



Newsletter

June 2019

DRISA in short

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

DRISA provides raw thumbnails with brief descriptions. Images are not cropped or enhanced, with no attempt to remove duplicates. Should images be required for illustration or publication, the high-resolution versions are available from the Transnet Heritage Library (THL). Users can digitally restore and enhance the images to suit their own purposes.

Since December 2019 ...

Since the previous newsletter of December 2018, DRISA continued to make progress:

- Scanning of the N Collection continues with two fulltime assistants under the guidance of Yolanda Meyer at the THL. No new images had been loaded onto the internet during the past few months due to other priorities, but a large batch of new photographs is scheduled for upload during the second half of 2019.
- The expert assistance of volunteers plays a large role in unlocking the treasures in the THL. Sandy, Stewart and John, on Mondays, completed cataloguing of the AE Durrant Collection and are now working on the “Hussey” set of some 40 albums. Olwyn Garratt, one of the early DRISA volunteers, is with us again to catalogue the document collection. Financial contributions were received from Friends of the Choo-Tsjoe in George and a contributor from the USA who wishes to remain anonymous.
- A beautiful photo book *People of Southern Africa* was produced by volunteer Ragnar Hansen from Bergen, Norway, using THL images provided by DRISA. This book was showcased by Professor Mike de Jongh, foremost anthropologist, at an international ethnological conference in Uppsala, Sweden during May.
- Scanning of the SAR&H Magazine is complete up to 1940. All the issues up to December 1930 are now on the internet. Processing and uploading of the 1931 – 1940 issues are underway and should be available on the internet later this year.

New SEARCH facility for the SAR&H Magazine Collection

The SAR&H Magazine was published every month, without exception, from 1906 to 1967. The total collection covers about 80 000 pages. These do not include the many pages devoted to advertisements and with “appointments, transfers, promotions and resignations”, as these pages were not bound into the volumes currently available in the THL. Finding information on specific subjects in such a vast collection is a problem. Up to about 1926, every issue was indexed by hand and users of the DRISA website could select from the pane on the left of the screen. In addition, the indexes published by the magazine are also shown as the 13th “month” of every year on the right. Even with these aids, users had to visit every year and every issue, one after the other, to find the desired information.

For the past few months, a SEARCH facility was incorporated into the DRISA website by volunteer Johann Haarhoff. At the top left of the opening screen, a SEARCH block is found for searching all the issues (at this point from 1905 to 1930) in one go. A list of results appears. Clicking on any of the results will open the appropriate page of the magazine, where the original text can be interrogated.

Users can narrow their searches in two ways. The first is to compound the query with the logical AND / OR operators, for example:

stockton AND tunnel	(16 results)
port AND elizabeth	(2185 results)
royal AND train AND (1910 OR 1925)	(39 results)

The second method is to constrain the date range using the "start_date" tag, like:

port AND elizabeth AND start_date:<1910	(121 results)
port AND elizabeth AND start_date:>1925	(1026 results)
port AND elizabeth AND start_date:(>1914 AND <1919)	(244 results)

To enable the SEARCH facility, optical character recognition (OCR) is required. OCR is never perfect, due to character size changes, changes in text direction and column width, and most importantly, the quality of the scanned image. This, in turn, depends on the printing quality and condition of the original pages used for scanning. The century-old pages of the SAR&H Magazine are of poor quality and the scans, even after hours of digital restoration, are therefore not great either. Users will therefore see that there are numerous OCR errors. In other words, there is no guarantee that the results showing up after a SEARCH are ALL the results. But even if OCR misses a few results, the DRISA team nevertheless found the SEARCH facility to be a tremendous help in locating articles of relevance to research questions. We hope that it will be equally useful to visitors to the DRISA website – please try it out!

Contact details

For questions and comments, please contact Johannes Haarhoff at johannes@haarhoff.org.za, Yolanda Meyer at Yolanda.meyer@transnet.net or visit www.drisa.co.za .

Images following ...

Large clock, Rand airport, 1935 (N43587)	Kimberley, aerial view, 1935 (N43558)
Theatre Royal, Durban (N06123)	Railway station, Uitenhage, (N19146)



