

NZASM

Footsteps along the tracks

The identified extant built residue of the
Nederlandsche Zuid-Afrikaansche Spoorweg-Maatschappij
(1887–1902)

Nicholas J Clarke & Roger C Fisher
assisted by Sipiwe Simelane



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Prolegomenon

For the architectural researcher, much as for the archaeologist, the artefact is the primary source. It is part of the repository of the archive. A built artefact persists through time. Its material sheds, accretes, stays useful, takes on new uses, persists, decays, becomes ruinous or is razed or celebrated as monument or memorial. All the possibilities become a palimpsest of a 'text' encoded in its fabric, traces of its existence, or memory that it once was or might have been.

While, to researchers in the discipline of architecture, this may seem self-evident, it here needs to be stated clearly, because, in the industry of research production of the academy, this is often lost in ideas that writing or the document are the primary source. Another distraction and perplexity for high-brow academe is that often the results, conveyed pictorially as complementary evidence, are picturesque, hence academically suspect!

The field is our archive. It is where we find our primary sources. Hence only by researching in the field does one find the artefact. Here we can 'read' the artefact. All other sources elucidate, illuminate, verify, challenge or debunk this reading.

The chief objective of this research project was to identify in the field the restant extant built fabric of the NZASM endeavour of the late C19 in the then ZAR. This we have done. The results here presented have been subjected to double-blind peer review in order that the record and its veracity be adjudged as meeting the academic and scholarly standards of research in the discipline of architecture.

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Kingdom of the Netherlands



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Front cover: View of the the NZASM bridge north-west of Barberton. (NZASM_BBL_016)

Back cover: Blueprint indicating the progress made in the construction of the NZASM lines on 5 June 1897. (South African National Archive, Pretoria)
All images are by the authors unless otherwise indicated.

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Message from the Ambassador

The Netherlands-South Africa Railway Company once connected the vast plains of South Africa. We hope that this book will do the same - that it will connect people and facilitate dialogue and interaction about our shared cultural heritage.

South Africa and the Netherlands share a long history and a unique, complex bond. The traces left by our past are important clues to understand how our identities and cooperation were shaped but also how they transformed and evolved over time.

Shared knowledge is the starting point for this conversation. This is also why the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands supports award-winning projects like ZA Eclectic Wilhelmiens, which gave key insight into Dutch architectural influences in 19th century South Africa. Footsteps Along the Tracks builds on that work, providing new understanding of the built legacy of the Netherlands-South African Railway Company.

Marisa Gerards
Ambassador of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in South Africa



Kingdom of the Netherlands

Left: The rolling Mpumalanga hills seen through a Culvert west of the Grootlifants River Bridge (NZASM_EL_133).

**This publication is
dedicated to the memory of all those who
contributed to the NZASM endeavour.**

Message from the Head of Department

The vision of the University of Pretoria is to be a leading research-intensive university in Africa, recognised internationally for its quality, relevance and impact. Broadening alliances in its research endeavours is essential to strengthening the international profile of UP's research initiatives, while focusing on issues of local interest and consequence ensures impact and relevance to society at large. The Department of Architecture sees its research role as the generation of knowledge to serve the concerns and aspirations of society; an approach rooted in the transdisciplinary tradition of problem-based co-created knowledge that is accessible to a broad audience.

The Shared Heritage Programme of the Royal Netherlands Embassy in Pretoria offers opportunity for such engagement and the research associates of the Department of Architecture are enthusiastic collaborators in this venture. There have been successful shared engagements in projects such as the Re-Centring Tshwane Project and the Eclectic ZA Wilhelmians Research Project, both culminating in double blind peer reviewed publications subsequently lauded and awarded by the architecture profession. The NZASM Footsteps Along the Tracks (FAT) Project has allowed for both institutional and international collaboration for field based research of the extant residue of the late C19 NZASM railway endeavour. This project contributes to the field of architectural heritage through the identification of artefactual remains of the NZASM endeavour and assessing their significance as heritage resources. The Department is proud of this research project and its achievements and congratulates the authors and young research assistant on successfully bringing the project to fruition and presenting it in this attractive and high quality format.

The projected audience, namely the academic heritage community, Transnet, heritage authorities, historic rail enthusiasts and associated national and local communities have already shown engagement and commitment and we believe this will foster benefits to the broader resident communities and the public users of these resources.

The Department thanks its support staff and that of Enterprises, University of Pretoria. I extend my thanks to the Royal Netherlands Embassy, Pretoria in particular for collaborating and as major financier of the FAT project.



Prof Chrisna du Plessis
Head of Department
Department of Architecture
University of Pretoria



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Preface

South Africa's extensive rail infrastructure is of vital importance to its people and economy. After a slow initial start the development of railways reached full steam at the end of the C19 after the discovery of mineral resources, gold and diamonds. One of the agents of rapid rail expansion in South Africa was the *Nederlandsche Zuid-Afrikaansche Spoorweg-Maatschappij* (Netherlands South African Railways Company) which was active in the former *Zuid-Afrikaansche Republiek* (South African Republic, the Transvaal). Over a period of thirteen years, the NZASM constructed and operated five main lines and one branch line, including associated infrastructure. In the process it founded towns and cities and changed the physical and socio-cultural landscape of South Africa forever. This shared South-African–Dutch built legacy lies scatters across the Highveld and Lowveld regions of our country.

The NZASM Footsteps Along the Tracks Project (FAT) endeavoured to assess the built residue of the short, but energetic period, for purpose not of nostalgia, but to serve as basis for actualising this often latent shared heritage resource.

This publication of the research findings is based on primary field work. This has been subjected to double-blind peer review by academics knowledgeable on the topic of research.