

STOP PRESS

SOUTH AFRICA NATIONAL RAILWAY & STEAM MUSEUM

By Howard Johnston

Scrap thieves destroy 25 engines in national museum

METAL thieves are running uncontrolled through a railway museum and scrapping 25 locomotives - many of them British-built and more than 100 years old - under the eyes of an apathetic management unwilling or unable to stop them.

While cheeky raiders are gas-axing engines' main frames to get at valuable bearings, calls for government and police intervention have gone unheeded.

The priceless exhibits are being smashed up at the South Africa National Railway & Steam Museum (SANRASM) storage centre at

Chamdor near Krugersthorpe, east of Johannesburg. It is supposed to be a joint development between the government and transport authority Transnet.

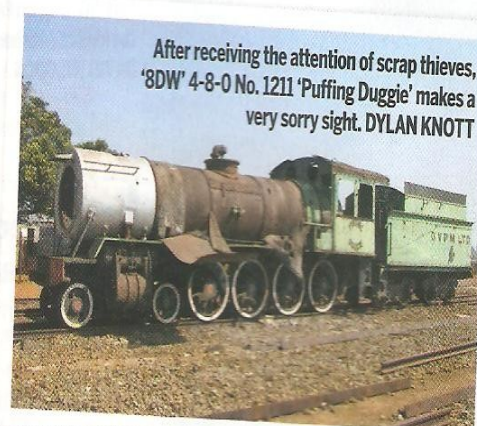
The location, which is a former mining site, is too dangerous for tourists to visit because it is unfenced and next to a squatter camp. Plundered at first by casual thieves, it is now regularly invaded by teams with heavy equipment and cutting gear, who have been so thorough in their destruction that they have even lifted the rails and sleepers that the engines have been standing on.

Stunned by a visit at the beginning of September, photographer Derek Walker said: "I was horrified to see the wholesale destruction happening there. I was shocked... this collection is finished, as there is nothing left of historical significance that could ever be saved. They were even doing it while I was present."

Another visitor, Jim Barrow, added: "It is like the UK's National Railway Museum opening up its yard at York, and allowing men with lorries and gas torches to break up everything they can lay their hands on while the staff sit and drink tea."

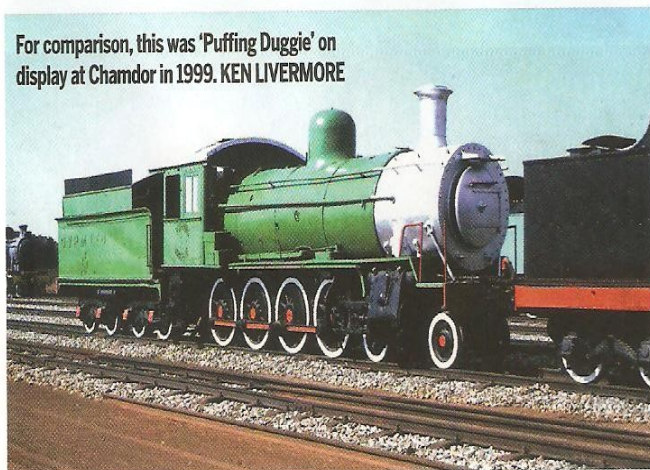
While engines stored at Barry scrapyards took more than 25 years to deteriorate, the Chamdor collection has gone from eminently restorable condition to wrecks in just three years. Drawing up a full list of engines affected has proved difficult, but many are products of the North British Locomotive Company of Glasgow and its constituents, and are believed to include the following:

'A' 4-8-2T No. 115, 'H2' 4-10-2T No. 264, 'J' 4-6-4T No. 341, 'S' 0-8-0 No. 372, 'S1' 0-8-0 No. 374, '19AR' 4-8-2 No. 678, '7A' 4-8-0 No. 990, '7C' 4-8-0 No. 1059, '8DW' 4-8-0 No. 1211, '19BR' 4-8-2 No. 1410, '19B' 4-8-2 No. 1411, '12R' 4-8-2 No. 1517, '14R' 4-8-2s Nos. 1589 and 1711, '14' 4-8-2 No. 1750, 'S2' 0-8-0 No. 3789, plus numerous other industrial tanks.



Above: The damage inflicted by the thieves is enough to make any steam enthusiast shudder. DYLAN KNOTT

For comparison, this was 'Puffing Duggie' on display at Chamdor in 1999. KEN LIVERMORE



Register your protest

SANRASM has been offered help by many organisations and museums, but refuses to accept the help and simply watches the locomotives be cut up by thieves.

Steam Railway readers can register their personal protest by emailing museum curator Lawrence Posniak at lawrence.posniak@mntloaded.co.za