



The Angolan locos-a rescue mission.

As Sandstone approaches its 30th birthday in 2026, it is a good time to look back on the achievements in the railway arena of the last three decades. Top of the list must be Angola as it was still a most hostile environment at the time of Sandstone's visit in 2003. As with most of Southern Africa, steam traction had diminished to almost zero but Angola, after a punishing civil war, was not expected to reveal much. How wrong we were! In fact, in the whole of Southern Africa, steam traction lingered on beyond the rest of the world and mass disposals did not take place. The result was pockets of old steam locos just abandoned and Angola was no exception. To this day main line locomotives still lie in the Angolan bush. In the industrial area Angola's sugar industry railway systems were run on steam with many survivors. The bush war closed many operations and in one day or so they just stopped functioning along with all their equipment. Although the war destroyed much of the infrastructure, a great deal was left where it stopped on the day the bullets started flying. This created a steam railway treasure trove as very little of Angola's industrial railways had moved on from steam traction. Even the main line system clung on to steam for a long time until reconstruction and Aid Programmes brought relief.

The Dombe Grande Estate, 600kms north of Luanda, was one of the first locations visited. It had a number of locomotives from various manufacturers, one of which was spotted in a Benguela scrapyard as late as 1974. However, the jewel was Decauville 0-4-0T Number 302 from 1899 which had survived as it had been placed in a museum at the Estate around 1930. During the conflict the roof of the building collapsed on to the loco and this, plus the danger of landmines, kept the loco away from prying eyes. Although suffering some damage many of the fittings remained. The works plate and name plate had, however, disappeared. An offer was made to the mill to purchase the loco.

Nevertheless, it took two years of negotiation to purchase the locomotive. Being in the southern part of Angola it was decided to transport it by road via Namibia where after it duly arrived in Johannesburg in August 2004. Initial restoration work was carried out in Pretoria but then the locomotive was transferred to Bloemfontein for completion. In what is probably a world record for loco restoration, Lukas Nel and his team returned number 302 to steam in just under four months.



Number 302 on arrival in South Africa



The Decauville out for a run after restoration.

The O&K's from Fazenda Tentativa, Caxito

Four locomotives, from an original five, form the final part of those discovered in Angola during the Sandstone visit of 2003 that have been shipped to South Africa. Serving the once thriving sugar industry of the Portuguese colony where the gauge was generally 600mm, the Fazenda Tentativa estate in Caxito was built to 500mm so these locos were not compatible with the Sandstone system. However, many of these small tank units were built to a variety of gauges and had their wheels keyed to the driving axles and could be easily converted to 600mm. The area was the scene of much guerrilla warfare and was riddled (and still is) with landmines. While being a curse on agricultural development in the area until finally cleared, the landmines protected the locos from vandalism.

As with the other locos from Angola, they were found in very poor and run down condition. Research from the O&K records indicates that the following 500mm units were delivered to Companhia do Assucar in Angola, the company fleet numbers (where known) follow the delivery dates:

O&K 10311/1922 10hp 0-4-0T shipped August 1922 Number 4

O&K 11112/1925 30hp 0-6-0WT shipped September 1925 Number 5

O&K 12140/1930 30hp 0-6-0WT shipped April 1930 Number 6

O&K 12493/1934 30hp 0-6-0WT shipped April 1934.

O&K 12536/1934 10hp 0-4-0T shipped August 1934.

It would appear, however, by Sandstone's visit in 2003 that 12536 and a spare boiler, No 12511, had been scrapped. The first four were acquired and transported to South Africa. On first examination 10311 was believed to be 12536 but this was discounted after extensive examination of the (few) remaining components.

One of the three well tank 0-6-0's, No 12493, was restored almost as a test run to see what could be achieved by Lukas Nel and his team after an enquiry to purchase one of the 30hp locos, in original 500mm gauge, from the Feldbahn Museum in Nuremberg, Germany. They operate a 500mm gauge line. With no known 500mm gauge O&K operational in the world, 12493 was chosen as its

particular axles did not allow the usual conversion to 600mm gauge as with the other three. After extensive boiler repairs and a new cab and motion the locomotive was steamed in 2011 for representatives of the museum at Bloemfontein and then shipped to Germany where it has been operating successfully ever since.

O&K 10311/1922

The second of the batch of four to be restored and, as with all the locomotives from the estate, the boiler was in poor condition with repairs and new components needed, in this case, the firebox, boiler and tube plates. Extensive repairs were also required to the cab, motion and cylinders, she was then converted to 600mm gauge. The locomotive was launched in to service in April 2011 and named “Jessica”.



10311 arrives in Bloemfontein



10311 fresh from overhaul

O&K 11112/1925

The third loco to be taken in for restoration, 11112 was restored alongside 12140 as the basic issues of each locomotive were the same. In reality there was very little to work with.

Originally delivered in September 1925 to Fazenda Tentativa, it was their Number 5 and was last reported in service in 1969. Having been left in the African bush for many years the loco's condition was believed to deem it beyond repair. However, it was decided to attempt a restoration which commenced in 2010. The cab and tanks had to be remade, and all the boiler mountings and fittings have been fabricated from scratch. The damaged frames were straightened and the cylinders rebored. The boiler was repaired to such an extent that it is effectively new and the locomotive reassembled.

It has been painted in a bright yellow colour which highlights the black boiler and frames, while coincidental, Stevenson's "Rocket" locomotive of 1829 was also painted a bright yellow. It was placed in service at Sandstone in February 2016.

The locomotive has also been named "Ermyntrude" after a Queen of the Valkyries who was a particular lover of children. Being a small locomotive "Ermyntrude" will be used frequently on children's trains at Sandstone.



11112 after arrival in South Africa



11112 after restoration

O&K 12140/1930

Alongside Number 11112, the chassis has been given a total restoration by Sandstone and converted to 600mm gauge by Lukas Nel and his team in Bloemfontein. The boiler has had a totally rebuilt firebox, with new tubes and tube plates fitted at Keith Steven's workshop in Howick. The locomotive has now been fitted with a newly fabricated cab, smokebox and all the internal steam pipes have been remade.



12140 on arrival, clearly marked No,6

The locomotive steamed for the first time in August 2015 and was then painted in an attractive green colour and named “Anna”, in honour of Lukas Nel’s wife who has contributed massively to the restorations done by Lukas and the Bloemfontein team since 2003. The loco was moved to Sandstone in early 2016 and entered service in February alongside number 11112. As with “Ermyntrude”, “Anna” will be used mostly on Seb’s Railway at Sandstone.



12140 on her steam test

The Angolan Collection represents one of the finest rescues of Angolan locos and will be admired for years to come.