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הרכבת

A Quarterly Journal on the Railways of the Middle East
Edited and Published by Rabbi Dr. Walter Rothschild PhD
Passauer Strasse 4, D-10789 Berlin, Germany
e.mail:Rothschild-Berlin@t-online.de



105:01

Saudi Arabia - Test trains with American locos and Chinese wagons on the Shah - Ruwais line. (Photo: Johannes Glöckner).



EDITORIAL.

This issue slipped by a couple of weeks due to personal circumstances, but we hope to appear in June all the same! And if not, then very soon thereafter. As always when producing a quarterly magazine there remain questions about the tenses to be used and the order in which it is to be placed – material is normally prepared as it comes in and so of course by the time the issue appears many of the announcements refer to events long past or tender deadlines already exceeded. But we hope nobody minds too much – it all helps to ‘keep the record.’ And work continues steadily on new lines, stations, electrification and more. The new IR timetable needs a little more time to digest – probably more on this in the next issue. It grows and grows....

The Editor managed two brief visits to Israel recently, with very little chance actually to ride the trains but at least an opportunity to observe progress on the old stations at Jerusalem and Jaffa, and the works on the bridges and tunnels on the A1 line. This included an adventure with Sybil when, whilst walking to get a better view we were unexpectedly offered a lift by the Project Engineer in his pick-up through one of the tunnels! (Fortunately not over one of the viaducts – it wasn't quite finished!) The scale of the works from close-up is even more impressive.

Regarding the rest of the Middle East news – what can one say? Most of it is rather depressing; With the exception of massive new rail networks in Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States.

Enjoy!

The Editor.

Sderot Station: Photo Shahar Wiesman - IR Spokesman



NEWS FROM THE LINE.

(a). CABLES CUT.

On 18.03.2014 a sub-contractor of Netivei-Ayalon building the road extension northward from Herzliya to Netanya, in the median of which the Tel-Aviv - Haifa main line runs, disconnected the railways' communication cables, thus causing severe delays and disruptions for passenger traffic for several hours.

(b). NEW PUBLIC TRANSPORT MANAGER AND SCHEMES.

From a press release of 19.03.2014 by Yefe-Nof: The company's directorate appointed unanimously Mr. Avishay Cohen as its new General Manager. Mr. Cohen, 49, with a Master's Degree in Public Administration, was until recently the Manager of Eilat Port and has wide experience in working with governmental and public authorities. The main reason for his appointment are two projects for the near future: a Cable Car line from the Technion (Technical Institute) and the University to the Bay of Haifa, and an LRV line to Nazareth.

(c). NEW STATION AT NETANYA SAPIR.

From a press release of 19.03.2014 by the Transport & Roads' Safety Ministry and Israel Railways Ltd.: "Good news for the inhabitants of Netanya and surrounding area; Tender No. 21306 for building the Sapir railway passenger station, to be named after the industrial zone at Netanya with the same name, has been published.

Minister Katz who briefed the press, said that the station will be of great importance for a large and important city like Netanya, and in addition to improved accessibility will also contribute to employment in this area. The latest date for submission of proposals is 23.04.2014.

The \$20 Million station will have platforms totalling 3,800 sq.m. in addition to 600 sq.m. of the station building; a modern terminal, elevators and escalators for the disabled, access to public transport, and Park-and-Ride facilities for 650 cars. Works are to commence within several months, with the opening date foreseen in 2016. The station is to be integrated into a big planned transportation centre to contain BRT lines and public buildings."

(d). IN THE SUMMER TIME.....

On 28.03.2014 Summer Time started in Israel: This enables operation of an additional train on each line on Fridays, whilst at the conclusion of Sabbath (Saturday night) there will be one train less.

(e). TRACKLAYING TENDER GOES TO DB.

From a press release of 23.04.2014 by Israel Roads Company:

"The biggest track-laying tender on IR so far has been completed and the winner is the group consisting of DB BahnBau with the Israeli construction company Shikun-U-Binu ('Housing and Building'), and Lesico Infrastructures Ltd., responsible for track laying and rail welding; other candidates were TSO of France, Indra of Spain, and the Israeli company TEN. The winners' quote was at \$200 Million.

The tender was for the upper infrastructure of the lines: Haifa – Afula – Beit-Shean (60 km); Acre – Carmiel (22 km); Sokolov – Hod-Hasharon - Herzliya (in the median of Highway No. 531 under construction) (9 km); in all totalling 100 km. [Ed. adds: Yes, I know this totals 91 and it is unclear whether route or track miles are meant and if so what length of sidings, etc.!]

(d). DEVELOPMENTS AT PATEY MODI'IN.

Near the Modi'in Outskirts station, a hotel, sport centre and a big park are to be built; details to follow when available.

(e). NEW ROLLING STOCK FOR THE NEW JERUSALEM LINE.

From a press release of 27.03.2014 by Israel Railways Ltd.;

"Although there is not yet any electrified line or even any equipment for the supply of electric current on Israel Railways, an important step was made on 27.03.2014 - at least as far as rolling stock is concerned: the first batch of Push/Pull double-deck cars fitted out for electric traction was handed over to Israel Railways by Bombardier Transportation at Lod depot.

Currently, the double-deck diesel operated trains consist of 6 cars, of which one is a power car/driving trailer; the other five are trailer cars, providing a total capacity of 750 seats. With the introduction of electric traction, train formation will grow to 8 cars – including a driving trailer (but no power car) – providing an increased seating capacity of 37% to 1,030 seats.

The following changes and improvements have been carried out on the new cars:

1. Fitting out for travel in tunnels longer than 2 km., amongst others on the fast A1 link Tel-Aviv-Jerusalem, while implementing the most advanced European fire safety standards.
2. The cars were built for a maximum speed of 160 km/h compared with the present maximum speed of 140 km/h.
3. An electro-pneumatic brake system has been installed for safer braking.
4. Added advanced systems for command and control, enabling amongst others interface with an electric locomotive and control of the pantograph arm.
5. Installed energy management systems.

In October 2010 a contract was signed between the railways and Bombardier Transportation, according to which Bombardier has already delivered 150 modern double-deck cars.

The current delivery of 6 cars is the first batch of an additional 72 cars, all intended for electric traction, and due to provide the initial solution for the first electrified lines - the A1 to Jerusalem and the Acre - Carmiel line, which will hopefully be operational in 2018.

In parallel, the railways will fulfil the option with Bombardier to convert all the former types of cars for electric traction; this is expected to last four years, while in the meantime until the completion of electrification (foreseen as 2020), both electric- and diesel-powered trains will be operated in parallel. During this period, the older carriages will be dual-traction with the ability to be operated both by diesel and by electric locomotives. Therefore, the current power cars with diesel engines and generators and compressors for internal electricity, air conditioning, etc., will continue to work that way until 2020.

The IR General Manager Mr. Boaz Zafrir said: "The railways are making all the arrangements and preparations at all levels towards the beginning of the electrical era; the fitting-out of the cars today for electric traction is taking place parallel to the promotion of the electrification tenders, and due to the rapid progress on railway infrastructure projects to Jerusalem and Carmiel."

Bombardier Israel General Manager Mr. Yossi Daskal (Brigadier General in Reserves) said: "We're glad to share the partnership with Israel Railways towards the beginning of a new era of electrification; Bombardier Transportation will continue its deep commitment to the railways and assist them with the complex challenges towards achieving the goals of the electrical era".

(Incidentally - The Editor noticed three double-deck driving trailers (Steuerwagen) with IR markings standing at the Wittenberge carriage works in March.)

(f). PESACH SPECIAL TIMETABLE.

On 06.04.2014 it was announced: Towards Pesach (Passover) and its intermediate semi-holiday days, the railways will operate a special timetable:

On Sunday, 13.04.2014 morning, trains will be operated according to Sunday's timetable; in the afternoon, trains will operate as on Thursdays.

The following services will be extended: The train departing from Beer-Sheva Central at 12:42 will terminate at Nahariya station at 15:27 instead of Tel-Aviv Savidor-Central. The train to Beer-Sheva Central, normally departing from Tel-Aviv Savidor-Central at 15:09, will start instead at Haifa Central-The 8 at 14:12. The train to Beer-Sheva Central, normally departing from Haifa Central-The 8, will start instead at Nahariya at 15:40.

On Monday, 14.04.2014 (Passover eve), on Friday, 18.04.2014 (mid-holiday), and on Sunday, 20.04.2014 (second Passover holiday), trains will operate as on a regular Friday. There will be an additional train from Beer-Sheva Central at 08:41 to Tel-Aviv Savidor-Central.

On Tuesday night, 15.04.2014 (conclusion of Passover first holiday), on Saturday, 19.04.2014 (Shabbat conclusion), and on Monday, 21.04.2014 (conclusion of Passover second holiday), trains will operate as on regular Saturday night (Shabbat conclusion).

On Wednesday & Thursday, 16.04.2014 & 17.04.2014, mid-holiday trains will operate according to regular timetable; however, there will be additional trains: From Binyamina to Rehovot at 11:58 & 13:58 from Binyamina, at 10:55 & 12:55 from Rehovot to Binyamina, at 10:02 and 12:02 from Ashkelon to Binyamina; from Haifa Central the 8 at 10:19

to Modi'in, and at 10:00 from Modi'in Central to Haifa Central-the 8.

On the Tel-Aviv - Jerusalem line: trains departing from Tel-Aviv Savidor-Central at 09:53, 11:53, 13:53 and 15:53, will terminate at 11:19, 13:19, 15:19 and 17:17 respectively at Jerusalem Malkha station instead of Beit-Shemesh. In the opposite direction, trains will depart from Jerusalem Malkha station - instead of Beit-Shemesh, at 10:25, 12:25, 14:25 and 16:2 respectively.

On the Beer-Sheva - Haifa line, the trains departing from Beer-Sheva Central at 08:38 and 09:38 will terminate at Haifa Central-The 8 – instead of Tel-Aviv Savidor-Central – at 10:56 and 11:56 respectively. In the opposite direction, trains to Beer-Sheva will depart from Haifa Central-The 8 - instead of Tel-Aviv Savidor-Central – at 14:12 and 15:12 respectively.

On Tuesday, 22.04.2014, trains will operate according to regular time table, but with the following additions: trains departing from Tel-Aviv Savidor-Central at 09:53, 11:53, 13:53, and 15:53 will terminate at 11:19, 13:19, 15:19 and 17:17 respectively at Jerusalem Malkha station instead of Beit-Shemesh. In the opposite direction, trains will depart from Jerusalem Malkha station - instead of Beit-Shemesh - at 10:25, 12:25, 14:25 and 16:25 respectively.

(g). ASHDOD STATION BUS LINK.

Starting on 08.04.2014, the people of Ashdod will enjoy - for the first time - direct minibus services to/from the railway station Ashdod-Ad-Halom. The lines are numbered: 15: Red; 5: Green; 8 & 18 : Green. They will enter service gradually. These services are of high importance as the station is located outside the city, which covers a large area, thus the need to travel to/from the station reduces the rail advantage; this is probably now going to change.

(h). TAKE A BUS TO THE KOTEL.

During the Passover mid-holidays - 16.04.2014 & 17.04.2014, Egged bus operator provided direct bus service Line 111 between Jerusalem Malkha station and the Western Wall (a holy Jewish site) and back, including one stop at the old historical railway station which has become an area for events. The bus schedules were co-ordinated with those of the railways, and fares the same as those of an urban journey.

(i). LINK TO NABATAEAN MARKET AT MAMSHIT.

The railways, in coordination with the Antiquities Authority, are enabling railway passengers to reach the Nabatean market at Mamshit (not far from Dimona) on 17.04.2014. Buying a special ticket

enable the passengers arriving at Beer-Sheva North/University station, to have a special bus service at reduced fare to the archaeological site of an ancient nomadic people).

Two special trains will depart Tel-Aviv Savidor-Central station at 08:32 and 09:32 and arrive at Beer-Sheva North/University station at 09:38 and 10:38 respectively, from where the bus services are provided. Trains back from Beer-Sheva will depart at 14:44 and 15:44 and arrive at Tel-Aviv Savidor-Central station at 16:02 and 17:02 respectively.

(j). DEATH ON THE LINE.

From 'Jerusalem Post' 21.04.2014. "A 31-year old pedestrian was run over today on the railway tracks near Nevatim, between Aruar and Dimona. Medics were called to the scene, but declared him dead on arrival. Medics reported that a pedestrian suffered multi-systemic critical injuries, which led to his death. The circumstances are being examined and police have begun investigating. "At 11.30 we received a report of a hurt pedestrian. For an unknown reason the man was hit by a freight train car, and died on the spot," MDA stated. "The possibility that the pedestrian did not hear the approaching train is being examined. Police clarified that the train stopped following the incident. No-one else was injured."

(k). SPECIAL TIMETABLES FOR YOM HAZIKARON AND YOM HA'ATZMA'UT.

Due to the Memorial Day on 05.05.2014 followed by Independence Day (which is a holiday), trains operated according to special timetables. On both days there were no reserved seats.

On 05.05.2014 - the Memorial Day, Yom HaZikaron - the bereaved families were to enjoy 50% fare reductions to/from military cemeteries; There were special bus services between railway stations and the nearby cemeteries free of charge; between 09:00 and 11:00 at every full hour from the stations to the cemeteries; between 11:30 and 13:00 from the cemeteries back to the stations. These services were provided at: Nahariya, Haifa Hof-Ha-Carmel, Binyamina, Kaisarya-Pardes-Hanah, Hadera West, Netanyah, Herzliya, Kfar-Sava-Nordau, Petakh-Tikva Sgula, Petakh-Tikva-Kiryat-Arie, Tel-Aviv (University, Rishon-Le-Zion West-Moshe Dayan, Lod, Rehovot, Ramla, Jerusalem Malkha, Ashdod-Ad-Halom, Ashkelon, Kiryat-Gat, Beer-Sheva Central.

Until 15:00 trains were to operate regularly but with the following changes: The 11:00 from Modi'in Central will terminate at Nahariya instead of Acre; The trains departing from Beer-Sheva Central at 11:38 and 12:38 respectively will terminate at Nahariya instead of Kiryat-Motzkin. Additional trains: from Modi'in Cen-

tral to Haifa Central-The 8 at 10:00, and in the opposite direction at 10:18; from Rehovot to Binyamina at 10:55 and at 12:55 respectively; in the opposite direction at 11:58 and 13:58 respectively.

From 15:00 and on and during 06.05.2014 - Independence Day, Yom HaAtzma'ut - trains operated at reduced numbers: On the lines: Nahariya - Beer-Sheva, Kiryat-Motzkin - Haifa Hof-Ha-Carmel, Tel-Aviv - Jerusalem, Hod-Ha-Sharon - Shderot, and Tel-Aviv - Rishon-Le-Zion-Harishonim, there was 1 train/hour each direction; On the Nahariya-Modi'in line 1 train/hour each direction calling also at Atlit; On the Binyamina - Ashkelon line 1 train/hour each direction calling at all intermediate stations including Kfar-Habad. Trains on the line Beer-Sheva - Dimona did not operate.

On 07.05.2014 trains operated according to Sunday timetable.

(l). TUNNELS ON THE CARMIEL LINE.

From press releases of 12.04.2014 and 23.04.2014 by Israel Roads (formerly Israel Roads Company and Public Works Department) responsible for rail projects since 2010:

"Within 11 days, history has been made regarding Israel Railways! On Wednesday, 12.04.2014, the first of the twin-bored 4.625 km long Gilon tunnels on the 23 km Acre - Carmiel line - under construction - was completed!

Further to a controlled explosion carried out under Gilon mountain, 200m under a settlement of the same name, the teams of the construction companies, the Chinese CCECC and the Israeli Dania Cebos met together, while hugging each other and raising the Chinese and Israeli flags!

Today, 23.04.2014 the second tunnel was completed; thus, this segment of the project is completed.

Transport Minister Mr. Yisrael Katz said: "The railways are approaching the Galilee, and this is good news for all the citizens of Israel towards Passover; a month ago, the international winning bidders for track laying, communication, were selected; Two weeks ago, the first double-deck cars fitted for electric traction arrived at Israel, and hopefully within three years, trains will cover the 145 km distance between Tel-Aviv and Carmiel in 110 minutes."

The Acre - Carmiel line is the one of the first two lines in Israel to be electrified; the other is the A1 fast rail link to Jerusalem.

Israel Roads' General Manager Engineer Shay Baras said: "The company is continuing (in parallel with line construction) in planning an extension of the line from its current end point at Carmiel in the Lower Galilee to Kiryat-Shemona in the Upper Galilee; the extension is de-

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signed for a continuous speed of 160 km/h while taking full care for environmental preservation with minimum damage."

The line project manager, Engineer Itamar Galil (the family name means 'Galilee' in Hebrew, which suits the area in which the line runs!) said: "The project is carried out according to the budget - about \$2.8 Billion - and schedule; the next stage will include building the tunnel infrastructures." He revealed that there are 18 interconnecting transverse tunnels.

A report in 'Jerusalem Post' (prob. on 11.05.2014) compiled by Tamara Zieve adds: "The building of two new tunnels connecting Acre to Karmiel was completed last week, constituting a 4.6km. route that connects the east and west sides of Mount Gilon. In three years' time the tunnels will be used for the railway line between Carmiel, Haifa and the centre of the country... "The railway lines that will open.... will encourage residency and tourism in the Galilee, and will provide a real contribution to strengthening livelihoods," the Transport Minister said... "The State of Israel's new railway network positively affects many areas in the Galilee and the Negev. The Israeli government's determination and facts on the ground are a message to entrepreneurs: Now is the time to invest in the periphery." Architect Shai Baras, CEO of Netivei Israel... added that in order to create a track that would be suitable for a train travelling at a speed of 160 km/h, they are moving roads, building new bridges over the Ne'eman River and diverting the Hilazon River. "At the end of the project we will return to the land thousands of cyclamen tubers and other plant species, which are being preserved during this time by the Israel Nature and Parks Authority," he said."

see photos on the next page

(m). DIMONA SERVICES SUSPENDED.

The railways announced that from 28.04.2014 until further notice, rail passenger services between Beer-Sheva North and Dimona have been suspended due to poor availability of the Bombardier IC3 Flexiliner dmus. The railways are providing alternative bus services free of charge.

(The Editor noted a long rake of IC3 sets stored at the former Tel Aviv Darmor station on 19.05.2014).

(n). GOVERNMENT AGREEMENT AND COMMITMENTS.

From a press release of 29.04.2014 by the Transport, and Roads' Safety Ministry: "The Knesset (Parliament) Financial Committee approved today, 29.04.2014, the agreement in principle signed with Israel Railways Ltd., regulating the current activ-

**TUNNELS ON
THE CARMIEL LINE.**



Photos - Albatross



**Overhauled engines for IC3
d.m.u.'s await refitting at
Haifa
East depot in December
2013. (Photo: Aharon Gazit)**



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ity, development programmes and subsidy payments for the next eight years at an overall sum of \$3.37 Billion.

According to the agreement, the railways are committed to act towards increasing use of public transport, improved passenger service levels, increase safety, developing rail infrastructures, adopting new technologies, increasing freight haulage by rail, and re-organizing the control and reporting systems regarding rail activities.

The agreement regulates the company's commitment, among the others, the operating and development programs to be approved by the Finance and Transportation Ministries, as well as the rules regarding the subsidies to be paid for current operation in hauling passengers and freight, as well as keeping to schedule and compensations for those damaged by delays.

The railways are also committed to present to the Ministry each year detailed programmes about operations; the government representatives are permitted to interfere and change the plan if needed. Minister Katz said that the railways are permitted to raise up to \$0.576 Billion by issuing bonds."

(o). EMEK LINE PROGRESS.

From a press release of 19.05.2014 by the Transport Ministry, Israel Ways, and Israel Railways Ltd.:

"A new road bridge at the Yezreel valley, the Kfar-Yehoshua bridge is to be opened in the night between 19.05.2014 and 20.05.2014; it is a grade separation between road No. 722 and the revived Hedjaz railway line under construction and due to open in 2017; it is named after the nearby railway station itself under construction; all carrying the name of the nearby settlement.

Transport Minister Mr. Yisrael Katz said: "The new bridge to be opened is a vital milestone, one of 20 sub-projects carried out in parallel as one piece, in order to complete the Valley (Hedjaz) railway line; the grade separation is of great importance and comfort both for pedestrians and for road vehicles, and opening it at this stage is a message for the future. We have built a new bridge which awaits the coming of the train, similarly to that of Yagur interchange (near Haifa) opened a year ago; stage by stage, the vision becomes a reality."

Netivei Yisrael (Israel Ways) General Manager Architect Mr. Shay Baras said: "The works on the bridge and underneath took exactly two years on a congested active road with traffic arrangements that avoided disruptions; similar to the sensitive design and implementation of the railway bridge being built west of the grade separation; here too, special attention has been given to preserving the nearby Kis-

hon river which runs under the bridges; works included also paving a 400m long new local road, and the company is about to pave a new access road from the new grade separation to Kfar-Yehoshua."

The cost of the grade separation reached almost \$50 Million, and while traffic will now be free in all directions, the works will be finally completed during June 2014.

(p). SHUTTLE BUS TO AZRIELI MALL.

On 18.05.2014 it was reported: The railways have started a new bus shuttle service free of charge between the Azrieli Mall at Holon and Tel-Aviv Hahagana station. Departures from Tel-Aviv Hahagana to Azrieli Mall are at: 07:55, 08:15, 08:55, and at 09:15. Departures from Azrieli Mall to Tel-Aviv Hahagana are at: 17:10, 17:45, 18:15, and 18:45.

(q). JERUSALEM LINE WORKS.

The line between Beit-Shemesh and Jerusalem is to be closed on Friday, 23.05.2014 due to infrastructure works; bus shuttle services free of charge will be provided.

(r). SDEROT LINE VULNERABILITY.

From Steve Waldenberg, 19.05.2014:

"A video clip published in recent days in the area of the Gaza Strip has caused Israeli security officials to lose sleep and reveals how great the terror threat is on the railroad tracks leading to Sderot. It shows how the trains are visible from within the Gaza Strip. The video was apparently shot by a Hamas member observing the line.

This specific section of the track has a length of 1,200m. Here, Israeli trains are exposed to problems from the Palestinian side, from the northern Gaza Strip. The establishment of this railroad segment was a matter of dispute between the Transport Ministry and the Defence Ministry. The Defence Ministry requested the establishment of a tunnel, but the Transport Ministry opted to finish the project quickly in its current form. The security system made arrangements for the threats revealed in the Palestinian video clip, but as at this time there is no complete solution for the vulnerability of the train. Next month, there was supposed to be an exercise to prepare the national home front, which was supposed to train forces for just such a scenario, but the exercise was cancelled. The IDF stated in response to the photos: "The IDF has given its recommendations to the political leadership who will make the decisions on the subject." The Transportation Ministry stated in response: "The plan for the line was approved years ago and a tunnel wasn't included."

The IPT (Investigative Project on

Terrorism') website on 19.05 added that the video in question had been seized by Israeli forces in Gaza.

(s). EILAT LINE CONTROVERSY CONTINUES.

A rather alarmist and hysterical report from 'Yediot Aharonot' 7/5/2014: "They Promise it would be Just Three Hours from Tel Aviv to Eilat! But you may be surprised to learn that a new study shows that the journey will in fact be longer – this means that one of the big promises of the Government of Israel in the past years is false – to build a high-speed railway to Eilat to allow for a travel time of just two and a half hours. The Prime Minister and the Minister of Transport even proclaimed that in the future the ride will be only two hours! Will that be possible? New calculations by the Office for the Protection of Nature show that the route will not allow this speed – even if it could get to Eilat at its maximum speed and not have to slow down for curves or to pause at stations, the ride would still take 2 hrs 40 mins.; If you then count in the stops and the slow sections it will be 3 hours. The current train from Tel Aviv to Beer Sheva, which was rebuilt in recent years, brings the travellers from one city to the other in 1hr. 20 mins. From Beer Sheva the travellers are supposed to continue in an electric fast train which can reach 220km/h on average. The length of the route Beer Sheva – Eilat is 260km and so the ride is expected to take another 1 hr. 20min. at least. Even under special circumstances with no stops on the way and no slowing down, and also not taking into account the possibility for needing to change trains at Beer Sheba, it would be impossible to get from Tel Aviv to Eilat in the proposed time.

Some environmental activists claim that to connect Eilat with the centre of the country one has to build through nature reserves and the line will cut for dozens of kilometres through hills and valleys and so cause major destruction of the natural environment, The proposal of the SPNI and the Nature & Parks Authority is that more of the line should be built through tunnels, especially under sensitive areas regarding nature, and so avoid disturbance. This was rejected as being too expensive. Nevertheless the Transport Ministry, Rakevet Israel and the Chevrat Netivei Israel, which will carry out the project, have not so far suggested the exact projected alignment. According to the plans the train is said to form a land bridge between the ports of Eilat and Ashdod but they fear dangerous explosives could then be conveyed across the country, and the projected tracks do not take this fear into account. Dangerous materials will be transported and pass through Beer

Sheba. So they claim at the SPNI. In order to minimise this danger a line should be planned to pass eastwards especially for the transport of these materials and outside the centre of Gush Dan."

In the 'Jerusalem Post' magazine for 9.5.2014 p.31 is an item from 'La Stampa' of 6.5.2014: "A group of young protesters will ride their bikes to highlight 'the grave damage to the environment' which the planned railway between Ashdod and Eilat 'will cause.' China seeks to establish an alternative route to the Suez Canal by building the high speed railway, which is planned to be 260 kilometres long. The group of 20 activists is alarmed by the damage that this will cause to 'the only vast desert in Israel.' The protesters will begin to ride their bikes from Dimona and undertake a six-day journey through the desert. 'If we don't stop this project right now, our children will think we have deliberately put ourselves on the tracks.' Environment Minister Amir Peretz has not yet been persuaded to change his mind on the matter."

(t). MORE PROGRESS ON NEW JERUSALEM LINE.

From a press release of 20.05.2014 by Israel Railways Ltd.:
 "The A1 fast rail link to Jerusalem is advancing by leaps and bounds and has reached the last straight in which the track, electrification and signalling are to be installed. Tunnel boring, as well as construction of bridges and Jerusalem HaCuma station is going ahead fast, and the railways are preparing to publish a mega tender for design, building and maintenance of electro-mechanical systems and slab tracks along the alignment, which will mark the final stage of infrastructures towards opening the line in 2017.

On Monday, 19.05.2014 the railways published the four best and final candidates which passed the PQ (Pre-Qualification) for the electro-mechanical systems and slab tracks:

- DCME PLUS Group, consisting of: Dania Sivus Ltd., Menolid Heruth Systems Ltd. (both Israeli), PEC+S Planning Engineering, Consulting + Services GmbH, and Chinese Civil Engineering Construction Company (CCECC).
- Jerusalem Railway Partners Group, consisting of: Sikun-Ubinuy-Solel Bone Infrastructures Ltd., Lesico Ltd. (both Israeli), Eiffage Rail GmbH, and Elcnor S.A.
- Shapir-PRS-Pasca JV Group, consisting of: Shapir Civil and Marine Engineering Ltd. (Israeli), Ingeneria y Construccsion Pacsa S.A., and Power & Railway Solutions S.L.
- Electra Boegl JV Group, consisting of: Electra Infrastructures Hasharon Excavators Ltd. (Israeli), Signon Schweitz AG, and Max Boegl Bauunternehmung GmbH

& Co KG.

The stage of building and maintaining the electro-mechanical systems and slab tracks is an essential part of the A1 project; it involves overall 46 km of slab track type upper structure including tracks, implementation of civil engineering works including tunnels, bridges, and inter-connecting sections, installing electro-mechanical systems supporting railway operation, management, coordination, monitoring of integration between all the installed infrastructures including electrification and other rail infrastructures, and maintaining the systems to be installed by the sub-contractor.

The railways' General Manager Mr. Boaz Zarir said: "The railways are managing the implementation works along the whole alignment while keeping the schedule towards opening at the end of 2017".

(u). NEW TIMETABLE.

From 14th. June a new IR timetable comes into force. The following link will reveal a hundred-page booklet containing the newest timetable (how times



have changed since the entire timetable fitted onto a sheet of A4!) -

<http://www.rail.co.il/HE/DrivePlan/Documents/???%202014/???%202014.pdf>

A fuller analysis in the next issue, but it is already worth noting that almost all stations are marked as Accessible for the Disabled (exceptions include Haifa Bat Galim and Beer Yaakov....)

A few days later Aharon Gazit wrote:

"As already reported, the new timetable became effective on Saturday night, 14.06.2014; so far, and despite the addition of more than 50 trains/day, punctuality is well above 93%, quite remarkable in particular for Sunday; just after introducing the timetable, the Workers' Union declared a labour conflict and sanctions, claiming that the timetable had not been properly prepared and that all the bonuses they were promised have not been given; the management has denied everything, relying on the Labour Tribunal which in its decision, more than a year ago, has forbidden any strikes or sanctions as part of the

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workers' commitment for three years."

On 04.06 Sybil obtained at Tel Aviv Merkaz a set of separate timetable leaflets for the following services:

- Hod Hasharon – Kfar Saba – Rosh Haayin – Petah Tikva – Tel Aviv
 - Harishonim – Tel Aviv
 - Beer Yaakov – Kfar Habad – Tel Aviv
 - Dimona – Beersheva – Lehavim – Kiryat Gat – Tel Aviv
 - Yavne Maarav – Rishon Lezion Moshe Dayan – Bat Yam – Holon – Tel Aviv
 - Jerusalem – Beit Shemesh – Tel Aviv
 - Modiin – Ben-Gurion Airport – Tel Aviv
 - Lod – Tel Aviv
 - Ramle – Tel Aviv
 - Yavne Mizrah – Rehovot – Tel Aviv
 - Binyamina – Caesarea – Hadera – Netanya – Beit Yehoshua – Herzliya – Tel Aviv
 - Nahariya – Akko – Krayot – Haifa – Atlit – Tel Aviv
 - Sderot – Ashkelon – Ashdod – Tel Aviv
- (All are only in Hebrew. The last three are in a larger format than the others.)

On Platform 4 at TA Merkaz she encountered a walking information office! "There are a lot of young people, presumably students, handing out the leaflets and answering questions about the new timetable, but this is the only one I saw dressed for the part."

(v). NEW PRESS SPOKESMAN.

From a press release of 12.06.2014 by Israel Railways Ltd.:

"The IR Directorate approved yesterday (11.06.2014) the decision of the company's committee for tracing candidates, the appointment of Dr. Yisrael Tal-Saranga as the railways' Spokesman and Information Department Manager, succeeding Mrs. Liron Gordon who resigned several months ago.

Dr. Yisrael Tal-Saranga, a Lieutenant-Colonel (Reserves) has a rich experience: he was the Air Force spokesman and Air Force commander consultant for communication, Chief Commander in the IDF spokesman department which included public military-diplomacy and the Army's public relations, commander of the Military Communication School, commander of the Air Force magazine and internet site; he was also the linking personality with various visitors from abroad, army information missions abroad regarding public relations, freedom of information, human rights, researchers and authors, mutual relations regarding conferences in Israel, and newsletters. Dr. Yisrael Tal-Saranga, has 3 degrees

in Political Science and Communication from the Israeli Bar-Ilan University, all as an excellent graduate! He is married, with two children.

The railways' General Manager Mr. Boaz Zafir said: "Israel Railways Ltd. is glad that Dr. Yisrael Tal-Saranga is joining the company; I wish him success in his new job and I'm sure that due to his many talents, he will take a significant part, together with the other company's management persons in promoting the company's targets."

(w). INFRASTRUCTURE WORKS ON OLD JERUSALEM LINE.

Due to infrastructure works for increasing safety on the old line to Jerusalem, trains are terminating at/starting from Beit-Shemesh; thus trains between Beit-Shemesh and the two Jerusalem stations (Biblical Zoo and Malkha) are not operated from 14.06.2014 until Saturday night 12.07.2014; the railway are providing alternative bus shuttle services.

(x). BUSES TO THE AIRPORT.

The railways are providing free of charge bus shuttle services between Beer-Sheva stations and Ben-Gurion Airport at late night hours (00:00 a.m. and 05:00) until Friday, 20.06.2014.

From Saturday night, 21.06.2014, a pay bus service line 469 of bus operator Metropoline will start.

105:05

A. TENDERS.

(i). Tender No. 11303: Providing Internet Services, Maintenance, and Technical Support for the access to Internet, integration and upgrading Hardware/Software Systems regarding Communication and Data Protection. The contract is for 36 months, with optional extensions of up to additional 48 months. Latest date for submission of proposal: 10.04.2014.

(ii). Tender No. 11306: Repair and/or rebuilding of Rolling Stock Radiators. The contract is for 24 months, with optional extensions for up to additional 36 months. Latest date for submission of proposals: 27.03.2014.

(iii). Tender No. 11310: Supply, Assimilation, Operating, and Maintenance of a Computerized System for Management of the railways' Fuel System: The contract is for 60 months, with optional extensions for up to additional 60 months. Latest date for submission of proposals: 19.05.2014.

(iv). Tender No. 11311: Maintenance services for Track Auxiliary Equipment: The contract is for 12 months, with optional extensions for up to additional 48 months. Latest date for submission of proposals: 01.04.2014.

(vi). Tender No. 11313: Providing Watchmen at Level Crossings and operating an on-line Information Centre for the railways' Safety Division. The contract is for 24 months, with optional extensions of up to additional 36 months. Latest date for submission of proposal: 01.04.2014.

(vii). Tender No. MS/RC/2014/7: Operating a Taxi service to/from Yavne-West railway station: The contract is for 36 months. Latest date for submission of proposal: 07.04.2014.

(viii). Tender No. 21413: Upgrading Works at the stations of Binyamina and Hof-HaCarmel stations: Latest date for submission of proposals: 23.04.2014. This tender replaces tender No. 21311, which has been cancelled.

(viii). Israel Railways Ltd. Tender No. 21405; Manufacture and Supply of pre-stressed Concrete Mono-bloc Sleepers: Requirements: the sleepers must follow EN13230 and/or UIC860 and/or Israel Railways Ltd. specification for manufacturing and supply of pre-stressed concrete sleepers from 2004 for standard gauge track with axle load of at least 22.5 tons and maximum speed of at least 160 km/h.

The contract includes accessorized and non-accessorized sleepers, storage of the sleepers at the manufacturers' store prior to delivery, loading the sleepers onto a truck ex-works; whether a truck under the manufacturer's responsibility or a truck sent by the railways for loading, delivering the sleepers to one of the suitable operational stations: Hadera West, Ashdod Classification Yard, Dimona, or Ramat-Hovav, and loading them onto dedicated flat railway cars or alternatively to any site along the lines according to needs; glueing pads to the sleepers.

As general information: the railways consumed in 2013 135,000 sleepers; however, this quantity is not any commitment for the quantity to be purchased. The contract is for 60 months, with optional extensions of up to additional 60 months. Latest date for submission of proposals: 30.04.2014.

(ix). Tender No. MN/KB/02/13: Completion of Infrastructure Works and structures needed towards track laying on the section between Daniel control section (Anabe) and the end of section A east of Bridge No. 6 (Anabe-Latron) of the A1 fast link to Jerusalem: Latest date for submission of proposals: 01.05.2014.

(x). Tender No. 11308: Provision, Installation, and Maintenance of a Warning System against Earthquakes: The contract is for 36 months, with optional extensions of up to additional 72 months. Latest date for submission of proposals: 21.05.2014.

(xi). Tender without a number – (issued 07.04.2014): Permission to distribute a Newspaper either daily or weekly free of charge at railway stations: The contract is for 36 months.

(xii). Tender 41402: For Manufacture and Supply of Ultrasonic Inspection Systems for Rolling Stock Hollow Axle, Solid Axle and Wheelsets. Bids by 15.04.2014.

(xiii). Tender No. MS/RC/2014/8: Permission for Advertising on railway stations' boards:

The contract is for 4 months. Latest date for submission of proposals: 12.05.2014.

(xiv). Tender No. 21411: Building a Parking Area and an access road at Ramla Station. Latest date for submission of proposals: 08.07.2014.

(xv). Tenders No. MS/RC/2014/10 & No. MS/RC/2014/11: Operating Taxi Services from/to the railway stations of Netanya and Ashdod-Ad-Halom respectively: The contract of each tender is for 36 months. Latest date for submission of proposals for each tender: 09.06.2014.

(xvii). Tender No. 21409: Design and building a road bridge at Hevron road (No. 60) over Beer-Sheva railway lines: Latest date for submission of proposals: 11.08.2014.

(xviii). Tender No. 11307: Providing Painting services for Refurbishing of Rolling Stock and Motive Power. The contract is for 24 months with optional extensions of up to additional 36 months. Latest date for submission of proposals: 25.06.2014.

(xix). Tender No. 11310: Delivery, assimilation, operation, and maintenance of a Computerized System for Management of the Railways' Refuelling System. The contract is for 60 months, with optional extensions of up to additional 60 months. Latest date for submission of proposals: 19.06.2014.

(xx). Tender No. 21417; Surveying Services for Bridges and engineering structures: The contract is for 12 months, with optional extensions of up to additional 48 months. Latest date for submission of proposals: 30.06.2014.

(xxi). Tender No. 11402: Providing services of renting equipment for the railways' Ceremonies and other Events: The contract is for 12 months with optional extensions of up to additional 48 months. Latest date for submission of proposals: 30.06.2014.

105:05:

B. TENDERS DELAYED OR EXTENDED.

(i). Latest date for submission of proposals for tender No. 11311 - Providing maintenance services for Track Auxiliary Equipment - has been changed from 01.04.2014 to 08.04.2014.

(ii). Tender No. MC/R/08/13 for replacing drivers' cabs, electrical systems, and control systems on GM freight locos has been cancelled; it is being re-checked, and a new improved tender is to be published soon.

105:05: C. TENDERS AWARDED.

(i). The company BARET HAYBES won

Tender No. 41301 worth ₪60,814.00 for Manufacture and Supply of Various Types of Wooden Sleepers.

(ii). The Israeli taxi company Israel Taxis won Tender No. MS/RC/2013/14 for operating services to/from Jerusalem Malkhah station; the value is \$4,500.00 annually.

(iii). The Israeli company Al-Trans Infrastructures, Engineering, and Development Ltd., won the almost \$5 Million Tender No. BN/KB/01/12 for constructing the command building at the new Beer-Sheva depot.

(iv). The Israeli company Security Services Avidar Ltd. won the \$1.95 Million Tender No. BT/SR/07/12 for providing security services at the railways' southern area.

(v). The Israeli company T&M Saar Security Services Ltd. won the \$1.88 Million Tender No. BT/SR/07/12 for providing security services at the railways' northern area.

105:06.

LIGHT RAIL.

A. GENERAL: PURIM BUSES.

Not directly to do with trams but public transport in general: 56 bus night lines were operated between 13.03.2014 and 16.03.2014 all over the country under Transport Ministry instructions; during these dates the Jewish Holiday of Purim was celebrated, during which people wear masks and drink a lot; the aim was to reduce private car usage in order to prevent accidents.

B. JERUSALEM.

Trams were cancelled between Merkazit and Givat HaTachmoshet because of the Palm Sunday procession. 13.04.2014.

C. TEL AVIV.

From a press release of 07.05.2014 by NTA (Tel-Aviv Mass Transit Project Management):

"After the PQ for tunnelling and underground structures regarding the Red Line has been completed, NTA has today made another step forward towards selecting the winning bidder.

The Red Line will consist of twin-bored 8 km tunnels which will form the main underground section from Geha interchange, running under Jabotinsky Road at Bnei-Brak and Ramat-Gan, then Begin Road at Tel-Aviv, until emerging on the surface not far from Jerusalem Boulevard at Jaffa.

Seven international companies from China, Russia, Germany, France, Spain, and Italy - among which is cooperation with Israeli companies - participated in the PQ (Pre-Qualification) meeting today at Ramat-Gan; all passed the PQ and will visit tomorrow along the Red Line alignment.

Transport Minister Mr. Yisrael Katz said: "Today's conference is a meaningful step to turn the vision of Greater Tel-Aviv Area LRV system into a reality, thus putting an end to bottle-necks and congestions from which the centre of Israel has been suffering more than 60 years".

NTA Chairman Engineer Alex Wishnitzer said: "We're laying today the foundations for selecting the TBM and underground structures' subcontractor; but this is only a part of the whole network to built at an overall cost of almost \$58 Billion; NTA is looking for financing it from external sources; when completed, the network will carry 200 million annually".

NTA General Manager Mr. Yehuda Bar-On said that NTA will do all to implement the project. Selecting the winner is expected for completion at the beginning of 2015 with works to commence immediately thereafter."

105:07.

NOTES AND COMMENTS.

(a). VERY EARLY FILM OF JERUSALEM.

This link leads to a fascinating brief film clip from the Lumière brothers, starting with some railway scenes.
<http://jewishinfonews.magnify.net/video/PALESTINE-1896>

(b). THE FIRST OFFICIAL TRAIN TO JERUSALEM IN 1949.

This newsreel film clip shows interesting sequences of the official reopening of the line to Jerusalem by Israel Railways, with shots in Tel Aviv, Lod, along the valley after Beit Shemesh and arrival in Jerusalem on 7th. August 1949 (the train, stuffed with dignitaries, being preceded by a pilot engine, both this and the train loco being Baldwin 4-6-0's.)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fzOhglnybPM>

(c). MORE ON THE MODEL RAILWAY EXHIBITION IN JERUSALEM FIRST STATION.

A little late – for the exhibition here has already closed and the layout dismantled – appears an interesting illustrated article in 'Märklin Magazin' 3/2014 pp. 115-118, by Roland Bischoff (thanks to Ulrich Gose of Köln for a copy; Of course, the article stresses a particular brand of model railway equipment!)

"Miniature World in Jerusalem. In only six weeks the largest model railway layout in the Middle East was created and became a magnet for the public.

The closed tracks have been covered with wooden planks, and pedestrians wander around over them – no train will ever depart from here again. And yet there is extensive rail traffic in the old Jerusalem station. In August 2013 Israeli Märklin fans opened to the public a model railway exhibition layout of 175 sq. m. This quickly became an enormous attraction for the public – an amazing story for a country with only little rail traffic. [sic!] In the first four months alone following the opening, over 75,000 visitors streamed into the new Märklin World and stood in wonder in front of the old historical atmosphere, in which as well as steam locos also diesel and electric engines worked. There were 100 trains to see, 24 of them in regular traffic over a kilometre of HO tracks.

Such rail experiences remain seldom in Israel – in the whole country there are only three model railway clubs. The enormous interest in the Miniature World surprised even the optimists amongst the organisers of the exhibition. Project Leader Shlomo Tuval explained: "Just like the 'Miniaturwunderland' exhibition in Hamburg, the layout offers the spectator not just different trains but also alternative landscapes, houses, mountains and lakes from an entire continent. The visitor can get a good impression of Europe." In a country with only limited opportunities for travel, "The visitors can manage a three-day European journey here in only two hours!" according to Tuval.

The 24-year old Märklin fan gives a further reason for the success: "A major factor is the technical curiosity of our visitors. Our visitors, young and old, wanted to know what different trains there are and how these function. One must of course understand that here in Israel we have only a few railway lines."

In the old station near Jerusalem there is now pure Railway Experience in the exhibition hall, which is the size of a gymnasium. There is a total of 100 trains, 93 points and 1,000 metres of track with a height difference of 2.4 metres. "Our trains run a total of five kilometres per day," says Shlomo Toval, not without pride. "The demands on the rolling stock are enormous, and only Märklin can manage to cope with such demands."

But it wasn't only in terms of the rolling stock that the Jerusalem model railway enthusiasts relied upon quality from Göppingen. "The track materials also came exclusively from Märklin," stresses Tuval. That the entire layout was fitted out only with Märklin materials hardly needs

to be mentioned. The electronic heart of the complex is the 'Central Station 2', a digital central point, from which even complex model layouts can be comfortably controlled. The operations of Miniaturland are supervised with the assistance of a Märklin 'Mobile Station App' for the iPad.

As unbelievable as the number of visitors seems, just as unbelievable is the history of the Jerusalem Model Railway Exhibition and how it was set up. In only six weeks 100 helpers built the entire layout. Of course there were a few crises along the way for such an ambitious project. Bureaucratic obstacles for the transport to Israel and the loss of entire packages forced the workers to work every minute. Instead of beginning as is usual with laying the tracks and the wiring, they had little option but to start by putting together the model buildings and the landscape details. "But we overcame all the obstacles! With a total working time of around 25,000 hours the exhibition was ready," says Tuval with pride."

BUT – in May came reports the same layout had been re-erected at the old station in Jaffa! It should run here until August 31st. The Editor went here on 19th. May and found there were posters on the site and a small circuit layout in a glass case near the entrance, but the main tent was closed and several disappointed members of the public were hanging around.

(d). NEW RAILWAY AND OTHER MODELS.



IR Ballast Hopper, HO Scale; Yaron notes: "Just arrived; made from brass; nmra coupler socket; highly detailed; Still without my IR decoration. Pic 20140522_151858

Yaron Dozetis attended the Nürnberg Toy fair and sent this report on 24.03.2014.

"This year, the toy fair comprised 170,000 sq. m. of exhibition space; 2,800 exhibitors from 60 countries, 1 million items, of which 75,000 were new items. Compared to the previous years, it was very crowded, as far as I could see in the Model Trains hall. Several compa-

nies have had some problems in the past year. Hobby Trade almost collapsed due to wrong investments. Now they are back in production, after all their double-deck coaches sold out. Vollmer will be closed this year. They were in their booth, large and nice as usual. The possible reason is that it is probably in their interest to sell the company "as is" or to sell their toolings.

Re. models: The Ex-USATC steam locomotive is one of the last that was seen on the Israel network before it was scrapped. The HO model was presented two years ago for the first time at the Nürnberg toy fair. The model is highly detailed, all metal with coal in the bunker, detailed cab and doors. The DCC ready version cost 200, Digital sound version costs 300.

Rivarossi and Jouef also have this loco, made of a plastic body shell with metal chassis. It is a bit cheaper and this version is also DCC ready. Artitec presented the UN Force soldiers as seen on the Golan Heights. These are well-detailed models in a 6 persons pack. They also have some Israeli military vehicles such as a Merkava tank, all well-detailed for the Israeli Army HO enthusiasts.

Re. The Süd-Express Euro 4000 Diesel loco; Only 200 have been produced of the I.R. (Israel Railway) version. 50 of these are for AC operation and 150 for DC operation. The AC version will work only digitally and if someone should want to run it analog, he will have to use an analogic decoder. The model became famous as it was chosen as one of the best models for 2013. It is highly detailed and it

to allow the coupler to move freely. By removing the body shell, it is possible to assemble the drop-in esu sound decoder (as recommended by the manufacturer). There is no need for tools, just follow the drawing in the loco packaging. The loco is powered by an ESU motor. Price for DC analog is 1500 NIS; Price for AC digital ready is 1600 NIS (from June 2014 prices will be higher). Orders via : ydotrains@gmail.com. One of the main interesting things that already influences the model trains market is the gps system. This has a single decoder with flexible antenna for each turnout or signal, so there is no need for wires. The transmitter range is 50 metres and the signals will be received even in hidden places. The decoder can be placed also in locomotives and all that is needed is just to drill a 2mm hole for the antenna. This system can save a lot of money and probably some problems on wiring.

Herpa & Wiking presented new cars, trucks, buses and accessories. A lot were of models that are seen on the Israeli roads, such as VW, MAN, Mercedes etc. Due to the fact that they have to pay a considerable fee to the prototype companies, there are no cheap prices. Kibri presented a nice model of a bus terminal, well designed and very nicely lit by LEDs. Item number 49000. Marklin/Trix presented a few new European models, but our interest is in Israeli models. Their Görlitz double-deck coaches look fine but they are at 1:100 scale, unfortunately.

Air Power 87 are specialist in HO scale aircrafts. The range of HO scale model aircraft is very small and now there is a nice range for battle aircraft, Cessna, helicopters and also some Israeli military vehicles. Preiser presented a nice collection of new items. Apart from figures, they presented very nice model accessories for the beverage market (item 17124). Also, some sailing boats and landing stages kit (17315), Interior for model houses (17710); road maintenance such as in Israel (33262); all hand-made and painted and highly detailed. Peco/Ratio: Smartswitch is a very nice system for controlling signals, semaphores, turnouts, level crossing etc....easy to set up, with servo motors, modular, stand-alone system for 12V DC or with DCC. Item 553 from Ratio may be interesting for us - a signal box interior, for semaphore control house."

Yaron is also offering a limited edition of ZIM containers – for details go to www.ydo.co.il/t

and <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NrqsnGJ--rc&feature=youtu.be>

(e). MORE AT THE OLD STATION IN JERUSALEM.

Steve Waldenberg sent a link to this story.

"When you visit Jerusalem's new First Station (Tachana Rishona) entertainment, activity and dining center, you never know what surprises you'll find there. It's open seven days a week with restaurants and coffee shops, Segway tours, hybrid bikes, walking tours, and a play area for kids. The station has an interesting history as a primary means of transportation between Jaffa and Jerusalem that started in 1892 and ended in 1998. Last year it was converted to the eight restaurant complex that also features ice skating, marionette theatre, and scheduled and unscheduled entertainment.

In March, just in time for Purim, an unscheduled event took place in the open area between the restaurants and shops. Without any announcement, fifty students from the Jerusalem Academy of Music and Dance, together with children from Sderot's Perach Tutorial Project, gathered at the station for a surprise concert. They were joined by Jerusalem Mayor Nir Barkat and philanthropist Shari Arison. The flash mob-style performance was part of Good Deeds Day, an annual event that originated in Israel in 2007 and now takes place in over 50 countries worldwide. On this day, volunteers reach out to the less fortunate and the vulnerable. The crowd that was shopping and dining that day enjoyed a bonus musical performance."

From personal observations by the Editor: "In the 'First Station', the former PR coach (a former BRCW 3rd. No. 332) is being restored in chocolate-brown upper works and cream frames and running gear on the side facing the road; the side facing the public has been partially sprayed in gold and silver and brown in an 'artistic' pattern. Better than rotting away, one supposes. On the same track 40 052 Tet bogie flat wagon (ex-USATC) is being enclosed in a wooden seating tribune. Nearer the station building the other identical wagon 40 057 Tet is surrounded by pot plants and has also become an 'attraction'. A section of the former turntable pit has been excavated and covered now with planking, but underneath can just be made out sections of original steelwork. Attached to some of the lamp-posts near the former signalbox – whose conversion to 'something' continues, new window frames having been installed – are panels with historical photos and texts in English, Hebrew and Arabic. All in all 'Harakevet' congratulates the organisers of this station and the park for showing a respect for the actual and not just mythic railway history – all those many citizens who walk past and take a look will learn something of the history of the country and its railways and their development and the impact they have had on the culture as well."

Incidentally the First Station is also now the venue for occasional Jewish synagogue services, Havdalah ceremonies and so forth by local modern, flexible congregations reaching out to the public.

(f). JERUSALEM – PARK HAMESILAH (RAILWAY PARK).

From personal observations by the Editor in mid-May:-The section of old railway line up to the 'First Station' as it is now called is now known as the 'Park haMesila' – 'The Track Park'. There is a website with this address and also e-Mail for anyone interested - <park.hamesila@gmail.com>

Along the former railway track in Jerusalem which is now a footpath, cycle track and linear park are now a series of enlarged historic photographs of the history of the railway in Jerusalem, placed on poles, and also some low curved metal structures with Hebrew texts cut into them. These extend as far downhill as Malcha. Some of these are (translated by Sybil Ehrlich):

"The cars on the Palestine railways are large and airy and have wide seats comfortably cushioned. They have a double roof, with space between for ventilation, and meals are served in the dining car. From Jerusalem to El Kantara East the journey is made in the daylight, daily. From El Kantara to the Holy City it is made in sleeping cars, and coffee and biscuits are brought to the compartments by Arab servants."

– A New York Times correspondent who visited Israel in 1922.

He described the journey from Egypt to Israel by Mandate train.

(original found in New York Times online archive, January 8, 1922)

"Today Jerusalem is receiving the first Hebrew train... I believe that the railway will perform its duty faithfully, improving the economic situation of Jerusalem, strengthening the historic connection between the Jewish People and its eternal capital, returning it to its ancient glory..."

– Ben-Gurion, in a speech at the dedication of the railway from Jaffa [sic] to Jerusalem, 1949.

(Translation: S.E.)

"On December 2, 1917 I was summoned to Mount Scopus to the chief command headquarters, and there I received the order to destroy everything I could in the Jerusalem railway station."

– Baruch Katinka, chief railway engineer who served under the Turks.

(Translation: S.E., from Walter's transliteration.)

"Hark! One calleth: Clear ye in the wilderness the way of the Lord, make plain in

the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill shall be made low; And the rugged shall be made level, and the rough places a plain."

– Isaiah 40:3-4.

(Jewish Publication Society translation, 1917)

"Mrs. Sussman closes the window. She's looking towards Tel Aviv and at her husband, who is perusing the morning newspaper. A man in a grey suit is asleep... Mr. Sussman can't sleep. Mrs. Sussman is looking. She opens the window. She closes the blind."

– Ma'ariv, Friday July 18, 1969, page 50.

(Translation: S.E.)

"Between the mountains and the rocks the train flies / and of all the young men I love you the best."

– Originally a Yiddish nostalgic song, words Yosef Rolnik, folk tune.

(Translation: S.E.)

"Tchik-tchik goes the train, tchik-tchik on the rails, tchik-tchik – we've already bought our tickets, tchik-tchik – we'll soon be in Haifa, my Land of Israel is so beautiful; yes, yes, yes."

– "The Train Song",

words by Gidi Koren

(Translation, inasmuch as it's possible to translate: S.E.)

"Sir: - I wish to call attention in your columns to the very unsatisfactory service rendered by the Palestine railroads. On Friday... it took eight hours... to travel [from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem]. Aside from the serious loss of time involved, it also caused many observant Jews to violate the Sabbath..."

– Letter [from Morton H. Lewittes] published in The Palestine Post, [March 7], 1934.

Original from Palestine Post archives

"The last two miles of the road before it reaches Jerusalem cross the Plain of Rephaim... A new conqueror is now at the gates of the city..."

– Selah Merrill, a clergyman who served for three terms as

American consul in the Holy Land, 1893 (English original, from an article in Scribner's magazine)

"The heat was frightful... sitting in the cramped, crowded, scorching compartment was torture."

– Theodor Herzl's visit, 1898

(English from "On Chariots with Horses of Fire and Iron" by Anthony S. Travis)

"What is really awful is that there are

things missing in the train, such as drinking water, ashtrays, and last but not least, if you'll pardon the expression, a toilet."
– Hemda Ben-Yehuda, Hazvi, 1907
(Paraphrased translation: S.E.)

"Hear ye! The roaring of the steam is the roaring of the victory of enlightenment over ignorance, of work over idleness, of wisdom over nonsense, of progress over backwardness, of intelligence over foolishness, the victory of the clear and health-giving breath of air over the spirit of bitterness, the victory of the enlightened over those who spout nonsense. Rejoice in the light, enlightened ones of Jerusalem!"
– Song of praise for the railway published in Eliezer Ben-Yehuda's Ha'or newspaper marking the inauguration of the Jaffa-Jerusalem Railway.
(Translation: S.E.;
the 1892 language is stilted but it's all there was in Hebrew at the time!)

"On both sides of the river valley rocky walls loom up. As we ascend the Judean Hills, the landscape becomes more and more bare... there is no trace of the forests that were formerly here. On the slope, terraces guard against erosion by the force of the rain... The train climbs and ascends, we arrive in the Holy City."
– Haim Boger (Bograshov), from a Lumière Brothers film, 1913
(Translation: S.E.)

"A sweeping vista on the railway to Jerusalem..."
– From an advertisement for the Jaffa-Jerusalem Railway, early 20th century.
(Translation: S.E.)

"And all the while I can't take my eyes away from the window, and I gaze in joy at the wide expanses. The train gasps, climbs slowly, and I notice remains of primeval forests. How I would love to get out of the carriage and climb on the rocky hills... The train enters the station. A few people get out of the carriages. Such tranquillity. Such dazzling light. I get out with my basket in my hand."
– Rachel Yanait Ben-Zvi, 1918
(Translation: S.E.)

"Tzif-tzif-tzaf, the locomotive breathed, and tik-tik-tak, the wheels banged, and then the rails said to each other: It's 70414..."
– "Song of the Locomotive", words Haim Hefer, tune Yonatan Zarai.
(Translation: S.E.)

"The loco drivers didn't know day or night. All they had was the 'Link' – the work rota. We went to work as we were needed, not according to the clock. We went home only to rest. Until the middle of the 1950s journeys could take as much as 24 hours..."

– Eliyahu Brunengraber, pensioner; driver of steam and diesel locomotives on Israel Railways from 1949 to 1978.
(Translation: S.E.)

"Get on the right track; go by train."
– Davar newspaper, 1972
(Translation: S.E.)

"The Israeli train got on the rails, and the renewed route was ahead of it. The driver, the firemen, the signalmen know their jobs, and there are also charming female ticket inspectors. Bon voyage!"
A woman ticket inspector – Davar newspaper, 1948.
(Translation: S.E.)
[How times change; would a woman write today of her "charming" female colleagues?]

"We've already organized a train here; come on children, sit down. The locomotive is already whistling. Anyone who isn't sitting won't go!"
– Words and tune anonymous.
(Translation: S.E.)
[This is a neat little rhyme in Hebrew that is untranslatable into English.]

"To Jerusalem of Gold, go by train and relax on the way."
– Israel Railways advertisement
(Translation: S.E.)

On the former signal box at the Koenig level crossing a picture of a train ascending to Jerusalem in IR days, taken from the train itself, has been put onto the wall.

(g). EINSTEIN'S DIARY.

Sybil Ehrlich was thrilled to see a page of Albert Einstein's diary open in a display case – mentioning the word 'Eisenbahn'! So she photographed it. Alas the combination of the genius' crabbed handwriting, the age of the exhibit, the photo and the e-mail makes it hard to decipher but the Editor has made the following out:-

... "im Garten.... F... ein Eindruck von gesundem Leben, doch wirtschaftlich nicht recht selbstständig. Eisenbahnfahrt nach Jaffa, durch Ebene mit allmählich wieder wechselnde Gebirge. Arabische und jüdische Siedlungen, jüdische Salzanlage Station vor Jaffa. Arbeiter kamen zum Bahnhof und grüssten nach Ankunft nach Sabbatbeginn in Haifa, trotz Frau Strucks vorherige Warnung. Gang zu Fuss durch riesigen Dreck mit Grünberg und der Physiker Prof. Tschernikowski..."

Tentative translation: He was at some settlement where he gained the impression that life was healthy there but the economic circumstances were not such as to allow full independence. Then a rail-

way journey to Jaffa – through a plain with gradually repeating hills. Arab and Jewish settlements, a Jewish salt facility at the station before Jaffa. Workers came to the station and greeted him, asked about Shabbat times in Haifa, in spite of Frau Struck's earlier warning. Walked through a lot of rubbish with Grünberg and the physicist Prof. Tschernikowski..."

Einstein was in Palestine from October 1922 to March 1923, and probably someone can find out the exact dates and his diary.

(Incidentally, we know that Moses was twice as intelligent as Einstein – "because Moses had ZWEI Steinen!")

(h). A NEW RAILWAY EXHIBIT AT NAHAL SOREQ:

Sybil Ehrlich recently glimpsed "a loco and some wagons" adjacent to the railway track at the former and disused Nahal Soreq railway station. Taking an opportunity some days later to explore by bus and foot she discovered a section of new, ballasted track laid adjacent to but not connected to the IR line between Naan and Beit Shemesh on which stood G12 Bo-Bo No. 114 and four IR wagons! Enquiries to Chen Melling got the following answer:-

"The old building at Nahal Sorek was leased by IR to the Nahal Sorek Drainage Basin Authority a couple of years ago. They intend to restore the building and locate their offices in it, as well as establish a regional trail and cycling centre in it.

They asked for some historic railway items to display around the site, and we agreed to loan them the vehicles pictured, formerly stored in Tel Aviv Darom station, which were worthy of preservation but not needed at the Museum [in Haifa] itself. They have agreed to restore them externally, while using the box cars (with added openings in the walls) for their purposes. The grain boxes are departmental nos. 1143 and 1148 (former numbers are not yet known, but are in the Taf-45 series), both originally Egyptian vehicles. The container flats are Tet 40 135 and Tet 40 145, both originally WW2 35 ton box cars. The loco is G12 114."

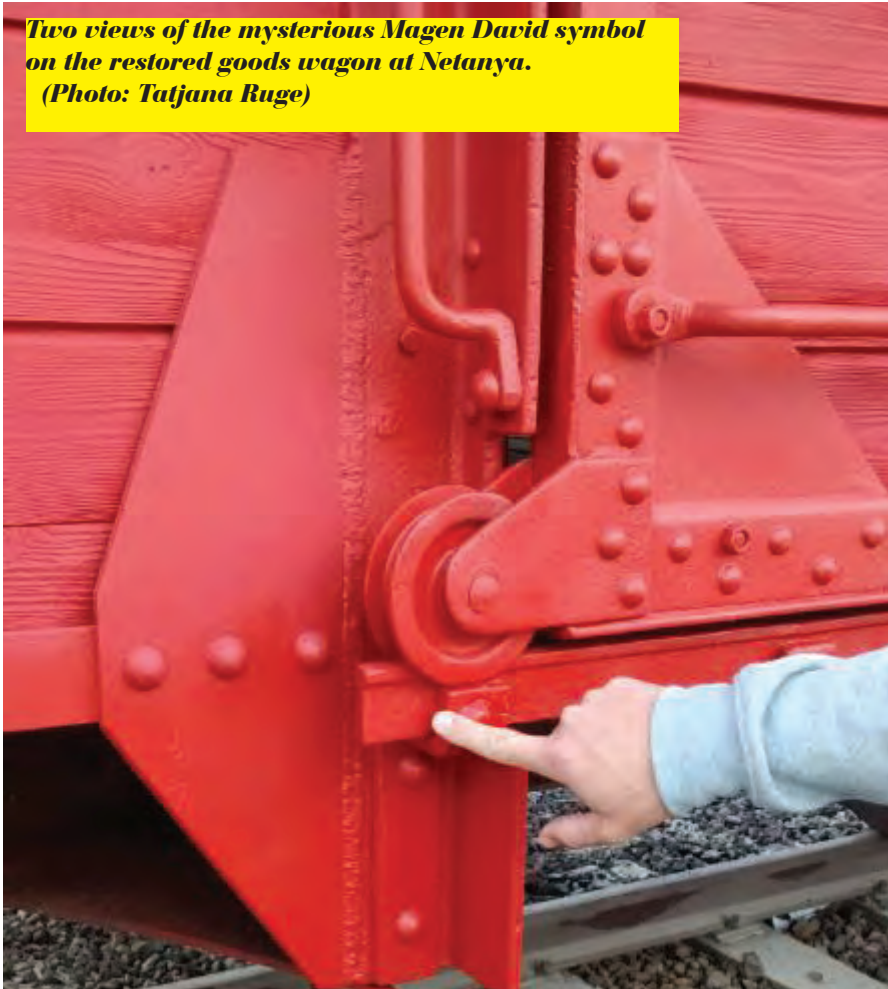
[see photos on page 14](#)

(i). A SECRET SYMBOL ON THE DEATH WAGON?

We have reported already on the former German (and later Belgian) goods van transported by Ronny Dotan and Tatjana Rüge of Berlin from a siding near Aachen to Netanya where it has now been restored. An article by Ulrich W. Sahn of Jerusalem of 4th. May now highlights an intriguing discovery.

"Three small, engraved Stars of David have been found after the wagon was

**Two views of the mysterious Magen David symbol on the restored goods wagon at Netanya.
(Photo: Tatjana Ruge)**



sand-blasted – each as large as a One-Euro coin. Possibly they were hammered in by a Jewish *zwangsarbeiter* (forced labourer) with hammer and chisel on the steel frame of the door and on a rod. Who marked this wagon with what has become a Jewish symbol is unknown. “

Sahm continues that there are several other similar wagons restored in Washington, the former KZ Auschwitz-Birkenau, etc., but that the wagon at Yad Vashem was built in Poland and has therefore been restored incorrectly! (The source of this information is not known to the Editor.)

(j). ISRAEL IN A DAY. By Raymond Batkin – a modern-day adventurer!

Wherever there is a logistical challenge – specially where transport is concerned – it is almost certain an attempt to set a ‘record’ of some sort will arise.

Mass transport systems are especially attractive to would-be record setters. Some of the world’s major cities have had subterranean MTSs for the best part of a century if not more. London’s Underground (270 stations, 469km of track), the Paris Metro (369 stations, 216km), the New York subway (468 stations, 373km), Chicago EL (145 stations, 165km) and Moscow (194 stations, 325km) are notable cases. Each has attracted a ‘challenge’ where an attempt to go through every station on a network in the shortest possible time has been made. The London Underground ‘Challenge’ was first attempted in the 1960s and the trend has been adopted in other MTS’s in other countries.

With periodic expansion of the networks over the years new benchmarks for time taken have become a magnet for new attempts to lower the existing records. The current records are now within a 24-hour period (London – 6h 44m, Paris – 14h 54m, New York – 22h 52m and Chicago – 9h 12m) are notable examples. As to ‘Why do it?’ – perhaps the most cogent explanation would be that given by the British climber George Mallory in 1924 when he was asked why he wanted to climb Mount Everest – ‘Because it’s there’.

The Israel Railways system (IR) offers a different proposition to the big-city urban MTS infrastructures. There must be very few examples where it is possible to go round an entire country’s railway network inside a day. In addition, IR has continued to expand year-on-year with established lines being extended and served by more stations. Since 2000 progress has accelerated and the current IR Network map suggests that any transit record would be short-lived. Existing, under-construction and planned lines could see the number of stations increase by at least 50% beyond the current total of 53.

The first attempt at setting a benchmark time was made by a Hod Hasharon father and son, Danny and Yoav Amir, on 28 March 2010. A time of 20 hours and 42 minutes was spent on the network – of which 6 hours and 20 minutes were spent waiting for trains. At the time of this attempt the network covered just over 942km. The cost of the journey (per person) came to the equivalent of \$76.

In 2014 the network had increased to a length of 1000.1km. The network in 2010, when the Amirs set their time, was minus the entire line from Tel Aviv Hahagana to Sderot. Holon Junction, Holon Wolfson, Bat Yam Yoseftal, Bat Yam Komemiyut and Rishon Lezion Moshe Dayan, all





:
Withdrawn IR loco
114 (GM G12 Bo-Bo) and wag-
ons at Nahal Soreq.
See 105:07:(h) for details.
(Photos: Sybil Ehrlich



opened in September 2011. Yavne West opened in the following February, and the extension to Ashdod first appeared in the timetable dated August 2013.

Ticketing, however, could have been better. There is no argument that the range of tickets available is made to fit the particular priorities that exist but catering for the tourist intending to use the network extensively over a period of time would not be a bad idea. There is some ambiguity surrounding the use of facilities such as Rav-Kav cards. Periodic tickets are too specific and are obviously geared to Israeli residents.

Buying thirteen tickets at once called for a little foresight and ensuring this was done in a 'quiet' period where there was little chance of causing angst to a queue of passengers behind you!

Security and the use of cameras on the network was also a point that needed addressing. Security itself was seamless. Passing bags through x-ray machines is routine. It is widespread throughout the country and needs no comment. Photographing on station premises and trains, however, is something of a grey area. I was told by some people that taking photographs was permitted but others disagreed. Being told firmly, but politely, by one of the station staff at Hod Hasharon to 'put the camera away' was enough to make any further snapping a bad idea. Prior to this event, however, a photograph of 'probably the only armoured train station in the world' at Sderot was taken – looking in the direction of the soon-to-be-opened Netivot and Ofakim stations on the loop to Be'er Sheva

105:08.

OTHER MIDDLE EAST RAILWAYS.

A. IRAN.

(i). LINE TO KAZAKHSTAN.

"Iran boosts economic co-operation in Central Asia." By Kulpash Konbrova. 02.03.2014:

"ASTANA - The foreign offices of Kazakhstan and Iran are working out the dates for a visit of Iranian President Hassan Rouhani to Astana this year. The visit should help expand the trade and economic co-operation, according to the Ambassador of Iran to Kazakhstan Gorban Seifi.

There is every reason to believe that 2014 will see a notable growth of relations between the two countries, Seifi told the Astana journalists on the eve of the 35th anniversary of the Islamic Revolution.

According to him, a meeting between the two Presidents – Kazakhstan's Nursultan Nazarbaev and Rouhani - will give a new impetus to the bilateral relations. The diplomats are currently discussing the dates of the visit. He also said that the presidential visit would be preceded by a visit of the Iranian Minister of Foreign Affairs Mohammad Javad Zarif to Astana at an invitation from his Kazakhstan counterpart Erlan Idrisov.

It is possible that the two leaders will meet at a highly anticipated big event next year –the completion of a Kazakhstan-Turkmenistan-Iran railroad.

Iran has already completed and officially commissioned its portion of the railway. So has Kazakhstan. As for Turkmenistan, it has completed the line to the Kazakh border, while the other part of Turkmenistan's line - to the Iran city of Inceburun - is still under construction. "We expect our Turkmen friends to complete their part of the line to the Iranian border this year. And then the Presidents of the three countries will meet at an official ceremony to mark the event," the Iranian diplomat added.

In his opinion, the project brings economic benefits not only to these three countries, but to the entire Central Asian region. First, for Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan,

The completed route:

<u>Departure</u>	<u>Time</u>	<u>Destination</u>	<u>Time</u>	<u>Duration</u>
Binyamina	05.21	Be'er Sheva Merkaz	07.21	(02.00)
Be'er Sheva Merkaz	08.04	TA Hahagana ¹	09.04	(01.00)
TA Hahagana	09.36 ²	Sderot	10.38 ³	(01.02)
Sderot	11.13	Hod Hasharon	13.00	(01.47)
Hod Hasharon	13.34	TA Hahagana	14.15	(00.41)
TA Hahagana	14.33	Modi'in Merkaz	15.10	(00.37)
Modi'in Merkaz	16.00	Jerusalem Malha	18.14 ⁴	(01.14)
Jerusalem Malha	18.25	TA Hahagana	19.46 ⁵	(01.21)
TA Hahagana	19.57 ⁶	Nahariyya	21.30 ⁷	(01.33)
Nahariyya	22.06	Binyamina	23.12 ⁺⁺	(01.06)

Notes:

¹ arrived 1 minute early

² left 1 minute late

³ arrived 2 minutes early

⁴ arrived 3 minutes early

⁵ arrived 1 minute late

⁶ arrived 7 minutes late

⁷ arrived 1 minute early

⁺⁺ arrived on time but doors failed to open. Alighted at next stop (Hadera West)

Total time spent on Israel Railways network	= 17 hours 42 minutes
Total time spent travelling	= 12 hours 52 minutes
Time lost due to late departures/arrivals	= 9 minutes
Time gained due to early arrivals	= 7 minutes
Overall time lost	= 2 minutes
Cost of tickets (including unused Dimona part)	= 340.50 NIS /GB£ 62.00
Total distance travelled (track distance)	= 908 km
Cost per kilometre	= 0.375 NIS / GB£ 0.683

The Editor adds: Quite a day! Of course there is now a new timetable and soon there will also be new routes.....

it will cut the way to the Persian Bay countries by approximately 600 kilometres. In addition, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan will become closer to Europe through Turkey. All that will strengthen not only the trade and economic relations, but also the cultural ties among the nations along the railroad," Seifi said.

The Iranian Ambassador talked about the solution of the problem of different track widths in Kazakhstan and in Iran. There will be no longer a need to re-load the railcars from Kazakhstan at the Iran border. The cutting-edge equipment installed on the Iranian part of the railway near the city of Serakhs (located on both sides of the Turkmen-Iranian border) will change the track width of the rolling stock as necessary, he said.

A summit of the Caspian littoral states scheduled for this year can become another opportunity for the leaders of Kazakhstan and Iran to meet. The summit on the legal status of the Caspian Sea will take place this April in Astrakhan. Before the summit, the foreign ministers of the Caspian littoral states will meet in Moscow, Seifi said.

He commented that the working negotiations on the legal status of the Caspian Sea have been very difficult both technically and legally, and that is why they have been going on for several years. "In any event, there has been progress in all Caspian issues. It is important that all countries have agreed that a decision on

the legal status of the Caspian Sea should be unanimous," the diplomat said.

Seifi mentioned that Kazakhstan had hosted two rounds of negotiations between Iran and the "5+1" (China, United States, Russia, France, Great Britain, and Germany). The Almaty negotiations brought a positive development – the sanctions against his country were partially lifted. He reminded that "Iran twice supported the holding of negotiations with the '5+1' in Almaty".

Seifi also said that, "if there is another discussion about holding Iranian nuclear talks in Kazakhstan, and if the '5+1' are agreeable to meeting in Almaty again, Iran will not object to such a decision". Choosing a venue for negotiations is a bilateral decision, which is made not only by Iran, but also by the "Five", he added.

According to him, the 13th meeting of the intergovernmental commission for trade and economic co-operation will take place in Tehran in the first half of this year. At the same time, the working groups of the chambers of commerce of the two countries will meet as well."

(ii). MORE GERMAN SECOND-HAND COACHES.

In 'Eisenbahn Magazin' 6/2014 p.6 is a brief news item and photo: The DB has sold to Iran 95 former Inter-City and Inter-Regio carriages, mainly former DR 'Halberstadt' types Bimz, Bimdz, Bomz 236 and Bomdz 236.2, which had been stored for some time at the Hamm marshalling yards. These have in fact been purchased by 'Heros GmbH' ('Helvetic Rolling Stock') and then sold on through an English firm! Trains of 19 coaches have been formed and travel via Turkey and (split into sections) over Lake Van to Iran. The photo shows black Vectron loco 193.272 on such a train.

B. EGYPT.

(i). FAROUK'S ROYAL TRAIN – FIAT 2-car DMU.

From Chen Melling: - "Egypt had a few royal trains, the last being the 1951 rail-car supplied by Fiat to the then-monarch Farouk (who was deposed a couple of years later). Alon Siton has found several nice videos and photos on-line which may be of interest:"

(a). British Pathé film:: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=csCiE-xf-hl>

(b). An Italian promotional film:<https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?v=612370625489404&set=vb.280533392006464&type=3&theater>

(c). Scans from a FIAT catalogue:
<https://www.facebook.com/media/set/?set=a.596433580416442.1073741835.280533392006464&type=1>

C. UNITED ARAB EMIRATES.

(i). The Deutsche Bahn runs a website called 'Lokster.deutschebahn.com', aimed at attracting young people to think about a career working on the railways in one form or another – the railways are in fact desperate for new and younger mechanics, signalmen, drivers, everything. In the 6.1.2014 edition is a relevant item, an interview with a German loco driver working in the United Arab Emirates:

"While many of his colleagues are preparing themselves for the winter, Christian Jobst needs sun protection. The loco driver has made the jump from München to the United Arab Emirates. Here a 1,200km long railway network, that should offer connection also to the neighbouring countries of Saudi Arabia and Oman, is being built, and should be ready in 2022.

LOKSTER: Since October you have been a driver with the Joint Venture 'Etihad Rail DB Operations LLC' in the UAE. What does your job involve?

CJ: My job is to get a 140km long stretch of line ready for opening for transport of freight, for Sulphur. By mid-2014 the rail network will grow to 260km. As more and more kilometres of the railways are ready we have been running test trips since October. In these we extend the train length step by step to the planned eventual length of 1.6km. The loaded trains will weigh 15,000 tons. As soon as all the test phases have been completed, we train local staff who later on will take over from us.

LOKSTER: Unusual working conditions and new locos form two major elements of your start in the UAE. How did you experience your first days at work?

CJ: After the initial greetings events, at which we got to know all our project partners, we were moved from Abu Dhabi to Mirfa which is some 150km away. This is where the construction depot is situated, and from here all the works are coordinated. It is also here that all vehicles are based. At the moment all the new station buildings and workshops are being constructed here. During the first weeks we were also trained on the new American SD70 locos. These locos are really gigantic, especially in relation to European conditions. 192 tonnes on 6 axles with 16,000 litres of tank capacity. After the first weeks we drove the locos for updates or modifications now and then into the workshops or shunted rakes of wagons from the 240 wagons currently available, in order to get ready for test runs. The station area currently consists of four tracks with a buffer stop at the end, but will be expanded in the coming months to 14 through tracks.

LOKSTER: You also had a Safety Briefing, What safety standards have to be observed in the UAE?

CJ: New for me at any rate was the danger from snakes and scorpions. But also in the summer months there can be for weeks on end temperatures above 45° In this respect the air conditioning plays an important role, as also the provision of enough water. Because of the proximity to the Persian Gulf and the often high humidity rate, flying microscopic rust particles form a major problem for locos and wagons. Partly amusing, but also necessary, are the fences to keep camels away from the line. Camels are very valuable in this land and their prices are much higher than those of cars.

LOKSTER: What experiences – personal or professional – have influenced you the most?

CJ: A part of my training fell in the fasting month of Ramadan. The normal national rules apply to foreigners too – so, no eating or drinking in public. Outside the summer months I find the higher temperatures very pleasant. Even in November it is usually around 30 degrees.

LOKSTER: What do you enjoy most about working in the UAE?

CJ: I work, where other people take their holidays. I can certainly get used to that! Because of the absence of any real winter there are of course more options for the free time. And of course I have the possibility during the three years to save some money."

(ii). GERMAN AND AMERICAN LOCOS.

In 'Eisenbahn Magazin' 5/2014 is an article by Johannes Glöckner on developments here.

"There is a new State Railway in the wide world of railways – it is called 'Etihad Rail', with its headquarters in Abu Dhabi and it is the new national railway organisation for the United Arab Emirates. The network will link all seven Emirates together, and include the neighbouring countries of Qatar, Oman and Saudi Arabia. The joint firm 'Etihad Rail DB Operations LLC' was formed together with DB Schenker Rail. With this minority holding, the DB undertakes for the first time operational responsibilities outside Europe.

The timetable is very ambitious. In 2006 DB International prepared a feasibility study; in April 2011 the contract for the preparation of an operational concept was received. The contract for a joint venture for the freight train operations was signed on 25th. June 2013. At present around 100km of standard-gauge line are ready, and seven locos and 240 goods wagons have been delivered. As soon as

the engine drivers, who have also been recruited in Germany, have become accustomed to the specific driving conditions of the desert railway, regular operations can begin. The trains are fitted with centre couplings, are 1.6km. long and weigh 15,000 tonnes.

In addition the building of further lines is being pursued actively. When EXPO starts in Dubai in 2020 it will also be possible for passenger trains to roll through the country; by 2022 the entire network should be complete and working. The UAE want to invest 80 Billion Euros for this project! This enormous investment makes clear just how much the Gulf States want to secure their future, when Oil and Gas will have been used up. The immense riches created by oil production are being carefully invested within the UAE in projects for the future. Crude oil is increasingly refined within the country before being exported; and with the tapping of new natural gas fields further raw materials such as sulphur can be won. With this valued material a chemical industry can be built up.

The first section of line that has now been completed is the 264km. long line for transport of sulphur from the desert near Shah to the harbour of Ruwais on the Persian Gulf. In the depot at Al Marfa stand at present seven American diesel locos of EMD type SD70ACS numbered ER 45001-45007 as well as a prototype loco. The construction firms maintain a sleeper factory, rail and ballast storage depots as well as workshops for the track machines and the construction trains. From February 2014 the line Ruwais – Al Marfa has been used for training trips, the section on to Habshan was almost completed. Work was underway on the alignment for the continuation to the terminal point in Shah, near the border to Saudi Arabia. The natural gas that will be pumped from here contains much poisonous sulphuric material. This will be filtered and refined on the spot and transformed into pure sulphur. The gas itself, without the sulphur, will be conveyed by pipeline, whereas the sulphur granulate will be transported in block trains in silo wagons to the coast. The UAE aims to be the world's largest exporter of sulphur by 2015.

Other lines will be used for transport of petrochemical products, steel and construction materials – sectors of industry in which large amounts are being invested. New terminals will receive containers by rail with goods from all over the world. These lines will be tackled next. It is mainly Italian construction firms that are having to battle with the desert, with its temperatures of up to 45°C and sandstorms. Near Shah is the highest sand dune in the world, which also moves according to the effect of the desert winds.

It is thus even the more amaz-

ing that several elderly locomotives from Germany can be found here. There is a Kleinlok built in 1965 which still carries on the cabside its old DB number 323 354-1; Two heavy Deutz diesel locos are over fifty years old; they had been bought by an Italian tracklaying firm from the Westfälische Landeseisenbahn, and are working reliably in the desert.

The Arabian Railway Future.

The United Arab Emirates form a major link in trade routes between Europe and Asia. Most major European firms are already represented here. Now the transport infrastructure is being massively expanded; new roads, harbours and airports and what has until now been totally missing, a railway network. When the Etihad Railway system is completed it will be possible to reach the Indian Ocean directly at Fujairah. The sea route through the Straits of Hormuz, controlled by Iran, can be bypassed. Bahrain, Qatar, Kuwait, Oman and Saudi-Arabia will all be connected. This Gulf State rail system should be ready in 2018. It is possible even to consider a land railway link through to Europe – the Bosphorus railway tunnel is already there.”

Photographs show the future depot at Al Marfa under construction in the salty desert; A Deutz centre-cab DG-1600 Bo-Bo owned by the Italian firm Salcef, formerly from 1960 to 1988 Westfälische Landeseisenbahn VL 0633 – the firm also owns the identical sister loco ex-WLE 0632 (KHD 1958), both now fitted with air-conditioning; the former DB 'Köf' 323 354 (KHD 1965) which came via Italy to the Arabian peninsula and has been fitted with additional air tanks for the brakes so that it can be used on line duties; G2000 Bo-Bo 52 DG (built Vossloh 2006), owned by Salcef; a MaK G400 diesel shunter on a rail train on the almost-ready double-track main line near Al Marfa; three EMD locos on a lengthy train of Chinese-built bogie silo wagons for sulphur granulate – these engines are fitted with additional air filters due to the frequent sand-storms.

D. TURKEY.

(i). TIMETABLE ALTERATIONS ON LONG-DISTANCE TRAINS:

On 26.4.2014: According to the TCDD website:

<http://www.tcdd.gov.tr/home/detail/?id=495>

From 26/04/14 to 25/07/14 the Van Golu Express 11:15 Tuesdays and Sundays Only Ankara to Tatvan and return will only operate between Ankara and Elazig. Return departs Elazig at 16:04 Tuesdays and Thursdays Only.

On previous occasions when the train only ran as far as Elazig, the southbound train

ran via the Malatya avoiding line and propelled into Malatya station, the loco then running round to continue to Elazig. This was so as to turn the stock ready for the return journey as there is no turning facility at Elazig. The Malatya avoiding line normally has no booked passenger services over it.

The Elazig to Tatvan and return Mixed services are also WITHDRAWN for this period.

(07:05 Tuesdays, Fridays + Sundays Elazig to Tatvan).

(07:15 Mondays, Wednesdays, Saturdays Tatvan to Elazig).

There is no mention of any alteration to the weekly Ankara to Tehran "Transasia Express" is made on the website, so it is assumed this train continues to run as booked.

(ii) TESTING STARTS ON ISTANBUL-ANKARA HIGH-SPEED LINE.

From the Railway Bulletin.com link: <http://www.railwaybulletin.com/2014/04/high-speed-testing-starts-on-istanbul-ankara-line>

Track construction is now complete on the Istanbul - Eskisehir section of the 533km high-speed line to Ankara. The test running is going to start. Test running is starting at 40km/h and is being increased by increments of 10km/h until the line speed of 250km/h is reached plus a safety margin up to 275km/h. Karaman says that 247 separate parameters are being measured during testing to ensure track quality, ride comfort and safety.

Karaman says completion of the civil works was delayed by 25 incidents where sections of signalling cables were severed by thieves and difficulties constructing the new line in Eskisehir.

Although an opening date has not been announced, the TCDD plans to operate 16 trains a day between Istanbul and Ankara with a journey time of 3h 30min. He says services will be extended next year through the Marmaray tunnel to the European side of Istanbul. The Eskisehir – Ankara section opened in March 2009.

TCDD has also announced a tender for the supply of 10 more high-speed trains. The contract includes spare parts and maintenance for three years.

(iii). MAP PROBLEMS.

There is an online TCDD map; From Malcolm Peakman: "I see some curious errors - the double track from Sapanca to Arifiye is shown as stopping midway - it was all the way last time I travelled that way; Google Earth shows the double track all the way. In the same vein the double track from Inonu to Hasanbey is omitted (I realise that it is currently lost in the area of Eskisehir) Again Google Earth

seems to show this still. Lastly the section from Sincan to Sanayi is shown as double track - it was single last time I travelled. Google Earth shows the new freight terminal - but it still appears to be single track - I assume that the sparse passenger service has ended?

Also noted is that some long abandoned lines like Civril are still shown, but others are not shown."

From Dr. Ergin Tönük: "The kilometre information of Haydarpaşa is incorrect though (like many other maps I have)! The old Haydarpaşa station was at km 0+000 (http://e40003.me.metu.edu.tr/43000/43011_43021.jpg ; in <http://e40003.me.metu.edu.tr/43000/> where we are facing in the direction of decreasing kilometres!) and you have to travel more for the current station building so it should be 0-XXX (depending on which line you take) rather than 0+XXX."

(iv). THROUGH TRAINS TO BAKU.

From Jeff Hawken on the Turkish Railway website:

"According to <http://www.blick.ch/news/wirtschaft/umstrittener-deal-besiegelt-peter-spuhler-liefert-nach-aserbajdschanid2908207.html> the Swiss company Stadler has won a contract to supply thirty new vehicles for the Baku – Tbilisi – Kars route. This will consist of 27 sleeping cars and 3 dining cars. The vehicles will be fitted with variable-gauge bogies, as they will operate on 1520 mm lines from Baku via Tbilisi to Achalkalaki, where a gauge-change facility is under construction. From there the trains will continue over the newly-built line to Kars in Eastern Turkey. The route is expected to open in 2015, giving Azerbaijan and Georgia a direct route to Europe via Turkey without the need to go via Russia or Armenia. The article claims that up to 3 million passengers per year are expected to use this route. That is an average of over 8,000 passengers per day. It will be interesting to see what the proposed timetable and service frequency is when the line opens, and whether the number of passengers arriving at Kars will prompt TCDD to run a second daily train from Kars to Ankara, as the existing 'Dogu Express' would not cope with much additional traffic."

(v). LEVEL CROSSING ACCIDENT.

On 15.6.2014 The "Dogu Ekspresi" hit a truck near Kayseri. The truck driver was killed, Somehow DE22005 stayed upright, first two coaches derailed <http://www.memurlar.net/haber/472809/>

A video of the crash is online; amazingly the loco stayed upright and all the passenger carriages also <http://www.sondakika.com/haber/haber-kayseri-de-tren-tir-i-bicti-6154602/>

E. SAUDI ARABIA.

CZECH SHUNTERS FOR CONSTRUCTION TRAINS.

In 'Schienenverkehr Aktuell' 5/2014 p. 259 is a brief item on the CKD-constructed Bo-Bo diesels of class T448.05, later CD Class 740, constructed in large numbers between 1973 and 1985 for Czechoslovakia (459) and Poland (161); some 40 or so were sold after 1998 for export to North Korea, Serbia, Cuba etc. Seven have now been acquired by the Spanish contractor OHL and overhauled by Loktrans in Strelice. They were painted yellow, given air-conditioning and other modifications; they are then to be shipped to work on the Medina – Mecca line which is under construction by OHL. The text confusingly refers also to a slightly lighter and faster version Class 742, but the accompanying photo shows 740 067 and 740 672 being prepared for despatch via a German port.

F. SYRIA.

From the 'New York Times' 25.5.2014, and later also in 'International Herald Tribune': "Syria's Fractured railroad echoes with nostalgia and loss." By Anne Barnard. "For Younes al-Nasr, the Hejaz railway station in the heart of the Syrian capital is a repository of shelved ambitions. Every day, Mr. Nasr, 68 a Transportation Ministry employee, pads around his offices in the Ottoman-era building, where light filters through red, yellow and blue stained glass. He imagines the place a century ago when it bustled with travellers heading for Mecca. And he pictures the future – the grand plans to connect the site to an expanded suburban railway network, restoring the station to life.

But that will have to wait until after the war. For now, the only evidence of those ambitions is an enormous pit out back. There, workers dug tunnels from outlying stations and began the foundations of a 12-storey shopping mall over the tracks, before the country convulsed in conflict three years ago, bringing construction, and eventually Syria's entire railway system, to a halt. Even here at the Hejaz station, the war has encroached; a few months ago, a mortar shell fired by insurgents struck the busy square just outside, killing 12 people.

To Mr. Nasr, the shutdown is only the latest contraction of the region's horizons. As borders and conflicts proliferated during the past 100 years, they cut rail ties that symbolized the lost links that once knitted the Levant, and the wider Middle East, together.

'Railways are the most sociable form of travel,' he said, recalling his own train trips through Turkey to Romania, Bulgaria and Iran, along a route now made impassable by fighting in northern Syria.

'They connect societies and economies. There would have been no United States without railways, and Europe is Europe because of them.'

Nostalgia is widespread here in the Middle East for the brief age of railroads that fostered such connections in the region. Mr. Nasr said his grandfather rode to work in what was then British-administered Palestine on trains that linked Damascus to Haifa and other cities there, now long cut off by hostilities with Israel. Trains to neighbouring Lebanon stopped during its civil war decades ago, along with the whole Lebanese railway system, never to resume.

The Hejaz railway was completed in 1908 to much fanfare, reaching Medina in Saudi Arabia, and cutting travel times to Mecca, the most important Muslim pilgrimage site, to five days from 40. The Damascus station opened in 1913.

But that line did not survive World War 1. British-backed Arab fighters sabotaged the tracks to weaken Ottoman supply lines during World War 1, an episode immortalised in the film 'Lawrence of Arabia'. Later, in 1920, Syrian independence fighters gathered at the Hejaz station before heading west to Maysaloon, Syria, for a suicidal stand against the French, now remembered as a heroic act of resistance. 'The Hejaz railway is part of the Arab memory,' Mr. Nasr said. 'It should stay alive.'

But periodic efforts to restore the line to Medina foundered over the decades because of regional rivalries and shifting priorities. Syrians rebuilt their section of track, but Saudi Arabia never signed on to reviving the whole route. The railway became an attraction for history buffs. Before the current war, visitors to Syria could take a vintage, narrow-gauge coal-powered train on a scenic trip towards the border with Lebanon. The Damascus station, its towering hall crowned with an enormous chandelier, became a museum, where tourists inspected antique wooden telegraph equipment and heard tales of a visit by Agatha Christie.

Now, Syrians occasionally pass through to gaze at a new exhibit: photographs of the destruction of the country's railroads. They show stations burned and shattered, bridges collapsed and antique steam engines wrecked along with the Qadam depot, on the capital's outskirts, where they were stored. Others show the derailment, in 2012, of a passenger train to Aleppo, which Mr. Nasr said insurgents accomplished with a kitchen pot stuffed with explosives. The engineer and his assistant were killed, but the 500 passengers were saved by 'destiny', he said.

Mr. Nasr, like the government, blamed insurgents who he said systematically sabotaged the lines; government opponents say that the government bombed

LIFE ON THE TRANS-IRANIAN RAILWAY.

In 'Black Eight' No. 133 (Spring 2014) pp. 6-15 are interviews with two former Royal Engineers who worked in the Middle East - their memories are fascinating as they give very much the view 'from the bottom up'.

Former Sapper Caleb Priestley had been in 190 Railway Operating Company. Born 1918, in August 1936 he started work at Royston shed, then transferred to Normanton and in 1937 as a fireman to Hellifield. "The Government passed an Emergency Bill that anyone who hadn't reached the age of 21 by 12th. June 1939 would be called up. I was 21 four days later on 16th. June, so in July 1939 I was in the very first batch sent to Oswestry for training on 4.7" anti-aircraft guns with the Royal Artillery....After the military training we were taken to Cardigan Bay by train with the guns. A plane would come in every morning towing a sleeve which we had to fire at. We passed out there with really good scores as we got the sleeve nearly every time. We didn't shoot any planes down! I was sent to the anti-aircraft barracks at Rotherham where we had to turn out at any time to man the guns.... After a few weeks I was told to report to Derby Territorial Barracks to be transferred to the Royal Engineers 190 Railway Operating Company. I knew where it was - you come out of Derby Station and turn right.

After about three weeks we were sent to the military railway at Melbourne. Some of us were allowed to visit the cinema, when suddenly there was a Red Alert (air raid). We didn't know what to do. Some took shelter, but I got on a bus to take this girl Edna back home. We got to her house which was just two streets away from the Rolls Royce factory! We were sitting there when an explosion seemed to take all the air away. The little shelter just seemed to lift up two feet before settling down again - her mother was screaming hysterically. What I didn't know until later was that Melbourne Camp was being bombed so I missed that. I don't think anyone was killed, but one or two were injured. We didn't really work any trains at Melbourne - that didn't happen until we got to Longmoor. At Longmoor I had to work as a driver, learning all the different stops and stations and speed restrictions. The two locos we used were tank engines. From there I went to Birmingham and Crewe and was sent out on locos riding as a passenger to keep my hand in.

Travel to Persia.

Then we got our orders to go to Persia; We travelled to Liverpool to board the Canadian Pacific liner 'Duchess of Richmond'. But we couldn't get through the Strait of Gibraltar because the Italian fleet were blocking it, so had to go out into the Atlantic where there was a heavy swell and all the soldiers and crew were violently sick. It was terrible - the sea was like hills and valleys - one minute you were down in a hole, the next right up in the air. After about two days we got out of it and into the Doldrums.

We called into Freetown, Sierra Leone, to refuel, but they wouldn't let us off the boat as there was a lot of trouble there. We went round the Cape of Good Hope to Durban, where we had 12 days waiting for a smaller boat. We really enjoyed it there - we could go into all the cafés and hotels. They used similar currency to us. The waiters served us a 3-course meal - as much as you wanted for 9d! (4p). We were treated really well. There was an opera singer there who used to sing and greet all the boats. We couldn't get a smaller boat, so the 'Duchess of Richmond' took us as far as Bombay, where we did get a smaller boat to the Persian Gulf. We stopped at Aden for water (fancy getting it there, it only

stations and depots after insurgents took them over.

Ministry employees still report for work every day in the offices tucked inside the Hejaz station, their workaday desks absorbing a bit of grandeur from stained-glass windows. They still draw their salaries, but there is little to do.

In one office, decorated with a map that shows the old routes extending into the Galilee, workers sipped tea and watched a government television station. But Mr. Nasr wanted to make one thing clear: 'We are not bored,' he said. 'Not bored! The Syrians are doing their duties, and we will win.'

Reconstruction will be expensive. Given the widespread damage and insurgent control of wide swathes of territory, it remains unclear whether Syria's railroad will remain just a memory.

Outside, the tiles on the underside of the portico are pockmarked by shrapnel from the mortar attack. The shells hit while workers were sandblasting the front of the station, and one fell to his death. It was only a matter of luck that more people were not killed, Mr. Nasr said, because the station's steps are a common meeting place.

Still, Mr. Nasr allowed himself a hopeful railway metaphor. 'There is light,' he said, 'at the end of the tunnel.' "

<http://www.nytimes.com/2014/05/26/world/middleeast/damascus-syria-hejaz-railway-station.html> provides also some illustrations.

G. LEBANON.

Nick Lera has informed us of a seminar in Paris:-

"The Institut du monde arabe in Paris are running a short symposium on Lebanon railways "The Lebanese Railways - Between the Past and the Present" on Sunday 15th of June 2014 from 16h-17h. Institut du monde arabe Paris. www.imarabe.org Presented By Mr. Gilles Gauthier.

"Lebanon without Public Transport: Elias Maalouf (5minutes); Elias is President and Co-Founder of the NGO Train/Train Lebanon. He is also a Film-maker and Railway Historian who has published a Documentary and various Studies about the Lebanese Railways. Elias will be presenting for 5 minutes the case of Lebanon without public transportation.

The Lebanese Railways From 1895 till 2015: Mr. Tatig Tendjoukian (20minutes); Tatig is well known among the Lebanese for being a pioneer in his research about the Lebanese railways. He started his passionate involvement in the late 1990s. He also was chief engineer for the study and design that was made by the French Company Egis Rail for the restoration of the Lebanese coastal line. Tatig's presentation will be for 20 minutes and the topic will be The Lebanese Railways From The Beginning till Today.

One Kilometre per Diaspora: Mr. Edmond Massih (5min); Mr. Edmond Massih is an active member of The organization WLCU "World Lebanese Cultural Union". He will be launching the Idea of the One Kilometre per Diaspora, which is a project initiated by Train/Train NGO in partnership with WLCU to study the possibility to bring funds from the Lebanese diaspora, which is found in almost 160 different countries around the world. The project is to propose to the Lebanese diaspora to fund one kilometre of rail per country. His Presentation will be for only 5 minutes.

Lebanon on Rails: Mr. Eddy Choueiry(5min). Mr. Eddy Choueiry has been touring around the Lebanese Railways for almost 10 years now. In his presentation he will take us in a journey around Lebanon with Photos from his recently published book Lebanon on Rails."

Nick added - "I've always felt the key to DHP research lay in Paris. I'd like to see what's in public domain there - I'll try to follow up the publications referred to. The only film of the DHP I've ever seen is the brief clip I took myself in 1968. I've still drawn a complete blank on a film someone showed at the CRC yonks ago. It apparently showed supplies for the ill-fated Hedjaz restoration in the mid-60s being double headed through Lebanon. I note an alleged film maker had a 5 min slot at the conference. His film must be as short as mine! An unexplored topic of potential interest is the role of the DHP in WW2. Were the newest rack locos delivered to Vichy or the Free French? Being Swiss property until paid for I guess they were categorised as neutral. I wonder if we'll ever see those wonderful Syrian DHP and HR locos again....."

[Editor notes: Clearly there are some people still interested - though a ONE-HOUR seminar indicates either how little interest there is or how little there is left to say....]

rained about once every 6 months!) When we got to Basra (Iraq) we were told there would be a hot meal for us, but when I collected it in my dixie there was a desert storm. It got covered in sand, so I had to throw it in the bin. We travelled by lorry from Iraq to Ahwaz in Iran. Both our HQ and depot were located at Ahwaz – this was December 1941.

Operating the Trans-Iranian Railway.

As the Germans had got as far as Stalingrad the Russians were desperate for supplies, so we did some good with 192 and 153 ROC's as Stalingrad never fell. We were taking trains one after the other, seven days a week, non-stop.

The first train I worked was to Andimeshk. It was midnight when I left – I hadn't got a chart or anything – they said 'Just go.' I asked about crossings and was told 'You'll be alright.' ... After a time it was decided that a Detachment was needed at Bandar Shahpur to keep the wagons moving from the jetty. Our CO sent me there and I spent the rest of the time doing most of the shunting. They also got Khorramshahr going for unloading supplies.

Query: The 8F locos were coal-fired when they arrived but many were converted to oil-firing - what were the conditions like working on the footplate in the heat?

It started off fine until it got to the heat of the summer. Then all the firemen had to throw the fires out because they couldn't get the injectors working – the water in the tank was almost boiling itself and the cones in the injectors just wouldn't pick the water up. It stopped the trains. The Russians didn't like that very much. The first thing they did was to contact India, where they had some hot water injectors; also a firm in Manchester sent some as well. We got those cones in and they were fine again. It got to 150 degrees F in the cab in the summer, even at night it never went below 100 degrees. We also had mosquitoes – you couldn't let them bite you. I never caught anything off them – my health stayed well.

One of my mates, Don Speight, was driving and saw camels crossing the line so they slowed down to let them cross over. But as soon as they opened steam to start off, one of the camels panicked and ran back and it derailed the train. The train went down the bank and rolled over. They were bruised but not badly hurt and they didn't have to go into hospital – just needed a check-up. It became a laugh in the company – it was said that we got everything working with trains through to Russia, but were then derailed by a camel!

Query: Did all of the wagons have brakes when you started in Iran?

Yes, most of them were piped up – as many as possible of them in the trains which were double-headed with a banker at the back. The Russians grumbled about wanting more and more supplies sending up the line and eventually there was an accident up near one of the tunnels, I think there were quite a few killed there.

I met some Russian soldiers – three men and one woman, whom we called Daisy. They were on the jetty all the time down at Bandar Shahpur. They were checking we were doing the job as quickly as possible, I can understand them because the German Panzer divisions went through Russia like a dose of

salts until they got to Stalingrad – if that had fallen they would have been through the Caucasus into Iran. Also by that time Rommel had got through to El Alamein near Alexandria. The two forces would have joined together and the war in the Middle East would have been over. I don't know what would have happened to us if they had, but it didn't. We were rushing these supplies through, and Stalingrad never fell, in fact, they finished up pushing the Germans right back to Germany.....

In 1943 we gradually handed over to the Americans – they worked on Stanier 8Fs to start with but they had their own MacArthur class (2-8-2's). Within two weeks they had a nasty accident – I think one of their officers lost a leg or something, they made a bit of a mess of it and yet at the end of the war they got a medal from Russia for work performed. But all the British from 190, 192 and 153 Coys. who had worked in Iran never got a medal... I was at Bandar Shahpur until the Americans came to relieve us.

[Then] to Baghdad shed while we were awaiting orders. At Baghdad we travelled on the footplate but didn't do any work. At that time I had to have an operation for a hernia and ended up in Egypt near the Suez Canal. I was in a little tent on my own above a two-foot deep hole in the sand – that was my convalescent home.

..... From Baghdad we went to Beirut in Lebanon – we had a camp with tents and were warned that deadly snakes were around the area. They were about two feet long – if you were bitten there was no treatment – you were a goner! I was in the same tent with Ian Street from Wigan. He had some matches and said he was going to look in his bed. He struck a match and there was one of those snakes lying in his bed – if you disturbed them they would shoot off. There was nothing in my bed. I thought Beirut was a lovely town – very French, as it was a French colony before the War.

From there we were rushed back to Alexandria and when France was invaded on D-Day my Company went to Catania in Sicily....." [The account continues with the Company's activities in Italy and Austria, then his career back in England. He passed away 24.11.2013.]

Sapper John Evans, formerly of 192 Railway Operating Company, Royal Engineers.

"I joined up when I was 20; I was called up with what was called the First Militia. After that the railway wouldn't let anyone go to join the forces – they sent me a letter asking me if I wanted to go back to the footplate; I said No, I was quite content in the Army.

Before the War I used to go to one of the drivers' houses where he used to teach me the rules and regs. and about the construction of the locomotive and all that. So when I went in the Army, after my military training, I had the technical training and I passed top, so they put me on the permanent staff at Longmoor, working the trains up from Liss to Petersfield. [sic] I complained because all my friends were going overseas to France and having a wonderful time.

Eventually they posted me in 1941 to 192 ROC at Swindon and then to the King George V dock in Glasgow to join the troopship 'Strathnaver'. That was horrific because there were Decks A to G – we were on G deck, right at the

bottom. Each room of troops had to send two men up to get rations; they would come back carrying two dixies of porridge or tea – this little Irishman slipped on the stairway where people had been sick and spilt all the porridge, so he scooped it all up into the cans and took it down to the men! We were in a big convoy and during the trip we could hear depth charges going off.....

We went to Durban first, then to Bombay and arrived at Basra on the 3rd. March 1942. Then into the desert for three weeks and into Iran to Andimeshk where we drove trains north through the Zagros mountains at 4,000 ft. above sea level to a place called Doroud, then down to Arak. We did that for a year. There was no timetable; in the Army if you were told to work a train, you worked it. The supply trains to Russia were allsorts - clothing, shoes, ammunition. The locos were LMS 8 Freights. It was murder; 137 tunnels in 135 miles. You would climb up through a tunnel and the smoke couldn't get away; it was a single line. We had a lot of trouble with the local people; I remember coming down with a train and all these men were laid out on the platform with their feet cut off. They hadn't the sense to get out of the way of the train in front of me. I asked when the Doctor was coming and the Stationmaster said no doctor would be coming. They were left there until their wives came and dragged them away.

....As crew I had a Scottish fireman working the 8Fs. There were no signals, you see; they would just tell us to drive up there to Doroud, and stations called Balaroud and Mazou. You just looked out for something to stop you; it was absolutely crazy. Looking back now, we got no help from our Officers – they hadn't got a clue. We were told to get on these engines and drive these trains up north.

In the desert at Andimeshk it was 140 in the shade, 150 on the footplate. I think there were five lads died of heat exhaustion. We were supplied with big canvas water bottles, charguls we called them. We used to hang them out the side and we had to put salt in because fresh water made you sick. Your shirt, when you took it off at night, was sodden with solid salt. A lot of fellows used to collapse with the heat. We all ended up in hospital at one time or another. Our food was all tinned, we weren't getting any fresh vegetables or anything.

In Doroud we were billeted in mud huts with just ventilation windows in the top, about 20 of us in line. One night one of my mates said there was a cat clawing at his feet in bed so he kicked it off and it went out through the ventilator. We realized there were no domestic cats there – it must have been a wild one! Also there were poisonous snakes everywhere and centipedes; every morning you would have to shake them out of your boots. Scorpions as well, great big things with black tails.

We would work 24 hours until the job was done – get where we were going, then get our heads down until they gave us one to go back. It was a single line run by telephone and ticket which was always written in Arabic; you knew it was permission to go to the next station where you handed it in. We had no brakes on - the English locomotives were fitted with vacuum brakes and all the wagons were Westinghouse (air brakes), so we only had brakes on the loco. We had local brakemen scattered throughout the train; they all smoked opium.

Wherever we stopped the train they would go to gather opium from the poppy fields – they showed me how to do it by scraping the juice off the poppy seed head and putting it in a cigarette tin. That was pure opium; they all smoked it or chewed it. So you had a train load of brakemen behind you who all took this opium. There was no communication with them. You would go up a steep climb into the mountains, get into a tunnel and then run down the other side, across a viaduct and climb again. When you wanted brakes you would whistle, but the brakemen were asleep (doped), so you would put the loco brake on to make the wagons go bang, bang to wake them up; then they knew they had to put the brakes on. ...

We were up in the mountains in Iran, it was pitch black and they sent engines out without any gauge lamps or anything. I got my shaving mirror and shone the reflection from the fire on the dials to see what steam we had got. A mate called Jock Whales, a fireman, he wasn't very bright, was asleep on the floor on a bit of matting while we were stopped in this station, and a train drew in alongside us – it was pitch dark but I could see some cigarettes going. We were talking about this and that for about 20 minutes or more, I could tell they were Scots by the accent, then Jock woke up and said, 'Who're you talking to?' - Some of the 5th Division here – where are they from? - Glasgow - which part of Glasgow? - Maryhill – so do I, ask which street he lives in – Rowlands Street – so do I, ask him what number – 111 – that's where I live, it's my brother! Just then the train drew away! For the rest of the shift he kept saying he should have been woken up, he hadn't seen his brother in about three years.

One time when we went the shed for the loco for a trip up the mountains, the Sergeant was drunk and half-dressed, the native workers had scarpered and steam was coming out of the wash-out plugs, so I got the Sergeant's uniform to protect my hands and tightened them up. I chucked the uniform onto the footplate. When we got up to 4000ft in the mountains the injectors froze up so I soaked the Sergeant's uniform in oil and set fire to it to thaw the injectors. Jock Whales said, 'Oh, you've burned the Sergeant's uniform – you'll go to jail!' I said, 'Don't tell anyone.'

On one of the engines, a German oil burner, the controls for the oil burner were the opposite way round. The Officers said we had to work that German engine. Jock moved the control the wrong way and it burst into flames, so I had to get on and move the engine out of the flames.

We were out of rations one time in Iran, so I went fishing in the lake (there weren't supposed to be any fish in there.) I was always inquisitive in any country I went to – they had a system of irrigation in Iran called a quance – they dug a hole down until they found water, then dug another (tunnel) underneath and another down to meet it. Some were very ancient. One of the lads, Charlie Parker, who was a keen fisherman, said 'Bound to be fish in there' so he went fishing and caught these strange fish, which he brought back to camp on several occasions. Some time ago we saw David Attenborough on TV 'discovering' these fish – I said 'We ate them years ago!' The food was appalling – we used to get all sorts of muck. We used to eat mountain goat and wild boar, which was dangerous to eat because it carried a disease called Trichinosis and it took a lot of cooking

– like pork, it's highly dangerous for butchers.

The average English soldier had some extraordinary stories to tell, things they did that were commonplace then. These two fellows were detailed to take a train away from Andimeshk up into the mountains – the Sergeant said to me, 'Jock, they're both plastered, they've drunk a bottle of vodka between the two of them, they'll get court-martialled and so will I.' I said to get them on the engine and I would drive the train up to Balaroud about 30 miles up the road then and when they come round, I'll get off and let them take over. It was hot, 140° even though the sun wasn't up. When I got off I went down to the stream in the valley to have a swim before the sun came up. I stripped off and dived into the stream off this rock, and was swimming around when the sun came up and I found I was swimming amongst hundreds of snakes. I panicked, I didn't know which way to go – I pulled myself up this rock and scraped my chest – for years afterwards I had all these white marks on me. The lesson is: Never dive into water unless you've tested it first. [Could these have been leeches, not snakes? WLR.]

The Americans came then – we had American crews come on the footplate to learn the road, they were all middle-aged. They couldn't understand why this boy of 24 was in charge of the train and telling them the job. They came from every railroad in the US – the last week they took over one of them was killed. They knew everything, they couldn't understand we were working on a shoestring. They said it was impossible to do it because the smoke in the tunnels was so bad they had to go slow. So they removed all the steam locos and put diesels on after we left, up to Tehran where the Russians took over.

On several occasions I had Russian troop trains – I would go round in the dark with the oil can and I turned round one time to see a little Mongolian soldier with a bayonet following me everywhere in the dark – I said to 'B*gger off'. When we got to Andimeshk, he called his officer out and said 'B*gger off', he didn't know what it meant!

I never got to Tehran, just the outskirts where the Russians took over – they were very suspicious, they wouldn't speak to you.

After that I went back to Baghdad working trains from there to Mosul. A civilian would join the train on the footplate; he was very hoity-toity, we were just scruffy ordinary soldiers. I said 'I know you from somewhere'; he had been a Premium Apprentice at Gateshead. I think he was called Pearson, he was the Chief Loco Inspector with Iraqi State Railways and was very friendly from then on. Years later I met him walking across the Portico in Newcastle, he worked in the office as local Superintendent. At Baghdad I worked on the streamlined Pacifics that were built at Darlington.

Going up to Mosul once we came to a stop in a swarm of locusts, everything went black and the loco was slipping on the locusts, they were a foot deep everywhere across the desert.

Water supply – they had tanks at various stations – they dug a hole and put a concrete tank in it. They brought up water once or twice a week and filled it up. When the locusts swarmed they filled the water tank; they had to shovel them out.

When we were in Baghdad they came to ask for volunteers for special services in Egypt. Four of us volunteered and they sent us to Haifa but when they discovered that we had no training in mines or demolition, they sent us to Moshu and Swalia to the RE HQ where we had three weeks training on mines and demolition. Then they discovered there was a shortage of train drivers so they sent us back to our unit, which I just missed and I ended up in Alexandria.....".

105: 10.

SOME MIDDLE EAST TRAVELS IN THE 1990's.

The Editor notes: I acquired this book - 'AA Great Train Journeys of the World' (pub. 1993, ISBN 0 7495 1257 1) ed. Susan Gordon - at an 'antiquarian' knock-down price at Highley station on the Severn Valley railway. Surprisingly well-written and illustrated for such a 'generic' coffee-table anthology book for non-specialists, here are accounts of rail travels in Egypt and European Turkey – not so long ago, and yet they describe worlds that have largely vanished in recent years.

FOLLOWING THE NILE FROM CAIRO TO ASWAN.
By Robin Neillands. (pp. 210-215.)

'Egypt', said Herodotus, 'is the gift of the Nile.' Its railways, on the other hand, are the gift of the British, who built them to nail down the country against civil insurrection and invasion between the time they entered Egypt in the 1870's and the time they left in 1953. It follows, therefore, that the railways of Egypt were built from strategic considerations and neither for speed nor comfort. A journey along the banks of the Nile by stopping train may require a certain resilience of spirit, but as a journey through modern Egypt it simply does not compare with the traditional but now rather mundane experience of a cruise ship.

Cairo is the largest city in Africa, the capital of the Arab world, but to the first-time visitor it much resembles an overturned ant-heap with people rushing in all directions, in a wide variety of Western and Arab dress, crowding the souks and the pavements, pushing you aside, selling you things you do not want, and demanding 'baksheesh', The first requirement is patience, and nowhere more so than at Rameses Station where people are milling all over the place, sleeping in corners, feeding or changing babies, or simply lying comatose on the platforms or on benches, waiting for trains or for something to turn up – and where the ticket counter staff seem to live in a state of terminal lethargy. Be warned that the process of reservation and ticket purchase can take anything from a couple of hours to a couple of days, depending on the mood of staff and how lucky you are.

The point of visiting Egypt is to see the ancient world, and for any visitor that is really the sole purpose of any journey down the Nile. There are two ways to make the journey by train. The first is on the special overnight sleeper trains operated by Wagons-Lits, which run from Rameses Station in Cairo to Luxor and Aswan. This is ideal for those who want to see only the main sites at Cairo and Luxor, like the pyramids and the Valley of the Kings at Thebes, before travelling on to Aswan. The trains are fairly new, air-conditioned Wagons-Lits Expresses with plenty of white-coated staff to fetch and carry, overnight two-berth sleeping compartments similar to those used in Europe, and dining cars. This is a comfortable method of travel but not particularly exciting. Give or take a camel or two on the line, you might be anywhere.

Serious travellers however – those who carry at least three thick guidebooks and several bottles of mineral water – will choose one of the day stoppers or local trains that link the small towns alongside the Nile. This is not a romantic train ride and even the First Class, air conditioned carriages are at best only adequate, but you can see the country, meet the people and get off whee and when you choose.

Once you get the hang of it, getting down the Nile like this is easy. There are plenty of trains, including a surprising number of freight trains — though the freight wagons all seem fairly full of people. Decide which place you want to see, get off the train at the appropriate station and then shoot off by taxi or bus to visit it. When you get back to the railhead take a train along to the next town which has reasonable hotels and start the whole process again. It may sound hit-or-miss, but it works. And it seemed to me that to take the soft option of the Wagons-Lits special would be to miss the experience of a lifetime.

With the travelling arrangements in hand or taken care of there should be time to see a little of Cairo before bracing yourself for the rigours of rail. The first place to visit is the Egyptian Museum of Antiquities which is full of wonderful things, including the treasures of the young pharaoh Tutankhamun. The other essential sites are the Sphinx and the Great Pyramid at El Giza, just on the southern outskirts of the city. It is possible to hire a camel here and most people take a ride on one, up from El Giza and once round the Great Pyramid. Those who are getting a feel for this wonderful ruined land will also take a coach excursion south to Memphis and the ruins and temples of Saqqâra. Coffee, lunch or an ice cream at Groppi's in the Midan Talaat Harb is another tradition wise visitors will follow.

All this seen and done, it was time for me to check out of my comfortable hotel. I had become a kind of hero to the other guests, who viewed my intention to travel south by rail with the kind of awe that Stanley must have endured when he said he was off to find Livingstone. One gentleman, who told me he had been down the Nile nine times, added that I would probably get my throat cut.

I had opted for an early train, hoping to avoid the crowds, but Rameses Station has a 24-hour rush hour. The confusion was increased by several score of people trying to carry my bag and a few more trying to sell me drinks, rolls filled with unspeakable foodstuffs, or hieroglyphic postcards.

The stopper trains are dented and dusty and usually carry far more people than they were designed for, and I have to say that my first reaction when I eventually fought my way on board was to wish I had settled for the cosy ride on the Wagons-Lits. Serious travellers seem to relish squalor and will probably enjoy this, accepting the crowding as part of life's rich pattern. The engines are French or Russian diesels left over from hauling concrete and equipment to the Aswan High Dam.

But there were already distractions. On the way out of the city, rattling over innumerable sets of points, I could see the jutting triangle tops of the pyramids and the scattered columns of the temples at El Giza, Memphis and Saqqâra. To the west is Faiyûm, Egypt's largest oasis, and delightfully green after the noise and dirt of Cairo. Sugar cane grows here, and palm trees hang heavy with dates. I was sufficiently tempted to leave the train at Beni Suef, 75 miles (120km) south of Cairo for an overnight stop, to explore this district by bus and taxi, seeing the river wheels at Medinet el Faiyûm and the pyramid at El Lâhûn.

From Beni Suef the railway track stays close to the Nile at El Minya, 155 miles (249km) south of Cairo, which takes about four hours on the train. I breakfasted en route, on oranges supplied in quantity by my fellow passengers who were carrying sacks of fruit, hens by the legs and at least one anxious goat. By midday we reached El Minya, a good base for visiting the tombs at Hermopolis or Beni Hasan, 12 miles (20km) further south. I got off the train (four or five hours on one of these trains is as much as the human frame can stand) but I chose to stay put for the day because El Minya has several good hotels for a meal, a good market to visit and excellent bus services up and down the river. It also has some very good beer. Hermopolis, a complex of temples dedicated to the god Thoth, lies near Mallawi, a small town 30 miles (48km) south of El Minya. South of here lie the remains of the city of Tell el-Amarna, built in the 14th. century BC by the pharaoh Akhenaten and his famous queen Nefertiti.

From El Minya I took a 'commuter' train, somewhat scruffy even by local standards and full of more fellaheen on their way to market. Getting on board required a rapid deployment of the elbows and a total lack of compassion. These local 'commuter' trains are strictly for the peasantry

and look as if they will fall apart at any minute. However, it is remarkably easy to get used to squalor. With the chatter and the incessant questioning of the locals I was never lonely. I would have quite liked to be lonely, but the Egyptians are intensely interested in visitors and since many speak a little English or French you are kept deep in conversation. There is also the ongoing backgammon school in every compartment, and what with one thing and another it is often a relief to get off. Sometimes it is hard even to look out of the window.

There are temple ruins to be seen, however, on either side of the railway line, as the train rumbles on to the next stop, Asyût, which marks the dividing line between Upper (southern) Egypt and Lower (northern) Egypt. Asyût is the main town of Upper Egypt, an important rail stop and a great trading centre, standing astride the camel routes that come in from the Western Desert and the Sahara. The dam across the river here was built by the British in the last century to irrigate the country as far north as Beni Suef. The direct journey time here from Cairo is about six hours, though it had taken me three days.

Another 60 miles (96km) further south, the train stops at Sohâg, a centre for Egypt's Coptic Christian community. The two monasteries, the Dier el-Armar or Red Monastery and the Dier el-Abyad or White Monastery, lie in the hills to the west and a taxi ride out there from Sohâg costs about 10 Egyptian Pounds, less if you haggle. I am not much good at haggling. The only time I tried it, the price went up. This hardly mattered because travelling like this may be dirty, but it is also dirt cheap.

I was now getting used to the journey and beginning to enjoy myself. My fellow passengers, the Egyptians, fell into two categories: friendly, and too friendly, as they offered me coffee, sweetmeats, fruit in various stages of disintegration and lethal bottles of orange juice and water. I even stopped worrying about my stomach and was eating platform food without a twinge — though getting a bad attack of the Pharaoh's Revenge on a rail journey through Egypt hardly bears thinking about. A bonus was that the demands for 'baksheesh' so constantly made in Cairo were not heard at all here, away from the tourist centres.

From Sohâg the train trundles on, stopping and starting through this timeless landscape, some of the trackside scenes looking almost biblical. At Nag Hammâdi the line crosses the river on to the east bank. The great temple at Dandara stands just a few hundred yards from the Nile and is rich with hieroglyphics. It contains a temple of Isis and a temple of Horus, and hieroglyphs praising Nut, the sky goddess.

However you choose to travel, Luxor is the highlight of any trip down the Nile. The train gives a good view of all it has to offer on the way in from the north and passes beside the Karnak Temple. Not only is Luxor a very fine town, it is also full of fascinating things to see and do. Any wise visitor will allocate at least three days to it, and even then will have scraped only the surface of all it has to offer. Besides, after five days on tatty trains from the Delta, I was looking forward to a spot of luxury, hot showers and tea in a pot.

Follow the Sharia el-Mahatta, the main road from the railway station, and it will take you directly to the Karnak Temple, dedicated to Amun, the Sun God. Visit it in the daytime to admire the great columns and the statue of Rameses II and the Avenue of Sphinxes and all the other sites, and again at night for the Son-et-Lumière presentation. To get to Thebes and the Valley of the Kings you need to cross the river by ferry or felucca. Set on the west bank opposite Luxor, Thebes was a vast and splendid necropolis, where the mighty of ancient Egypt, the Kings and Queens and their children, their courtiers, servants and nobles were buried in great, gilded, and carefully hidden tombs.

The most famous of all the tombs to survive the onslaught of thieves, of course, was that of the boy pharaoh Tutankhamun. It was discovered virtually intact by the British archaeologist, Howard Carter in 1922, after six years of searching. The treasure, those '... things, wonderful things' that Carter saw in the funeral chamber, is now in Cairo, but the boy pharaoh still rests in his ancient tomb and a most wonderful sight it is, the walls rich with painted figures and hieroglyphs.

I took an evening felucca cruise on the Nile and I drank weak tea with buttered toast on hotel terraces and then I

caught the train south again, down the last 130 miles (210km) of track to Aswân. Places to see on this final stretch are Isna and Idfu and the temple at Kom Ombo. I must have caught a dozen or more trains on this journey, but not one completed the distance in the time the station master had assured me it would. These stopping trains are better at stopping than starting. We spent so long at Isna that, given prior warning, I could have left the train and taken a stroll around the town.

At my last night's stop, Idfu, the pride of the town is another temple, dedicated to Horus, the falcon-headed son of Osiris, a huge, grim building in the town centre, reached by gharri after crossing the river. Once the cruise ships had gone I seemed to be the only Westerner in town.

Further south Kom Ombo is a dual temple on the riverbank dedicated to the gods Horus, the falcon-headed one, and Sobek the crocodile-headed one. Crocodiles used to haul out on the bank at Kom Ombo, but the Nile crocodile has long since been driven from the Nile in Egypt.

Aswân was and is a riverine port and railhead at the northern foot of the great Nile cataracts. These now lie under the waters of Lake Nasser, which spreads out to the south towards the Sudan. Aswân is a winter holiday resort, and among the local attractions are the famous Cataract Hotel, a felucca cruise to Elephantine Island or Kitchener's Island, or a visit to the tomb of the Aga Khan. Tired and dusty, and in sore need of a drink, but with a great sense of superiority over the river cruise crowd, I humped my baggage off the train for the last time and took a gharri to the Cataract Hotel. This is where Agatha Christie wrote *Death on the Nile*, while her husband, the archaeologist Max Mallowan, was excavating in the area.

From Aswân it is possible to take a final excursion 300 miles (480km) south to the marvellously preserved temple at Abu Simbel. The rising waters of Lake Nasser would have drowned it, but a mammoth rescue operation was mounted by UNESCO and the temple was cut into 2,000 huge blocks of stone, transported up the hillside and reassembled where it stands today. Pharaoh Rameses II, who built the temple in the first place, could hardly have done better.

Seen like this, travelling slowly down the railway, hopping on and off the train as fancy took me, Egypt was revealed as a wonderful, almost magic land. Nobody bothered me for more than a cigarette and if I often felt dirty and weary, I never felt even remotely threatened. The country people are far too engaging and the towns and sites far too interesting. It is hardly possible to get to know this land and all it contains in one visit, but those who come down the Nile by train, seeing this land at a gentle pace, will have made a very good start."

An accompanying text (with the map) adds a sort of overview/summary:

"Most of Egypt is desert, so it follows that the centres of population are either on the coast, in the Delta or on either side of the Nile. The railway follows the course of the Nile, alongside the road, taking the visitor close to the places of interest.

From Cairo the train follows the western bank of the river south past the Sphinx and the pyramids to the ruins at Memphis, and then Saqqâra. It runs on beside the Nile with glimpses of feluccas and cruise ships through an almost biblical landscape. There are palm trees and irrigated market gardens around El Lisht, and after a while the ruined pyramid at Meidûm looms up on the skyline. Beni Suef is the first train stop, a market centre for the produce-growing Faiyûm district.

The railway runs south into El Fashn, a riverside town popular with cruise ships, and then to El Minya, another market town and the centre for a number of interesting sites. Asyût has the ancient city of Lycopolis as the main attraction, and is a centre for the production of cotton.

Railway, road and river now run on side by side to Sohâg, which has a Coptic cathedral as well as a bus station and an airport. Places to visit from here include the necropolis of Abydos or, on a slower train, the river town of El Balyana, another popular stop for cruise ships with a good souk, or market. The line passes the temples at Dandara, best reached from the railway halt at Qena or by coach from Luxor, and next are the temple of Karnak and, on the west bank, the hills that shelter the Valleys of the Kings, Queens and Nobles. Stop

at Luxor for at least three days to rest, to visit the Valley of the Kings and the Karnak Temple, to explore the town and to take an excursion to Dandara. Aswān is 130 miles (210km.) south, past Isna and Idfu and the temple at Kom Ombo. From Aswān you can take a flight or a coach for another 300 miles (500kms) across the desert to the great temple of Rameses II at Abu Simbel."

From "ATHENS TO ISTANBUL" (from pp. 46-49) by Piers Letcher.

"The main railway line from Athens runs north, up the eastern coast of Greece to Thessaloniki, and then east through Macedonia and Thrace to reach Istanbul, 846 miles (1353km) away. The start and end points of the journey are two of the world's most culturally and historically interesting cities, and the train journey takes you slowly past Parnassós and Olympos, along the Aegean coast, and through the endless emptiness of ancient Thrace. The journey is not a comfortable one, with at least one sleep-free night guaranteed on or near the Turkish border, but the rewards far outweigh the discomfort."

".... There is just time between trains in Thessaloniki for a beer at the station's giant bar, where half a dozen customers sit dwarfed by a room the size of a small concert hall. I am slightly jittery because the last time I was on this train every single seat, eight to a compartment and no hint of a couchette, was full. The water ran out in Thessaloniki, and the toilets ceased to function soon afterwards. But this time major hygiene improvements have been made – the toilet works all the way to Istanbul, and is cleaned regularly, and the washbasins provide water almost to the end of the journey.

Two slightly older carriages with chalked numbers matching my 'from Thessaloniki' reservation have been attached to the long train to Alexandroupolis. These are the through carriages to Istanbul, although it does not say so anywhere. Needless to say, those of us with reservations have all been crammed into two adjoining compartments. It takes us a while to realise this, after leaving Thessaloniki, but here we are, all the foreigners grouped together. Three Americans, two Mexicans and one Australian to accompany me to Istanbul.

Every so often one of us makes a foray into the all-Greek carriages, but this is a risky enterprise, because it is not exactly clear when the train splits; although both parts of the train do eventually go through Alexandroupolis they do not appear to do so at the same time. The guards I ask seem as unsure as the passengers. One of the Mexicans comes back to the compartment with Dmitri, a young well-travelled, multilingual Greek, and he stays with us until Xánthi.

Greece for the most part is rural and underpopulated. With over half its people now living in the capital, and most of the mainland being mountainous, this should not be surprising, but the train winds on through the endless fields of Macedonia and Thrace, and tiny stations at which we stop never seem to yield or exchange more than half a dozen passengers, practically all of them middle-aged or older; the young have abandoned the countryside forever, here as in so many other places, for the lure of the big cities.

Dmitri disappears for a few minutes and returns with a loaf of bread, some pungent feta cheese and olives – a gift from his family, several carriages down the train. We are busy picknicking when we pull into the small town of Dráma. I am nearest the door and after a little while I am sure I can smell burning. I go out into the corridor, and sure enough smoke is billowing out of one of the light fittings. The train is on fire. I would not mind, but this is the second time this has happened to me in Greece, and last time we were stranded for half a night in the Peloponnese.

An engineer arrives and makes short work of the light with a hatchet, waving away all offers of screwdrivers and spanners from a party of helpful locals who have climbed on board to enjoy the spectacle. Molten plastic runs out and the smoke clears. He points up happily at the now severed electrical cables, and we resume our journey. The wires hang accusingly from the ceiling thereafter, and still have not been repaired three days later when I make the return trip.

The train arrives at Xánthi only an hour or so behind schedule, and we wave off Dmitri and his family, but it is not long before we discover that the driver and engineer had disappeared too, along with our friendly cleaning woman. The

engine is ticking quietly to itself as it cools down, and the station master just looks at us blankly when we ask what time we are leaving. We wait and we wait, and it begins to get dark. A wash of scent comes drifting towards the open windows from a sweet-smelling rose-garden beside the tracks.

Night falls, and it seems much later still that our lighthearted crew return, looking as if they have ingested a fine meal and much Retsina while they have been gone. Meanwhile the Turkish train, some 100 miles away, has arrived at the border, found us not there and has gone away again, shrugging its shoulders.

We rumble on, painfully and patently late. At Pithion, the Greek border post, the station master lifts his hand to heaven and is cheerfully apologetic; there may be another train tomorrow morning, at around 6 o'clock. A man in uniform gathers up our passports and disappears with them into the night. His sidekick waves his torch vaguely towards our bags in an all-encompassing customs inspection. The Greek engine wheezes off into the night, leaving us without heat or light, and we settle down to sleep on our individual bench seats.

Some time during the night, paralyzed with the cold (it has dropped to near freezing after a long hot day) I wander around the station buildings looking for warmth. The two solitary carriages of our train look rueful with the Greek engine gone and the Turkish one nowhere to be seen. I share a coffee with the bleary-eyed station master who explains that my misconceptions about the timetables is best explained by the fact that I do not realize that there is not only a right way and a wrong way of doing things here, but a Greek way. He also swears to me that the delay was caused by an engine breakdown. I am sceptical; nobody tampered with our locomotive during the long and silent stop at Xánthi.

Things improve as dawn breaks and a burly unshaven man with his tunic buttons undone comes bustling noisily along the carriage, wrenching open the doors and proffering a variety of passports at me. The change of identity offered by, say, a Mexican passport, is momentarily tempting, but I settle for my own. A Turkish engine appears to one side in the dawn light and tantalizingly sweeps past, only to reappear a short while later on the other side, with carriages attached. It takes a good deal of shunting and lurching before our own two carriages are picked up, and as we are flagged away by the guard we have the frustrating sight of the station's coffee bar being opened up, just too late.

It is only a 20-minute ride to Uzunköprü, the Turkish frontier post, and here things are a good deal more businesslike. Herded off the train by men with guns, we stand in a huddle in the biting wind on the grassy tracks outside the border post. Inside, a darkly bearded man bearing an alarming resemblance to Bluto, Popeye's arch-enemy, calls us in one by one and stamps our passports by bringing down his huge forearm with all the force he can on to a tired and barely moistened rubber stamp.

Back on the train, as hunger overtakes us, one of the Americans delves deep into a holdall and comes up triumphantly with his last two slices of singularly greasy spinach pie. We break it up between us, and it is delicious, washed down with the last of the Ouzo.

And we are on our way again, travelling through the fertile fields of the tiny part of Turkey that is in Europe – just three per cent of the whole country. It feels like more. We pick up fresh passengers at each of the many hundreds of stops, but while the other carriages become ever more crowded, ours remains mysteriously empty.

The morning passes, the day warms up quickly, and lunch is just a sign of hunger which we try to avoid discussing, silently promising ourselves huge feasts in Istanbul.

Standing in the corridor, with our heads out of the window, blithely ignoring the quadrilingual signs advising against this, we watch the countryside crawling past. The train is going so slowly that small children beside the track can run alongside and clamber on board, but there are other distractions: an old man wearing a tatty skullcap ushers a herd of geese across the level crossing, bescarved women walk in groups with, but separate from, men in suits cut to fashions from the forties and fifties, barefoot urchins run in circles, hair cropped to the last quarter inch, Gravestones, unmarked and forgotten, keel over in ramshackle cemeteries in the Islamic way, in startling contrast

to the ornate and well-kept Orthodox graveyards to be seen in Greece.

New housing developments herald our impending arrival in Istanbul, and although this turns out to be still an hour away there is a tangible air of excitement throughout the train. Istanbul is exciting, and is attracting something like half a million new residents a year from the arid, impoverished eastern half of the country. It looks all set to grow into one of the world's largest cities.

The views from the train coming into Istanbul are unparalleled. We catch our first glimpses of the Sea of Marmara, resplendent in the midday sun. On the horizon great tankers and ships are massing for the plunge through the narrow straits of the Bosphorus into the Black Sea.

The train comes in on the most attractive side of town, breaking first through the oldest wall, just a few stones and fragments now, before running along the shore as the Sea of Marmara narrows. At the last minute there are suddenly tremendous views of the Blue Mosque and Ayasofya from underneath, and then the train pulls round the corner inside the old Topkapi Palace walls with a long view across the untended gardens. This was the heart of such vital empires, of intrigues and despotism and power turned corrupt, and even now, inside the harem, there are hundreds of dusty rooms, closed up and abandoned at the turn of the century, intricate carvings, acres of priceless carpets and tapestries and cedarwood inlaid with other of pearl crumbling to dust.

A last flashing view across the deep blue waters of the Golden Horn to the crush of buildings in the other side and the train slides around the final corner into Sirkeci station, 32 hours out of Athens and half a continent away."

And an additional column provides 'Practical Information' which was clearly valid at the time and gives an insight into why international rail services dwindled even then – presumably this account, although undated, refers to a trip in the late 1980's or early 1990's.

"One train sets off each day from both Thessaloniki and Istanbul, and arrives at the other end 14 - 24 hours later (there is no sleeping accommodation or buffet car). Nine trains a day run from Athens to Thessaloniki and vice versa (night trains have sleepers and couchettes). The shortest total theoretical journey time from Athens to Istanbul is 24 hours 15 minutes, with the return journey 19 minutes shorter.

Reservations are compulsory and must be bought before the day of travel, although being caught without one is disciplined only by a small fine.

The best time to travel is early summer or autumn – July and August can be scorching and busy with Eurailers. Take warm clothing or a sleeping bag from September to June for the overnight wait on the border. Bring food and drink.

A visa is needed for Turkey. They are available on the border, depending on the time of day you cross; you may be asked to walk the mile and a bit (2km) to the local post office to buy one. Visas are difficult to obtain in advance. Currency exchange between the two countries fluctuates, and rates should be checked in advance.

Abroad, tickets can be purchased through International Rail offices. Thomas Cook publishes the best and most reliable timetables, and these can be used for advance planning, (although actual arrival and departure times are subject to 'local variations').

...Thessaloniki, port and Byzantine crossroads, is home to another brilliant archaeological museum, this time housing the treasure from Vergina. Thrace is a sparsely populated and unspoiled area of countryside that is partly in Greece and partly in Turkey. There are practically no tourist facilities, but friendly locals more than compensate. Alexandroupolis may look tempting on the map, but is not the place to stop. The Evros River marks the present day border between Greek and Turkish Thrace; the train follows the river all the way from the coast to the frontier post at Pithion/Uzunköprü. Istanbul (Byzantium, Constantinople and now Istanbul): mosques, minarets, the Bosphorus dividing the world's only city to span two continents, seat of influential empires – there is enough here to keep visitors occupied for weeks..."



A Siemens-built Viaggio push-pull train approaching Haifa Hof-HaCarmel station, the city of Haifa in the distance. (Photo courtesy of IR Spokesman Shahar Wlesman)