

FOTR MEMBERS' UPDATE- JANUARY 2012

Greetings members and friends, and a very happy New Year to you all from myself and the board of Friends of the Rail!

We sincerely hope that 2012 will be a much better year for us, with 2011 being a year that we would rather forget. However, the gloom of the train operation side has been tempered somewhat by the ongoing progress made in the development of our Hermanstad site. If one looks at what has been accomplished down in the western suburbs of Pretoria, we have much to be proud of. Plans are being formulated for this year, and some exciting developments are in the pipeline.

I must apologise for the scarcity of newsletters of late. The usual pressures of everyday life have left me with little time for writing, sadly as I do enjoy this pastime, but you can expect some offerings this year. In the meantime, this short bulletin will have to suffice!

2011 TRAIN SEASON

In the optimistic spirit of the New Year, it would be best not to dwell too much on the 2011 trains season.

Despite our gallant marketer Arno trying his heart out, the elements combined against us heavily. At the forefront was the terrible service received from the railway establishment, with continuous problems involving signal outages, track and overhead theft and faults, and on certain occasions uncaring pilots, all contriving to derail our schedule. A significant number of trains were abandoned or cancelled due to these causes, despite our locomotive and train set being all ready for departure. Public confidence in us is therefore at an all time low, with the perception being that we are incompetent and unprofessional. Of course this is not fair at all, as we have been hamstrung by all these matter beyond our control. The final train of the year was sorely fitting in that it followed the same path as the first train, being disallowed to leave the yard due to signal failures.

Does anyone know what it is like to send a train full of excited passengers home, after they have been processed, boarded and pulled up to the yard signal? It is gut wrenchingly sickening and heartbreaking for our staff to have to do this time and time again.



Fortunately FOTR has now made some useful contacts within PRASA, who towards the end of the season were able to intervene and assist our operations. Due largely to these people we managed to reach Cullinan fairly regularly towards the end of the year, thus restoring some faith. There has also been support from a tourism group in Cullinan who recognise the value we add to tourism in Dinokeng.

Our Tshwane Explorer trains did not prove popular, despite the attractions of the Open Days which went with them. Perhaps we need to give this excellent concept more time to develop, as it is fundamentally sound. It is obvious though that Cullinan is the cash cow, and we cannot survive without efficient running to this destination. FOTR and Cullinan are names that go hand-in-hand.

The result of all the failed trains, as well as lower patronage, is that our finances are in the worst state they have been for some time. We have however been able to sacrifice and save in order to keep afloat, and we are still proudly keeping ourselves just above the red line. 2012 will provide big challenges for us, and will not be easy. Hopefully our trains and the income generated will substantially improve- we just have to believe in it!

NEW YEAR UPDATE

January has seen the small but determined FOTR team of paid and unpaid workers hard at work.

On the loco side, all efforts are underway to get our locos operational. The 24 class needed some small repairs and thanks to Robert Dadford is now ready to go, with just a washout to come.

The 19D boiler work is still proving a bugbear. Slowly but surely leaks are repaired, welding is done and hydraulic testing repeated to determine the success thereof. Just when all seemed well, another small tube needed replacing. Luckily we had a spare and it was moved down from Hermanstad to CP in the editor's horsebox over the weekend 21/22 January. We are pretty sure she will be ready during February, but with such a small force working on her it is not guaranteed. Tribute must be paid to Gabor Kovacs, Tony Attwell, Steve Smith and John Dadford for their weekend shifts on 2650. Great going guys, your efforts are appreciated!

During the last train weekend in December, we did some shunting and tidying up at Hermanstad. The SANRASM 24 class, freshly painted, looks very neat at the head of some passenger stock, and is the sight the public see when entering at the main gate. There are plans to position the cosmetically restored 15F 3094 in her position as a change later on, so we can show off a big main line loco. The site has been mowed and long grass slashed around the perimeter, and with the good rains is looking green and inviting. We have had some changes in the caretaking personnel, and have also freed up the office, with the caretaker now staying in a room in the big shed. The extra office space is most useful, and was employed for our first board meeting of the year on 14 January, when the weather gods drove us indoors! This office has now been fitted out as the new sign-on, document-storage and radio-charging area.

Once again mention must be made of Trainman Berelowitz, who has and continues to be the driving force behind the new site's development and upkeep. On many evenings in the week and weekend days he is to be found pottering around Hermanstad, plotting and implementing his newest schemes!



A view from the waiting area on Hermanstad station, with the neat gardens and entrance looked over by the SANRASM 24 class

Our model railway team, led by Chris Becker and David Benn, has begun work on the installation of a model train layout in one of the steel 3rd class coaches, which has been stripped for this purpose. Chris has designed and made the plywood bases, and hopefully this year will see the creation of this exciting feature!

UPCOMING EVENTS

Our first train of the year is Valentine's Day, on Sunday 12 February. This is traditionally a big one, and is necessary to kickstart the year financially, and give us momentum. Last year this was where it all went wrong, as explained above- but we are confident of a great success this year. Let's have as much member support as possible- requests for availability will go out soon.

We return to Cullinan on Saturday 17 March, for the famous Groot Gat Festival- a noteworthy day in the life of this dorp. Then our Easter Bunny Train goes out on Easter Monday, 9 April.

During March we will be hosting our AGM. Notices will be sent out in good time, and we urge all members to attend. It is certainly not the dreary occasion one expects from these meetings, and with Nathan chairing the meeting you are sure of a few good laughs!

May will see another photo weekend, which may or may not go to Cullinan, depending on the situation. But it will be a good show no matter what.

Our Tshwane Explorer trains- which may well take on a new name this year, in better keeping with the city's heritage-watch this space- return during the winter months.

A full schedule, as well as lots of news, appears on our excellent railway forum.

Those members and friend who don't visit this site are missing out! Log on to www.friendsoftherail.com/phpBB2/ and go to forums, and be part of the action.

TRAINMAN BECOMES A DRIVER!

On the 16th of December 2011, Nathan Berelowitz finally achieved his childhood dream of becoming a driver. After doing his 30 trips during the year, he was examined and passed out by Inspector Coen Pretorius. Here we see the proud Trainman being congratulated by Rovos driver Arrie Grundling, along with Gabor Kovacs. Well done Nathan. Hopefully Gabor, Tony Attwell and Steve Smith will follow this path in the near future.



CONTACT INFORMATION

Thanks to computer-literate FOTR member Gabor Kovacs, we are now on Facebook! Have a look at this hot gossip column for the latest talk and information.

Coupled to our involvement with Cullinan, FOTR is proud to be associated with the new Dinokeng Big 5 Game Reserve. Go to www.dinokengbig5.com to read about the latest happenings here, and view an FOTR slot which editor Alison Odendaal kindly provides for free.

As usual, the website is at www.friendsoftherail.com
With the all-informative forum at www.friendsoftherail.com/phpBB2/

The sales office has a new dedicated number- 0820986186

Let's have a great 2012. Cheers till next time!

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