



Friends of the Choo-Tjoe

The Loop

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Editorial

By now everybody will be aware that the reopening of the George-Knysna is going ahead. The line will be brought into use in stages starting from the Knysna end. The announcement from Classic Rail and our own announcement which we posted on our website have produced a huge response from the public (8406 hits up to 25th June). The news first broke on the Sedgefield Locals facebook page. It was subsequently picked up by other sites. There is very little detail at the moment but as plans are firmed up, we will let you know.



Keyters Nek in better times



Slip below Keyters Nek

In this issue we have Sandy Buchanan's reminiscences of his boyhood holiday trips from Port Elizabeth to the Garden route. It must have been a fascinating time.

Julie Jenkins

The way forward.

Now that the line reopening is going to happen, we, as a support group, must decide how we are going to help Classic Rail fulfil its ambitions. We have been at the forefront of keeping the line in the public's eye and drumming up support from people, literally, all over the world; very often in the face of scepticism and doubt. But your committee always believed that the line would be reopened and we thank those members who have shared our belief. We are also grateful to the many wellwishers we have met on this journey. Once it was clear that there was only one serious player in the process, namely Classic Rail, we focussed all our efforts on assisting them.

The question for our organization now is, how do we assist CR in the future? This will, to some extent depend on CR's requirements but your committee feels that, as a support organization, there will still be

scope for our participation. I said, at the AGM, that ten seemed to be a lucky number so far as railway projects went and so it has proved.

Once again, thank you to our supporters, and to those members we have lost, why not rejoin? We will need you as we move forward.

If you wish to rejoin or renew your membership, please contact the membership secretary, Dirk van der Zeyden at mvdzeyden@gmail.com

Colin Jenkins (Chairman)

Memories of Yesteryear: The Avontuur Line and the George – Knysna branch.

Whilst in Knysna over December 2015/January 2016 I was reminded of my boyhood years when we lived in Port Elizabeth and would often holiday along the Garden Route at various resorts. The time frame would have been the late 1940's: certainly after the end of World War II.

In those days it took my father, driving his Chevrolet, the best part of a day to get to our destination, because none of the magnificent bridges had yet been built over the Bloukrans or Grootrivier passes.

The Wilderness was one of our favourite destinations both from a beach point of view & access to George, but from my point of view Wilderness station was within easy walking distance with regular trains!

When leaving Port Elizabeth we used to stop for tea at the hotel at Thornhill. This was a great experience because the limestone trains from Loerie were regular and Garratt hauled, and with a bit of luck we would see two, and maybe a mixed train as well. Because Loerie was at an altitude of 100 feet above sea level and Thornhill 724 feet, in the 12 miles between these two stations the train climbed an astonishing 624 feet in this short distance by twisting & climbing along what was once called "Tippetts Luck" – an amazing stretch of railway line if ever there was! It was just about possible whilst sitting at Thornhill to hear the trains tackling the long climb the moment they left Loerie!

The shunting loco at Loerie right up until about 1964 for the limestone trains was Baldwin NG 10 number 61.

Then on to the Garden Route!

Arriving at Knysna we were aware of the demise of the South Western Railway which ran from Deepwalls in the forest to Thesen's Jetty in Knysna, but never saw any of the locomotives. The trackbed was still plainly visible from Thesen's up the hill to the east of the town & then next to the sand road headed to Deepwalls (not Deepwalle!) then Uniondale via Prince Alfred's Pass. This, like the Avontuur line, was a 2 foot gauge railway. There had been a proposal at some early date to connect the Avontuur from its terminus, to Deepwalls, but the cost & difficulty of bringing this into being was adjudged as being prohibitively expensive & difficult so it was canned.

Pity! Just think of a class 13 or 16 Beyer-Garratt descending the equivalent of Prince Alfred's Pass! This would have rivalled the Darjeeling- Himalaya railway quite easily and simultaneously provided a narrow gauge alternative to the Montagu Pass! One can dream!



Log train at Knysna.

George – Knysna was a busy line in the late 1940's.

Firstly the passenger train to George that passed thru' Wilderness at 11h08 whilst we were there was hauled by a class 7 loco. Regretfully I don't have a number. Then the return working at 16h38 thru' Wilderness would see her again. Not a mixed train – a genuine passenger train.

The other trains were all class 24's which at that time were still relatively new. Their performances on the Sedgefield – Goukamma section and return were pretty darn good! The passenger service was daily, two trains in both directions, but no service on Sundays. The scheduled travelling time between the two centres varied per train but was roughly 3 hours 15 minutes.

This branch line was completed & opened for traffic on 1 May 1928. One wonders what motive power handled the trains? Possibly classes 6 and 7, both wonderful loco classes.



7th Class at George



7th class near Ruigtevlei

(Pic) Rob Tibbets

In 1934 the official timetable shows the early railcar (yes – railcar!) from Knysna departing at 06h45 and arriving in George at 08h47. That's only 2 hours in round numbers! On the N2 today by car it takes nearly the same time in December! (*Does anybody have a picture of this railcar? Ed*)

The later Monday steam hauled train left at 08h15 and was in George at 11h00 - 2 hours 45 minutes elapsed time. Still not bad.

It is a great pity to see it standing unused today. This branch, correctly managed & operated would, (as we all know) be an enormous tourist attraction if steam operated.

I mention to readers who have not been to Knysna recently that standing in the station is a 110 year old carriage built in Oldbury still carrying its damaged builders plate. (*Private Saloon No 33 CERES Ed*) Next to it is an articulated set ex the Union Limited (I think). (*Private Saloon No 2 Ed*) Go and have a look!

Sandy Buchanan

Errata

In the last issue I described our journey from Ceres to Hartenbos and back. I said we had over-nighted at Stellenbosch. This should of course have been Swellendam. Getting my Stellens and Swellens mixed up. Blame old age. Some members have drawn attention to the press release by Classic Rail where it is stated that the class 32 diesels were the first main line locomotives in South Africa. It seems that the class

31spreceded them. Perhaps someone with more knowledge than me of diesel history can put the record straight.

Colin Jenkins

Some thoughts

Reading through the latest edition of the Severn Valley News, one reader described how he first came to be aware of the railway, having walked with his parents from Bewdley to Arley, the next station up the line with the intention of catching the train back to Bewdley only to discover they had missed the last train by 18 months. He posed the question, “what did the founders (of the Severn Valley Railway) think they were creating all those years ago?” He went on to answer his own question; nobody really knew. They just felt it was the right thing to do. Some would have seen it as somewhere to run preserved steam locomotives , some would have seen it as preserving old working practices that were rapidly disappearing whilst others may have thought of it as saving a transport link. For my own part, having been a lifelong railway enthusiast, I just wanted to be a part of preserving our heritage and developed my special interest later. He further asked if we ever imagined that the railway would change from a small group of people grubbing around for every penny they could lay their hands on to the million pound organization it has become, hosting as it does (quite apart from normal train services) a spectacular number of special events. These encompass such things as Santa trains (sold out before they are even advertised with figures which many a department store would kill for), Halloween evenings, Murder mystery evenings, Evening Dinner trains, Lunch trains, Afternoon tea trains, Wedding receptions, School parties, Several steam galas and diesel galas a year, War weekends, weekends for children , Railway in bloom, Vintage vehicle/bus weekends, Corporate events, Private party hire, Footplate experiences and firing and driving courses (not cheap and always sold out), the list just goes on. I wonder if we will look back at our own railway in fifty years time and wonder at the success it has become. I certainly hope so.

Colin Jenkins



Museum notes

The Class A tank has been cosmetically restored and now awaits its turn to enter the museum. This will be done when other preparatory work inside the museum is completed.

Class S1 375 and Electric locomotive Class ES are next in line to be relocated from Millsite depot to Bloemfontein storage facility. A service provider is being appointed and should be in place within the next week. It is estimated the road move could take up to five days to complete.

Colin Jenkins/Kobus Volschenk