



Newsletter

April 2018

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.

Since August 2017 ...

It has been almost eight months since the previous newsletter! DRISA worked uninterruptedly and made meaningful progress, the major milestones being:

- The latest, updated version of the AtoM database (AtoM 2.4.0) was installed during April 2018. The upgrading and hosting of the DRISA internet platform continues to be donated by Afrihost, a loyal sponsor of the DRISA project from the start.
- A further collection of the South African Railways and Harbour Magazine, covering the period 1921 to 1925, was processed and published on the DRISA website at the end of February 2018. This means that DRISA has now completely captured the first twenty years of this valuable resource – total of 23 400 pages. Scanning is underway for the 1926-1930 collection.
- The LS collection of lantern slides was made available on the internet. Lantern slides were used in earlier years for projection during talks and presentations and extensively used overseas to market South Africa to potential tourists. Most of these slides had disappeared over the years, but 20 boxes of lantern slides remained in the Transnet Heritage Library. They were catalogued during 2017 by volunteers Sandy Buchanan, Stewart Currie and Jon McClement, scanned by the DRISA interns and now available to all. After filtering out the badly damaged slides and the numerous duplicates, 1320 lantern slides are now accessible to users.
- The N Collection of glass plates and negatives is probably the most valuable part of Transnet image collection. It took about two years to collect information from different sources and tedious of retyping to produce a rough N catalogue of the estimated 50 000 photographs. This task is now complete and DRISA is now scanning these photographs systematically. The first 1345 images were posted to the internet during the past month.

How to find specific images on the AtoM website

- Go to the DRISA website at www.drisa.co.za.
- Click on IMAGE COLLECTION and then next to “hosted here”.
- If you have the number of the image, type it in the search box at the top left. Type it *exactly* as shown below, eg LS_01_001 or N1234, and hit enter.
- The picture will show with all its associated metadata. At the top will be its number (or REFERENCE CODE in the words of AtoM) and a short TITLE. Below the picture, further information is shown regarding its type (negative or print, colour or black-and-white) and its size (in mm in the sequence height x width), as well as its keywords (ACCESS POINTS in the words of AtoM) regarding PLACE and SUBJECT. At the bottom of the panel on the right the box number of the original in the THL is shown.
- In the panel on the left, a treeview will show. By clicking on the image numbers immediately above and below the one currently in view, you can see the surrounding images. This is useful when a series of images on the same topic is present in the collection.
- To get a quick idea of the type and variety of images, browse (button at the top left) by ARCHIVAL DESCRIPTION. This takes you to only one entry, namely “THL Collection”. Click it to see the collections currently posted in the lefthand panel, eg Albums, P, PB, R, N, LS, etc.
- At the same time, a carousel will appear which can be dragged by the white button to see all the images. This is rather useless for browsing. More useful is to click on the “show all” button below the carousel. This brings up a mosaic of 50 thumbnails at a time. Sort by REFERENCE CODE to put them in numerical order, by collection. There are currently 169 such sheets to browse, if you have the time!

[Stupid joke department: What did the Tower of Pisa say to the Tower of London? If you have the time, I have the inclination...]

Examples from the LS Collection

- Two early aerial views:
 - Durban Point LS_02_078
 - Port Elizabeth LS_04_059
- Some shots of early Cape Town:
 - Railway station LS_01_057
 - Harbour pier LS_01_086
 - Harbour pier LS_01_087
 - City hall LS_01_091
- Construction:
 - Colenso power station LS_01_005
 - Dry dock Cape Town LS_01_013
 - Dry dock East London LS_02_004
- Rare pictures of the Chinese mine workers brought to SA after the Anglo-Boer War:
 - LS_05_002
 - LS_05_003

Examples from the N Collection

- Town scenes:
 - Swellendam first church N02210
 - Hermanus N38418
- Washing wool at Toise River near Stutterheim:
 - N04702
- Durban Harbour:
 - N06201
- Collection of vehicles used by the SAR Road Motor Services in 1925:
 - N37543

Examples from the SAR&H Magazine 1921-1925 Collection

In terms of industrial and technological development, there was hardly anything happening in South Africa which was not covered in the SAR&H Magazine in some way or other. Some themes that may interest most modern readers were:

- Development of a grain elevator system to improve access to international markets. March 1923 p210 and p230; April 1923 p340; June 1923 p543; September 1924 p897.
- General discussion on electrification of railways. September 1921 p592.
- Electrification of the Glencoe – Dundee line, the first in South Africa. January to June 1924 – check all issues.
- South Africa’s participation in the Empire Exhibition in London in 1924, where the SAR had a fully functional dining saloon, tea garden and large garden. June 1924 p536; November 1925 p1092.
- The opening of many branch lines at a time when new railway construction was continuing at a hectic pace. For a few examples see May 1923; January 1925; November 1925.
- Cato Ridge – Clairwood deviation. February 1921 p100; March 1921 p157; May 1921 p302; June 1921 p381.
- After 21 years of publication, the history of the SAR&H Magazine was summarised in an article in the October 1925 issue starting on page 968.

To view a specific article, go to www.drisa.co.za and click on MAGAZINE COLLECTION, then its URL. Select the collection in the left panel, then on the monthly issue of interest. Browse the ARTICLES on the left panel to get the article and read from there with the NEXT button. Adjust the width for comfortable reading by setting the preferred pixel width.

The future of DRISA

DRISA was formally launched during 2015, after about three years of preliminary surveys, planning, experimentation and preparation. Now, early in 2018, most of the catalogues have been completed in draft form and all the required methods and conventions have been finalised, currently being captured in a formal procedures manual. Through these actions, most of the bottlenecks have now been cleared to get more images onto the internet.

At this point (April 2018), the overall progress is summarised in the table below. (Three major collections are not included yet, as they are being investigated at present namely the album, colour slides and colour negatives.)

Collection	Total number	Scanned	Internet
LS Collection	1 320	1 320	1 320
M collection est.	90 000	1 936	552
N Collection est.	50 000	3 106	1 245
P Collection	7299	4 462	3 390
PB collection	2 573	2 406	1 666
R Collection	1 486	1 486	1 486
Total	152 678	14 716	9 659
Percentage	100%	9.6%	6.3%

When first announced, a call for sponsors was made to engineering companies and interested individuals that met with mixed success. The dream was, and still is, to make DRISA a volunteer project in the truest sense, with smaller contributions from as many enthusiasts as possible. The common concerns raised at the time, understandably, were firstly the uncertainty of what the images were about, whether they would be readily available and how they would be presented. Secondly, was this not only a pop-up project that would disappear after a few months without tangible results? Three years later, DRISA has now accumulated impressive evidence to demonstrate that DRISA is indeed playing an important role in preserving some of our precious engineering heritage, and that it does so in a professional, transparent way. To the individual sponsors that helped to get DRISA this far, a sincere word of thanks and appreciation.

To ensure the continuation of DRISA, we have to ask the readers of this newsletter once more to:

- Approach your employer, bring DRISA to their attention and ask them formally to consider a corporate contribution. (An amount of R7000 will fund our current team of two full-time interns for one month, to produce about 2000 scans with their associated metadata.)
- Consider a personal financial contribution to the project.
- Bring this newsletter and the DRISA website to the attention to your colleagues and friends who share our common railway and historical interest.

In turn, DRISA undertakes to:

- Acknowledge all contributors on the DRISA website.
- Use all funds exclusively for the payment of the interns, a principle used from the start.

Details of how to make contributions from within South Africa are on the DRISA website. Contributions from overseas had been too irregular to warrant setting up of a PayPal account. Individuals contributing in this way have either made deposits by hand when visiting South Africa, or by (more expensive!) bank transfers. Please contact Johannes Haarhoff (details below) if you run into a problem.

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