



Newsletter

January 2017

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.

Reaction to the October 2016 Newsletter

The reaction to the first (October 2016) newsletter was heart-warming. The original recipients did very well to send it further to others potentially interested in DRISA – most of the replies came from enthusiasts not on our original mailing list. Many thanks to all!

Since October 2016 ...

The major milestones since our previous communication:

- The scanning of the P and PB Collections (containing the oldest material) is continuing unabated with anticipated completion by the middle of 2017.
- A web domain www.drisa.co.za was registered.
- Afrihost (a prominent South African internet hosting company) has generously offered to host and manage the DRISA website, which includes the AtoM database.
- A major breakthrough was made when seven original handwritten accession books of the M Collection were found, the key to unlocking this important collection which comprises about a third of the total Transnet collection. These were retyped and used to reconstruct an almost complete M catalogue of about 9500 folders holding an estimated 80 000 individual negatives.
- A catalogue of all topics covered by the BF Collection was typed. (The BF Collection is a series of 855 files filled with printed copies of original images in the Transnet Heritage Library, arranged by topic. Only a small fraction of the overall collection is covered in this way, but it is helpful to date and identify a large number of images.)

Sponsors and Donations

Financial assistance, since the start of DRISA, was provided by P Day, J de Koker, J Haarhoff, CM Lewis, Y Meyer, PC Pretorius and SAICE. Computer hardware was donated by Root3 Consulting

(desktop computer), JA Williams (laptop computer) and CM Lewis (a top-end scanner). Afrihost sponsors our internet presence and was very helpful in setting up our web pages and the AtoM database.

New DRISA Volunteers

It is a pleasure to have Sandy Buchanan, Stewart Currie and John McClement in the Transnet Heritage Library every Monday! This team has tackled the small, but important LS Collection of a few thousand lantern slides – see

https://brown.edu/Departments/Joukowsky_Institute/resources/lanternslides/2466.html for more on this old technology. They are working from first principles, in other words without any catalogue and their expertise in identification and interpretation is invaluable! Concurrently, a procedure for scanning was developed and tested, yielding good results. The LS Collection should be digitally available by the middle of 2017 if the current momentum is kept up.

The South African Railway Magazines

The scope of the DRISA Project has been broadened to include the older SA railway magazines. These older magazines are solid gold to railway enthusiasts and an essential resource for finding just about anything about early SA railways. The scanning of these magazines started as an independent project about two years ago, but proved so valuable for identification of older photographs that it only makes sense to integrate the scanned magazines with the scanned photographs.

Before Unification of SA in 1910, two monthly SA railway magazines had already been published. The Natal Government Railways took the lead in October 1905 and published 18 monthly issues of the “NGR Magazine”, the last in September 1907. During the same period, the Cape Government Railways and the Central South African Railways joined forces to start their own monthly “SAR Magazine” from September 1906. After 13 months of having two monthly railway magazines, common sense prevailed and from October 1907 a single “SAR Magazine” was produced, reflecting a complete national picture of railway development. This publication ran uninterrupted until 1967.

At present, all the above magazines up to December 1910 have been scanned and are available on the internet (details below). The paper versions were made available by Eric Conradie from his private collection, and he has generously allowed their cutting up for scanning purposes. The project is tackled in chunks of five years and the SAR Magazine Collection from January 1911 to December 1915 is almost ready for internet publication.

The DRISA website

Our DRISA website at www.drisa.co.za was made alive during November 2016. It is still in its early, modest developmental stage, but those interested are encouraged to check in. The site offers:

- The usual introduction, contact information and bank account information.
- A history of the DRISA Project along with some key documents.
- A link to the **SAR Magazine Collection**, mentioned above.
- A link to the **AtoM database**, the platform for presenting the catalogues and digital images of the Transnet collection.
- A link to **Soul of a Railway**, an independent website established years ago by others. This site has nothing to do with DRISA, but serves as an excellent demonstration of how the story of our railway heritage can be effectively told through photographs. It is linked with the kind and supportive permission of Charlie Lewis and Les Pivnic.

Navigating the AtoM platform

The AtoM platform offers a powerful array of features for hosting large and complex archival collections. Unsurprisingly, such power comes at the cost of a user interface which may be slightly intimidating at first. If you wish to visit the platform, it may be worthwhile to keep the following in mind:

- You do not need to install any software other than the web browser that you very probably already have – Firefox, Chrome or similar.
- You can browse the collection without having to log in. Login is only required for editing, uploading and site administration.

To browse the images:

- The images are all hosted under “THL Image Collection”. To see this label, click on the “Browse” box at the top left and then on “Archival descriptions” and it should appear in the main centre part of the screen.
- Click on “THL Image Collection” to see specific collections appear below “THL Collection” in the left margin. Clicking on any of these will take you to the specific collection (R, P, PB, etc).
- Click on “Show all” to see a sheet with thumbnails, 30 at a time. By using the sheet selector at the bottom, you can jump to different sheets of thumbnails.
- Click on a thumbnail to see the full image record – a larger version, title, size and type, etc.

Randomly browsing through thousands of images is not very useful. For focused research, it is necessary to use the “Search” function:

- Click the “Search” box at the top left.
- Type a place name or subject that may be of interest.
- A list of results is shown. To see only those records with digital images, click “Show results with digital objects” at the top of the list. Click on a record to see more detail.
- (Bear in mind that some records have only descriptions – no images yet. The images for those images will be added during the course of the DRISA project.)

To get a list of subjects and place names:

- Click the “Browse” box at the top left, and then “Subjects” or “Places”.
- Clicking on a specific subject of place will also return the available objects.

What every reader should consider

- Spread the word by sending this newsletter to your own network of railway and history enthusiasts. The previous request drew good response – thanks. The larger the network, the better. All who wish to be included in future updates, should send an email to johannes@haarhoff.org.za or use the “Contact” button on the website.
- If you are part of a railway club or interest group with some online resources or newsletters which could be useful to the broader SA railway network, consider linking it to the DRISA website. If you wish, please contact us.
- Our previous request for small financial contributions from companies drew a complete blank – all the assistance came from individuals. Now that there is some tangible evidence of progress, please 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 at

minimum wage level, with all the rest coming from unpaid volunteers. An amount of as little as R1300 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.

DRISA needs

- A volunteer knowledgeable on early cinematographic material to advise on the retrieval of early SAR films that were deposited elsewhere years ago, and the digital conversion of these and other film material still in Transnet possession.
- A volunteer willing to advise on making the DRISA project financially sustainable through focused marketing and fundraising.

Please contact johannes@haarhoff.org.za or on 076 569 0852 for more details. For matters pertaining to the Transnet Heritage Library, or to visit there, please contact Yolanda Meyer, the librarian, at Yolanda.meyer@transnet.net.

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.

We had enquiries on how contributions from overseas could be made, and are therefore looking into the best mechanism to accept donations in an easy and cost-effective way. Please be patient – the next newsletter will hopefully give the details.

Mystery photographs

The mystery location in the previous newsletter was quickly identified by three different respondents – outside Beaufort West on the road to Loxton. On the following pages, six more photographs for the sleuths amongst us! The first five were taken at unknown locations during the 1947 Royal Tour. The last one shows G Boeschoten (presumably the one with the railway uniform) and a burgher with rifle at the base of a waterfall. Which waterfall? Please let us know.

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R1454 at the top; P1460 at the bottom.





R1478 at the top; P1366 at the bottom.





R0724 at the top; P2190 at the bottom.

