

Ten ways you can help keep steam alive

The Reefsteamers Association is working to keep the Age of Steam alive.

July 1, 2017



Janine (Loco 3046) is one of the beautiful locomotives run by the Reefsteamers Association. Photo by: Ian Morison

For 30 years and more, enthusiasts around the world have quietly and insistently been keeping the Age of Steam alive.

Men and women take great pains (and spend huge amounts of money) to build replicas of famous engines. Large numbers of clubs exist so that people can build scale models and run miniature train sets, even at home.

Locomotion is a mechanical wonder, and has had many people fascinated since the first steam locomotive was designed by Richard Trevithick in 1804, more than 200 years ago.

When steam locomotives were systematically decommissioned by the South African Railways in the 1980s and 1990s, preservation groups sprung up all over the country.

One of these is the Reefsteamers Association based at the old Germiston Steam Locomotive Depot, in Knights.

On a lease-lend basis from Transnet, Reefsteamers restore, maintain and run a number of the SAR's Historic rolling stock of locos and coaches.

Reefsteamers is a registered non-profit company, and the members are all volunteers — men and women from all walks of life, aged from 14 – 84 with a few even based overseas.

Many of them are “old Spoories” who just want to see steam in action.

There is also an agreement with African Academy in Boksburg, regarding several of their mechanical engineering students making practical use of the tools and machinery under guidance.

Reefsteamers' income is predominantly generated from the sale of tickets for scheduled Saturday trips to Magaliesburg and to Irene, when possible.

Sadly, the ravages of time and weather are taking their toll on the depot itself. Hail in recent years has smashed many window panes, and rust has set in on the all-important roofing which protects the locomotives and coaches.

Consequently, a major membership and fundraising drive has been initiated. There are ten ways in which the public can contribute towards keeping the Age of Steam alive on the East Rand:

- **Book a spot at the Annual Winter Photo Shoot:**

Takes place on July 8, before dawn, for the best of photogenic steam photos. A second opportunity exists on July 29. Email photo@reefsteamers.com or call Ian Morison on 082 903 9463 for more information.

- **Attend the Reefsteamers' Annual Open Day:**

Takes place on August 5 – book a ticket on a vintage steam train from Rhodesfield Station, bound for the Germiston Depot. Learn all about locos and see them in action. There will be activities for children and much more. Visit www.reefsteamers.com for more information.

- **Donate towards loco repairs:**

Since 1991, Reefsteamers continue to repair and maintain a succession of SAR locomotives. Currently, the focus is on the very last remaining Class 12AR No 1535 “Susan” which is 98 years old, and a Class 15CA No 2056. Both are planned to be ‘in steam’ by the end of the year. Passenger coaches also need routine lifting and servicing.

- **Donate towards depot repairs:**

The oldest building dates back to 1895. The main workshop was built during World War Two by Italian POWs and the rail infrastructure is decades old. Roof repairs are required on the loco storage shed, and over 300 hailstone-shattered window panes need replacing. All kinds of materials and labour of every description is called for to fix up the many buildings over a large area.

- **Buy a ticket or two:**

Experience a real vintage steam train trip in Gauteng with all the sights and sounds of a bygone era. The trip schedule is available at www.reefsteamers.com for trips from Johannesburg to Magaliesburg and Rhodesfield to Irene. Call 063 743 9200 or email bookings@reefsteamers.com for more information.

- **Charter a whole train:**

Anything's possible. Trips are tailored to your corporate, organisation or school's requirements, for film crews and producers, TV and music videos. Email enquiries to bookings@reefsteamers.com

- **Name a loco for five years:**

Machines are usually named after women, remember. Just think of the publicity over time. Email enquiries to engineering_director@reefsteamers.com.

- **Extraordinary skills:**

Reefsteamers has one of South Africa's only operational but massive wheel lathes and many other specialised heavy machinery. Email enquiries to engineering_director@reefsteamers.com.

- **Recycle:**

Do you have aluminium cans to sell for recycling? Drop your aluminium waste off at the depot in Knights.

- **Become an active member:**

Train to be a fireman, driver, safety officer, a marshal on board, or get down and dirty in the mechanical workshop. Are you a carpenter, an upholsterer, a glazier or swagger? Contact Claire Nelson-Esch on 082 894 8877 or email membership@reefsteamers.com for more information.