



Friends of the Choo-Tjoe

The Loop

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NEWSLETTER NUMBER 9 - APRIL 2013

Well Easter is over, and a pretty dismal one it was, in the Outeniqua region anyway.

We held our 2nd AGM at Sedgefield on the 19th March and a report on what took place is included in this newsletter. After the general business of the meeting, members heard a report on the activities of the Dutch Delegation presented by member Jan Burger. The Dutch Delegation (DD) had a meeting with Transnet in Johannesburg. Transnet had put together a presentation on the problems of reopening branch lines throughout the country, but there was a will to provide more freight for the core lines from viable branch lines. Our line was one that was being looked at. DD then put forward their ideas and at the end of the meeting, felt that some progress had been made.

One thing that did come across was that Transnet do not like our petition or all the letters that have been written. They seem to view this as hostility which could not be further from the truth. It is intended merely to show just how much support there is for the reopening of the line. We have been asked if we would be the "single point of contact". We would be happy to take on this role if a clear understanding is forthcoming about an open exchange of views and information. Time will tell.

Julie Jenkins

MEMBERSHIP

Can I remind those members who have not renewed that the cut off date for 2013 is the 1st May. A renewal form is attached and this should be completed and returned to the address below. For those on the mailing list who are not yet members, but who would like to join, a membership form is attached. Your continued membership is appreciated.

Colin Jenkins(membership)

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Website

Our new look website is up and running and pictures have been added to the gallery. The site is work in progress and now that this has been migrated to the WordPress platform it is capable of easy update by the *'technologically challenged'*. If you have any comments or suggestions which will improve our site, drop us a mail at friendsofthechoo@telkomsa.net

The conversion has been carried out by Karen Leigh Designs and we are most grateful and appreciative of her assistance. As with all our supporters and sponsors if you have any need for design services speak to Karen on 082 559 8651, have a look at her website.

<http://www.karenleighdesigns.co.za>

Allan Waterston

Minutes of the 2nd Annual General Meeting of the Friends of the Choo-Tjoe (FOCT) held at the Municipal Library Hall, Sedgefield, on 19 March 2013 at 16:00

- 1 Welcome:
Fraser Howell, Chairman of the *Friends of the Choo-Tjoe*, welcomed all to the meeting. Fraser requested that items 6 and 7 of the Agenda be dealt with in reverse order.
- 2 Attendance:
As per the attached attendance register. As per the attendance register, 18 members were present.
Apologies:
Bernd Rohloff, Murray Douglas, John Potter, John Hawkes, Geoff Hall, Ina Engelbrecht, Andrew Stevens, Dave Jones, Gill Wolf, Rita Wiid and Gillian Burgess.
Proxies Received in favour of the Chairman:
Hardus Mynhardt and Les Smith.
- 3 Minutes of the 1st AGM:
The minutes were taken as read. Proposed: Colin Jenkins. Seconded: John Webb.
- 4 Matters Arising:
There were no matters arising from the minutes of the 1st AGM.
- 5 Treasurer's Report and Financial Statements:
The Treasurer, Allan Waterston, circulated a number of copies of the accounts to members. Allan stated that the finances of the *'Friends'* were in a satisfactory position and for that reason, no specific fund-raising efforts had been made. The trolley was now operational and on display at the Waterfront. However, expenses in respect of permits and fees to the Rail Safety Regulator (RSR) and Transnet for the proposed operation of the trolley between Knysna and Brenton/Belvedere may arise in future.
There were no questions from the floor.
A copy of the Treasurer's report is attached.
- 6 Chairman's Report:
Fraser Howell read his report to members. Thereafter Fraser invited questions/statements from the floor. (A copy of the report is attached as **Addendum 1** to the minutes of the meeting.)
 - a. Had there been any contact with outside organisations and potential investors? Fraser responded that it was too early to talk to potential investors since it would seem that Transnet were not averse to re-opening the line themselves if sufficient business (freight and eventually passenger traffic) could be sourced to make the line a paying proposition. Regarding the non-operation over the Montagu Pass of the George Power Van over the Christmas holiday period, it was confirmed that the Van had temporarily operated on the George to Mossel Bay line over that period.

b. Selwyn Reed said that the *Friends* should contact a strategist (Mr Louw) at Transnet and talk to Reefsteamers for guidance to plan the way forward.

c. Jan Burger was invited to update the meeting on his participation at the recent Transnet meeting with the Dutch Group and how their involvement had occurred. Jan said that the Dutch initiative had the support of Karel Bos who sponsored the visits of Jaap Nieweg and Arnold van den Horst to South Africa in February 2012 to evaluate all aspects of the costs involved in resurrecting the George/Knysna (G/K) railway line. Jaap published a comprehensive report in May 2012 and sent a copy to the CEO of Transnet, Mr Molefe. For some months thereafter, no response from Transnet was forthcoming. However, towards the end of 2012, contact was made with Mr Albert Links, head of the Transnet Branch Line department of Transnet Freight Rail (TFR) responsible to promoting freight on all branch lines in the country. Mr Links confirmed that if there were sufficient business opportunities for a re-opened G/K line, Transnet would consider this provided a business plan could demonstrate the line was economically viable and sustainable over the long term - also that safety would have to be of very high concern. Freight was deemed the highest priority as freight could be fed to the mainlines.

The RSR had a prohibition notice out for the whole G/K line dated Jan2008 which was reconfirmed in July2012

Transnet had been inundated by multiple correspondence regarding the re-introduction of the Outeniqua Choo-Tjoe and the re-opening of the line but no organisation had offered to invest any money in such a project. Transnet wanted a single point of contact with regard to any correspondence/contact with themselves and had proposed that FOCT undertake this task. For more railway-related matters, Transnet wanted to work with the Dutch Group (which the Dutch Group had agreed to do) – which in effect, meant that FOCT and the Dutch Group would need to co-operate more closely. For FOCT this means being a single point of contact (with more communication) with TFR resulting in fewer actions against Transnet by the general public as a whole (as Mr Molefe wanted to stop all the correspondence directed at himself). Jan confirmed that Transnet do not like petitions which they view as direct pressure not conducive to the project. (Comment from a member: do not put the petition in the trash-can as it might still be very useful.)

Regarding a business plan, Jan said further work was needed to determine income from freight (and ticket) sales. To this, the economic impact for the region must be added after consultation with stakeholders and other relevant organisations – a task which needs to be carried out by a highly experienced/qualified person. Only after this study has been completed, will the financial consequences be known. The establishment of a foundation for financing by all stakeholders and financial institutions, together with Transnet may be an interesting option.

7 Progress Report:

Fraser commented that all the sub-items under Agenda Item 7 had been dealt with under the Treasurer's and Chairman's Reports and proposed that the meeting proceeds to Item 8 on the Agenda.

8 Election of a management committee for 2013:

Fraser said the committee needed additional members and requested proposal from the floor for a new committee – especially for the portfolio of marketing/publicity. Jan Burger was proposed but Jan declined as being too involved with the activities of Dutch Group of which he is a member. There being no other responses, a members proposed that the present committee be re-elected. Proposed: George Freeburn. Seconded: Jan Burger. Fraser commented that any member who would like to volunteer for any specific task on the committee would be most welcome.

9 Other Business:

a. On a question regarding the lobbying of the cycle association to convert the G/K rail reserve into a cycle way, Fraser responded that Transnet would not accede to any such demand or request – which was confirmed by Jan Burger. Colin Jenkins had responded to most of the letters in the press from the cycle association

b. Comment: It appears that most people are in the dark about efforts by FOCT in getting the line re-opened. The public needs to be informed and updated to what is happening. Fraser said that very little information is forthcoming from Transnet and highlighted again the many actions that had been undertaken which had been addressed in his Report. Fraser concluded by agreeing that there was a definite need for FOCT to more regularly communicate with the public

c. Comment: FOCT should try for the re-opening of a short section of the line. Fraser: As the priority by TFR was for freight on the line, there was not much point in trying to get a short section of the line operational – except in the short term for the operation of the trolley, if authority could be obtained.

d. Jan Burger stated that the Dutch Group were instrumental in getting communication with and by TFR going. Fraser responded that the single-point-of-contact proposal will be investigated regarding what is expected of FOCT and how the relationship with TFR will practicably work

e. Comment: Government sees petitions as dissent and therefore, the view of Transnet on the FOCT petition is understandable

f. Allan summarised the actions that need to take place to get the trolley running on a short section of the line and what had been done thus far, namely:

- a 'permission in principle' request to Transnet had been sent, but no response had yet been received
- if a favourable response is received from Transnet, RSR testing and safety permits need to be obtained.

A member reminded the committee that the public should be informed of progress when and if this occurs. Fraser said that the withdrawal by the RSR of the operating licence of Transnet was a setback for passenger services but for the operation of the trolley, this obstacle could quite possibly be overcome.

10 Closure:

In closing Mike Barber thanked and commended the committee for their fortitude. Fraser closed the meeting at 17:25.

Addendum 1: Chairman Fraser Howell's Report.

Welcome everyone to this, our second, Annual General Meeting of *Friends of the Choo-Tjoe*.

Firstly, I wish to mention some of the progress we have made this past year towards our goal of seeing the George to Knysna railway line reopened and operating heritage steam trains. You will remember that at our last AGM the meeting was addressed by Mr Alan McVitty (AMcV) who informed us of some of the problems that he had experienced with Transnet. This situation culminated in Alan sending the *Friends* an open letter regarding his frustrations with the Authorities together with some details of his business plan and costs of repairing the damaged line. The difficulties in trying to engage with the various 'Authorities' (such as Provincial Government of Western Cape (PGWC), Ministry of Tourism, Ministry of Planning in the Office of the President, etc), do not appear to have diminished this past year, although there has been some slight positive movement in discussions with Transnet these past 6 months.

After receiving the AMcV letter in April FOCT started to correspond directly with Transnet about the reopening of the line but correspondence was mainly from us to them and little progress was made. Each of the replies received from Transnet Group Chief Executive, Mr Brian Molefe, has centred on his stipulation that FOCT must state how we intend to raise R250m. He is aware, of course, that potential investors would not consider putting money into a scheme which promises little security of that investment. We believe that should Transnet wish to have complete control of the line they must be the sole investor. If, however, an injection of private money is required to make the repairs then suitable safeguards for all contributing parties need to be put in place; for example, the line assets should be placed in a Trust or similar financial vehicle with Trustees formed from the contributing parties.

We have also spoken about the need to obtain an independent engineering survey in order to be able to properly make assessments of costs of repairs and reinstatement of the line. A request was made to PGWC to help with the costs of such a survey but this was refused. Received offers of technical help from Members and others regarding the engineering survey are in hand but we may still need to obtain other specialised help regarding some of the problems on the line.

You may remember that in February last year we met with a Dutch Group, which included two of our members, Jan Burger and Karel Bos. This group has also been trying to engage with Transnet and finally managed to secure a meeting with them on 26 February 2013 in Johannesburg. Jan Burger and Jaap Nieweg (members of the Dutch Group) travelled to George on 28 February to give the FOCT committee an update on the meeting with Transnet. The Dutch Group said that the impression conveyed to them by Transnet was generally positive; they had been well received and there was hope for the future! A report from Jaap Nieweg on this meeting has been received. We acknowledge and appreciate all the effort that Jaap, Jan and Karel are contributing to ensure the George to Knysna line sees trains once again.

Knysna Municipality have kindly allowed us to utilise a rail connected under cover space at the Knysna Waste by Rail site. Garden Route Steel Works made a very generous offer to supply and erect a gate to make this space more secure for which we are extremely grateful. We have recently concreted beneath this gate (aggregates kindly sponsored by Den-Ron Ready Mixed Concrete) in order to prevent unwanted entry into our area. We are presently storing the pump trolley at this location.

Our biggest achievement during this current year has been, arguably, the completion of our Wickham trolley and its transport to the Waterfront car park by kind permission of Sheldon Meese. We owe Ron Hollis of Bodge Engineering a special vote of thanks for allowing us the use of workshop space alongside some very expensive and exotic motorcars! It wasn't just the space that Ron so very generously supplied but it was also his help with tools and expertise that we sometimes needed. Many thanks Ron!

Our old friends Ricky, Marck and Gavin Cooper of Knysna Motor Strippers again came to our aid to efficiently move the trolley from Ron's workshop in the Industrial Area to the Waterfront. The machine was loaded, transported and offloaded in under 45 minutes! After the delivery of the trolley to the Waterfront we continued with a 'snag list' of items to be attended to which included work to the windscreen wipers, seals to the doors, fitting of a manual choke to the engine, etc, etc. These snag items are largely complete.

During October we again attended the Leisure Isle Festival. The weather was foul on the first day but the Sunday was much better. We talked to many people at the event and attracted interest, collected signatures for the petition and enrolled some new Members and donations!

In October an urgent call was received by us to attend an impromptu meeting with two Transnet staff from the Branch Lines Department. Because of little notice I was the only Committee Member able to attend. We met in the trolley and a useful interchange of ideas and opinions was exchanged. We learned that Transnet felt that the only way the line could be resuscitated would be if freight were to be put back on rails again. This intimates that the whole line would need to be reopened but, whilst we support such an objective, this does not mean that a smaller length of line could not be reopened in the short term. Your committee therefore decided to put in an application to Transnet for a "Permission in Principle" to run the trolley between Knysna to Brenton/Belvidere. Our application has been acknowledged but to date no further communication on this subject has been received from Transnet. We will continue to follow up. If a positive response to our request is received from Transnet, the real work for our association will then begin! An operating company will need to be established (Transnet would probably not deal with an association), funds would need to be accessed to purchase and renovate another rail trolley plus trailer, formal agreements would need to be entered into with Transnet and various other statutory authorities; training would have to be undertaken and safety critical posts filled by competent and correctly certified individuals, etc, etc. If our request is refused, depending on the reasons for such a refusal, would probably mean we would have to carry on much as we are at the moment - lobbying for a reopening!

Earlier this year, but not strictly in this reporting period, we collected a semaphore signal and two locomotive chimneys from Botriver to add to our growing collection of railway artefacts. Sometime in the future we would like to commence with the renovation of these items together with some minor repair work on the pump trolley. If anyone feels they would like to be a part of the team doing this work, please contact a Committee Member.

During the year we decided to start a petition with the question "Do you wish to see the Outeniqua Choo-Tjoe run again"? Many people have collected signatures on behalf of the *Friends* but I wish to pay particular thanks to two collectors, Boet Marais and Geoff Pullen, who between them have collected a significant percentage of the 11000 signatures collected to date. We have yet to decide to whom we wish to pass this petition but in the meantime we continue to collect. Much of the more recent collecting of signatures has been done at the trolley in the Waterfront and even some in Cape Town as well as other places nearer home. In order to inform the public about our aims, collect signatures and increase our membership, more help is needed to man the trolley. Please contact any Committee Member to offer your services even if it is only once a month. All offers of help will be gratefully received. We need, more than ever, to get our message across to the general public, to have a public face, and we need help to do this. I would also request everyone to write letters to the Authorities and to the national and local press for the need to for act to save the line. This is the only pressure that we can apply.

The Pink Festival together with the Oyster Festival will soon be happening. We really need to squeeze out the maximum effect for our cause that these events can achieve. Please volunteer your help to ensure that we do this.

In closing, I would like to express my thanks to my fellow Committee Members for their help and support and to convey the gratitude of your Committee to all our sponsors, donors, helpers and last but not least, you, the Members without whom we would have achieved little. Your continuing support will become ever more important if we are to see our goal of a reopened and vibrant George to Knysna railway realised.

Fraser Howell

Chairman

13 March 2013



On the footplate of a 24



1. A WELCOME STOP BEFORE THE CLIMB.
Passing at Goukamma

The following article was produced to be distributed among the passengers of the hugely successful Bushfeld Safari trains. Part two will appear in the next Loop.

GEORGE - KNYSNA

	GEORGE
14	WILDERNESS
22	DUIWE RIVER
37	SEDFIELD
51	GOUKAMMA
61	BELVIDERE
67	KNYSNA

BEFORE THE TRAINS CAME

The commercial value of the timber in the area around Knysna attracted many settlers in the late 18th century. Although a passage through The Heads was offered from the sea to the lagoon, it remained a dangerous passage. Through the years many ships came to grief trying to use this entrance. It is one of only a few spots in the world where insurance by Lloyds of London still does not apply.

As more workers settled in the area, a more reliable mode of transport was desperately needed. Thomas Baines started a road from George through the numerous ravines in 1868 but it only reached Knysna in 1887. This road became known as The Seven Passes Route and, although it made transportation easier, it was still a very difficult route, not really suitable to transport heavy timber.

When the railway line reached George in 1907, a survey was done to extend the line to Knysna, but the Cape government decided it would be too expensive and nothing came of it.

CONSTRUCTION (1924 – 1928)

During the economic depression of the 1920s railway building was used to create jobs for the unemployed. H G Dempster, a SAR engineer, used the previous surveys and, with a few alterations, submitted a report which was accepted by Parliament in 1922.

Construction of the new line started simultaneously from the George and Knysna sides in 1924. Sleepers for the line (73 920 in total and 1 093 per km) came from the local forests and were shipped at six pence a sleeper to Mossel Bay and then railed to the railhead for laying.

The contract for a bridge over the Kaaimans River was awarded to the company of M D Vallero and work started in July 1926. It consisted of 15 concrete piers with 12 deck spans of 9m and four of 12m. The bridge was to be built on a curve where the river reached the sea. Excavation for the

piers was hampered by the difficult conditions and the fact that bed-rock was only found at a depth of 21 metres.

Storms, wind and the sea made the construction more dangerous while the construction structures were often lost when the river came down in flood. It took a year longer than planned, but the bridge was opened for traffic on 17 October 1928 and finally completed on 30 November 1928.

Hugh Owen Bruce Grant, the Director of The Wilderness (1921) Pty Ltd, who started the present-day village, feared the trains and holidaymakers would destroy the tranquillity of the village. He pleaded with J W Jagger, the minister of railways, to change the original intended route between Wilderness and Fairy Knove stations to rather cross the Touw River at its mouth and again 2km upstream at Freesia Rock. His meeting with the minister led to a slight change in the route, as requested.

The next bridge, also over the Touw River became locally known as the Biton bridge. As happened often in the earlier days of motoring, the bridge shared both rail and road traffic.

To keep the gradients to acceptable levels, a deep cutting was dug with pick and shovel out of the shale. Numerous bones of eland and buffalo were discovered at this spot. It remained the largest cutting in South Africa until the advent of the N2 in 1951.

A steel girder bridge was used to span the Goukamma River. To lift the line to the final obstacle, Keytersnek, the line was constructed around the hills with a horseshoe bend.

Causeways and bridges to a total distance of 2.5km were constructed to cross the Knysna Lagoon. The piers of the bridges were screw pylons driven into the shale below the mud of the lagoon.

The line was officially opened for traffic on 1 May 1928.

THE LINE'S BIGGEST ENEMY

Through its entire existence serious washaways and rock falls were not uncommon and the line often had to be closed for repairs.

On 28 December 1931 the line was closed after heavy rains, which damaged the tracks in many parts. Landslides and rock falls occurred over the whole length of the line, cuttings caved in and embankments disappeared. Near Sedgefield the line was even suspended for a distance of more than 28m after the whole of the Swartvlei embankment was practically destroyed. Two piers of the bridge at Fairy Knowe subsided and the same happened at the bridge near Sedgefield. A portion of the line was re-opened on 6 January 1932 but the rest of the line was remained closed until 21 January 1932.

One can pay tribute to the railway employees who worked day and night to re-open the line within such a short period of time. When this also happened in August 2005, communities were no longer dependent on the line and it remained closed for years until a decision could be made whether it was worth the cost of around R100 million to re-open the line. In 2007 even more damage was inflicted by heavy rains and this time the embankment at Swartvlei again disappeared as it had 75 years previously.

OPERATING THE LINE

As in the case of other branch lines in the country passenger services were never a financial success on the Knysna line.

Between 1928 and 1936 full passenger trains were run, but they were replaced by petrol driven railcars, introduced in 1936. This was a measure to cut the losses on passenger services, but the railcars only lasted until 1943, before they were also withdrawn. Passenger trains were re-introduced and lasted until 1964. Although replaced by a bus service it was still possible to travel over the line on a mixed train, with a passenger coach attached to the rear of the train.

From the start the line was worked by SAR classes 6, 7 and 8 until the arrival of the class 24, specially designed for branch lines, in 1949. Their tractive effort was 48% more than the classes 6 and 7, dating from the 1890s.

While steam engines were replaced in the rest of the country by more modern traction, the class 24s merrily trundled up and down the line, keeping steam alive, increasingly appreciated by tourists. Steam enthusiast specials also kept the line on their itineraries. On 18 April 1979 the Sunset Limited became the first official triple-headed passenger train on SAR metals when it traversed the line behind **class 24** numbers 3627, 3669 and 3670.

A MUSEUM LINE (1991)

In July 1991, during the Steam Festival at Kimberley, Dr Anton Moolman announced that steam would be phased out but Transnet had decided to declare this line a museum line. The line would fall under a subsidiary of the Transnet Heritage Foundation to continue steam operation.

After being declared a museum line, classes 19B, 19C and 19D became regular performers with a GO Garratt also making an appearance on odd occasions. Coal consumption on a one-way trip is about 3 tons while about 65% of the 20 000 litres of water in the torpedo tenders is used. Vintage class 32 diesels (GE, 1959) are used when the fire index becomes too high, often supplemented by class 35 diesels.