



***THE NORTH STAR CHRONICLES – a newsletter primarily for the model railway fraternity***

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***Editorial***

Four members of the Highway Model Railway Club paid a short visit to Knysna in November last year. The primary purpose of the trip was to view model railway layouts in the area but the opportunity was also taken to visit several museums and undertake the Powervan run up the Montagu Pass. We also toured the Parnell Bruce motor collection in Knysna and the stationary engine museum in Stutterheim.

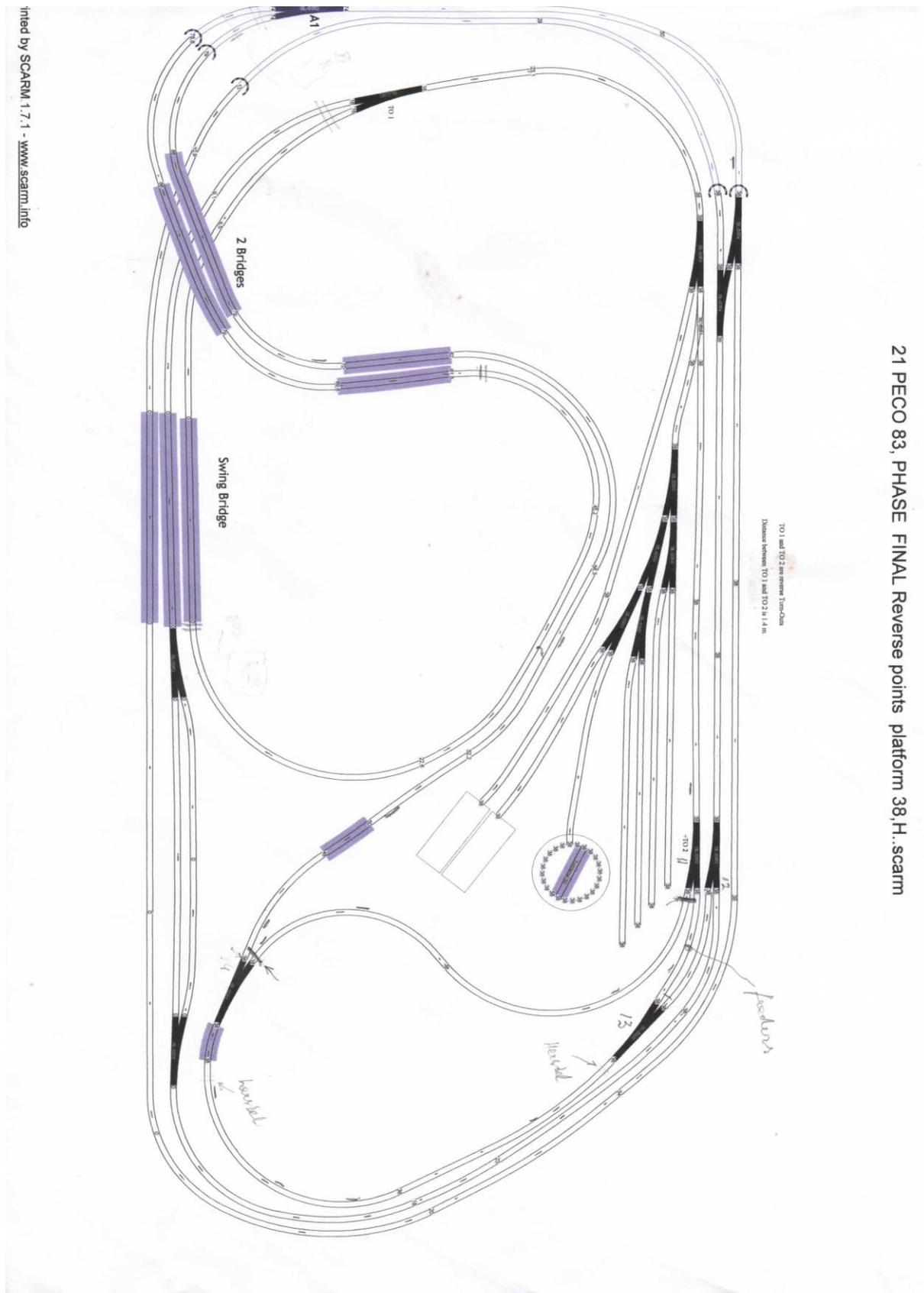
Several of the layouts viewed have already been featured in previous NSCs, in the form of Klaus Gessel's N gauge, Brian Messenger's HO<sub>n3</sub>, the Waterfront HO Marklin, the Knysna Shopping Mall N gauge and Ron Speight's HO. However, a number of new layouts were also seen, all works in progress, which this NSC will feature. The layouts all deserve articles to themselves. This edition will give an overview (a teaser?) with further newsletters to feature more comprehensive descriptions as the layouts progress.

***Cees van Stegeren's HO European***

Cees has a house in a commanding position overlooking the Knysna lagoon which has a dedicated model railway room. What is interesting about Cees is that he has come into the hobby in his eighties, proving that you are never too old to get involved with model railways.

There is a number of interesting features about this DCC controlled layout including the amount of track that has been fitted in to the available space while still incorporating generous curves, the beautiful

control panel and the use of extruded foam to scenic the layout thus saving a lot of weight.

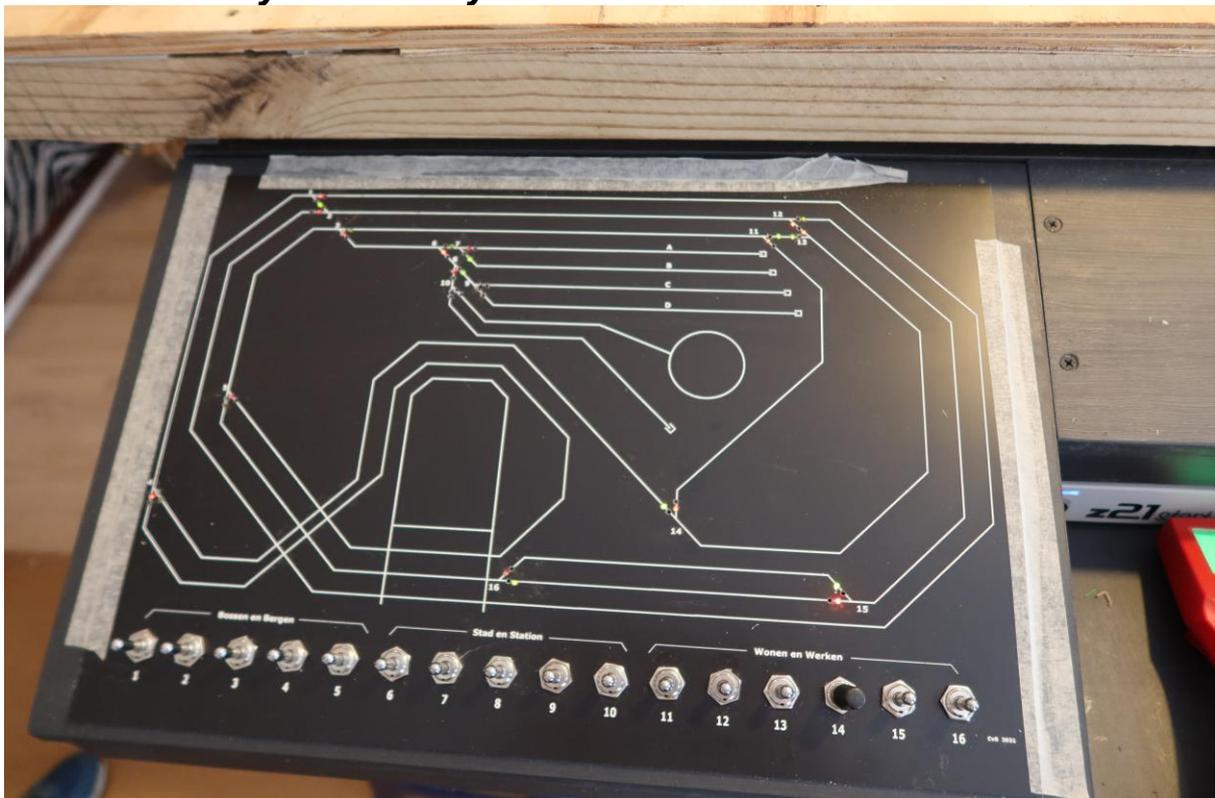


**Track plan of Cees's layout. Note clever use of reversing loops to extend the length of the run.**

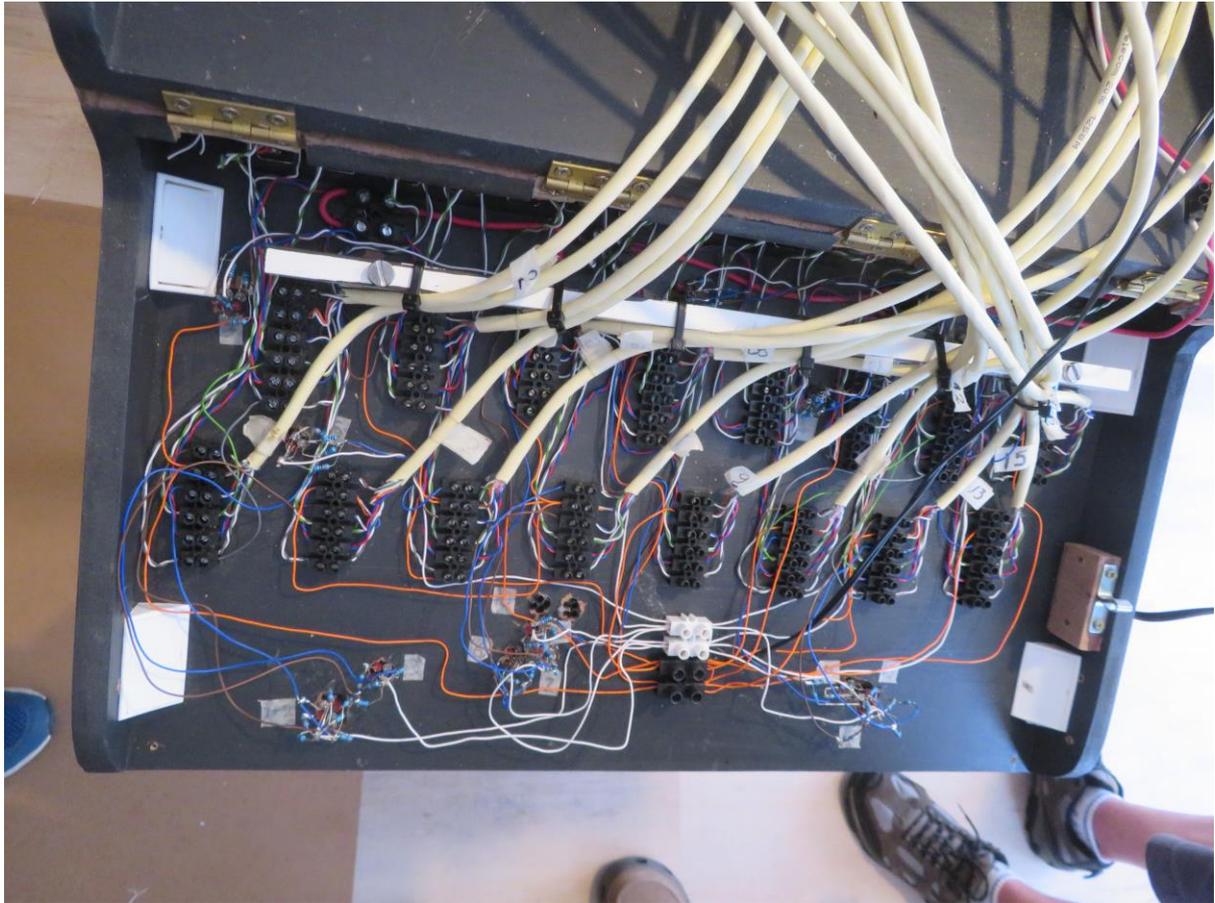


**The actual layout. Rodney Proud on left; Cees van Stegeren in the middle and Colin Healey far left. Note use of cannister extruded foam.**

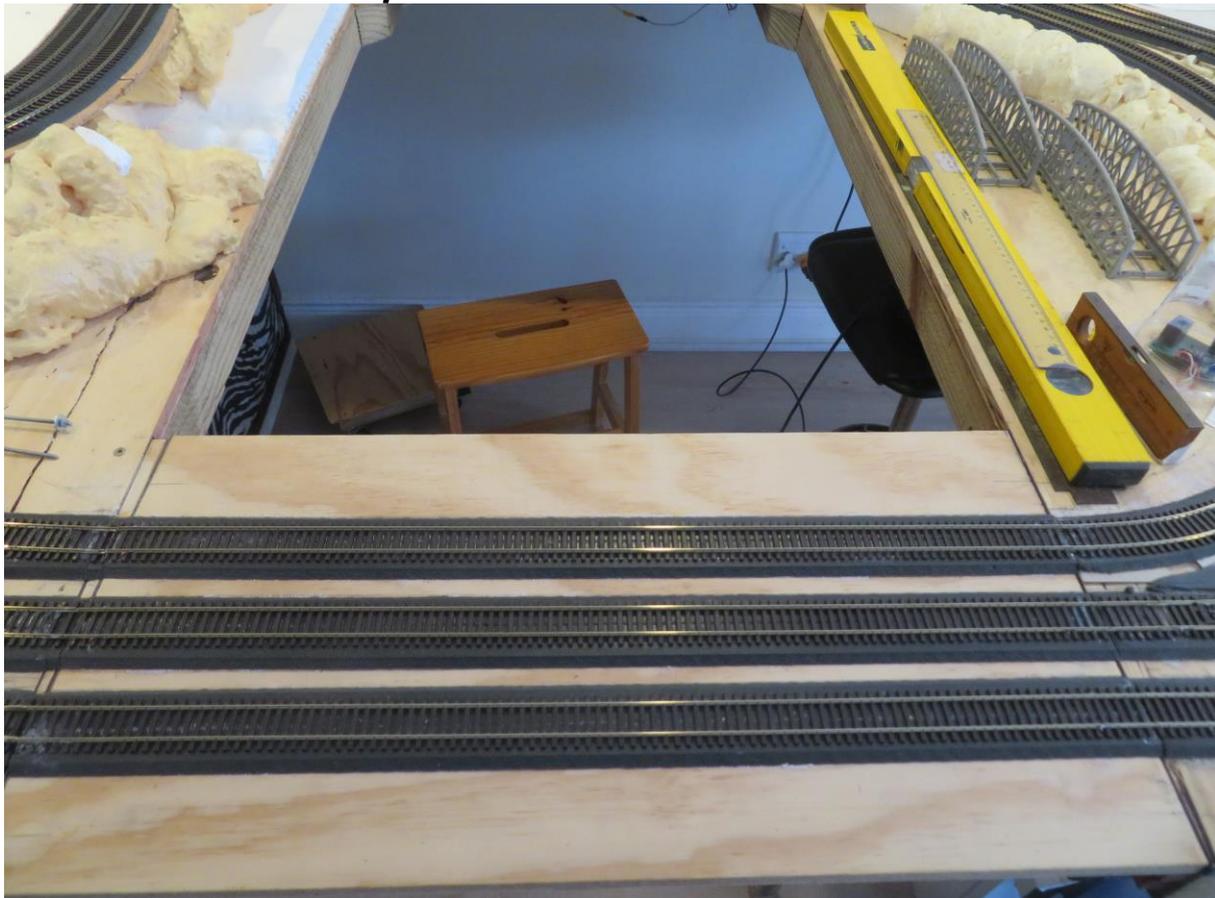
**Photo courtesy Gravin Phyfer**



**The control panel was etched in Knysna**



***Underside of control panel***



***A lift off section instead of a duck under to provide access to the middle of the layout.***



***The section at rear incorporating styrene and extruded foam lifts off to provide access to the tracks below.***



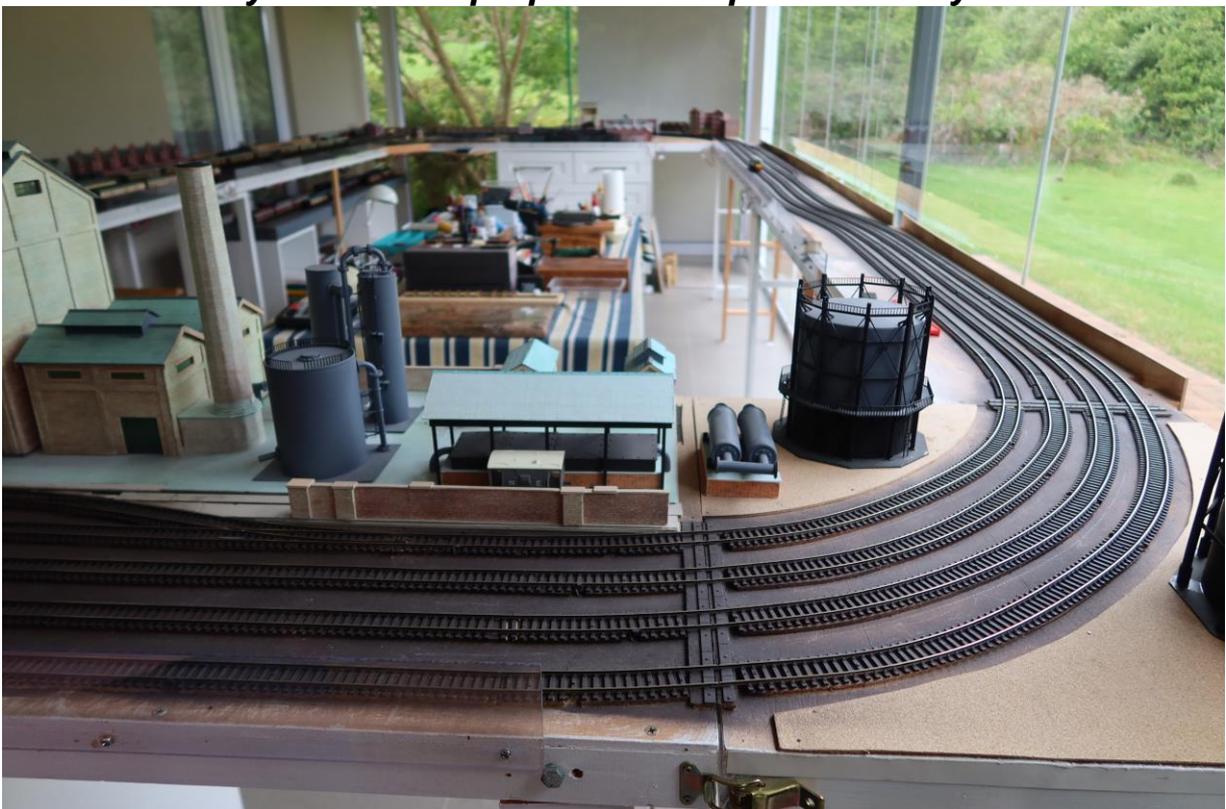
***Finally, a very smart tank loco in the form of a Roco BR 85 009. This features dynamic smoke, produced by one of the most realistic smoke generating units I have seen and which compares favourably with many of its big brothers. Refer the video at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZxIZNybpSoA>***

**Mike Griffiths British OO layout**

Mike lives in a retirement village in Knysna, the setting of which is stunning. The extensive DCC layout with the locos all sound equipped, has been erected on the veranda which must have involved some intense negotiations with management! In fact the size of the layout is such that it is difficult to photograph in one shot.



**Left side of layout. Note laptop used to operate the layout.**



**Mostly right side, the far right of which can be easily dismantled**



*Bird's eye view of mpd*



*Another view of mpd*



***Row of Metcalfe houses***

***Neville Ewing N gauge North American layout***

Neville lives in a recently built house on an estate in George. The size of the dedicated 'train room' and the choice of gauge has enabled an extensive layout to be built which is DCC controlled with the locos being sound equipped.



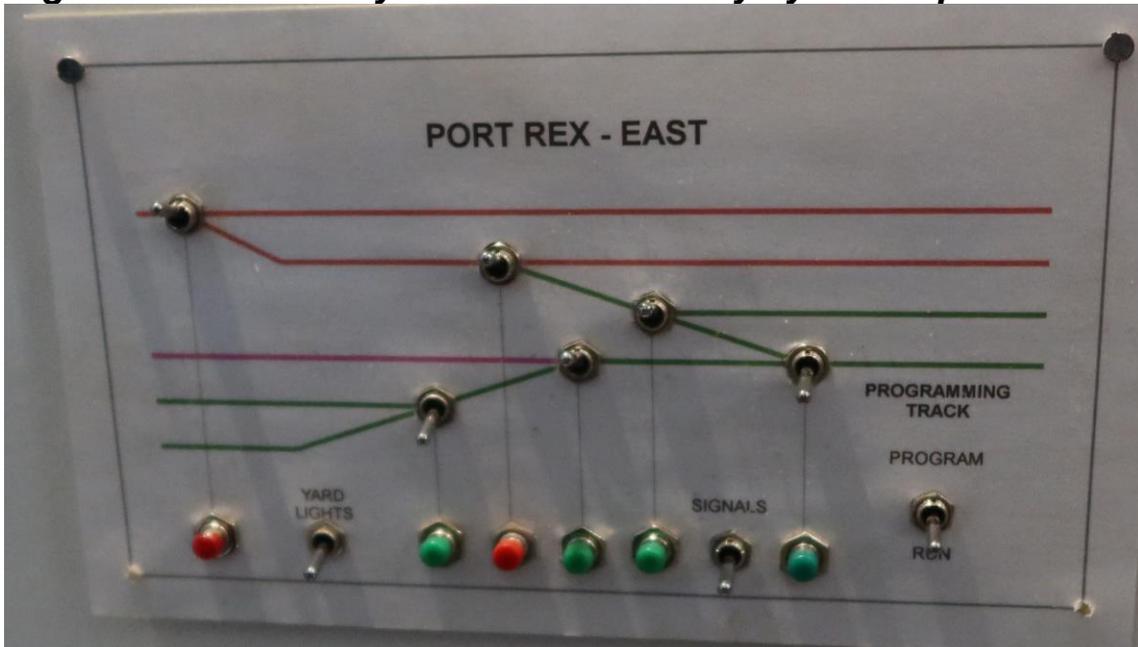
***Left hand side. Note extensive roundhouse and signals which are all operational and integrated into the control panels/ turnouts for the sections concerned.***



***Middle section***



***Right hand side of layout under the beady eye of Inspector Healey***



***An example of the high quality electronics on this layout***

### **Mike Dane's O gauge British Layout**

For many years O gauge was popular in South Africa but the popularity waned as HO/OO and latterly LGB (G scale) became more prominent. Perhaps as regards the larger scales this is understandable as if an interior layout is concerned O gauge requires a lot of room and if one is going to build a railway in the garden the track for LGB is more robust. The result is that today there are few O gauge layouts in South Africa and I know of no retailer who stocks track for that gauge. Fortunately, there is one individual ploughing a lonely O gauge furrow – in Knysna in the form of Mike Dane! Mike builds his own locomotives and rolling stock from brass kits and then paints them. The results are superb.



***The track plan. Top half is located inside the garage and the bottom half will circle the house.***



***Section inside the garage. Kit built brass loco and rolling stock, scratch built point. Mine host right rear.***



**Closer view of rolling stock**



**Kit built Princess Anne**



**Aid to track laying – laser cut plywood templates of varying radii. In the background, 0-8-0 shunter. Prototype Crewe built D class for the London and North Western Railway. Rebuilt as G class by LMS.**



**If you can't buy it, build it.**

## **Stop Press – George Knysna railway line.**

In August 2006 a landslide occurred at Dolphin Point adjacent to the Kaaimans River bridge which blocked the 67km long George Knysna heritage railway line. Flooding at Swartvlei, close to Sedgefield, damaged the line further in February 2007. Finally, a considerable number of sleepers were burnt in the Knysna fires of June 2017. Various attempts have been made to reopen the line over the years, the last being by an organisation called Classic Rail in 2016, which came to nothing. Finally, 15 years after the line closure, on the 18<sup>th</sup> December last year Treasury published a tender document for the grant of a concession. Details can be downloaded from the Treasury portal:

<https://www.etenders.gov.za/Home/Opportunities>

Services: Professional	FOR THE CONCESSION OF TRANSNET OWNED HERITAGE ROLLING STOCK, USE OF PERMANENT WAY AND REAL ESTATE FOR RAIL TOURISM AND FREIGHT PURPOSES ON THE GEORGE – KNYSNA BRANCH LINE IN THE WESTERN CAPE FOR A PERIOD OF UP TO TWENTY-FIVE (25) YEARS.
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### **TENDER DOCUMENTS**

[Annexure G - Track Access Agreement Template.pdf](#)

[Annexure B - George-Kynsna Concession Information Overview\\_FINAL.doc.pdf](#)

[Annexure J - Safety Interface Agreement Template.pdf](#)

[Annexure H - Concession Agreement-Template.pdf](#)

[Annexure C - George-Knysna Returnables Information Overview.pdf](#)

[RFP HOAC-HO-37111 George - Knysna Concession.pdf](#)

[Annexure A - George - Knysna Bid Evaluation Matrix.xlsx](#)

[Annexure D - George - Knysna Draft Visual Track Assessment Report.pdf](#)

[Annexure I - Commercial Agreement Template.pdf](#)

The tender closes on the 18<sup>th</sup> March.

It remains to be seen whether there is anyone with deep enough pockets who is prepared to take on the financial challenges associated with the restoration of the line. Transnet allegedly estimated the cost thereof as R250m and that was 10 years ago! Pre Covid this would have been a reasonable bet but the collapse of the overseas tourism industry on which the passenger side of the operation would be highly dependent (according to the Friends of the Choo-tjoe website -

<https://www.friendsofthechoo-tjoe.co.za/history-of-the-line-and-current-status/> at one stage 70% of passengers on the line were overseas

tourists) poses further obstacles to financial viability.

Obviously freight is crucial but there are also limits to what can be done in this regard. Moving the transport of refuse from Knysna (where there is no rubbish dump) to Mossel Bay from road to rail and perhaps timber are possibilities but the current contractors will not be pleased about losing business. There is no bypass from George to the far side of Plettenburg Bay so heavy vehicles have to drive through Knysna which is not exactly desirable.

I have been a sceptic about the possibility of the railway line reopening. While such a development would bring substantial benefits to the area and I wish anyone who tenders every success, I am still not holding my breath.

But it would be so nice to be proved wrong!

The end