

1964

Jean-Paul Sartre is awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature, but turns down the honor.



1964

Canada: A Multi-Party Parliamentary Committee selects the design which becomes the new official flag of Canada.

1966

The Supremes become the first all-female music group to attain a No. 1 selling album (**The Supremes A' Go-Go**).

1966

The Soviet Union launches **Luna 12**.



TOP  
4  
TWEETS

01



US-Bahrain partnership saving lives. Advanced medical devices in use @AMHBahrain, manufactured in the #US. In 2017, medical equipment was the 6th largest export category to #Bahrain at \$36M. Great to visit this institution during #DiscoverAmerica2018

@USAmbBahrain

02



Regular weekend in Kashmir: young pregnant woman killed along with her unborn baby, 10 yr old boy killed, 5 civilians killed. My Facebook timeline has blood splattered all over it. If the Defence Minister tells you that they're doing a great job, they aren't. This isn't helping!

@Shehla\_Rashid

03



When will this WOMAN, @SenWarren say something like...."I am so sorry & regretful for lying to all of the Native American People & feeding off the American System to gain Political Power, I am so regretful & SO Sorry." (we're waiting)

@KristySwansonXO

04



Does anyone have a political right to enter the temple of a deity they do not honor, have never sincerely worshipped and whose devotees they have maligned?

@davidfrawleyved

Disclaimer: (Views expressed by columnists are personal and need not necessarily reflect our editorial stances)

# A train ride back to the old Israel

*It takes four times as long as the new high-speed rail. I take it anyway*



The historic Jerusalem-Tel Aviv line was laid in 1892.



MATTI FRIEDMAN

Last month, the first section of a new high-speed rail line opened in Israel. When it's fully operational a few months from now, passengers will board fire-engine-red carriages in Tel Aviv and be whisked on electrified track over the country's long-est bridge, then over its highest, and through the longest tunnel, and finally into a new station 260 feet under Jerusalem. The trip, about 35 miles, will take less than 30 minutes, making it, by a wide margin, the fastest way to get between the country's two most important cities.

The line, more than a decade and many delays in the making, is the new Israel. Or at least what Israel would like to be: a place that can look any Western country in the eye. The Israeli train of 2018 is shiny, fast and travels in a straight line. But progress has its victims. And here it's the old country — a small, inefficient but compelling place that Israelis call the "good old land of Israel."

The old Israel is represented in this case by the main casualty of the new train: the historic Jerusalem-Tel Aviv line, which has been running on and off since 1892 and isn't likely to run much longer.

Like the old Israel, the old train is sporadically functional. It can take four times as long as the new service and twice as long as driving. It's so im-

practical for most commuters that even before the appearance of its flashy rival, it was nearly empty much of the time. But the old train has a modest cult following, of which I'm a proud member, and I'd hate to see it pass from the world without proper tribute.

I'm writing these lines in the first carriage of the 10:57 am from Jerusalem, winding down through the Sorek River Valley at the speed of a bicycle. In the winter months the landscape is as lush as Ireland, but now, at the end of a long summer, it's dry olive-green and limestone under a pale blue sky.

We pass near the homes of the Palestinian village Bittir, where an old man looks out from a stone terrace. Eucalyptus trees lean overhead, and at some of the sharper turns it feels like we might tip into the stream beside the track. After about 20 minutes without a sign of human habitation, the valley bottoms out, the train cuts through a rock quarry and a few miles of citrus orchards, and makes a few listless stops before the 21st century abruptly reappears in the form of skyscrapers, billboards and the energetic urban tumult of Tel Aviv.

"I ride the old train because it lets me see landscapes that haven't changed in thousands of years," Deborah Harris, a Jerusalem literary agent and another of the train's aficionados, told me. "It feels like traveling through space and time." The train is a commute, a nature excursion and time travel, all for \$5.60.

An early account of the train was written by Theodor Herzl, who rode it in 1898 from the port of Jaffa, adjacent to mod-

**The new train will be able to move more than 3,000 people an hour each way, quickly and efficiently. Few of them will know what they're missing.**

ern-day Tel Aviv. At the time, the train was the only one in this remote and impoverished corner of the Ottoman Empire. Herzl, a Vienna journalist who'd come part of the way east on the luxurious Orient Express, thought it was awful. "It took an hour merely to leave the Jaffa station," he wrote. "Sitting in the cramped, crowded, burning-hot compartment was pure torture." One day, Herzl thought, there would be a modern Jewish state here, and a wonderful network of electric rails. (The new train is, 120 years later, Israel's first electric line.)

The train's birth, six years before Herzl boarded, was the doing of a Jewish businessman from the old Sephardic community of Jerusalem, Joseph Effendi Navon, with the help of Swiss and French investors and the blessing of the sultan in Istanbul. The company laid just one track to save money, according to a history of the line by Anthony Travis of Hebrew University, and made it of narrow gauge to navigate the hills.

Jerusalem's residents were Jews, Muslims and Christians

who tended to be pious and poor. Many had never seen a train. When the first one arrived on August 27, 1892, an elderly Jewish woman at the station declared the smoking, clanking behemoth to be "possessed of the devil," a reporter noted, and a frightened group of Muslim kids nearby agreed.

One history describes the line's construction as "catch-penny and defective," but others were enthusiastic. "Like a dreamer I watched the high mountains, the hills, the valleys and the plains of grass that passed by me, engrossed in thoughts about the making of such a superior machine," an early passenger from Jerusalem wrote in one of the Hebrew newspapers. Of historical interest to early passengers was Bittir on its hillside by the tracks, thought to be the site of ancient Beitar, where a Jewish revolt against Rome led by Shimon Bar Kokhba ended in defeat in 135 B.C.

Hebrew was being revived just then as a language for daily use, and new words were required for things absent in the Bible, like trains. A teacher in Jerusalem suggested the word "katar" for "locomotive," from the word for "steam," and a Zionist leader came up with "raket" for "railroad." Both words are in common use today.

Problems on the line began immediately — foul-ups, flooding, near-bankruptcy and even sabotage by the Bittir villagers, some of whom seem to have been camel drivers or porters who feared that modernity was about to put them out of business, as indeed it was.

But the train steamed on, threading through this coun-

try's remarkable century. It survived World War I, when sappers blew up bridges to slow the British advance against the Turks, then ran through the three decades of the British Mandate. Two British guard posts from the 1930s still stand by the track. After the war around Israel's creation in 1948, the route became the cease-fire line between Israel and Jordan, the train running just inside Israeli territory. In 1967 the land on the other side of the track, the West Bank, including Bittir, came under Israeli control.

The train travelled through years of political turbulence, by the Jewish trees and the Arab trees and the trees that don't belong to anyone. In the manner of the old Israel, it seemed aware of the landscape, skirting hills instead of tunneling through them.

There were faster and easier ways to travel, and you were welcome to take those; the train wasn't for everyone. It arrived when it arrived.

The old train's fate hasn't been settled. There's a chance it could be maintained as a "tourist line," a railway spokesman told me, which would probably mean a few trains on weekends and holidays.

It won't make sense to run empty trains, and there seems little chance that regular service will continue.

The new train will be able to move more than 3,000 people an hour each way, quickly and efficiently. Few of them will know what they're missing.

(Matti Friedman (@MattiFriedman), a journalist, is the author of the memoir "Pumpkinflowers: A Soldier's Story of a Forgotten War.")