

Railway Preservation

By John Batwell

Sandstone Heritage Trust, Eastern Free State

*Sandstone director of operations
Dave Richardson reports:*

April 2-12 in the Eastern Free State reverberated to the sound of steam locomotives at the Stars of Sandstone 2015 heritage event, attended by over 3,000 visitors. While Sandstone is well known for its 610mm gauge railway, the festival also showcased vintage tractors, traction engines, agricultural machinery and classic vehicles, as well as the South African Armour Museum collection of military vehicles and vintage aircraft.



Sandstone Trust's latest locomotive in operation in April 2015 was Orenstein & Koppel (O & K) no 12691. Photo: J A Dulez

The railway has a route length of some 25.6km. The fearsome mountain section to the north of the rail headquarters at Hoekfontein faces steep gradients up to 1:22 profile. Twenty-one different locomotives were steamed during the April gala, with a total of 101 different trains operated. On the 11 April public open day alone, 24 trains ran in a six-hour period.

The centre point of railway operation is Hoekfontein Station, adjoining the main farm complex. With a full programme of non-rail activities throughout the 10 days, most train operations were confined to the Hoekfontein-Mooihoek and Hoekfontein-Grootdraai sections. Passenger trains were run from 08:00 until lunchtime. At 15:30 each day, The Mountain Wanderer, hauled by double-headed ex SAR

class NGG16 Garratts, traversed the entire system - a two-hour journey. On selected evenings, a "Stargazer" train left after dinner at 20:00 for Grootdraai.

Freight trains were run too, with differing consists to exhibit Sandstone's collection of goods wagons. For variety, a few mixed trains were scheduled. For the benefit of photographers, a number of special trains were run at sunrise, employing various consists and locomotives.

Sandstone's vintage 1955 ex-Welkom Municipality Bristol bus accompanied these specials, to move photographers between locations. Added props were provided by Sandstone on request such as tractors and traction engines, as well as classic and military vehicles. Dramatic backgrounds were provided by vintage aircraft.

This year, crews were brought in from both Europe and Australia to work the steam locos. All were certified at Sandstone by a registered South African assessor and authorised to work in this country. A number of trains were crewed entirely by Australian or Belgian visitors. In view of the limited appearance of South African crews this year, Sandstone is considering the introduction of a crew training programme ahead of the 2017 festival, taking account of the safety critical grades defined by the Railway Safety Regulator.

In line with tradition, Sandstone launched a new locomotive at the Stars event. This year it was O&K 0-6-0WT no 12691, rescued in derelict condition from the now defunct Sanrasm site and restored at Sandstone's Bloemfontein facility by Lukas Nel and his team. Built in 1936 for the New Machavie Gold Mining Company Ltd near Klerksdorp, the locomotive, now resplendent in blue livery, was displayed hauling a suitable mine hopper. It was named Montana after one of Sandstone director Wilfred Mole's granddaughters. The locomotive was joined later by the three other O&K locomotives based at Sandstone for a quadruple-header to Grootdraai.

Each morning, different locomotives from the Sandstone stable hauled passenger trains. The afternoon double-header used two of three NGG16 locomotives, nos 153, 113 and 88, with a Garratt kept in steam at all times.

NG15 no 17 saw good service but is restricted to the section to Vailima Siding as its long boiler is prone to priming on the steep mountain section and its long wheelbase is unsuited to the sharp curves. No Sandstone event is complete without an appearance by the gem of the fleet, Lawley 4-4-0 ex Beira Railway no BR7, which ran a photographic special as well as a number of passenger turns. All the depot's operational ex-industrial locomotives were run during the period but special mention should



NGG 16 Garratt no 88 enters Hoekfontein during Sandstone's recent festival. Photo: J Attwell.

be given to Sezela no 3 which was turned out specially to mark the Sezela mill centenary in 2015. Illovo Sugar's general manager was present at the event.

The programme on 11 April, the public Open Day, included the military parade by SA Armour, aircraft flypasts and two military-style trains, one hauled by "Feldbahn" no 498 (ex-Sena Sugar) and a lengthier consist hauled by NGG16 no 88.

On the final day, O&K no 12691 was teamed with Avonside no 1624 Xanthe, also ex Sanrasm, as a tribute to master engine restorer, Lukas Nel.

There is to be no Stars of Sandstone event in 2016. A number of infrastructure changes are to be made to cater for a larger number of visitors. The 2017 festival is to feature the oldest surviving Garratt locomotive in South Africa, class NGG11 no 52. Acquired in extremely poor condition, it is currently under restoration with Lukas Nel in Bloemfontein. No 52 will be joined by the last of the two ex-Angolan sugar estate locomotives which came to Sandstone in 2003, O&K nos 11112 and 12140.

Stars of Sandstone 2017 is to take place from 30 March to 7 April 2017, with an additional public Open Day on 8 April.

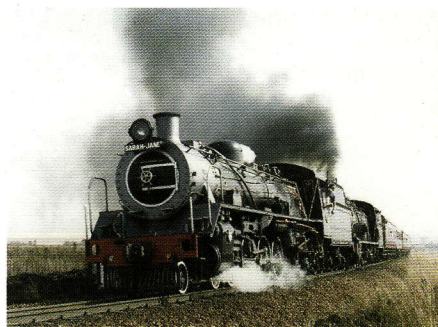
Class 14R no 1745 to be scrapped

Sandstone Heritage Trust has advised the intention to scrap its class 14R locomotive no 1745, currently stored in Germiston, following extensive consultation with fellow preservationists. While with previous owner Natal Cambrian Collieries, the middle two driving wheelsets had their flanges removed, a modification that disqualifies its running on Transnet lines.

"In fact it cannot be moved by rail from Germiston at all without two new wheelsets. In addition it is devoid of all nonferrous fittings and is badly rusted. The tender would need replacing and extensive work - on the boiler for example - would be required, were it to be put back to working order." To do

so would cost at least R5 million, according to estimates, and there are in fact two examples of the class in private preservation in KwaZulu-Natal. The Trust considers that R5 million would be better spent preserving and rebuilding other more important locomotives.

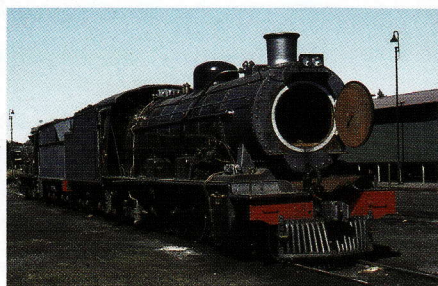
Although Sandstone's emphasis is primarily on 610mm gauge, it does own a number of 1,067mm gauge locomotives. Of these, class GMAM Garratt no 4079 - the first locomotive ever acquired by Sandstone - is at Germiston in the care of Reefsteamers, in working order bar a requirement that all wheelsets be reprofiled before it may operate on the national rail network. There are many examples, particularly in the UK, where one locomotive's sacrifice has enabled another to be reborn. The funds raised by the scrapping of no 1745 could assist in the return of no 4079 to main-line operation.



Class 19D no 3322 Sarah-Jane - named after Ian Pretorius' daughter - is a likely candidate for use on the 26km Wolseley-Ceres-Prince Alfred Hamlet line. Photo: J Batwell.

Atlantic Rail, Cape Town

In line with its appointment by the new Ceres Railway Company to operate the scenic 26km Wolseley-Ceres-Prince Alfred Hamlet line, Atlantic Rail is looking to move class 19Ds and a class 19B to Cape Town from Voorbaai.



Class 14R 4-8-2 no 1745 at Millsite depot, Krugersdorp, in 1981. Photo: J Batwell collection

Rovos Rail, Pretoria

Class 6A 4-6-0 no 439 is regularly lit up at Rovos Rail's Pretoria depot for use on shunts, for steam pictures on the front of a trainset, as well as for charters in the Pretoria environs.

Enthusiasts visit Botswana for steam

Bamangwato Concessions Ltd (BCL) played host during May to a party of enthusiasts keen to photograph the 19Ds - one of the last bastions of industrial steam on the continent. Meanwhile the dumped ex-Zimbabwe class 14A Garratts serve as a reminder of the mine's temporary venture into Garratt traction.



Enthusiasts visiting Bamangwato Concessions Ltd (BCL) in Botswana during May 2015 saw class 19D 4-8-2 locos 807 and 813. Photo: A McCarthy.

Photographic tour to Zimbabwe

During May, the National Railways of Zimbabwe (NRZ) scheduled two Garratts - class 15 4-6-4 + 4-6-4 no 414 and class 14A 2-6-2 + 2-6-2 no 519 - for the British-based tour operator Geoff's Trains. On this occasion, Bulawayo's steam depot was not able to provide a class 16A Garratt, to represent a third type of motive power.



Geoff's Trains May 2015 tour: National Railways of Zimbabwe class 14A 2-6-2 + 2-6-2 no 519. Photo: G E Cooke