

**DARTMOOR RAILWAY**  
ASSOCIATION

# The Dartmoor Pony

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Dartmoor Railway Association**

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**The Dartmoor Line is Open!**

# The Dartmoor Pony

Issue No. 43

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## Dartmoor Railway Association

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The views expressed in the newsletter are not necessarily those of the Dartmoor Railway Association.

**FRONT COVER:** 150221 and 150233 departing Okehampton with a well loaded 2E78 1530 to Exeter St David's on 20<sup>th</sup> November 2021 *Photo:* © Bernard Mills.

**BACK COVER:** Top: 150233 and 150221 racing past Bow with a nice display of autumn colour with the 2K07 1248 Exeter St David's-Okehampton on 20<sup>th</sup> November 2021. With thanks to Mel and Dick Henrywood for access to Bow station and their kind hospitality. Bottom: 150261 and 150232 round the Coleford Curve with the 2Z06 1150 Exeter St David's-Okehampton, also on 20<sup>th</sup> November. *Photos:* © Bernard Mills.

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# **Chairman's Report – Hard to Believe.... It Really Has Happened!**

*Sue Baxter*

It is actually beginning to feel normal, a daily rhythm every two hours of passengers arriving and numbers swelling on the platform. A 150 unit arrives which has two carriages. Many passengers descend, with or without luggage. They are greeted by friends or nonchalantly walk away from the station. Catch the 118 bus right outside (to go down into town or on to Tavistock) or return to their car. Meanwhile a guard is issuing tickets or information to customers unused to the ticket machine. The train fills, orange lights go on indicating departure is imminent, the guard takes a last look outside to the station driveway, sounds the buzzer, closes doors and then departs. At night the station is left lit and with CCTV, but the lights dim when there is no movement. Some passengers like to sit on our Platform 2 seats while they wait.



*150233 leading about to leave Crediton on 20<sup>th</sup> November 2021.*

Passenger numbers are above the predictions made for the business case. Currently the busy trains are from mid morning through to early evening. We are definitely being visited by many who are pleased to ride on a “new” service, but equally many are happy to be able again to do a journey that was once normal, or make a visit which is so much more convenient now to Dartmoor, friends, London or Aberdeen. Everyone agrees that the ride is superb, with 11 miles of continuously welded track, newly ballasted, and with subtle track realignment giving speeds of up to 75mph. Just 3 temporary speed restrictions remain in place, which will be lifted with more track improvements next year.



*Painting from a MEWP (mobile elevated work platform).*

So how did we get to the Official Opening by a VIP? Well we were generally on target, fences painted ready for going back on Platform 3 towards the signal box. However those of you have visited the station may have noticed some panels not repainted, and that was sadly down to us not being given the opportunity to do them! Ron Kirby and Paul Vodden put up the bunting and Devon and Cornwall flags, while Geoff Brooks and Alan Harris, with others, swept, cleaned, tidied and polished, so all our facilities were ready on Platform 2.

Meanwhile the very dilapidated portacabin was eventually removed from the south car park, smashed up first. Originally bought by Dartmoor Railway CIC back in about 2000, it was craned into place because it would not fit under the bridge! They hardly used it as an office apart from to hand out their notice to staff, just before the departure of Ealing Community Transport.



*Alan painting our store on Platform 2.*

Network Rail has marked out 59 car park spaces on the North side, with that figure rising to 76 once a dormouse licence has been granted for reshaping the bank beyond the concrete coaling stop block. Disabled car park spaces are now nearer the track with level access at the Exeter end of the platform. Just beyond the roundabout is where the car park machine is going. The magic eye sees car registrations as they arrive and customers pay by phone or by card at the machine. £2 a day.

Devon County Council did an inspection of their footbridge and found one very minor wood defect which was rectified to their satisfaction by Pat from DRA. With our help they lit it first with movement sensor lighting and now with mains electricity taken from Platform 2.

Paul Bryant of Parc Signs has renewed many signs and poster boards which were originally put up by him for the 1997 reopening, as well as new replica posters. A very interesting aside he shared with us is about the Mid Hants Railway. We knew that they acquired the footbridge from North Tawton station and the Okehampton buffet counter. However on the day they collected the footbridge, they were told that if they decided that they also wanted the Okehampton footbridge, there would be a crane available to lift it the next day. Fortunately for us they decided that they did not have the need for it!! Paul has temporarily taken back into his care some signs which are for station facilities which are not now expected to be open until the Spring....Buffet, Toilets and Waiting Room.



*Concrete base for lighting column*

When we finally knew that Wednesday 17<sup>th</sup> November was the Official Reopening Day it was a day or two earlier than expected and increased the rate of activity! However on Tuesday the driveway was still being laid and no vehicles were allowed round the front of the station. So everything was carried over the footbridge. This included all the 1,000 GWR chocolate bars, Becky Bettesworth Flags, sound equipment, tables, stage etc.



*Man shows depth of light column base.*

Then there were our 10 empty planters, and all the compost, plants and bulbs for them. (two planters with well grown conifers did not make it to the front of the station for the Reopening!) We finally had a chance to move the barrel planters into position after 6pm. At 7pm we were helping plant up some Network Rail (NR) square planters placed over the bases of unfinished lighting columns. At 8pm one of the lighting columns was carried into place. Security took over for the night before the closed event.

17<sup>th</sup> November 2021 turned out to be a brilliant day. Tom and I had been told to attend Crediton Station by 10:30 with a taxi offered, which we thought was a bit over the top. We caught the 5A double decker bus instead and dressed in our smartest gear, which we thought was our Heritage Railway uniform as Guard and Driver. Transport Minister Grant Shapps had requested that we meet him for the start of his reopening journey. We were invited to be the ones to step down onto the platform immediately after him. A real accolade for the work of DRA at Okehampton Station. He was genuinely interested, well

informed and enthusiastic. Mark Hopwood and Peter Hendy, Chief Executives of GWR and NR were also on the train.

Okehampton Station was ready for the 11am arrival with children representing all the local schools lining the platform waving flags, in front of many other invited guests, including past steam railway men Gerald Smallacombe and Richard Westlake. All were invited to a buffet before boarding a train for a journey to Bow and back. Then there was a second celebratory train on which many DRA volunteers were invited to travel. On the day there were special goody bags. Previously an engaging rail safety video had gone out to all the primary schools.



*The Hummingbirds performing*

Saturday 20<sup>th</sup> was the start of the regular public service for which about 2,300 tickets were sold, the majority from the Okehampton end. Some of our early risers like Ron and Paul were there near to the start of preparations from 5.30am. A queuing system was in place to ensure fairness. The future Bulleid Buffet operators (the Youth Hostel) were

ready to sell bacon baps and hot drinks on Platform 3 while we had a lower key operation offering hot drinks and cake. The Hatherleigh Band came to play under our downside running-in board, with the help of some temporary lighting, as the train approached at 7.10am, which created a wonderful sense of pomp and ceremonial sound connecting with the railway's past. Then the glitzy Hummingbirds took over on Platform 3 with their Okehampton version of the Chatanooga Choo Choo.

Several of us took the chance to just go up the line and back, on the first day, as the trains were 4 coaches and some extras had been provided. In fact we met up with Robin Townsend and David Payne at Exeter St David's. After organising dining trains on Dartmoor Railway Robin left to run a successful, much bigger service for charter trains on the network and has only recently retired. David was Meldon Quarry Manager and then for a while Dartmoor Railway General Manager.



*Robin Townsend at Exeter St Davids*

The publicity around the whole event has been a bit overwhelming at times and my thanks go to many members who responded to the call to

open up the station for filming, be on TV or be interviewed. The station has appeared in the first of the new series of Britain's Scenic Railways, upstaged by the mouse in our Post Office barrow. It has also been great to welcome our regular photographers Bernard Mills and Dave Hunt who help give coverage in the railway press. Okehampton has featured in the Guardian, Observer, Breakfast TV and even Sky News in Singapore! The result is apparently an astonishing coverage for such a relatively small scheme of some 80 million people! according to the publicity gurus. Very good for the future of the service as the passenger figures are staying higher than predicted.



*GWR's Ian Mundy is chuffed*

## **DRA's Ongoing Position**

We are now looking after a whole station, backed up by regular visits from GWR stations' team, usually when we are there on Wednesdays. Many volunteers have already received training in Cleaning, and Station Adoption in the construction temporary offices in the former Gunn's Coal Yard, with a further chance early next year. The good news is on the cleaning front that we are not dealing with any dangerous chemicals at all, as a new water based formula is being used for almost everything.

DRA also took up the offer of six places at Newton Abbot on a Customer Care Course, recognising the fact that we are on the spot often helping GWR passengers. A first chance for most of us to use the Okehampton Rail Service for a genuine purpose. All the courses have been quite fun with a chance to chat and relax. Now when we sign in at the station we also note which task area we cover, for GWR or DRA. We are continuing to open up the Museum at weekends, and serve drinks and cake, alongside the shop.

Our rolling stock did not get down to Okehampton Station for the reopening, and as the available time shortened for the necessary restoration work we were in one sense relieved when the responsibility was taken out of our hands. The signallers noticed that the normal overrun for a train not being correctly stopped in the station, was further than the distance to the existing ground frame to the West. After considerable agonising, it was removed so that driver training and subsequently the full service could start with agreement from the Office of Road and Rail Regulation. However future work on both the track up to Meldon and the reinstatement of the ground frame further West are already linked to the future reopening of the Quarry.

In November we had a very useful meeting in Meldon Quarry with the new Aggregate Industries (AI) property manager for the south west of England, Mark Stephenson. At the same time we agreed together that our stock outside could be used by Devon and Cornwall Police for blank fire arms training. Work on our licence from AI is proceeding.

Finally it has been very good to make direct contact with DCC personnel who are in charge of the footbridge and be able to discuss our role with them for its maintenance. We hope to be able to make some improvements in February, at the same time as track improvements are made during a line closure planned in February between 19<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup>. So far we have been very lucky to have had an excellent service even while many Exeter based GWR crew and maintenance staff are off due to Covid.

I wish our Dartmoor Line success and yourselves all the best in 2022!



*Dartmoor Line vinyl wrap on the side of a 150 unit*



*150 unit at the 4-car stop board on 20<sup>th</sup> November 2021*

## **Membership & Volunteer Report**

*Geoff Horner, Membership Secretary/Volunteer Coordinator*

The end of December saw membership just top the hoped for 200 mark with a total membership of 202. It is also a pleasure to welcome the following new members:

- Ian & Kerry Saunders of Okehampton
- Margaret Conkey and Philip Brown of North Tawton
- Paul Wimsett of Teignmouth
- Elizabeth Westlake of Meldon

The New Year has seen a welcome number of membership renewals coming through the letter box or directly in to the association's bank account. Thank you to all for your continued support and also for the many donations generously given.

Volunteer activity is as usual reduced at this time of year particularly as



the weather on the edge of Dartmoor does not encourage much of the regular outdoor work. However the Station Maintenance team have continued to find things to do including decorating our platform 2 side of the station with Christmas lights, a 'Happy Christmas from DRA' banner and a decorated and lit Christmas tree. These make a cheery sight for the passengers using the GWR service to and from Exeter. SMT members are now getting to grips with the station adoption role with GWR keeping the platform 3 areas and the car park tidy.

It was decided that as the demand was there we would continue with the sale of hot drinks from platform 2. A welcome spin off of this has been the custom making purchases in our shop. This has more than justified

the efforts of the group of volunteers who have turned out each Saturday and Sunday. Thank you one and all.

When I penned the November Newsletter I expressed a cautious hope that things would have improved for the Carriage & Wagon group at Meldon. Although Aggregate Industries continue to talk positively regarding a licence agreement for us to be able to operate at the Meldon quarry site, the settling of matters between them and RMS Locotec who claim an interest in the former DRCIC carriage shed is still dragging on. Unfortunately there is little DRA can do but await the outcome of these negotiations.



## **Railway Studies and Modellers Show**

*Geoff Horner*

We took the DRA display stand along with a small selection of items to sell from our shop to the Railway Studies and Modellers Show on December 4<sup>th</sup> at the Railway Studies Collection in the Passmore Edwards Centre in Newton Abbot. The stand was manned by Chris Horner, Geoff Horner, Tom Baxter and Dave Clegg. This was the first outing of the stand under the DRA name and proved very beneficial with a great deal of interest shown in the Dartmoor Railway/Line and,

importantly for us in the DRA, what we are doing and what is planned for the future. It also brought us into direct contact with a number of other associations and societies and the wider heritage railway world. Our efforts were well justified in sales made on the stand and hopefully in some future new members.



*The DRA stand in the Bullleid Room in the main Railway Studies area at Newton Abbot. Photo: Geoff Horner, 4/12/21*

## **Events List**

**DRA social evenings** continue at the Taw River Inn, Sticklepath, Okehampton, EX20 2FG, on the first Wednesday of each month, starting at 18:30. All DRA members are welcome. Upcoming dates, Wednesdays 2nd March, 6<sup>th</sup> April, 4<sup>th</sup> May, 1<sup>st</sup> June, 6<sup>th</sup> July, 3<sup>rd</sup> August, 7<sup>th</sup> September.

### **Railtour visit to Okehampton, 26<sup>th</sup> March 2022**

*Springtime Hoovering in Devon* railtour. Details on the UK Railtours website <https://www.ukrailtours.com/product/springtime-hoovering-in-devon/>

## **Dartmoor Line Travel Information**

Regular Okehampton-Exeter services commenced on November 20<sup>th</sup> 2021, operated by GWR and marketed as The Dartmoor Line. The new service has a dedicated website, <https://dartmoorline.com>



*The Dartmoor Line headboard. Photo: Dave Ellis, 17/11/21*

From Sun 12<sup>th</sup> December 2021 the new National Railway timetable starts, and applies until May 14<sup>th</sup> 2022. Dartmoor Line train times have some small amendments compared to the timetable which came into force on November 20<sup>th</sup>.

Most trains on the Dartmoor Line will now call at both Exeter Central and Exeter St David's seven days a week.

Dartmoor and Tarka line train times are published in Great Western pocket timetable D2, available at most manned Devon stations or available via the web:

<https://www.dartmoor-railway-association.org/cms/files/Tarka-Dartmoor-Winter-TT-21-D2-1212-1.pdf>



*The new Okehampton Rail Link bus at Lydford  
Photo: Roger Joanes, 23/11/21*

The 118 Rail Link bus (Tavistock – Mary Tavy - Brentor – Lydford – Okehampton West St – Okehampton station) operated by Dartline will now run seven days a week, timed to connect with trains. Devon County Council are financially supporting this service.

The bus timetable is available as a PDF download from this link: <https://dartmoorline.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/Timetable-Leaflet-Service-118-from-Dec-2021.pdf>

You can also look up bus times:  
<https://bustimes.org/services/118-tavistock-okehampton>

And see the live tracker map for the bus's real-time location:  
<https://bustimes.org/services/118-tavistock-okehampton#map>

## **Since reopening- the service so far**

*Tony Hill*

The Okehampton (Dartmoor) line service, since reopening to regular passenger trains on 20/11/21, of 8 trains each way Monday to Saturday and 7 on Sundays has at the end of December been, overall, punctual and reliable with only the 1908 St David's and 2025 Okehampton on Sun 12/12/21 having to be cancelled and replaced by taxis, due to no driver being available.

Only on a couple of occasions have trains arrived at Okehampton or Exeter more than 15 minutes or so late. For the first few weeks trains were formed of four cars instead of the scheduled 2 car class 150 unit. Crediton station on Sat 20/11/21 had a total of 62 passenger trains call there, believed to be the most ever.

Much management attention has been given by GWR to ensure that cancellation of an Okehampton service is only done as a very last resort.

Be aware of the various ticket and railcard options which could save you money; e.g. Group Travel, Devon/Devon & Cornwall Day Ranger and the various Railcards (such as the Devon & Cornwall Railcard) which can be obtained at manned stations, such as Exeter St. Davids, Exeter Central and Barnstaple.

Patronage of Okehampton services by real passengers (i.e. by non track bashers!) continues to grow and it is good to see those passengers with backpacks, cases and other luggage etc. indicating use of the Okehampton railhead instead of for example Tiverton Parkway, Exeter, Plymouth, Bodmin or even Truro. The major disruption caused by cancellation of services on Tues 7<sup>th</sup> December between Exeter and Newton Abbot for several hours, due rough seas resulting in the failure of THREE new Hitachi IET trains, led to some passengers who would normally have used stations between Penzance and Plymouth inclusive, instead using Okehampton for journeys to Exeter and beyond.

With Okehampton trains having generally excellent connections at St David's with other services, it is possible for example to be in Paddington in mostly three hours, with 2hrs 54mins currently the best journey time.

The Government Department for Transport (DfT) has given permission to GWR to only produce, for the current Winter Timetable, printed pocket timetable D2 which covers the Exeter to Barnstaple and Okehampton services.

### **Engineering works blockade Crediton to Okehampton and Barnstaple**

The Network Rail planned closure north of Crediton of the North Devon and Okehampton lines during the coming February half term week from Saturday 19<sup>th</sup> to Sunday 27<sup>th</sup> February inclusive for mainly infrastructure (bridge) renewal works at Yeoford, will unfortunately cause the first planned 'Bustitution' of Okehampton rail services. There will be a second line closure (of two weeks) from Monday 25<sup>th</sup> April to Monday 9<sup>th</sup> May and is mainly for trackworks to enable the current temporary restrictions of speed at some locations west of Coleford to be removed so that the hourly timetable can be introduced as planned in mid May.

Buses will run between Okehampton and Crediton stations and vice versa, connecting with trains to and from Exeter. Full details are currently available from the National Rail Enquiries Service and from stations with booking offices.

#### **Please note**

We have inadvertently printed the old website address on the 2022 membership cards. Please keep up to date with news, events and other information at:

[www.dartmoor-railway-association.org](http://www.dartmoor-railway-association.org)

## **YouTube coverage of the reopening**

A selection of YouTube videos covering the line's reopening:

Dartmoor Line to Okehampton has Reopened – Geoff Marshall  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0DFGy27h-4U>

The Dartmoor Line Returns - GWR Trains at Okehampton 20th  
November 2021  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DV5tx6Cxhtg>

Mark Hopwood GWR MD Introduces the VIP Event Opening of the  
Dartmoor Line Okehampton – OkeRail  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HqCfe9dOGXs>

First regular Okehampton train since 1972 – Paul Barlow  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b8BF1Ku1kfl>

First regular passenger service to Okehampton in 49 years 20th  
November 2021 – British Rail Productions  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o26kMkT1XF6>

The Dartmoor Line - IQ Devon and Cornwall Branch event – Institute  
of Quarrying (talk by Christian Irwin and others)  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=snIbOdj9ggM>

## **JOIN-UP Campaign**

New campaign launched to join-up the Dartmoor and Tamar Valley Railway Lines.

The Dartmoor Railway Association is a stated supporter of the reopening of the line from Okehampton to Tavistock and Bere Alston. Visit this website <https://join-up.uk/> which is recommended reading and very informative - join if you wish.



The view in 1959/60 looking south from Thorne between Coleford Junction and Bow, shows a treeless well cared for railway with an ex Great Western Mogul working an Exeter Riverside to Plymouth Goods via the Southern main line. Also of interest are the mainly Devon cattle and all with horns.

Taken by the late Kathleen Hockridge of nearby Landsend Barton and reproduced by kind permission of her granddaughter Elaine Rowe.

## **DRA online**

*Jon Kelsey*

When we changed our name to Dartmoor Railway Association last spring, we also had to change our domain name. Thus our website address became [www.dartmoor-railway-association.org](http://www.dartmoor-railway-association.org), and our main email address became [info@dartmoor-railway-association.org](mailto:info@dartmoor-railway-association.org). The old address will remain alive until about May 2022. In the meantime, calls to the old website address are automatically redirected to the new one. If you are accessing our website using a shortcut or favourite which was created using the old address, it will stop working when the forwarding mechanism is removed in a few months' time, so please create a new one, now.

Whilst this was being set up, we had the website modified to work properly on a mobile phone. There was a technical justification for this, as Google will place a website lower in its search results if it detects it isn't 'mobile friendly'. Much more importantly, we wanted to ensure that as many people as possible could reach our website, particularly tourists whose only internet access is via a mobile. The mechanism detects the size of the screen the site is being displayed on, and modifies the screen layout and menu below a certain width. Our simple site looks clear and neat on a mobile.

I have resisted requests to put the latest Exeter service announcements on the website, as I'm concerned about creating an expectation we can't always meet. Such information will always be secondhand, and sooner or later we'll miss an important update and possibly let someone down. I prefer to encourage travellers to get information from the horse's mouth.

When things are quiet the website receives something like 60 or 70 hits per day. An event such as the first scheduled service on November 20<sup>th</sup> attracts many times this number of visitors.

Appropriate website contributions from members are always welcome.

Many of you will be aware that we have a Facebook page (<https://www.facebook.com/dartmoorrailwayassociation>). I confess to an intense dislike for Facebook – especially its convoluted administration – as well as being at a bit of loss how best to use our page, but somehow (as of Jan 28<sup>th</sup>) we have attracted 1964 'likes' and 2112 'followers'. No, I don't know either.

John Caesar and I are tentatively experimenting with a Twitter account, to discover how we can best use it to DRA's benefit – perhaps mainly by retweeting material from other organisations which might be of interest to members. The address is <https://twitter.com/DartmoorRail>. First impressions are that it's easier to administer than Facebook.

## **Dartmoor Ponies**

With apologies for missing this out of the last issue, a wonderful illustration by DRA member Jed Falby to celebrate the work on bringing the line back into regular use.



## **Rosie's Last**

*Sue Baxter*

When I first met her I raised my hand to point to something and she immediately tried to hide with her tail between her legs! So I ignored her and before too long she was jumping up at me, and then Tom, but no one else. 2 years later she got her wish and came to live with us, as the lady who had adopted her at age one from the Exeter Little Valley RSPCA Rescue Centre was unable to give her long walks. She appeared to fear everyone and had probably been hit with a stick and got shut in doors and gates as they closed.

In 2008 we brought her up to Okehampton Station and to Meldon Viaduct where she found not only were people good to her but they also had good food from the two buffets. So her opinion of people in general changed as she was offered titbits. She developed the most appealing "I've never been fed" gaze and gently flicked her ears independently to catch attention.

Rosie had a full life so began writing her own diary in the Dartmoor Railway Pony magazine. She joined the trackside vegetation gang helping with rodent control and was even caught on camera in the driving seat of the Wickham Trolley. On Santa Trains at both Okehampton and on the Welsh Highland Railway she was good with children (who dropped biscuits!) and with challenged adults who couldn't talk, being very gentle and cautious. She travelled everywhere including by train across the continent, even into Poland. In Cologne she was so confident that when an engine driver said he would like her photo she jumped up to inspect his cab and then pose with him, to his surprise.

Latterly she was part of the station patrol during Covid lockdown. When climbing the footbridge began to get harder for her, she found her own way round and under the stabled carriages. She led her fellow canine Fluffet astray too. As 2021 progressed the days of roaming the station off lead came to an end, but not before she had made many more friends amongst GWR and Network Rail officials. Notably she took

immediately to Network Rail's Top Man Andrew Haines. She was not always so trusting but many chaps made an extra special effort to win her over, being such a pretty girl.

Rosie would have loved to have been with us on the first train from Okehampton but will be with us in spirit, dreaming of a trip to Teignmouth and a ride in the ferry to Shaldon's beach.

Her full name was Rosie May Bluebell, born in May when the bluebells are out. She died on 8th September 2021 age 14 years and 4 months.



## Committee of the Dartmoor Railway Association

**Chairman:** Sue Baxter

**Vice-Chairman:** Paul Vodden

**Acting Secretary:** Tom Baxter

**Treasurer:** Christine Horner

**Membership Secretary & Volunteer Coordinator:**

Geoff Horner

**Committee Members:**

Dave Clegg, John Coxon, Tony Hill, Ron Kirby

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**Arthur Westlake**

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