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Stars of Sandstone 2017

THE EVENT, titled 'Where the Mountains meet the Stars' ran from March 30 to April 9 and took place on the Sandstone Estate, Eastern Free State, South Africa, writes *Robin Patrick*.

This large agricultural estate is close to the Matuti Mountains and the border with Lesotho. The estate has a 26km long 2ft gauge private railway with around 30 steam locomotives in a working condition and with more on site. In addition to the railway and its operation, traction engines, classic cars, trucks, military equipment, agricultural and tractor displays, aircraft, helicopters, as well as ox wagon and mule carts were to be seen. There was therefore always something to watch or photograph. It's also a working farm so modern equipment was often mixed in with the old. The visit to the event was simply an unforgettable experience at a superb location.

The Locomotive Club of Great Britain tour spent nine days there before visiting other steam operation locations in South Africa for a further couple of weeks.

Fowler crane engine No 9403 of 1902 kicks up a bit of a dust storm, adjacent to an assortment of light aircraft.

Marshall 'Gainsborough' type colonial traction engine No 53048 of 1909.

The driver has perhaps just hopped out of the Sentinel S4 waggon's cab to start loading it using the hand crane. The waggon is No 9178 of 1934.

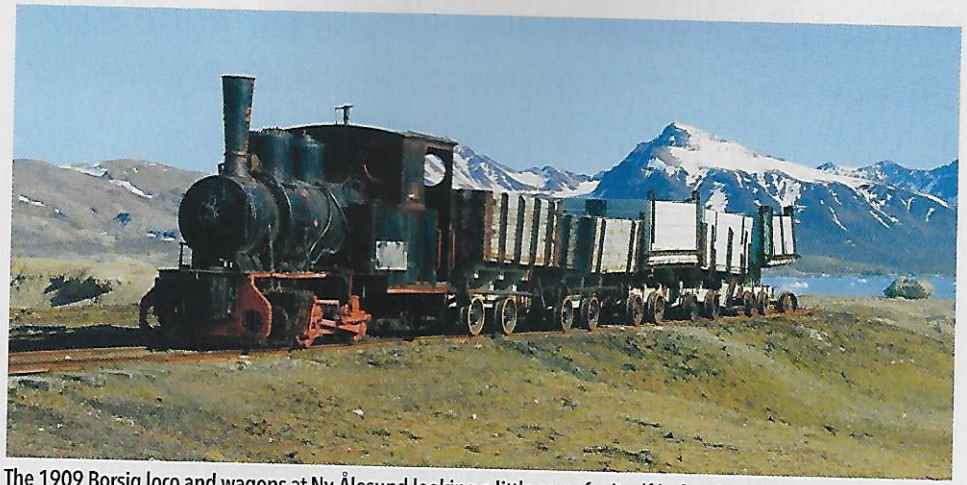
A train approaches on the 2ft gauge railway as Fowler roller No 19543 of 1935 crosses the tracks. The Marshall 'Gainsborough' traction engine is in the far background to the left. ALL: ROBIN PATRICK

Cosmetic renovation for 'extreme far north' coal mine locomotive

WHEN *Tom Brown* and father *Ashley* visited Ny-Ålesund on Spitsbergen, Norway, they found a locomotive which worked at the coal mines there at one time.

Further investigations on returning home revealed that it was the sole survivor of seven such locos which operated at various times in the area from 1917. It was German-built 900mm gauge Borsig No 7095 of 1909, an 0-4-0WT, named *Toa*. After the coal traffic was handed over to road operation in the late 1950s, the majority of the railway equipment was scrapped – with the exception of this locomotive which continued in use, as a result of its light weight, until 1960. It eventually passed to a Norwegian organisation on the payment of a nominal sum and remained on exhibition there as a monument to past times.

Over the years the loco's condition deteriorated, having become the home of a bird colony and with the inevitable ravages from the savage weather conditions regularly experienced in the area.



The 1909 Borsig loco and wagons at Ny-Ålesund looking a little sorry for itself before its recent cosmetic restoration. ASHLEY BROWN

As time progressed, the centenary of the commencement of mining on Svalbard approached and a significant grant was made to the present day owners of the area for the loco's cosmetic restoration in order to mark the event.

The loco left Svalbard for mainland Norway in early 2016 and she happily returned home from the Oslo area in January this year, looking considerably better as a result of her journey south.