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Sandstone completes loco rescue

Sandstone Steam Trust has completed the major move of locomotives to its base in Ficksburg, an operation sparked by security concerns.

In *NGW* 162 we reported how the Trust had relocated four giant 3ft 6in gauge locomotives from storage in Bloemfontein in August.

Three North British locos built in Glasgow – 4-8-2+2-8-4 GMAM class Garratt no 4114 of 1957, a 2-8-4 class 24 (3688/1949) and a class 11 2-8-2 (929/1904), plus 4-8-2 Krupp 19D class no 2654 of 1939, had spent more than two decades in the former shed as part of the South African Railways reserve museum collection, but had suffered from increasing incidents of vandalism and theft at the site.



SOUTH AFRICA

All four, along with two water tanker wagons, were transported 140 miles to the Sandstone estate in Orange Free State, the Garratt on a 152-wheel multi-axle trailer, and with this move completed in early November the museum set about moving locos it had in store at the former Germiston Steam Depot.

The locos moved included an engine formerly owned by famed UK artist David Shepherd, Class 15F 3052 'Avril', as well as a Class 25NC 3488, GMA/M Garratt 4079 with its auxiliary water tanker, former Rhodesia Railways Class DE2 diesel electric loco no 1207 and ex SAR steam crane number 578.

Specialists Fairlie Projects, Mercor Transport and Munro Transport co-ordinated the operation which required nine heavy haulage rigs – five multi-axle units and four conventional lowbed trailers totalling some 745,500kg.

Adding an extra challenge was the fact that the former Germiston Steam Depot could only be accessed by road through two very narrow and height-restricted tunnels that were originally rail tunnels.

The maximum width of three metres

allowed the trailers through but the height, to the former SAR loading gauge, caused problems as once the stock was loaded onto the trailers it measured five metres in height.

Grading the tunnel floor helped to increase the space available slightly and the stock was able to pass through with a clearance of just 100mm.

The operation also required the depot's original access road, which over several years had become an illegal dumping site and been blocked by rubbish, to be cleared and reopened. The existing access road included a tight 180-degree hairpin bend on a steep slope that the heavy transport vehicles could not negotiate.

Loading of the locomotives began on 2nd November and after they had been loaded the transporters all had to be weighed before beginning the journey to Sandstone, a distance of 400km, under full police escort.

On arrival at Sandstone the locomotives were moved to a new 3ft 6in gauge display area which has been created near the museum's security entrance. While primarily a 2ft gauge operation Sandstone is now home to a 3ft 6in gauge collection totalling 64 items, including 24 steam locomotives.

Top: Heavy transport – the Garratt heads for its new home.

Above left: Clearances in the tunnel were very tight...

Left: 3ft 6in gauge line-up at Sandstone – the loco second from right was formerly owned by artist David Shepherd.

Photos: Sandstone ST/Fairlie Projects