



STARS OF SANDSTONE 2014 SET FOR WORLD CLASS STEAM FESTIVAL 2014

THE annual Stars of Sandstone (SoS) Steam Heritage Festival is taking place from 12 to 21 April 2014. Steam enthusiasts from across the globe will be gathering at Sandstone Estates near Ficksburg in South Africa to celebrate the myriad steam-driven vehicles and machines that have been restored to pristine condition by Wilfred Mole and his team in celebration of the origins of transportation from days gone by.

Military vehicles, trek oxen, old tractors, steam lorries, traction engines, locomotives, old buses and cars will again be taking centre stage with the backdrop of the impressive Eastern Free State landscape and the majestic Maloti Mountains of the Lesotho Highlands in the distance.

Sandstone's world-renowned 26km narrow gauge railway forms the backbone of the world-class event and the distinctive autumn light provides a breathtaking vista ideal for photo opportunities of the vast vintage steam collection. Ever-enthusiastic visitors return to Sandstone from across the globe every year to share this spectacular festival. Old tractors and other agricultural relics in mint condition will also be exhibited at the 2014 festival.

Says Wilfred Mole, director of the Sandstone Estates and its incredible collection of steam-driven and additional vintage machines: "The end of an era of steam-driven transportation should not end with us and our forefathers; we should instil a love of yesteryear in our children and grandchildren so they have a deeper understanding of the history of the high-tech transportation we utilise today. How could we possibly appreciate what we have when we don't understand the history of how it all began?"

"No one would want to miss the magnificent Mark IV Sherman tank in action, immaterial of age," he exclaims with his usual passion for this annual event, which was his brainchild some years ago." Wilf, as he is known by most, has a passion for preserving our heritage, which includes the planting of trees on the impressive estate.

In fact, many visitors register and voluntarily operate specific vehicles as members of Reefsteamers, Friends of the Rail and the Sandstone Heritage Trust. Yes, these people actually pay their fees to register and then come to work as drivers at the festival – talk about love of steam...

In the 90s Sandstone received a telephone call from the Curator of the South African Railways Museum (SARM), requesting the estate store an impressive collection of vintage railway equipment, cars, trucks and tractors pending a decision by the SARM on the future of these machines. Formerly housed at a museum in Midmar near Pietermaritzburg as a joint venture between the Natal Parks Board and the National Railway Authority, the Natal Parks Board decided the preservation of these relics was no longer their core business. They sent a notice to the Railways to remove all equipment.

After a few months, once the long haul of all the equipment was completed and now based at Sandstone, the machines were offered for sale and purchased by Sandstone, which resulted in the 2-ft narrow gauge railway being built on the estate. The trust now works closely with the South African Armour Museum in Bloemfontein.

Sandstone Estates is situated on the farm Hoekfontein, which was acquired by the Mole family in 1994 to be used for mostly recreational purposes and a place to keep Wilfred's vintage tractor collection. Now a Heritage Collection, Sandstone Estates was formed as an agricultural business with specific objectives: that it should be large enough to be viable, self-sufficient and not dependent on service providers.

Today, the farm is an organised and established agri-business with livestock and arable crops including sunflowers, soya beans, maize and wheat, having hosted the SoS galas since 1999, when it was titled *The Great 100 Working*.

TRAVEL & EVENTS DIARY

As stated in the Ficksburg Cherry Festival news: "... Sandstone has an impressive collection of important military vehicles — the result of a joint venture with the Armour Museum at the School of Armour in Bloemfontein. In terms of this, both the Museum and Sandstone would seek out rare military vehicles which were relevant to the various confrontations in the Southern Hemisphere since the Second World War. One of the stars of this collection is undoubtedly the Second World War Mk IV Sherman Tank that makes regular appearances at Sandstone's events. All of this can be seen at the Stars of Sandstone 2014 steam heritage festival to be held from 12 to 21 April 2014."

What type of guest does Sandstone attract during this event? Says Wilf: "Visitors arrive from Europe, Australia, the UK and some from South Africa; we usually host around 1,000 visitors each year. These are people with a love for our non-stop steam, military, agricultural and heritage transportation activities at SoS. We do not have any difficulty attracting enough qualified crew members who are more than happy to pay their registration fees to be part of the gala. The experience on this railway with its tough grades, tight turns, mountain excursion, not to mention the wide selection of locomotives, means it is a 'must do' for many professionally trained crew operators.

"We also have an airstrip on the estate and visitors enjoy the additional entertainment when pilots fly in to attend the festival. In fact, we encourage pilots to do a fly-by on arrival and departure."

A South African first-time visitor to the SoS gala in 2013 says: "I have never experienced anything like this; I've visited steam events in the UK and visited many museums exhibiting such machines but I will be attending all future galas at Sandstone when possible, taking all my friends with me to revel in the vast estate and its amazing 'toys for boys' activities! In fact, I bought a DVD of the event, showed it to my wife and she decided to join me at the festival as she loves the romance of steam from days of old (and she's not old)..."

"During the 2013 event I camped in pristine surroundings on the estate but will now seek hotel or guesthouse accommodation when accompanied by my wife. We may be accompanied by our good friends and their 2 children as the registration price for families is very reasonable. Spending a day or a few at the festival should be a family affair as there is so much to see and experience."

A now regular UK visitor wrote: "We've visited South Africa five times and travelled on the Shongolo Express, Rovos Rail, the Outeniqua Choo Tjoe and are now hooked on the SoS annual festival; we also realised that we needed to register in good time as it is hugely disappointing when the gala is fully booked, which means accommodation and transport to the beautiful estate, complete with 26km narrow-gauge railway track, is also booked up."

The 2013 DVD is now available and view some of the Sandstone action at:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H5Wdx-x1jYO>

For registration and quotes for the Stars of Sandstone gala and accommodation contact Joanne West at joannewest@btinternet.com or Babita Hira at babitah@sandstone.co.za – call +27 11 805 4692/6530 – www.sandstone-estates.com

