



Friends of the Choo-Tjoe

*The Loop*

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## **NEWSLETTER NUMBER 5 – APRIL 2012**

Well we have held our first Annual General meeting and the good news is that interest seems as keen as ever. The bad news is that there has been very little progress in getting the line reopened. Meetings that should have taken place didn't and it is still almost impossible to get answers to our questions. Allan McVitty gave the meeting a synopsis of what had gone on between Classic Rail and Transnet and a copy of this report will be appearing in the next copy of the Loop.

On a brighter note, several members paid a visit to the Sandstone Steam Railway and a report of the festivities is included in this newsletter. It demonstrates what can be achieved if the will is there. People from all over South Africa, and indeed the World descended on Ficksburg no doubt delighting local businesses.

Recently the George Herald ran a poll on whether the train should be retained or the route turned into a cycleway. The result was pretty conclusive with 93 per cent in favour of the railway. A big vote of thanks must go to all those who took part in this exercise. It shows the level of support for the railway.

To demonstrate the level of support for the railway, we are also sending out forms for a petition and we hope that you will all collect as many signatures as possible. One member has already collected three hundred, while another has collected one hundred. While a petition will not decide the outcome, it is another lever when dealing with the authorities.

**Julie Jenkins**

### **Membership**

A reminder to all those who have not renewed their membership for 2012. The deadline for renewal is 31 May. You can renew using the attached renewal form, and can I ask you please to complete the form and return it to the address at the bottom of the page or you might slip through the net! Remember your support is vital if we are to convince those in authority that we really are serious.

**Colin Jenkins**

## AGM Notes

Fraser Howell, Chairman of the *Friends of the Choo-Tjoe*, welcomed all to the first Annual General Meeting which was held in the Knysna Library Hall, Memorial Square, Knysna, at 16:00 on the 20<sup>th</sup> of March 2012. There were 21 members in attendance and 18 apologies and proxies were noted.



Treasurer, Allan Waterston, circulated copies of the accounts to attendees and highlighted a number of figures: administration costs were kept to a minimum, the bulk of income and expenditure had occurred with the purchase and renovation of the trolley and, though finances were in a precarious position, virtually all commitments were met. Allan did not foresee a further large investment in the renovation of the trolley which was now nearing completion. However, when the time was right, regulatory documentation and permits would need to be obtained from the Rail Regulator in order to run the trolley – which would incur unknown costs. With the focus of the group on the restoration of the trolley and owing to uncertainties surrounding the future of the George/Knysna line, a budget for the following year could not with any confidence, be presented. Hopefully, during the course of the year, this would change. Many donations-in-kind had been received for which the *Friends* were very thankful. Allan thanked the sponsors and detailed what their donations to date had been.

Fraser, in his report, touched on some of the more significant happenings during the period under review, spoke briefly about the future and mentioned steps which he considered necessary to advance the *Friends'* objective of supporting the reopening of the George to Knysna railway line and so, restore the icon of the Garden Route - the *Outeniqua Choo-Tjoe*. Fraser mentioned that soon after the formation of this committee, the *Friends* were able to arrange an informal face to face meeting with the Minister for Finance, Economic Development & Tourism, Mr. Alan Winde, of the Provincial Government of the Western Cape (PGWC) who is a fervent supporter of the re-opening the line to bolster tourism and support business growth in the Southern Cape. At this meeting, in September 2010, Minister Winde said that he had expected that the line would be transferred from Transnet to PGWC but to date this had not happened. Such are the vagaries and unpredictability of politics!

Fraser continued “Of importance was that we - the *Friends'* - have consistently said that we support anyone who shares our wish to see the railway reopened. Within this context, we have and will continue to support Central, Provincial and Local Government, Transnet, Tourism Authorities, potential operators together with any other organisations which support our vision for the line to be reopened as a tourist/heritage railway. It must be remembered that the *Friends* are not, at the moment, intending to be an operator of the railway; we are a supporters group. The *Friends* would not support the cycling lobby who have advocated the conversion of the rail reserve to a lineal park for use by cyclists, walkers and runners. Such a conversion would destroy an existing National Asset

which will, we believe, have increasing importance in the future as the affects of 'Peak Oil' make road transport and road maintenance ever more expensive. Apart from the considerable costs of ripping up the line and constructing an all-weather path, the problems of revenue collection and safety for users has, we believe, been understated by the proponents of the cycleway. We further believe that the multiplier effect has been unreasonably over-inflated. The existence of the railway could well prove to have far greater significance than just that of a tourist/heritage railway; it could yet prove to be a very important lifeline for this area as a carrier of passengers and particularly freight.”

On the premise that the line would soon be under the control of PGWC, a few of the *Friends* set about purchasing, transporting and renovating a nine-seat railway inspection trolley with a view to demonstrating to members of the public that the group was serious about its aims and objectives - and needed support, both verbally and financially. A number of members had made significant financial donations to ensure that the renovation progresses and continues to do so. Several Members preferred to make regular monthly donations which are very welcome. Several Corporate Members have been particularly supportive for which the *Friends* are particularly grateful.

Much of what has happened this past year has been already covered in the early *Friends'* progress reports and latterly by The LOOP and Newsflashes. The Website of the *Friends* is becoming more popular judging by the number of *hits* recorded while a *FaceBook* page has also been opened, as *Facebook* was deemed a more accessible and friendly electronic tool to raise awareness and to communicate the *Friends'* aims and objectives with the public.

A visit to South Africa of several enthusiasts from the Netherlands to offer the benefit of their wide experience of preservation in their country, had taken place recently. The visitors were shown parts of the line and got a good feel for the extent of the problems that face those who will manage a reopening. They produced an interim draft report on how they saw the possible solutions to these problems. A final edition of this report will be issued soon.

In answer to a question from a member about public support, it was proposed that a petition needs to be circulated targeting the public who do not necessarily want to become members of the *Friends* but who are passionate about the Choo-Tjoe. On a question about the state of the line, Fraser elaborated that a number of inspections had been done and that the line between Knysna and Sedgefield could probably be repaired to running order without too great an expenditure. Various larger problems existed on the western end of the line – particularly in the Kaaimans area.

A representative of Classic Rail elaborated on actions that had been undertaken by the group over quite a long period of time in order to get a steam service going again – ranging from meetings with relevant authorities, drafting viable business plans, submitting a tender to operate, but which failed as tender conditions set were too onerous – but to date no progress could be reported. There was general support from attendees for Classic Rail's commitment and thanks were expressed for the initiatives undertaken.

The meeting drew to a close with a request for nominations to the management committee for 2012. No new or additional members were nominated. On a show of hands, the outgoing committee was re-elected.

**Kees Estie**

## **KALAHARI SUNRISE at SANDSTONE ESTATES**

**23 March to 1 April 2012**

Three Members, Kees Estie, Allan Waterston and Fraser Howell, recently returned from a visit to the above event. It was our first visit to the farm and its railway and it lived up to its reputation as being a spectacular feast of narrow gauge steam!

A different programme of locomotives with trains of varying consists gave visitors something new to experience and to view every day from double headed Lawleys to various combinations of tank and tender engines.



A long train headed by quadruple Garratts plus a Kalahari on a freight of DZ's, flats, tankers and box cars was the most spectacular show of the whole ten day event but having said that every day was different and catered for a variety of tastes and preferences of both engines and trains. Most trains had passenger accommodation for those who chose to ride. Runpasts were invariably made for both those riding the train and those linesiding. Those who chose to chase were driven to the runpast sites in a 1950's Bristol single decker bus!



We were free to wander around this working arable farm to view the extensive collection of other machines there. These included steam tractors, steam rollers, steam portables, farm tractors of many different types, farm machinery both old and modern and various military vehicles including artillerypieces and a Sherman tank and a 'Stalin Organ'!



**Apart from the NG railway equipment, the farm is also home to some 3' 6" gauge locomotives including a Class 10 and several tank engines some ex Simmer & Jack mine.**

**Apart from SA enthusiasts there were parties from UK, Australia, Germany, Switzerland and Belgium.**



**On several evenings we were treated to talks by attendees from the Welsh Highland Railway and Australian enthusiasts. It was these groups that did most of the driving and firing during the event.**

**We were also given a guided tour of the Sandstone railway workshops in Bloemfontein. This was another first for us 'Friends' and gave us a good insight into the considerable investment that continues to be made in the renovation and preservation of steam in this country by Wilfred Mole and his staff at Sandstone Estates.**

**We rounded off our trip home by calling in to Blaauwater Siding situated between Middelburg and Graaff Reinet. There we met Charles Kingwill who took us up to the top of the Lootsberg in his Trackmaster trolley. The weather was perfect and the views from the top were fantastic!**

**We all had a marvellous time on this trip. We enjoyed each others company together with the sight, sound and smell of working steam engines!**

**Definitely a trip to be recommended!**

**The Sandstone organisation also host the Steam in Action group and anyone interested in railways and steam generally can subscribe free of charge by registering with Joanne West at [joannewest@btinternet.com](mailto:joannewest@btinternet.com)**



**Fraser Howell**

## **TROLLEY PROGRESS**

**as at 15 April 2012**

**The trolley continues to change all-be-it very slowly but the end is definitely in sight!**

**This past couple of months the windows have received attention with all the glass having been fitted and sealed into the window frames. Of the 6 frames, the four windscreens have been permanently fitted into the body frame with a high quality sealer. The two remaining side windows need to be fitted when additional sealer becomes available (we are using an imported product).**

**The door glasses and their internal mechanisms together with the door locks have been renovated.**

**The windscreens were originally capable of being opened but were permanently sealed up by the railways probably because of the difficulty in preventing water ingress. Because of their poor fit we will also seal up these windows. Main ventilation will then only be available by opening the door windows!**

**Another recent task has been the dismantling of the seat frames and their preparation ready for painting. Spray painting of these frames should commence shortly as we have been informed that the recovering of seats will be completed before the month end. This will allow the seat frames to be reunited with the refurbished seat backs and squabs. Prior to the fitting of the seats a new rubber floor covering will be laid.**

**Electric work still need to be completed together with the fitting of internal cladding panels.**

**The regular team of Alistair, Inga, John , Allan and Fraser would welcome visitors (or helpers) who may care to see the progress first hand on any Wednesday and Saturday mornings.**

**Fraser Howell**