NARROW GAUGE WORLD

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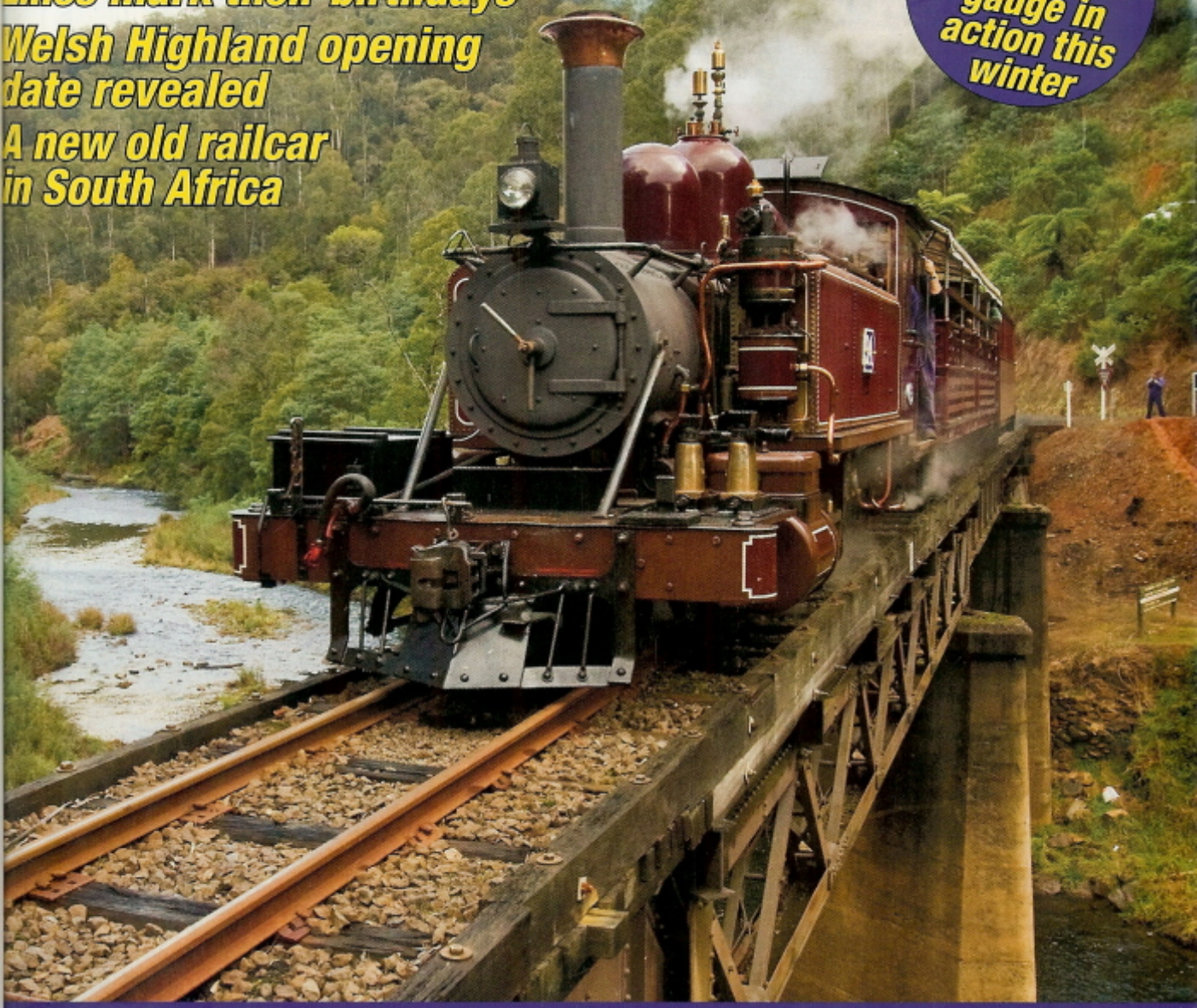
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We'll take the car...

The Sandstone Estates Railway in South Africa has recently put into service a historic but also very useful track inspection vehicle. Estates Director *Wilfred Mole* describes the history of the BSA Railcar





Many years ago a black & white photograph, which has since unfortunately been mislaid, came into our possession and showed a British built railcar dating back to Edwardian times being used by the resident British High Commissioner in Uganda as his official hunting vehicle. It appears that he had a railway siding adjacent to his house and over weekends he would invite a few friends, take some guns and ammunition, and go and shoot elephants from the line.

The car itself was of unknown make but very closely resembled the BSA. After a considerable amount of research and working with the National Motor Museum at Beaulieu in England we decided it was a BSA motor vehicle which had been suitably modified and fitted to a narrow gauge railcar chassis.

Our search began and eventually we located a 1910 BSA motor car more or less complete but in pieces in the suburbs of Harare, Zimbabwe. After some difficult negotiations we eventually acquired most of the parts although the owner elected to keep the lamps and various other items.

In the meantime we had come across the remains of a railcar chassis which had been abandoned in the veld not far from Millsite near Krugersdorp. It appears that a large number of ex-museum artefacts from the Johannesburg Railway Museum had been stored in railway trucks and then parked on an abandoned siding. Unfortunately vandals and thieves quickly discovered the treasure trove and broke open the containers scattering the contents far and wide. The chassis that we found comprised the wheels and springs but there was no drive gear.

"After some difficult negotiations we eventually acquired most of the parts..."

As a result of a number of years of close cooperation between the Sandstone Heritage Trust's steam workshops at Hoekfontein and the modern farming workshops a project was created where slowly but surely the chassis and what items from the car had been saved were meticulously pieced together in order to produce this Edwardian railcar. Although the original BSA petrol engine is in Sandstone's possession and in good order it was decided that for practical purposes a diesel engine was required, and as a result a 2-litre Toyota diesel engine was fitted which works admirably.

Desmond Clarke used a rear power takeoff unit from a Massey Ferguson tractor to transmit power from the Toyota engine and gearbox to the chain drive mechanism on the rear axle which drives the railcar.

They often say in preservation circles; "If it looks good it is good". We think it is good. It is very comfortable on the line in any of the top gears. However, it does have an inclination to speed and so the best way of operating it is to put it into third gear, fix the hand throttle, and sit back and relax!

Heading shot overleaf: Elbe Rothman is 16 years old, the BSA railcar she is pictured with a mere 110...

Lower shot overleaf: The completed railcar ready for duty.

Above: Elbe Rothman with Wilfred Mole, Director of the Sandstone Estates, out on the line.

Right: The BSA railcar earlier this year still very much in the rebuild stage.





What is the Sandstone Heritage Trust?

■ Some readers may have heard of Sandstone but not be aware of what it is all about. The Sandstone Heritage Trust is a private preservation initiative established in the 1990s on a commercial farm in the Eastern Free State in South Africa. The Trust extends way beyond the narrow gauge railway, to military vehicles, agricultural traction engines, buses, cars and ox wagons with oxen. The Trust is particularly proud of its collection of vintage tractors which still work the farm.

Narrow gauge railways came to Sandstone in 1997 when the closure of the Midmar Museum put several narrow gauge assets and a railway line onto the market. Sandstone successfully bid for them and acquired enough components to create a small narrow gauge railway, including an NGG16 Garratt similar to those now on the Welsh Highland Railway. The closure of the Majestic Highlands water scheme in Lesotho enabled large amounts of rail and other materials to be acquired.

Recognising that there was no one in particular in South Africa encouraging the purchase, transport and restoration of 2-ft narrow gauge assets of historical interest, Sandstone took on the challenge and the collection as it stands today was established. It has since grown and for example now includes more than a dozen 3ft 6in gauge steam locomotives.

In the late 1990s the former steam running shed at Bloemfontein became available for rent and Sandstone established a steam locomotive rebuild facility in the building. Retaining many original fitters, the Trust has rebuilt more than 15 locomotives some from very poor condition.

Full information on the Trust, its narrow gauge collection and other preserved items, and details for those wishing to visit, can be found on the extensive website at http://www.sandstone-estates.com/





Above: Winter at Sandstone Estates in the Eastern Free State. The team of Afrikaner oxen returning from a day's work get right of way at the level crossing.

Right: From the passenger seat. Running Shed Manager Gert Jubileus (left) and Elbe Rothman enjoy the winter landscape while carrying out a routine line inspection.

Right: Sandstone's policy of using everything that is restored sees the railcar regularly used for farm inspections, to check crop status and the like. It is quick, economical, and convenient. Gert Jubileus stands with Desmond Clarke, Arable Manager.

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