



Apple on Track

Official newsletter for Apple Express Rail NPC
Port Elizabeth - South Africa
Circular 26 – First Quarter 2018

Historic return of *Apple Express* train

24 December 2017 was a historical day for Port Elizabeth, when locomotive NG15 No 119 headed a seven-coach consist steamed out of the Transnet Humerail Narrow Gauge and Diesel Depot and made its way down to Kings Beach – a section of the Port Elizabeth-Avontuur line which last saw steam operations in 1995.

For the team involved in the project for almost six years, it was a moment to behold and the just reward for their years of hard work.

The crossing of Humewood Road bridge was an emotional experience for all as the sweet whistle of No 119 filled the air and a plume of smoke greeted the motorists below – their responded with hooters and shouts... the last time a steam train crossed this bridge was on 29 December 2010.



A coalition of the willing – comprised of Transnet, Nelson Mandela Bay Municipality and Apple Express Rail enabled a special holiday season “Pilot Phase” – carrying the headboard Nelson Mandela Bay Steam Train honouring our late icon, Nelson Mandela – enabled the train to operate between 26 December and 7 January.

Apple Express Rail NPC was appointed the Train Operator by Transnet, with the train running between Kings Beach, where a station area was set up, and the Airport – a 9.8km round trip of about an hour.

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The official launch of the “Pilot Phase” was held on 27 December 2017, with Tourism Portfolio Head, Councillor Andrew Whitfield and Apple Express Rail CEO, Nerina Skuy, doing the honours much to the delight of the guests and passengers.

Below: Nerina Skuy (CEO, Apple Express Rail) and NMBM Councillor Andrew Whitfield. (Photo: Richard Saunders)



NG 15 No.119, carrying the Nelson Mandela Bay Steam Train headboard, on an early morning trip (Photo: Tom Mathews).

During the “Pilot Phase” of 12 days, the Nelson Mandela Bay Steam train ran 60 trips – each booked to capacity! (Photo: Tom Mathews).



After the “Pilot Phase” was completed, NG15 No. 119 donned the historical Apple Express headboard and ran fully-booked for a further six days, with the blessing and support of Transnet... much to the delight of the many cruise liner passengers who had arrived in the port.



Photo: Richard Saunders

A trip on a steam-hauled train was an experience that many passengers had not experienced in a long time (some never before) and they loved it, with positive comments all round!



Trainee firemen on the job are (left) Gerhard Du Preez lighting NG15 No. 119 and (right) the wheels being cleaned and oiled by Justin Wood and Mark Ruddy

Every morning during the period of operation, the dedicated depot volunteer crew arrived for duty at 03h00 to light the locomotive and prepare her for the day's activities.

The night crew were tasked with cleaning the consist (loco and coaches) for the next day's operations. Their work was praised, with many compliments from passengers on the condition of the train. The hard working crew behind the scenes are often forgotten, but not by the passengers who came to ride the train this holidays.

At 06h30 the train crew arrived at the Depot, with the day's operations starting with safety briefings, duty rosters and medical checks for all. By 07h30 the train was loaded and ready to head towards the Kings Beach station area.

Below: Manie Johnson – night crew – kept the train spotless.

(Photo: Justin Wood).



The Kings Beach station was controlled by Nerina Skuy (left) as Station Master, who ran to strict safety protocols. A mean feat as she had to deal with approximately 500 adults and children – daily. Shaq Ebrahim (right) ran the ticketing system – seamlessly! The ticket office was based in Half Loaf “NG1050” coach.

Below: AER's Technical Team kept 119 in tip top condition for the operational period. (Left to right) Willie Schaap, Tino, Vernon Petzer



A big achievement for AER was the number of youth that volunteered on the train, mainly as Coach Controllers. Training for these positions took place in the weeks leading up to the train's operation.

Photo: Hilton Skuy



The Coach Controllers were under the guidance of seasoned Apple Express Train Manager, Willem Ferreira (Pictured below).



Huge thanks to our footplate crew, who kept the wheels turning safely – every day! Well done!

Doing footplate duty on the Nelson Mandela Bay Steam Train...



Above: (left) Mark Ruddy (Fireman). (Right) Alan Todkill (Trainee Fireman) and Jacques van Zyl (Pilot). Photo: Tom Matthews

Below: The media had a field day and this report was published by The Herald.

Below right: Train Driver, Hennie van Rooyen (Photo: Justin Wood)



Below left: Alan Todkill and Gary Ruddy. (Photo Justin Wood)



Above right: Justin Ruddy (Trainee Fireman) and Gary Ruddy

We welcomed our fair share of VIP passengers over the period, but probably the most memorable was having Nelson Mandela Bay Executive Mayor, Athol Trollip come for a ride. Asandiswa Tuswa had the honours of being their coach controller in NG143.



Photographs sourced from Mayor Trollip's Twitter account.

After the last trip for the day, volunteers gathered for a safety debriefing and sharing of experiences – as shown in the photo below.



If YOU want to become a part of the exciting *Apple Express* initiative, please contact the Membership Secretary: Alan Todkill by emailing: appleexpressvolunteergroup@gmail.com

The **APPLE ON TRACK** Newsletter is compiled by Justin Wood & Asandiswa Tuswa