



Newsletter

August 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.

Since March 2017 ...

The major milestones since our previous communication:

- A new, much improved version of AtoM, the electronic database for hosting the image collection on the internet was put in use.
- A further collection of the South African Railways and Harbour Magazine was published on the internet. All the South African railway magazines from 1905 to December 1920 are now available for browsing and reading – a total of 17 000 pages plus.
- A volunteer has started to work through the collection of uncatalogued video cassettes to identify those worthy of digitisation.
- Initial contact was established with the National Film Archive to locate some early SAR films that had been transferred there many years ago.
- Scanning of images and typing of catalogues are continuing unabatedly.

More about the new AtoM

The AtoM database is maintained and improved by a company in Canada and financially supported by large national archival institutions. The software can be downloaded and used without charge by smaller institutions and those in the developing world. For an annual, quite hefty fee, the Canadian company provides additional support services. For DRISA, we have to rely at this point on volunteer network administrators to provide software support, whom are greatly acknowledged.

AtoM 2.2, previously installed on the DRISA website, was upgraded to a much improved AtoM 2.3.1. This new version was made operational on the DRISA website during June 2017 and continues to be

hosted free of charge by Afrihost – also greatly acknowledged. Casual users will see little change, but users looking for specific material will find greatly enhanced search facilities. It is now possible to zoom in on images with specific topics, date ranges and title words, separated by Boolean operators.

A further change to the database was to only publish information on those photographs for which digital images are available. Previously, the catalogue also included information on images which had not been scanned yet, which proved confusing and disappointing for users who could find a description of the image, but not the image itself.

Try the following to get a quick introduction to AtoM, brushing up your aircraft knowledge at the same time:

- Go to www.drisa.co.za and click on **Image Collection**.
- Click in the **Search** block (top left), type “aircraft” and click the search icon to the right.
- A list of 390 images appear, which can be browsed from top to bottom, then clicking on the next page, etc.
- Too much? Click in the **Search** block at the top left and click again on **Advanced Search**.
- Type “Douglas” in the **Search** block that comes up and click on **Submit** at the bottom. This brings up 84 images of only those aircraft manufactured by the Douglas Aircraft Corporation.
- Still too much? We know that that the SAA used the DC-3 (Dakota), DC-4 (Skymaster) and DC-7B versions. Go to **Advanced Search** again and type “Douglas DC-3” or only “DC-3” to narrow the selection down to 18 images.
- Only interested in Johannesburg? Return to **Advanced Search** and click **Add New Criteria** with the **AND** operator, and type Johannesburg in the new **Search** field that pops up. Now you should be down to 8 images. (Note that some of the images now missing might have been taken at Johannesburg, but we do not have that information.)
- Finally, click on the images in turn to get a better view and to see the full title, location in the Transnet Heritage library, etc.
- Have fun!

More about the SAR&H Magazine

In the previous newsletter, some background was given about the early Railway Magazines. On 24 March 2017, we had the NGR Magazine 1905 to 1907 (707 pages), the SAR Magazine 1906 to 1910 (4101 pages), and the SAR Magazine 1911 to 1915 (6338 pages) on the web page. On 7 August 2017, the SAR Magazine 1916 to 1920 (4928 pages) was added. Scanning of SAR Magazine 1921 to 1925 is currently underway and the target date for its publication is the end of February 2018.

Why the delay between scanning and publication? A number of processes have to follow scanning:

- Renumbering to match digital pages with physical pages.
- Scanning pages missing from our unbound copy, made available by Eric Conradie.
- De-skewing, cropping and reduction of each individual page – a manual operation. (The primary difficulty is to adjust the contrast to compensate for the early printing processes which generally presented darker images with fainter text.)
- Uploading each individual page to the internet, with correct page number.
- Indexing each issue to provide the finding aids in the lefthand margin of the web page.

Up to December 1920, we are happy to report that not a single page is missing, except for cover pages. The cover pages were always stripped before binding the library copies, so we are dependent

on the few loose cover pages still available. If you would have some cover pages, and those covers are missing from the website, please contact the undersigned.

The magazine collection can be accessed through the DRISA website at www.drisa.co.za and one is amazed at the variety and depth of the topics covered. Most readers will enjoy the perspectives from a hundred years ago, often on matters still topical today. Try these random examples:

- December 1917 page 922: Early surveying practice in Australia.
- March 1916 page 164 and May 1918 frontispiece: Early tunnelling in Natal.
- March 18 page 178: Bridge construction.
- February 1920 page 95: The history of metal rails.
- November 1920 page 847: Fastening rails onto sleepers.
- October 1916 page 799: General description of Port St John.
- December 1919 page 884: General description of Namibia.
- April 1920 page 256: Aviation at the Cape.

The DRISA website

The DRISA website at www.drisa.co.za provides links to get the full history of the DRISA project and provides has full information on how to make a donation, however large or small, to the project. The money goes exclusively to pay the young interns – all other costs and time are borne by a few willing volunteers. Other than links to the SAR Magazine and the AtoM Collections, there is also a link to Soul of a Railway, an excellent example of how the South African Railway story can be told through the medium of historical photographs – a link well worth exploring.

Meet one of the interns...

We are proud of the achievement of one of our interns recruited last year, who was recently elected to be a Mellon Mays Fellow, which took her to the USA during July. She introduces herself:



My name is Elekeana Nyirenda, and I am currently in my third year of a Bachelor of Arts degree at the university of the Witwatersrand. My majors are International Relations and Philosophy. As a Mellon Mays Fellow, I am part of an organization aiming to transform the academic landscape, therefore preparing myself for a career as an academic, while being guided by the grace of God. I am an intern to the DRISA project, collecting and collating information on old reports and photographs. It is proving to be a delightful and eye-opening experience. Prior to this I had no idea of the value of archives before ...

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