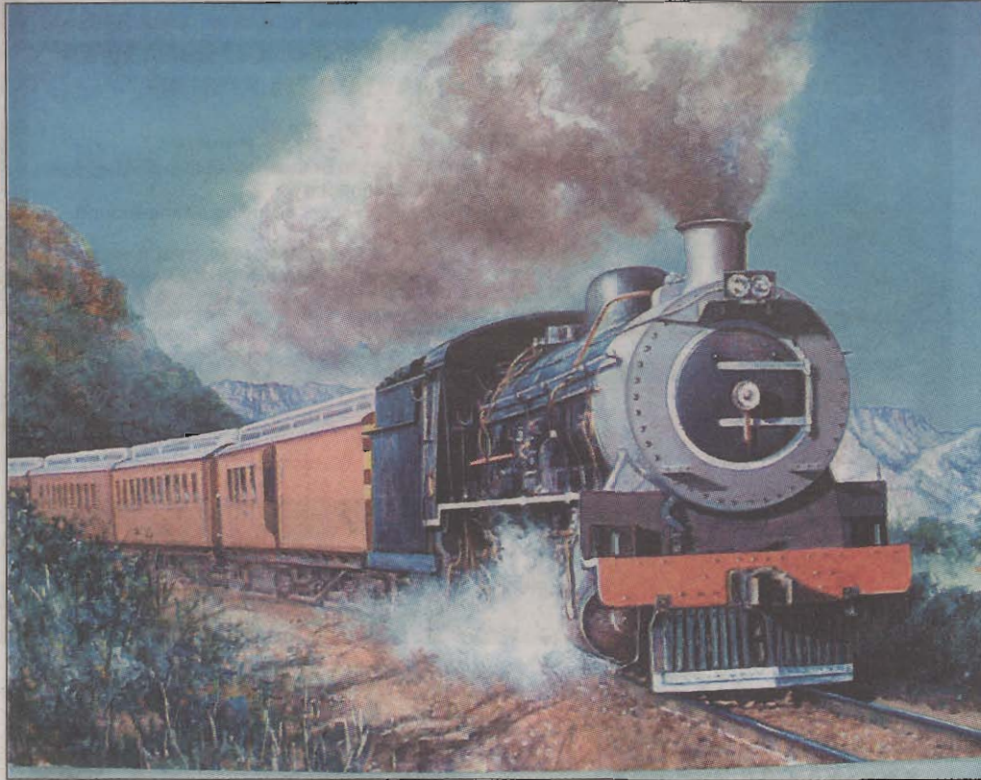


Choo-Tjoe enthusiasts fear pilfering



The Friends of the Choo-Tjoe with 20 active members are campaigning to restore the train service between Sedgefield and Knysna where the station was given a thorough clean-up recently. They are taking active steps to attain their ideal as it has been done in the rest of the world by volunteers.

PAULINE LOURENS

There are fears in steam enthusiast circles that our Outeniqua Choo-Tjoe locomotive trains will suffer the same fate as those kept at the South African Railways and Steam Museum in Krugersdorp where about 29 had to be scrapped, due to the damages inflicted by bronze thieves.

Friends of the Choo-Tjoe chairman, Fraser Howell, a retired civil engineer from Knysna, said this week that to get to the bronze parts of the old historic locomotives, axle-boxes were destroyed which render them useless for future trips. It was perturbing that in these raids hundreds of kilogrammes of bronze were stolen under the noses of security guards. The dismayed steam enthusiast said being inside a museum was no guarantee for safety.

Kobus Volschenk of Transnet's Heritage Preservation said this week that all four of the Outeniqua Choo-Tjoe steam locomotives used for the train service are securely locked away. Two steam locomotives are in the Outeniqua Railway Museum in Mission Street in George, where the railway carriages are also kept behind security fencing, and two at the Voorbaai workshops and depot which is not easily ac-

cessible and generally closed to the public.

Howell said the Friends of the Choo-Tjoe are in the process of restoring an old railway inspection trolley (built in the 1970s) with which they wanted to keep the Choo-Tjoe in the forefront of attention. Pressure must be placed by Transnet to transfer the trains, rolling stock and land to the Western Cape Province, because premier Helen Zille and finance minister Allan Winde are quite serious about getting the train back on track. This was done with funds raised among the members. Outside funding will also be sought to keep up the campaign.

Active

Amongst the Friends' members there are civil engineers and architects who are in the process of conducting their own survey as to what it will cost to restore the railwayline between Sedgefield and Knysna, which was washed away by the floods, so that it can be determined exactly how much money is involved in getting the service up and running again.

"Too many figures have been bandied about, resulting in confusion and people jumping to the conclusion about how impossible it is to restore the damaged rails.

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