



Sandstone's mountain section to be lifted

South Africa has experienced unprecedented rain over most parts of the country over the last 3-months. At Sandstone our annual rainfall is normally about 700mm but at the current rate we will more than double that for this rainy season. This has had severe consequences for agriculture, for roads, and in our case, for the railway line itself.

Our mountain section is, by definition, very vulnerable because huge amounts of water flow off the mountain down into the valley. Unfortunately, our railway stands in its way and the consequential damage is clear to see from the photographs below.



The mountain section at Sandstone has always been extremely tricky. It needs top class drivers to cope with it. The maintenance on the line is very high relative to the number of trips that we do there. As a result, we have decided, for the time being, to lift the panels and to rehabilitate the erosion etc. that has taken place. We have no plans to reinstate the railway line, mostly due to the fact that, as a result of Covid, the potential for our events has been curtailed, and at the present time the roads leading to Sandstone have deteriorated to the point where ordinary passenger vehicles and luxury coaches have difficulty getting to us. We hope that situation will be dealt with in due course.

Finally, and as anticipated, sections of the line are already under threat from scrap thieves. Many of the fishplates have been stolen and that of course makes the line very vulnerable to derailments. So, therefore, from a practical safety standpoint, we are having to limit our train journeys to the balloon at Grootdraai and to the passing loop at the bottom of Vailima.



Some of the many rail joints with missing fish plates on the mountain section.

We hope that the thieves will leave this section of line alone but we are having to patrol it 2-3 times a day to ensure that it does not fall victim to scrap thieves. It is public knowledge that scrap thieves are in the process of destroying the South African National Railway network.



The first track panels of the mountain section are being lifted.



All pictures by Sandstone Heritage Trust.



*Soon to be a memory, double headed NGG16 Garratts on the mountain section.
Picture by David Benn.*