the shrill whistle of CGR 6th and 7th Class locomotives as they haul their heavy trains into the stygian darkness pierced by their paraffin head-lamps. Their chimneys belching black Welsh-coal smoke, the noise of their motions reverberating off the masonry as trucks and coaches add their contribution to the cacophony of power.

In the silence too one may hear the call of Boer War British officers warning their men in open trucks to shelter beneath their coats to minimise the inhalation of fumes. And finally in one's mind's eye one may see a Class 15F thundering from the tunnel portal with the last train to traverse this route. [03.09.1957] With trains gone forever one may sense the eeriness of the silence which descended on this edifice of man's achievement.

There is more than one tradition regarding the name Dassideur. The 1909 Cape Colony Imperial map for the Cradock area names the station Das en Door, [the name of the farm on which the station is located], but the 1910 timetable refers to Dassiedeur. Contemporary (1878 onwards) newspaper references are to Dassiedeur. Das en Door may have been 3.

corrupted to Dassiedeur. Another tradition says the name comes from the construction men who on breaking through said : "Daar's hy deur" and this was then corrupted to Dassiedeur.

The alignment from Witmos to the southern portal climbs steadily following the contour of the hills. The scenery is not spectacular. However, the climb from Dassiedeur station to the northern tunnel portal affords breath-taking vistas of the valley of the Great Fish River. Twisting through a 180° change of direction, the line crosses a stone arch bridge of glorious proportions. Then a cutting with large boulders trapped in a prehistoric convulsion. Below orange tree orchards, the muddy Fish River and in the distance the new alignment disappears into a cutting and then a tunnel under the large bush-covered hills.

This route was 1 in 40 uncompensated (equivalent to 1 in 34 compensated). The 1957 route is 1 in 80 compensated. The improved gradient eliminated double-heading thereby freeing up five locomotives and crews for transfer elsewhere. On the CGR line the rise was 585 feet and the fall 345 feet : on the 1957 line the rise is 277 feet and the fall is 37 feet. (8)

The CGR's 6th & 7th Classes could each haul 200/250 tons through Dassiedeur Tunnel. One SAR Class 12 could haul 400/440 tons. On the 1957 alignment a Class 15F locomotive could haul 910 tons. (9)

From Dassiedeur to Drennan (10) the alignment was cut into a high, extended kran which hugs the western bank of the Great Fish River. There is another large stone arch bridge. It is similar to the one nearer the tunnel. There is also a stone platelayer's cottage. (11) Though roofless the walls of the cottage are well-preserved. The structure informs the type of accommodation which was built for CGR staff in the 1880s. Perhaps the most interesting feature is the underground brick-plastered water reservoir. As the

reservoir is not built of stone, it is probably of later construction. These cottage reservoirs were no doubt refilled weekly by a special water-tanker train or perhaps the pick-up goods train.



*Cape Archives AG 8085*

*CGR bridge construction in 1879 over the Sundays River a few kilometres east of Graaff-Reinet. This photograph illustrates the engineering used for bridge construction by the CGR in the 1870s & 1880s. Stone abutments and pillars with flat girder sections. It would appear the section was rolled out on I-beams. The section was then jacked up, the I-beams retracted and the section lowered into place. Note in the background the CGR 1st Class locomotive with two trucks of workers and a British-type guards-van (balcony at both ends) on a temporary embankment across the river.*

On Wednesday 05.12.1906 a huge boulder fell from the krans adjacent to the river. The rock bent the inner rail and threw it 18 inches out of parallel. Here the locomotive of 8Up jumped the rails into the cliff-face. The first two coaches telescoped. Mr Leonard of Prospect Farm, Bedford, who was standing on the fore balcony of the second coach was carried by the force of the collision through the lavatories and two compartments. He was trapped in the wreckage of the wooden coaches and had to be sawn out. He had

both thighs fractured. A woman was trapped in a second class compartment. She was jammed against the table by the compressed wall behind her. She had cuts and bruises, but no serious injury. Her husband was shaken but unharmed. Three second class passengers in the compartment closest to the locomotive escaped unhurt.

There was a relief train from Cradock and Cookhouse. The latter brought medical assistance and a breakdown gang. Mr Leonard and the stoker, Mr Alfred Schofield, who sustained bruises, were taken to the Cradock hospital. By that night the line was sufficiently cleared for “the English Mail” to traverse it. (12)

On Wednesday 04 January 1911 boulders – one weighing six tons – fell on to the track just north of the northern portal of the Dassideur tunnel. Fortunately the section’s platelayer was able to stop a train as it emerged from the tunnel. The train ran back to Witmos while a crane and breakdown gang were summoned from Cradock. The obstruction was cleared and the train arrived at Cradock only four hours late. (13)

This route which was used continuously from 1880 to 1957, affords the historian an insightful perspective of railway engineering in the earlier years of the latter half of the 19th century and steam-hauled train operation through the Great Fish River valley.

The Grahamstown Journal reported that “the total cost of this line from Cookhouse to Cradock, including stations, water supply, and everything except the line of telegraph, will be £476 000.” Historian Martin Meredith has computed that £1 about 1900 was 86 times £1 in 2007. Hence the cost of the CGR line in today’s Rand would be about R7bn. (14)

[The grandeur of the area and the awesome construction are best appreciated visually. A series of photos are available by email on request from the writer.]

(1)Cape Archives : CCP Vol. 1/2/1/46 Report on the Progress and Working of the Railways of the Colony during 1878. At first the Cape Colony’s railways were not a separate department, but were administered by the Ministerial Department of Crown Lands and Public Works.

(2)Ibid. Letter : Chief Resident Engineer, Eastern District to the Commissioner Crown Lands and Public Works. 22.02.1881

(3)Cape Archives : CCP Vol. 1/2/1/43 Report on Railways 1879.

(4)Until 1880 government reports refer to “Cookhuis,” but by 1880 the usage has changed to “Cookhouse.” It is surmised that there was a Mr Cook who had a house in the area of the station.

(5)Cory Library, Rhodes University. The Grahamstown Journal 1879.

(6)Ibid. Letter : Chief Resident Engineer, Eastern District to the Commissioner Crown Lands and Public Works. 22.02.1881

(7)The Grahamstown Journal 03.06.1881

(8)South African Railways & Harbours Magazine (SAR&HM) October 1957 p.1007

(9) SAR&HM January 1955 p.31

(10) Drennan was the CGR’s Resident Engineer during the construction.

(11) The CGR station building at Witmos is today a shop. At Dassideur there is a small shed which is a SAR construction. There is also a deserted SAR house.

(12) The Grahamstown Journal 06.12.1906. The train name, “The English Mail,” refers to overseas post for conveyance by Union-Castle ships.

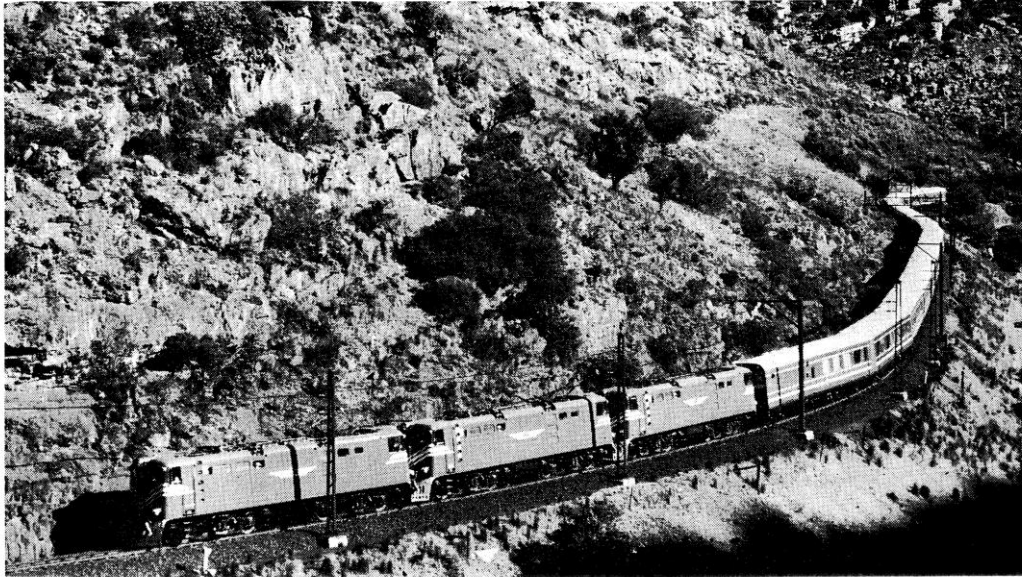
(13) The Grahamstown Journal 04.01.1911

(14) Based on the value of £1 in 1880 being 90 times greater than 2007 and today R16/£1.



Map by courtesy of Bruno Martin, author of "Railway Atlas of South Africa."

Researched and written-up by Allen Duff. January 2014.



Die nuwe Bloutrein op sy kronkelweg na die noorde. Hierdie foto is naby Tulbagh geneem

The new Blue Train on its winding way to the north. This photograph was taken near Tulbagh

## REISGELD

### Reisgeld.

Bloutrein '72 — die enigste trein in Suid-Afrika wat u vier verskillende maniere van reis bied — superluuks, luuks, halfluuks en standaard.

Die enkelreisgeld van Pretoria en Johannesburg na Kaapstad word hieronder aangetoon (retoerreisgeld, dubbel). Besonderhede oor reisgeld vanaf ander stasies op die roete sal met graagte deur enige stasie-meester of afdelingsbestuurder verstrek word.

**Superluuks** — met u eie private badkamer, sitkamer en slaapkamer.

Pretoria—Kaapstad ..... R80,85

Johannesburg—Kaapstad ..... R78,60

**Luuks** — eie badkamer en private toilet.

Pretoria—Kaapstad ..... R64,68

Johannesburg—Kaapstad ..... R62,88

**Halfluuks** — eie stort en private toilet.

Pretoria—Kaapstad ..... R54,98

Johannesburg—Kaapstad ..... R53,45

**Standaard** — gebruik van stort en toilet.

Pretoria—Kaapstad ..... R45,28

Johannesburg—Kaapstad ..... R44,02

### Maaltye.

Volwassenes: Ontbyt ..... R1,20

Middagete ..... R2,20

Aandete ..... R3,00

Kinders: Alle maaltye ..... R1,20

(Onder 10)

Maaltye kan ook privaat in u eie kompartement genuttig word teen 'n diensgeld van R1.

## FARES

### Fares.

Blue Train '72 — the only train in South Africa to offer you no fewer than four different ways to travel — super-luxury, luxury, semi-luxury and standard.

The following are the Pretoria-Johannesburg-Cape Town single fares (return fares, double). Details of fares between other stations en route are available on application to any station master or System Manager's office.

**Super-Luxury** — with your own private bathroom, sitting room and bedroom.

Pretoria-Cape Town ..... R80,85

Johannesburg-Cape Town ..... R78,60

**Luxury** — own bath and private toilet.

Pretoria-Cape Town ..... R64,68

Johannesburg-Cape Town ..... R62,88

**Semi-Luxury** — own shower and private toilet.

Pretoria-Cape Town ..... R54,98

Johannesburg-Cape Town ..... R53,45

**Standard** — use of shower and toilet.

Pretoria-Cape Town ..... R45,28

Johannesburg-Cape Town ..... R44,02

### Meals.

Adults: Breakfast ..... R1,20

Lunch ..... R2,20

Dinner ..... R3,00

Children: All meals ..... R1,20

(Under 10)

Meals can also be enjoyed in the privacy of your compartment at a service charge of R1.

In September 1907 George was connected by rail via Mossel Bay & the New Cape Central Railway (NCCR) to Cape Town. The NCCR operated Mossel Bay/George for the CGR.

No longer did SW Cape residents have to travel by horse & cart to Mossel Bay and then embark on a coastal steamer. In just over a day and a night one could reach the capital of the Cape Colony. This advertisement appeared in the *George & Knysna Herald* in 1908.

Note : £1 at the end/start of the 19<sup>th</sup>/20<sup>th</sup> centuries was worth 86 times more in 2007.

[p. 527 *Diamonds, Gold and War* by Martin Meredith.]

---



Mobile Train Laboratory at Culemborg yard. Does anyone know what this coach was used for? Was it a replacement for a dynamometer car?

Wakky Greig