

Still off the beaten track

Smartie train is currently under repairs

By POLISWA PLAATJIE

IT WAS once a colourful attraction that created good memories for thousands of kids over the years, but the East London Smartie train now resembles a ghost train.

It ran for over 50 years, moving in 1998 from Marina Glen to the East London Zoo, where it has been chugging along since. But in recent times, the playful colours faded and the carriages are now grubby white.

Kids hoping for a ride on one of the city's attractions will have to wait a while longer as the train has been grounded while repairs are being made. A note stuck on the window on the front of the train reads: "Please take note that the Smartie train currently requires extensive mechanical repairs to its engine. The repair process is currently under way and we are endeavouring to ensure that it will be completed at your soonest convenience. Round Table apologises for any inconvenience."

The train tracks are covered with grass.

For years the train has been sponsored by Nestlé South Africa, but in 2009 the company pulled out. Early last year, a "Save the Smartie train" campaign was launched by the East London Round Table Number One, the custodians of the train. Nestlé again pledged to sponsor the train, but all that remains now are white carriages.

Nestlé spokesman Ravintheran Pillay confirmed to the Saturday Dispatch the company has committed funds until 2013.

"We'll support the Smartie train with an annual maintenance fee of R25 000 until 2013," he said.



DERAILED: The Smartie train lies stationary at the East London Zoo and is in need of repairs.

Picture: MARK ANDREWS

Round Table Number One treasurer Guy Rich said the train's engine has been giving problems for a few months but someone was working on it.

Rich said the train was expected to be running again in October. Asked why it

days she and her husband used to take their two daughters to the Smartie train at Marina Glen and described them as "the best days of my life".

"It was such a nice, safe and relaxing environment and the garden was beautiful."

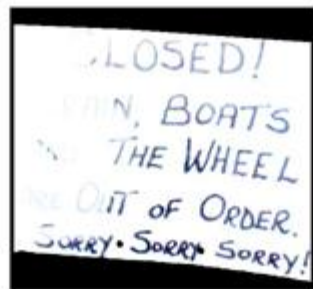
Another local, Kathy Eggersgluz used to visit Marina Glen with her mother every Saturday to play games and get a ride.

"We drove past the Marina Glen recently and I was horrified to see the people who were supposed to be enjoying the grounds sitting in among all the garbage."

Both Cloete and Eggersgluz said the Smartie train was Marina Glen for them and since it moved to the zoo, "it was never the same".

David Roux, who has been living in East London for more than 54 years, used to take his children to Marina Glen every Sunday afternoon after church.

"They so looked forward to this outing," he said. — poliswap@dispatch.co.za



A sign showing the Smartie train and other rides are temporarily out of order at the East London Zoo.

Picture: MARK ANDREWS

was now covered in white paint, he said they were still waiting on Nestlé to re-brand it.

People have shared fond memories of the train.

Liz Cloete remembers the