

Sandstone Heritage Trust South African Railways Class 24 2-8-4, SAR number 3688, North British 26400/1949

3688 was acquired by the Sandstone Heritage Trust in 2016 after it was removed from the Transnet National Collection and earmarked for disposal. As the locomotive was at Bloemfontein and in good condition it made good sense to acquire her to avoid the locomotive being scrapped.



Number 3688 ready for haulage into the running shed. Picture by Lukas Nel.

After the Second World War South African Railways (SAR) still had a large mileage of 45 pounds per yard track and some ageing light axle load locomotives. The result was the 24 Class 2-8-4 with an axle load of just under 12 tons designed by Dr M.M. Loubser, Chief Mechanical Engineer (CME) of the SAR from 1939 to 1949. The locomotives were built by North British Locomotive Company (NBL) of Glasgow, who delivered one hundred of them in 1949 and 1950, numbered from 3601 to 3700.



In a first for South African locomotives, the 24's had cast steel frames integral with the cylinders. These frames and the Buckeye bogies for the tenders were supplied by General Steel Castings of Eddystone, Pennsylvania.

Of the 100 units constructed by NBL, 58 saw service in South West Africa.

Following dieselisation in South West Africa in 1961 the 24's allocated there were returned to South Africa. The 24's are probably best remembered for their service on the George to Knysna branch and "The Outeniqua Choo-Tjoe" tourist train.

Sandstone's example, number 3688 never saw service in South West Africa but we know that she was shedded at Sydenham in Port Elizabeth in 1976 where she would have seen service on the Kirkwood and Alexandra branches. By 1984 she was at Voorbaai and then in 1987 moved to Breyten to work on the Lothair branch.



3688 at Breyten Depot in 1987. Picture by Ken Livermore.

In 1989 she had moved to Kroonstad and had been designated for the National Collection while still an operational locomotive, probably on the Winburg branch, although she was hired to St. Helena mine in Welkom on occasion.

By 1993 3688 was moved to Bloemfontein. She hauled a number of trips on Union Limited tour trains including a mixed for The Southern Cross and Indian Ocean Limited on the Underberg branch in July 1999. Perhaps the last appearance of a steam locomotive on this branch.

Scheduled for an overhaul which did not take place, she was removed from the National Collection and set aside for disposal. Number 3668 being retained in her place at the museum in George.

Following the removal from the National list number 3688 had had all her fittings removed for storage at Voorbaai but they are available and she remains at Bloemfontein awaiting restoration. Recently the locomotive has been thoroughly

cleaned and painted in Bloemfontein with 3688 now in covered storage next to Sandstone's 19D number 2654.



Number 3688 after cleaning and painting at Bloemfontein. Picture by Lukas Nel.



The tender of 3688 is next on the list for painting and cleaning. Picture by Lukas Nel.