

# 'Los Chufi'

## The Argentine Sentinels

Built by Sentinel in 1949-51, 100 'S6' waggons were commissioned by the Argentine Coal Board. These advanced designed waggons were to be the last ever steam road haulage from Sentinel.

### Background

It was the war-time shortage of coal that prompted the new excavations. Argentina had relied heavily on Welsh coal that rapidly became unavailable as the U-boat war developed. The country experienced a serious fuel crisis, despite increased oil production and the use of wood and other 'biomass' fuels for locomotives.

### Coal from Río Turbio

Located in the province of Santa Cruz, Southern Argentina. Due to its remote location, a means of transporting the coal was needed from the mines to the port on the Atlantic Coast 160 miles away. For the first few years petrol lorries were used, consuming incidentally more energy than they actually carried and often being abandoned on the road for lack of parts to repair them.

### Arrival of the 'S' Type

1950 they received a fleet of 'S' type under-type (i.e. with cylinders below the frame) steam lorries from Sentinel of Shrewsbury, England. They were known colloquially as '*los chufi*'. These were the last steam lorries to be built for commercial use anywhere in the world, and one commentator suggests that the Argentine state never completed the payments for them! <sup>1</sup>

Under the technical supervision of a Mr.



McKay from the Falklands, they operated in convoys of 10-15 taking 12 hours for the journey to Río Gallegos<sup>2</sup>. They were relatively modern in design but still used a substantial proportion of their load during the 320 mile round trip and it became obvious that only a railway would do the job properly.

### End of an era

The formal opening was on 25th November 1951. The railway was initially known as the Ramal Ferro Industrial Eva Perón (RFIEP or Eva Perón industrial railway line) However, after the military coup in 1955, renamed the RFIRT, or Río Turbio industrial railway line.

### In preservation

One of the Sentinels is preserved at Río Turbio (now a preserved railway) and another lies at Lujan zoo near Buenos Aires. Recent reports suggest that some of them remained in use until 1959.



1. A Report by Héctor Peréz Morando in el diario Río Negro 10 April 2004.

2. Con corazón de carbón, by Sergio García, a comprehensive study of the RFIRT in Todo Trenes magazine no 68, June 2009.

[www.martynbane.co.uk/modernsteam/ldp/rfirt/santafes.htm](http://www.martynbane.co.uk/modernsteam/ldp/rfirt/santafes.htm)

[www.railwaysofthefarsouth.co.uk/09dbuildingrfirt.html](http://www.railwaysofthefarsouth.co.uk/09dbuildingrfirt.html)

[www.railwaysofthefarsouth.co.uk/09dbuildingrfirt.html](http://www.railwaysofthefarsouth.co.uk/09dbuildingrfirt.html)

Picture Credits:

One of only two known photographs showing a Sentinel S6 steam waggon in action. © W.Roil - Río Gallegos (pioneer commercial photographer and historical archive). The only remaining Río Turbio Chuffie looking somewhat battered on display at the mines museum. January 23 2004