

Friends of the Choo-Tjoe

The Loop

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Editorial.

This edition is earlier than usual because I will be overseas on the 1st October._

Since our last issue, news of what was happening seemed to dry up: following all the hype on facebook and announcements in the press from both Classic Rail and ourselves, we received many enquiries as to what was happening, if anything. In the last few weeks, Classic Rail put out a further statement and you will all have received this by now.

In this issue we have some further reminiscences of the Garden Route railways, mainly centred on Port Elizabeth.

Also included is a report by the Resident Engineer, Mr H G Dempster dated 1921 laying out proposals for a line from George to Knysna.

Julie Jenkins

Line update.

Work has been continuing on clearing the line to Keyters Nek and the vegetation has been removed from the whole of the formation. With the track cleared, it is possible to determine how many sleepers will need to be replaced and how much rail (if any). There are a number of places where sand has encroached onto the line and this sand is being removed. But some of the banks and cuttings are unstable and will need remedial work. This is a long standing problem and one SAR/Transnet had to deal with. In the worst places, old sleepers were driven into the banks to hold the sand back, but over time, these have rotted away. No doubt this is an area the civil engineers will be looking at. The bridges over the lagoon at Knysna are also in need of attention and our understanding is that a firm of bridge engineers has inspected the structures and will be reporting back. Keyters Nek station is a rubbish tip. Someone “liberated” the gate at the entrance to the station and now it is used to dump builders’ rubble and household waste.

Colin Jenkins



The turntable pit cleared



A repainted Knysna station



The Donkey bridge



Eroded embankment



Removing sand below Keyters Nek



Unstable cutting walls



Rotted sleeper retaining wall



Uncovered flange lubricator



Keyters Nek Cleared



Dumping at Keyters Nek

Reminiscences of south coast railways.

In the late forties & early fifties whilst there was regular traffic on George – Knysna and certainly much of the traffic was logs, I don't think that these were yellow wood. I was too young to be all that interested in the cargo/freight, but I'm pretty sure that it was commercial timber from the estates such as saligna & pine. However I'm not 100% sure.



On the PE – Avontuur narrow gauge line, at Loerie there was a large limestone quarry just north of the station. It was then owned by Eastern Province Cement Co. The limestone was brought to the EPCC terminal by an aerial ropeway. It dumped the limestone into a large circular cement bin from where it was then loaded into the SAR trucks shunted by the little class 10.

Then the train would be made up & an SAR Garratt (usually an NG 13 or 16), would haul the load (if I remember 10 trucks – about 40 axles or 215 tons) up the steep winding climb from Loerie to Summit & eventually Chelsea on the north side of PE. Here there was a “wy” and the start of a long siding (almost a branch line!) to the EPCC works about 12 miles away on the north side of PE and at sea level. This private siding line was so interesting and I know of no photographs having been taken on it. What a pity! It wound down from Chelsea on a 1 in 45 gradient thru’ a scenic valley away from houses and industry at that time.

There were earlier locos on this line all owned by the EPCC, but the one that I saw was a 2-8-2 Hunslet built loco in 1949. She handled trains of 400 tons on the downgrade & 150 up. When she was built she was claimed to be the most powerful narrow gauge loco in the world (although the SAR class 15’s were slightly more powerful).



Locomotive as built

The Hunslet later ran off the rails and (I think) went thru' a buffer stop at Chelsea, thereby derailling and messing up the frame. She stood there for a long period. By then my dad had been transferred back to Jhb so I lost regular touch with PE & the Avontuur line. The good news is that a British preserved railway bought the loco, resurrected it & shipped it back to the UK where it still runs (I can't remember which line, but probably the Festiniog or Welsh Highland because they operate on 24 inch gauge) I take my hat off to those Brits for the remarkable preservation work they do! (*Breckon Mountain Railway. Ed*)

In my humble opinion the Avontuur line is one of the finest & most interesting railway lines in the world. Not only is it a decent length at 177 miles, but it has beautiful scenery, plus what was for years the highest bridge on the South African Railways at van Staden's which is 250 feet high, amazing climbs & gradients and fantastically powerful & unique locomotives. If this was Britain it would be preserved and running and bringing thousands of tourists with powerful currencies to our shores. With its terminus at PE it is ideally located. However in SA very few understand loco & railway tourist potential!

Sic transit Gloria!

Sandstone Estate thanks to Wilf Mole has a very good representation of ex SAR narrow gauge locos.



Whoops!



Restored

Sandy Buchanan

Survey report of 1921

From a document supplied by Geoff Pullen with additional input from Kobus Volschenk.

Railway link George – Knysna

Report of Mr H G Dempster, Resident Engineer, George – Knysna survey. 18/11/1921.

In accordance with instructions received, I undertook a detailed survey of a line from George to Knysna commencing the work on November 11th 1920. I now submit a report, together with plans, sections and detailed estimates.

After devoting considerable time to a thorough examination of the country between George and Knysna and also to the route recommended by Mr A.F.Stewart in his report dated 26th October 1904, I made a detailed survey of a line shown on the small scale plan accompanying this report the length of which is 41 miles 72 chains from centre of George station to centre of proposed station at the Sleeper Depot, Knysna.

Route and Station Sites:- Leaving the George – Oudtshoorn line at the East end of George Station (1) the line follows a spruit which flows down to Christiana Bay to within a mile of where it enters the sea. At a point about five and a half miles from George there is a waterfall on the spruit and it is here necessary to cut the formation down to a level below the bed of the stream and to provide a channel for the stream in a widened and deepened portion of the cutting immediately to the right of the formation. This involves some rather heavy cutting but enables the line to get down to within 55 feet at low water sea level at the mouth of the Kaaimans River at eight miles 28 chains. The preliminary location and estimate of this portion of the line was rendered particularly difficult by the fact that it is through dense thorn bush. The line falls on a continuous maximum grade from mile five to Kaaimans River, but I have provide for a Halt and spur at six miles 46 chains to serve Victoria Bay. The property in this vicinity belongs to Mr Edmeads of Oudtshoorn who contemplates developing it as a seaside resort. Should there be any prospect of traffic of this description when the line is built a road should be constructed by the Divisional Council from Victoria Bay to the Halt at six miles 15 chains and then up the hill to the North of the line, joining the present George-Victoria Bay Road at the top and avoiding the exceedingly steep road now going to the Bay and also avoiding the necessity of building the 15ft. arch over the existing road at seven miles six chains.

The Kaaimans River presents the most difficult problem in the construction of the line between George and Knysna and after considering several alternatives I propose to cross it at the mouth, as it appears on the whole to be better than running up the gorge on the west side, crossing it near the junction of the Zwart River and returning to the coast on the east side of the gorge.(2)

A halt is proposed at the Kaaimans River, a reinforced concrete platform and handrail being provided for on the parapet of the bridge which will give access to either side of the river.

There is a station site provided at 9 miles 25 chains which will serve the Wilderness Estates but until the development takes place only a Halt will be necessary. The line passes along some sand dunes at the back of a number of building sites already laid out along the sea front

and after skirting the open space reserved for a Park follows the edge of the Touw River Lagoon and is located so as to interfere with private property as little as possible, though there will probably be some requests for some other route when time for construction arrives. After crossing the Touw River the line follows the bottom of the steep hill and is just above the flood level of the Lower Lange Vlei.

Between Lower and Upper Lange Vlei the line crosses to the South side of the latter, station sites being provided at mile 14 and also at 16 miles 45 chains.(3)

Mr Barnard MDC, and others living at Ronde Vlei are in favour of the line passing to the North of both Upper Lange Vlei and Ronde Vlei, and joining the route I have adopted a little to the East of Ronde Vlei. There would be no difficulty in locating a line on this route and the earthworks will be no heavier than are those on the South of the Vleis but the distance would be one mile longer and the extra cost say £3000.

A good level road could be constructed across the strip of land between Lange Vlei and Ronde Vlei for £600. Ronde Vlei is entirely surrounded by sand hills and no water flows into it, but the water backs up from Lange Vlei when the outlet to the sea is closed and it has been known to flood this sandy strip of land, but by raising the road about 2ft it would be high and dry at all times.

The only advantage of the route to the North of the vleis is that the comparatively small amount of traffic from the Ronde Vlei district would be saved one mile of easy road transport. On the other hand it would result in the traffic from East of this point, including Knysna and the country being tapped beyond, being taxed to the extent of one mile extra railage on all goods and passengers. I therefore cannot recommend this route.

The line crosses the Zwart Vlei at mile 21 and a station site is provided at 22,1/2 miles which will serve a few farms lying between the railway and the sea and then after passing over a neck between Zwart Vlei and Groen Vlei rises to a ridge at 26,1/2 miles where I have provided for a station site. The route proposed by A.F.Stewart passes to the North of all the lakes and joins the route I have surveyed at this point (26,1/2 miles).(4)

There are only two roads giving access to the proposed line from the sour veld and forest country to the north between the Wilderness and Goukamma River. One is at Ronde Vlei and serves a comparatively small area and as already explained, is only affected to the extent of one extra mile of easy road by the line passing to the south instead of to the north of the lakes. The other road comes down the valley of the Zwart River and taps a larger area which would certainly be better served by a line on Mr Stewart's route than the one I propose. This latter road, however, already continues to the proposed station at 26,1/2 miles and if hardened would give easy access to the line with no severe grades, though the distance would be increased by about two and a half miles. This station would also be served by a road which would probably be constructed from Roode Kraal and Elands Kraal and tap a large block of forest and plantation reserves and as far as this area is concerned there is no advantage in favour of Mr Stewart's route.

As a line passing to the north of the lakes would only materially benefit the area tapped by the Zwart Valley road and would be about one and a quarter miles longer than the one to the south, besides being more costly per mile, I have adopted the latter route.

From 26,1/2 miles to 32,1/2 miles across the Goukamma, both the line I have adopted and Mr Stewart's line follow the only practical route as all lines between George and Knysna must

pass through the neck at 30 miles 30 chains. At mileage 33 I have doubled back with a horseshoe curve and passed over Cato Neck at mile 35.50. A station site near the neck will serve the Millwood, Lawnwood and Portland area by means of a road which already exists, but which would have to be hardened and improved, running along the ridge between the Goukamma and Knysna valleys. As far as this particular area is concerned this station would be better than the one near the Westford Bridge on Mr Stewart's route, as the rise and fall of the road would not be so great. From Cato Neck the line falls to the edge of Knysna Harbour (a station site being provided just above the Belvidere Township) and then crosses the latter and terminates on the Admiralty Ground now occupied by the SAR Sleeper Depot in Knysna and close to the main station of the South Western Railway Company's line to Broken Hill.

Before going on to describe the engineering features of this line, I must refer to Mr Chivers' very comprehensive and able report of June 2nd, 1920, in which he states that the veld near the mountains is sour but with proper treatment it is capable of producing all kinds of cereals and providing traffic for a railway.

While I admit this may be quite true, I must point out that there are large areas of precisely similar veld around George Station that are still covered with heather and where with the exception of tree planting little or no development has taken place since the line was opened to George in 1898. This line also labours under the serious disadvantage of being close to the sea and therefore having no area from which to draw traffic from the South while owing to the rough nature of the country and inaccessibility of the line for the first 12 miles no goods traffic worth consideration can be drawn from the area West of the Klein Keur Booms River.

From this point to the station to the East of the Goukamma River (Mileage 33) there is an area of approximately 20 square miles of excellent sweet veld having advantages of soil, rainfall and climate which are unequalled in any part of South Africa.

In considering the purely agricultural possibilities of the district served by this line, this is the area that must be taken as a basis for calculation and not the figures given by Mr Chivers under "Areas of farms land Cultivated and Lying Fallow" in the George – Knysna districts, which though interesting, have nothing to do with the case. It must, however, be understood that the area of 20 square miles, is a rough approximation as the line between good agricultural land and sand dunes is one that it is impossible to draw with any accuracy.

From a plantation-timber point of view the possibilities of this country are enormous and once the construction of this line is assured the whole of the country between it and the Outeniqua Mountains could be profitably be planted with pines which would more than justify the existence of the railway when they mature in 20 years' time. The value of a railway to the Forest Department is enabling it to dispose of the thinnings from plantations during the years of development of the trees is one that had, I believe, been fully dealt with in the reports of the Conservator of Forests, Knysna.

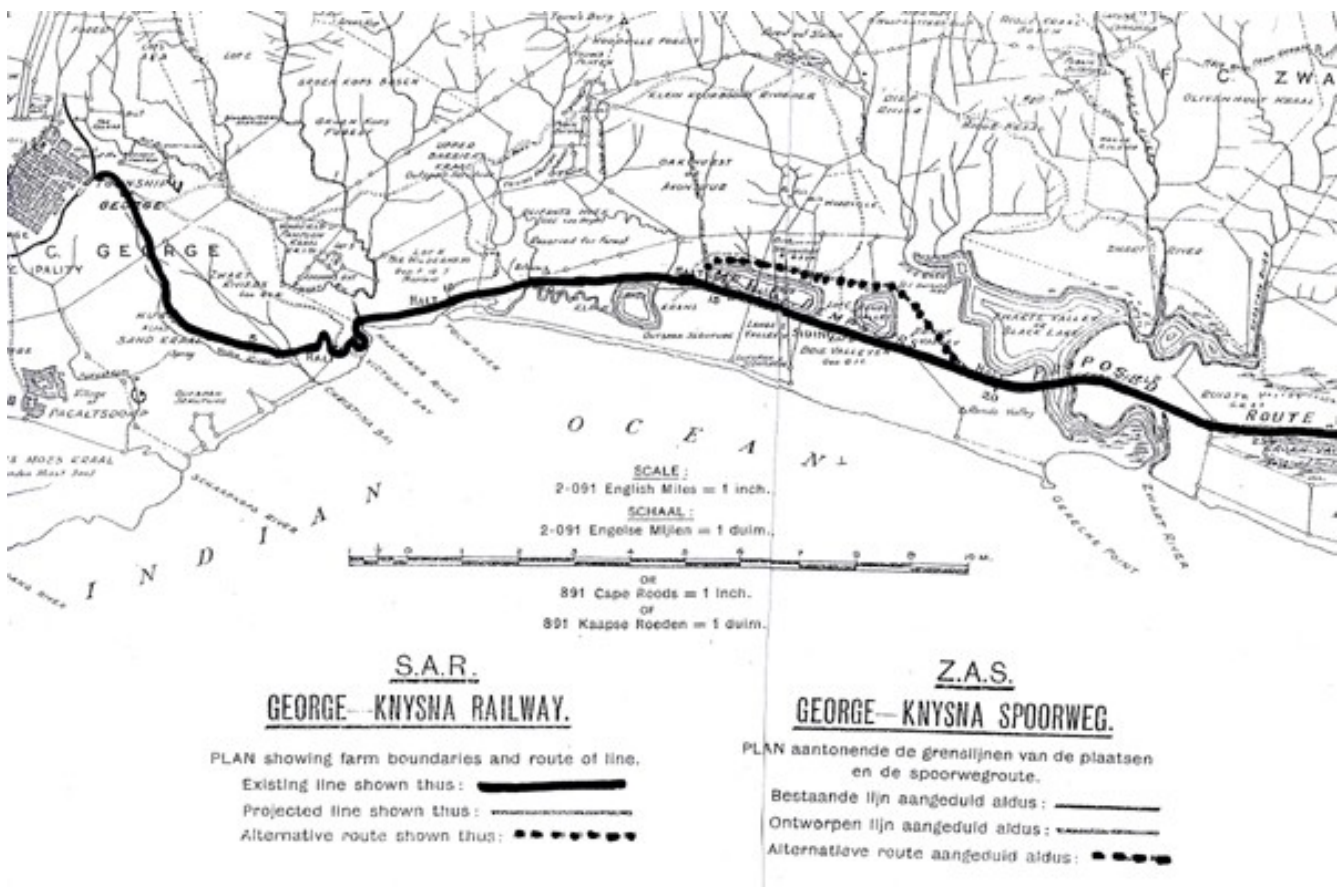
(1) It is interesting to note that the line was planned to run more or less through the museum site and along the N2 towards the Mall before reaching the present line.

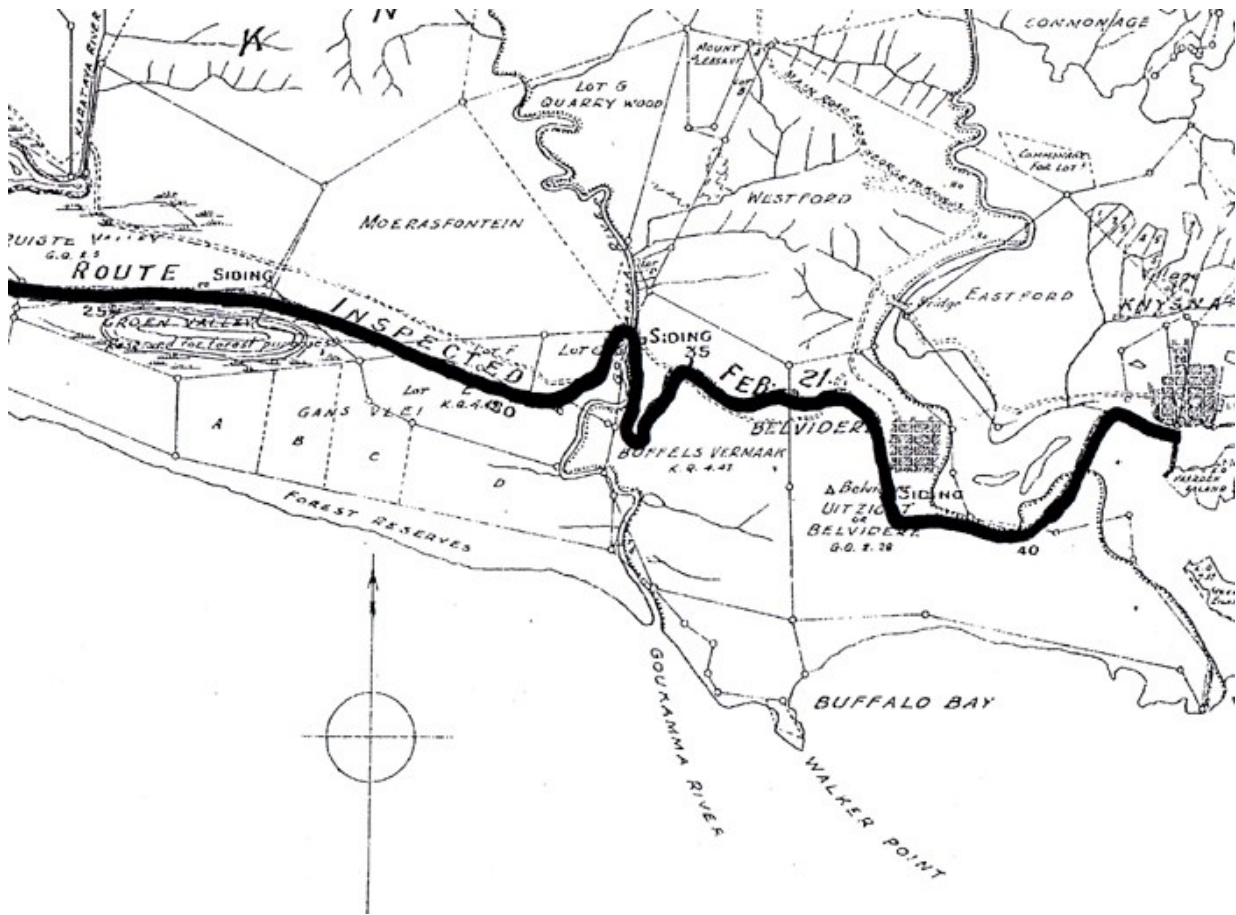
(2) Obviously some thought was given to bringing the line up the Kaaimans Gorge and crossing somewhere in the area of the Swart River and running into Wilderness below where the N2 now is. An earlier survey had suggested a line from George roughly following the

present N2 down the Klein Swart river and crossing that river on a viaduct some 240ft high and 700ft long before descending to Wilderness round the hillside. This was part of Mr Stewart's report of which more later.

(3) Interesting that the proposed line was to the south of the lakes as far as Swartvlei.

(4) The earlier proposal to take the line to the north of all the lakes would have seen it well away from Sedgfield, meeting the current line near Ruigtevlei.





To be continued

Colin Jenkins

Diaz express is running trips from Hartenbos to Maalgaten river. There is a stop for coffee near Reebok. If you feel so inclined, you may walk across the bridge at Maalgaten before returning to Groot Brak where a stop is made for lunch. The Trans Karroo restaurant serves up some excellent food while there is a cheaper burger restaurant next door. This trip can also be done from Groot Brak for a shorter ride. Also mooted is a trip from George Transport museum to Groot Brak with a bus tour to places of interest. Details from info@diazexpress.co.za

Ceres rail ran a successful trip from Ceres golf course to the Royal Cape Yacht Club, Cape Town on 27th August in what will hopefully be a regular feature. Details from events@ceresrail.co.za

The restaurant at Goukamma station is open again. Well worth a visit on a sunny day (or any day)

