



Progress Report

October 2016

The past two years

It was almost two years ago when a first email was sent to a select group of railway enthusiasts to gauge the general support for an idea to digitise the vast image collection residing in the Transnet Heritage Library in downtown Johannesburg. Many of those initially contacted probably, and rightly, may have thought that the idea died a natural death. Well, far from it. The sustained efforts of the past two years bore fruits in a number of ways:

- The management of Transnet Freight Rail (the custodians of the collection) gave the green light for the initiative to go ahead.
- The South African Institution of Civil Engineering pledged their support.
- A Memorandum of Understanding was subsequently drafted, agreed to and signed by both parties.
- The project acquired the name DRISA, reflected at the top of the page.
- A volunteer day was held in February 2016 which demonstrated tangible evidence that enthusiasts are willing to contribute their time and knowledge.
- Since February 2016, two interns were appointed to start the systematic scanning and digital processing of the collection. A further two interns joined the team during September 2016.
- DRISA was officially launched on 29 June 2016 at a breakfast hosted by the Railway Division of SAICE – an event covered by the SAICE Magazine of August 2016 (appended).
- By mid-September 2016, all procedures for processing the images were in place and we started to upload some of the material onto the AtoM digital platform. About 2% of the total collection is now uploaded.
- A very productive workshop was held on 28 September 2016 with about 20 invitees, all expert in one or other aspect of railway heritage. The digital platform was demonstrated and useful discussions followed. Support was unanimous with a strong resolve to continue the project.
- Most importantly, our network of correspondents has grown by leaps and bounds and modest financial contributions throughout the year allowed the retention of our interns.
- This communication is the first of planned regular updates on DRISA and its progress.

DRISA in short

DRISA plans to present, on the internet, a searchable catalogue of the Transnet Image collection, with thumbnails of each image, freely accessible to railway and history researchers all over the world.

What is not included?

The Transnet Heritage Library holds a wide variety of equally important materials, including a comprehensive railway book and magazine collection, surveys, engineering reports, maps, technical drawings, railway artefacts, etc. At this time, DRISA is narrowly confined to the digitising of the image collection. As such, it is already a project of major proportion – adding all the other elements at this early stage would be premature. The digital platform, however, is set up such that it allows the addition of the other materials at a later stage.

Breakdown of the image collection

There are seven major sub-collections of images in the library:

- N collection, accounting for the largest number of images, focuses on both railway matters and general photos of South African landscapes and towns.
- M collection, the second largest collection, focuses mostly on the internal matters of the SAR – social functions, infrastructure, rolling stock, lighthouses, harbours, etc.
- Albums, which contain images arranged according to topic.
- P collection, housing mostly older photographs before 1920.
- R collection, a small collection dealing with the Royal Visit of 1947 only. This collection was processed first as a pilot project to test and refine the procedures developed for DRISA.
- BF collection, a set of about 800 files with photographs pasted according to topic. Mostly duplicates of what is elsewhere, but often the only remaining copy of some photographs.
- CN collection, a few hundred boxes of colour negatives which still awaits proper survey.

Progress

Each image is processed in three steps – cataloguing, scanning and preparation for digital upload. Exact estimates are not possible as yet, but the best predictions are:

Collection	P	N	M	R	Albums	BF	CN
# images	10 000	100 000	80 000	2 000	20 000	40 000	?
catalogue	100%	10%	80%	90%	5%	10%	0%
scanned	40%	1%	0%	90%	0%	0%	0%
loaded	30%	0%	0%	80%	1%	0%	0%

The next steps

All the systems are now in place to continue at full speed. However, at the present rate, the completion time is estimated at ten years, while the MoU allows for three years. A strong push is required to achieve a doubling or tripling of the resources and effort. At the workshop, a number of key requirements were identified:

- A strengthening of team of interns to about six. These are recent matriculants who are trained in-house to follow the DRISA procedures and are paid very modestly. Up to now, funds are barely enough to keep the current team going. The first requirement is to stabilise the financial side of DRISA to allow for better continuity.
- The library provides enough space for the interns to work.
- There are four computer stations dedicated to the project at present. For the planned step-up, an extra scanner and computer will be required.
- There is currently no internet connection available to DRISA, and no hosting of the database on the internet has therefore been arranged. An offer of technical assistance was made at the workshop which is actively pursued with the goal to have it active by the end of 2016.
- At the workshop, an offer was made by an experienced asset manager to draw up a business plan for DRISA. This is followed up to be started in November 2016.

What you can do

Should you wish to contribute to DRISA, please consider some of the following:

- Spread the word by sending this report to your own network of railway and history enthusiasts. All who wish to be included in future updates, should send an email to johannes@haarhoff.org.za.
- Also submit it to the management of your own company with a request for a contribution, however modest. Funds are exclusively used for the payment of interns, with all the rest coming from unpaid volunteers. An amount of as little as R1000 will keep a team of two interns working for a week.
- Try to attend one of the 'volunteer days' that will be announced as we go. Not only will your presence assist DRISA, but you are guaranteed to be awed by the interesting and impressive amount of material residing in the library.

The DRISA account

The project and its financial affairs are regularly overseen by a steering committee of three – the project leader (Johannes Haarhoff) and one representative each of South African Institution of Civil Engineers (Johan de Koker) and Transnet Freight Rail (Yolanda Meyer) – the co-signatories of the MoU. EFT payment details are as follows:

Bank	Capitec Bank
Account holder	T Haarhoff
Account name	DRISA Project
Account number	14 5921 1721
Branch code	470 010
Reference	[please provide your own name]

Cheques have to be made out to "T Haarhoff" and deposited at any Capitec Bank branch by providing the details above. For any difficulties, please use the contact provided at the end.

Mystery photograph

Below is one of hundreds of mystery photographs encountered so far, and we have barely begun! If you know where this is, please let us know!



Contact

For any questions or ideas on DRISA, please contact Johannes Haarhoff at johannes@haarhoff.org.za or on 076 569 0852. He is also available to present a talk, free of charge, at your local railway club or historical association on the DRISA project and some of the interesting parts of the South African railway network.

For matters relating to the Transnet Heritage Library, or to visit there, please contact Yolanda Meyer, the librarian, at Yolanda.meyer@transnet.net.

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