



Friends of the Choo-Tjoe

The Loop

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NEWSLETTER NUMBER 2 – JULY 2011

Where does the time go? It seems only yesterday that we were putting the first edition together.

The Slow Festival at Sedgefield has come and gone. We showed our faces and did quite well, a fair amount of interest being shown, some of which translated into new members. It does seem that there is a tremendous affection for our railway. Colin Burgess did the organizing and his report follows. Colin has also taken on the job of PRO; a vital job if we are to keep our profile high. I am sure everybody will wish him well in this post.

Work on the trolley has been ongoing and a report by Fraser Howell is included.

The fourth General Meeting was held on 5th May where Alan McVitty outlined his proposals for reopening the line. All proposals however hinge on the transfer of the line to Province and although Minister Winde keeps plugging away, there is still no transfer. It is very frustrating, especially for those of us who would like to see the trains running again before we pop our clogs, but we must keep on believing that it will happen.

Remember that we would like to hear your views on the newsletter, on the trolley, on the line, on anything in fact. It *is* your organisation. Mark Robinson of CREA raised a few points and we have attempted to follow up on his suggestions.

Finally, Allan Waterston has been working away at our website and it is now up and running.

Julie Jenkins

Sedgefield Slow Festival, Friends participation

Easter weekend saw the second Sedgefield Slow Festival. Events were held throughout the village from Good Friday through to the following Wednesday culminating in the Barefoot Bowling Marathon.

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These events included the Easter Bunny Beach Fling, the paddle pedal and pant races and best of all, the Amazing Creatures parade through the village to the Village Green on Kingfisher Drive on the Saturday morning.

The Friends had decided to participate in order to promote the aims and aspirations of the group and hopefully entice membership. Also to raise some much needed funds.

This was done with an information stand with photographs and items of railway memorabilia. A gazebo was loaned by local resident Tori Anderson (thanks Tori), display board materials were donated by Build-It Sedgefield (thanks guys) and trestle tables loaned by Friends member George Fitzpatrick (thanks George).

The boards were plastered with progress photographs of the inspection trolley refurbishment and rail line survey walks, the latter showing in particular the wash-away at Swartvlei Bridge and in the Goukamma forest. There were also a selection of postcards depicting the Choo-Tjoe and Fraser Howell loaned some of his valuable collection of brass loco number plates and a couple of marker lamps which all made for an interesting display.

As mentioned the purpose of the stand was promote the aims of the Friends to the residents of and visitors to Sedgefield. Everyone fondly remembers the Choo-Tjoe but unfortunately there is a lot of negativity out there due in the main to the 'huge sum' attached to the repair of the line after the floods.

We held a raffle to assist with the fund-raising. The prizes were a copy of 'Shimmer of Steel', a railway photo essay kindly donated by Kees Estie and a bottle of whiskey kindly donated by fellow member George Freeburn. Many thanks to you both.

Membership forms and info flyers were also made available. The stand was manned over the five days by members of the Friends taking either a morning or afternoon shift. Initially it was planned to base ourselves at the Steam Whistle Stop Café at Sedgefield Station but although we gained a new member within the first hour the day was woefully slow!

After some hasty replanning, Saturday morning saw us move to the Village Green on Kingfisher Drive, where we were amongst the Slow Art Exhibition and right on hand to see the Amazing Creatures Parade which is not to be missed if it included in next years festival. Both of these events drawing large numbers of people.

The Village Green proved a far better position with a steady stream of enquiring visitors asking "when's the train coming back?" and about the condition of the line and it's likely re-opening.

We tried to answer all the questions and in the end we gained ten new members and collected around R500.00 in raffle ticket sales and donations.

With publicising ourselves at such events we can bring our aims to more members of the public. So, next up is the Knysna Oyster Festival.

My hearty thanks to everyone who helped man the stand (including the ladies) and those who loaned and donated items without which we would not have been able to gain the exposure we did.

Colin Burgess PRO

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Membership News

As from 15th June, we have 142 people who are on our mailing list and 62 fully paid up members. We have two members from overseas with the prospect of several more in the coming days. This is particularly gratifying as the more members we can attract from outside the country, the more it will show just how well loved our line is by overseas visitors. We get a steady stream of enquiries and mostly these are followed up by enquirers becoming full members. May I once more ask those on our mailing list who have not yet signed up to do so. The membership fee has been kept low so that it will not be a drain on your purse. And remember, if you have any friends who might be interested, tell them to get in touch at julie.j@cytanet.com.cy or by post at **58 Fraser Street, Sedgefield 6573**

Colin Jenkins

Knysna Oyster Festival July 1st to the 10th.

After our mild success at the Sedgefield Slow Festival the committee has decided that participation in the Knysna Oyster Festival would go a long way towards continuing to put the Friends name out into the public arena, along with the opportunity of getting the true facts about the Choo-Tjoe known.

We would ideally need two persons per shift of three hours, morning or afternoon for the ten days of the festival. To cover the full span of the festival it would need volunteers to fill more than one shift slot.

So we need your help as a volunteer to help man the stand to spread the word of our aims regarding the possible reopening of the rail line.

Please contact me soonest with your preferred timeslot.

Colin Burgess 0443432387 or 0828522586

Presentation by Alan McVitty of Classic Rail Preservation:

Alan McVitty introduced his talk with a brief summary of the outcome of a recent meeting with Minister Winde at Pezula. The brief from the meeting was that parties with an interest in the future of the George/Knysna line need to come to an agreement on the way the asset is to be utilised - once the Provincial Government of the Western Cape (PGWC) had received transfer of all the assets from Transnet.

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Alan stressed that the Choo-Tjoe brand was internationally recognised and presented an overview of a viable plan to operate trains on the line. Allan Waterston, in the introduction to his presentation, informed the meeting that he had joined Allan McVitty's in his endeavours to get operations going again.

A steering committee needed to be formed and Alan McVitty requested FCT to nominate a member to serve on the committee. It was proposed by George Freeburn, seconded by Boet Marais, that Allan Waterston be nominated as the FCT representative – which was accepted by Allan on a show of unanimous support from the meeting. The PGWC undertook to nominate a representative. The Garden Route Cycling Association would also be approached to nominate a representative as well as any other organisation with a vested interest in the future of the Choo-Tjoe.

Comments from the floor focused on time-frames to get operations on the line going again, expertise needed, rolling stock required and servicing facilities that would have to be built, as well as a concern about how the Cycling Association's proposals would be incorporated into the greater plan.

Report on the meeting held at Pezula with Minister Winde

On the 19 April 2011 your Committee was invited to attend a meeting at Pezula Hotel called by PGWC Minister Alan Winde to discuss the 'Options for the Choo-Tjoe Rail Track'. Other parties attending the meeting included Minister Winde, Alan McVitty of Classic Rail Preservation, John Stegmann of Garden Route Cycling Association, a representative from the Knysna Chamber of Business, Derrick Coetzer representing a Swiss funder with USD30million on offer and ourselves. PowerPoint presentations were given by both Alan McVitty and John Stegmann.

Time was limited and although some discussion took place this was, by circumstance, not very detailed.

At the end of the meeting Alan Winde suggested that Alan McVitty and John Stegmann co-chair a task team to put together a plan for the future use of the line.

As we understand it this task team will examine the relative strengths and weaknesses of both the railway plan together and that of the cyclists with a view to finding and developing synergies where they exist.

We appear to be entering a new phase of the campaign to reopen the George to Knysna line.

The crux is still the 'tipping point'; the point where control of the line is passed to PGWC. But details of how a reopened railway can be structured are now being considered. There is much to ponder!

Fraser Howell

Station Clean Up

During March we planned to continue with our station clean-ups; completion of Knysna plus Goukamma and Sedgefield was envisaged. It was decided to cancel further clean-ups after we received feedback that our efforts had not been well received in certain quarters within the big railway. It was felt that we should rather not further inflame relations by publicising our attempts to make the stations look like they were not abandoned. We understand that clean-ups at Wilderness, Sedgefield and Goukamma have been done by tenants at these stations. The continuation of the clean-up at Knysna Station was subsequently continued by Transnet's own contractors together with input from the Waterfront.

Fraser Howell

WEBSITE

www.friendsofthechoo-tjoe.co.za

Progress our website is now up and running and we are waiting for the train. Visit our site which still requires a bit of refinement. We are still working on the picture gallery so if you have any pictures that you are happy to share let us have these. Please title your picture and include the date and place where it was taken with the name of the photographer. Photographs can be sent to mwwally@mweb.co.za

Well if that isn't enough progress we are also moving with the times and have a facebook page www.facebook.com Friends of the Choo-Tjoe. This is an interactive site where you can follow developments and leave your comments and suggestions. Let's have your support for the reopening of the line visit our page and leave your comments. Become an on-line Friend of the Choo-Tjoe by registering on facebook.

Allan Waterston

Trolley progress

The trolley has featured largely in our ongoing efforts of preservation and renovation. Member Bernd Rohloff successfully identified a source of works drawings in the UK. these were purchased and have been delivered to us. I think they will prove to be highly beneficial but unfortunately the set we have acquired is incomplete and some aspects are not covered

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such as the braking system. Fortunately the air brake system uses many standard road truck components so we do not foresee too many technical difficulties.

Recently the trolley body frame was removed from the chassis by forklift and it was transported to the sandblasters. On Tuesday 03 May 2011 the frame was blasted and a team comprising George Freeburn, Colin Burgess, Allan Waterston and Fraser Howell commenced painting late in the afternoon. The following day Colin, Allan and Fraser started early and by early afternoon had moved the frame out of the blasting area and completed the second coat of etch primer. By 1500hrs the frame was back at the workshop premises!

Subsequently the frame had its two finishing coats applied for maximum protection.

The rotten part of the roof has had a new piece of sheet steel welded in and primed by John Webb.

All the components of the air brake system, compressor, relief valves, boosters, brake cylinders and control valves have been removed from the chassis and have been delivered to Messrs Air-Tech in the Knysna Industrial Area for refurbishment. The clutch slave cylinder was found to have a broken lug but it looks as if a suitable replacement unit has been located.

Bernd recently took the radiator fan and its carrier to his home workshop. On stripping it was found that the fan was loose on the shaft and this had caused severe wear in both keyways as well as the shaft. The whole unit has been rebuilt with a new shaft and new bearings and is now available to be refitted.

Recently Allan W, Bernd R and Fraser H, with the assistance of Gavin Cooper of Knysna Motor Strippers, moved the chassis out of the workshop in order that it could be pressure cleaned. Parts of the frame were also rubbed down and given a coat of primer. It was taken back inside the same day. Gavin's help in achieving this is very much appreciated.

At present the handbrake and gear change mechanisms are being stripped and lubricated prior to reassembly.

Steady progress is being made with the repairs. However, the speed of this renovation is determined by the receipt of donations. Our hard-pressed Treasurer, Allan Waterston, will welcome any and all donations.

If you would care to lend a hand and be involved in this renovation in a practical way please contact any member of Committee. Your help will be much appreciated and it is cheaper, but just as effective, than going to the gym!

We have been trying for some months to acquire a 4 wheel P-Way (ganger's) trolley as an historical artefact (and a future possible useful plant item). These trolleys were once very common on our railways but they appear very difficult to source these days! If you know the location of such an item please inform us!

Fraser Howell 13 June 2011

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From The Chairman

There is a steady stream of people who wish to know more about the Friends of the Choo-Tjoo. We endeavour to keep up the interest in Friends as we see it imperative that we grow a sizeable membership with which we can best influence the 'powers that be' to support the reintroduction of steam to the George Knysna line. It is in this vein that several talks have been given recently to the Knysna Historical Society and the Knysna Branch of U3A. Each one generates a few more Members

We are also hoping to hold a fund-raising function in Knysna. Member Monica Van Bosch has kindly offered to organise this event and we are very grateful for her willingness to carry this through. Monica has already organised and received donated vouchers from businesses which we must convert into cash through prizes of raffles, etc. It is becoming urgent for us to take advantage of these opportunities but we do need someone to organise and control these operations. Anyone who would like to take this function under their wing is urged to contact any Committee member.

As we move forward we are trying to refine our organisation to make ourselves more effective and professional. This needs motivated people to manage various operations. The introduction of our newsletter "The LOOP" is one such progression.

Membership Secretary Colin Jenkins started off The LOOP but a 3 month sojourn in Europe has meant that we have invited his wife Julie to join the Committee as Editor. We are pleased that Julie, who has, in the past, been intimately connected with operations on the Severn Valley Railway in the UK for some years, has accepted cooption to Committee.

During April, Committee received resignations from Rita Wiid, our Publicity Officer, and Rob Burford both due to personal reasons. We thank them for their efforts towards the building of Friends and look forward to their becoming active again when they see their circumstances improve. Both remain Members of Friends. In the meantime, Colin Burgess has taken over the task of PRO.

Fraser Howell

We were recently contacted by Mr Richard Havenga who enclosed a couple of photos of Knysna station as it was when his grandfather was stationmaster back in the fifties. We hope to show a few more of these in a future issue but in the meantime, here is a taster!

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Can you work out where the young lad is standing?

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