



THE DARTMOOR PONY

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A Peak at Okehampton

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Editor: John Caesar

E-mail: museum@dartmoor-railway-sa.org

DARTMOOR RAILWAY SUPPORTERS' ASSOCIATION

Website: www.dartmoor-railway-sa.org

Facebook: www.facebook.com/dartmoorrailway.sa

Postal Address: Peter Flick, Copse, Exeter Road, Sticklepath,
Okehampton, Devon, EX20 2NR

Telephone: 01837 840670

E-mail: prflick@dartmoor-it.co.uk

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

FRONT COVER: Class 45 'Peak', number 45060 'Sherwood Forester', at Okehampton on 15th November 2015 awaiting Polar Express duties. *Photo: P. Wagstaff*

BACK COVER: Top: Devon & Cornwall Railways 31601 'Devon Diesel Society' awaiting to depart Okehampton with the two Thumper units on 19th October 2015. Bottom: 47701 'Waverley' and 33103 'Swordfish' at Okehampton, also for the Polar Express. *Photos: P. Wagstaff.*

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Notes from the Chairman

Rev. Philip Wagstaff

I have recently been elected as Chairman by my colleagues on the committee – thank you for the privilege of serving DRSA in this way. I would like to pay tribute to my predecessor Dick Henrywood who held the role for a number of years, steering the Association through often difficult waters. Thank you Dick for all your work over the years which is greatly appreciated.

We are as an Association at the moment in a period of change. Since the ‘Friends of Dartmoor Railway’ started 10 years ago the group has been there to support the work of the railway. This is still the case although we are moving into a very different place than even last year.

Through the good offices of Granite Line Ltd. and Nigel Remmington, Thumper 1118 worked throughout the last season. This unit has now left the line for repair and will not be returning to us. I would like to thank Nigel and the team for their work with GLL which gave the opportunity to run heritage trains last year.

This means that we have Dartmoor Railway’s Thumper 1132, the 08, the stock that the DRSA and Julian Pope own and the Polar Express stock for potential services next season. We will be speaking with DR and explore how this might work although nothing is decided yet. It is good that agreement has been reached to run the Sulzer weekend with the Polar Express locomotives. This is an initiative from DR with DRSA support.

The committee will also be exploring opportunities for volunteering and membership benefits with DR and we will let you know what is happening there as soon as we know.

As a general principle any News from DRSA will be placed on the website although we do recognise that some members do not have access to the internet so it is our intention to send out information by post as appropriate.

The committee will be looking at the way that officers of the association are elected. At the moment this is by vote on the committee, we will be looking at whether or not it is time to change this to vote for officers at the AGM. We will bring some proposals to that meeting for discussion and agreement.

Thank you for your support for the railway – as we move into a new year, even with all of its uncertainties, your committee will continue to explore ways of supporting the railway. If you have any comments please write to me via the contact on the website or by post to Okehampton station.

Railway News

Committee News

Philip Wagstaff has been formally elected as DRSA Chairman. We would also like to welcome Tony Hill of the Tarka Rail Association, who has been co-opted on to the committee.

Sulzer Weekend

As this edition goes to press the Dartmoor Railway Sulzer Weekend on the 23rd and 24th January 2016 has just taken place. This gave an opportunity to travel behind the visiting Polar Express locomotives before they leave the railway. There were three round trips each day running the full length of the line between Coleford Junction and Meldon Viaduct. See the website for reports on the event, and more will be published here in the next edition.

Heritage Services

On 19th October 2015, Thumpers 1132 and 1118 were both towed away for wheel repairs to Bristol St. Phillips Marsh Depot. They returned on 26th October. After running services for the Bow/North Tawton 150 event, Thumper 1118 left Meldon on 1st December by road, heading for the Williton workshop on the West Somerset Railway, where the paintwork damage incurred on its delivery journey will be rectified. It is not expected to return to the Dartmoor Railway.



On Monday 19th October 2015 Class 31 31601 collected Thumper units 1132 and 1118 to deliver to Bristol St. Phillips Marsh Depot for tyre turning. The train is seen at Exeter St Davids whilst 31601 was running around the units and out of sight. Photo courtesy of David Hunt..

Bow & North Tawton 150

The railway opened to Bow and North Tawton on November 1st 1865, and services on November 1st 2015 commemorated the anniversary. We ran three round trips. The original intention was to run to the Network Rail boundary at Coleford Junction, but this was inadvisable because of slippery track conditions, and eventually we ran to Bridge 583 at Nymet Tracey, where the slight downhill gradient assisted the restart. Trains stopped at Bow on the return journey, and passengers were welcomed by the station's owners.

Numbers were a little disappointing, reflecting the short notice available in which to promote the event, but those who attended were full of praise, and it was an enjoyable end to the season. One of the passengers on the last train of the day was a lady who, as a 10 year old girl, had travelled on the last passenger train on the line in 1972.

Our thanks to all the volunteers who made it a success, especially driver and 1118 owner Nigel Remmington.



The Thumper crew at Bow on 1st November 2015 (Tom Baxter).

Line update – Den Brook Crossing

Work is continuing on the installation of a new level crossing at 189m 29ch to 189m 31ch which is over a mile or so beyond North Tawton station (towards Bow station). It is called Den Brook Wind Farm crossing as it is being installed to facilitate the construction of the much discussed wind farm which is on the south side of the line. The large crossing is designed to allow the transport of the turbine blades across the railway in addition to the numerous cement lorries in the construction phase. There is access under the track nearby for standard sized vehicles so once construction is complete the crossing will be locked out of use and only used in emergencies or when large vehicles require access. The wind farm has permission for 25 years so the crossing also has to be retained for decommissioning of the wind farm.

Those of you who use the Crediton to Okehampton road will have seen the access to the construction site from that road which has necessitated a road/track of ~2 miles in length to be built to enable road traffic to be able to reach the work site.

South Devon Railway Visit

We were delighted to welcome a party from the South Devon Railway on 17th October. In the absence of a regular train service from Buckfastleigh to Okehampton they were travelling by Routemaster bus. With 1118 sidelined with a wheel flat problem, and even Lab 11 temporarily out of service, they explored the railway in our latest variant on 'The Titfield Thunderbolt' theme (LMS brake van and the FK hauled by the Class 08)!



Okehampton in O-Gauge

DRSA member Russell Burrige has informed us that the (Princes) Risborough & District Model Railway Club in Buckinghamshire continue to progress their 'almost to scale length' O-gauge recreation of Okehampton, dubbed 'O'kehampton for obvious reasons! It is hoped to be completed in about 18 months time and then will appear on the exhibition circuit. Here is a photo to show progress.



Railway Ramblers – Lydford to Okehampton

On Tuesday 19th April the *Railway Ramblers* have an organised walk from Lydford to Okehampton along the former LSWR line. DRSA members are welcome to take part in this walk. The aim is to catch a bus from Okehampton to Lydford and walk back after having seen Lydford Castle and viaduct before joining the Granite Way back to Okehampton. Please contact walk leader Mark Jones for further information: agapemone@btinternet.com

Membership Matters

Peter Flick, Membership Secretary

Since our last issue we have been pleased to welcome to membership Alan Davies of Okehampton, Paul van der Linden of Exeter, Derek and Yvonne Spittles of Jacobstowe, and Rachael Wilson of Bodmin.

Sadly we must record the death on New Year's Day of Peter Dawson, a regular supporter of the Railway and in particular of the Buffet on Friday mornings.

Volunteering

Geoff Horner, Volunteer Coordinator

DRSA volunteers took part in a day of Health & Safety training on 24th October 2015, delivered by Ian Hughes of Green Dragon, a specialist railway safety company that has worked with a number of heritage lines and small industrial railways.



Most participants looked happy before the training started.... (Ian Hughes).

DRSA would welcome more help with keeping our railway running. For more details contact our Volunteer Coordinator, Geoff Horner, at volunteering@dartmoor-railway-sa.org or by telephone on **01363 82383**.

For up to date news, photos and train service updates please keep an eye on our website and Facebook page:

www.dartmoor-railway-sa.org

www.facebook.com/dartmoorrailway.sa

DRSA Shop

Christine Horner, Treasurer

We are pleased to announce that the DRSA now has its own shop, located on Platform 2 at Okehampton Station. Opening times will depend on the availability of DRSA volunteers to staff it and on what train services will be operating on the Dartmoor railway this year. For the next few weeks it is expected that shop opening times will be limited to Saturdays, probably between the hours of 11.00 and 15.00.

The shop has a good stock of second hand railway books, DVD's and videos, postcards, railway picture cards and some second hand model railway (HO) locomotives, rolling stock and track work. Dartmoor Railway related mugs and other souvenirs are also available.

More stock will always be needed so, if you are having a clear out, your unwanted railway books, videos, DVD's etc. would be most welcome. The shop organiser Christine Horner can be contacted by email at christine.horner@talk21.com or on 01363 82383.

If you are visiting Okehampton please do take time to call in and have a browse round.

Raise money for DRSA when you book your holidays!

As well as online shopping, you can raise money for DRSA via our [easyfundraising](#) page when you book holidays, flights, hotels etc.

www.easyfundraising.org.uk/causes/drsa

Over 2700 retailers take part in the scheme, including Thomas Cook, Thomson, Expedia, Saga, ebookers.com, LateRooms.com and Brittany Ferries amongst many other travel companies.

Why not take a look before you book?

Carriage & Wagon Report

Geoff Horner, Volunteer Coordinator

As I write we are already approaching the third week of 2016 and it seemed an appropriate moment to look back at the C&W group's activities over the past year and to hazard a guess (almost impossible) as to what they are likely to be for this year.

January 2015 arrived with the long refurbishment of the DRSA owned RDB975046 'Laboratory 11' carriage approaching completion. Work had also started on the refreshment of DR's driving trailer S61743. By March 'Laboratory 11' was receiving its final touches to the interior varnish, the saloon carpet was ready to be laid, tables being fixed and chairs purchased. April saw the welcome sight of both vehicles completed and in service forming an air braked set hauled by '08' shunter 08937/D4167.

By June work had started on two further DRSA owned vehicles, the BR Mark2A 'FK' S13436 and the LMS Goods Brake Van 713411. This work continued on into July though by this time the necessity of cutting out and replacing previously undetected areas of rotten floor timbers to one of the verandas of the GBV meant that what had started with the intention of a quick freshen up had developed into a major refurbishment project. The work to the GBV meant that it was September before these two vehicles, could be used as an alternative '08' hauled vacuum braked set on the occasions when 'Thumper' 1118 was receiving attention.

In October C&W turned their attention to the ex 4-CEP TSO S70273, owned by a DRSA member. Work on this vehicle continued for the rest of 2015 and is still ongoing.

Looking ahead into 2016 the completion of the refurbishment of S70273 remains the current project. What comes C&W's way after that is at this moment uncertain, at least until DR management reveal their plans for this year's heritage services. Whatever it is we will endeavour to carry it out with our usual aim of producing the best result we can and turning out vehicles that are a credit to DR and to the hard working (though generally cheerful) C&W volunteers.

Station Maintenance Report

Tom Baxter, Station Maintenance Team Co-ordinator

A limited amount to report this time. The winter period is not a good one for outdoor maintenance and the Polar Express effectively means little or no access to items on the station during its operating period. Prior to the event we always need to create additional space on Platform 3 for the large passenger numbers expected and the barrows and other platform heritage items need removal and safe storage. This year we were fortunate to have access to the Platform 2 rooms which meant that no items had to be stored off site. This considerably simplifies things and greatly reduces the chance of loss or damage.

We completed the replacement running-in board for Platform 2. You will recall that the former version was reported with extensive wood rot and danger of collapse. We assume it was erected when the station was reopened in 1997. Therefore it had a working life of approximately 18 years. Probably not so bad considering the predominantly damp climate in Okehampton and district. But it does indicate a continuing need for ongoing replacement work for such items.

The two leased rooms on Platform 2 are now fully repainted and a shop sales area has been created in one of them. We have also assisted with shelf construction and other items needed for the shop. No doubt the 'shop people' will elaborate further as to their plans.

Again thanks to our stalwarts who continue to support the 'Team'. Work would not get done without them and, as always, any others who would like to join us would be most welcome. Relatively simple DIY skills are needed although extra skills and knowledge are also most appreciated. We also have our own tea brewing area on Platform 2 and, if we speak sweetly to the shop folks, a chance to preview various railway DVD/videos during lunch breaks.

Arthur Westlake Museum Report

John Caesar, Museum Co-ordinator

It has been a successful year for the museum, which included the grand opening ceremony during the summer when the museum was named in honour of Arthur Westlake. We have a new acquisition – a North Tawton target sign which has been kindly loaned to us by Jonathan Edwards.



Having used the room adjacent to the main museum room for some temporary exhibition space this year, we hope to be able to develop this space during 2016 to include more information, photographs, and items of interest.

DRSA Social Gatherings, open to all members!

First Wednesday of the month from 18:30 onwards:

The Kings Arms Inn, Tedburn St Mary, EX6 6EG

Third Thursday of the month from 18:30 onwards:

Fox & Hounds Hotel, Bridestowe, EX20 4HF

The Polar Express 2015

Paul Martin, Duty Manager

After all the build-up, Polar Express season came and went in a month. For the first time on some days Dartmoor Railway ran three trains seeing ~1500 people use the railway on a daily basis. Traction for the trains consisted of the returning 33103 'Swordfish' and 47701 'Waverley'. The back-up engine was 45060 'Sherwood Forester' making the welcome sight of a Class 45 at Okehampton. This year the premium class coaches were resplendent in blue and ivory colour scheme and once again two coaches were hired in from elsewhere. The guard's carriage was brought in from the Weardale Railway to complete the lengthy rake, with 'Rocket' providing the power and lights for the train.



45060 and 47701 (33103 on rear) arrive at Okehampton on 28th November 2015 with a Polar Express training run from Sampford Courtenay. Photo courtesy of David Hunt.

It was incredibly mild temperature-wise throughout though it was also very wet or windy and on many occasions both. My personal record was 4 pairs of socks at one time drying in the signal box! Not really 'Christmas weather' or ideal rail conditions. The 'North Pole' at Meldon looked impressive as ever and survived the gales and downpours. The station looked resplendent at night, lit up with the

Christmas lights, and this year the tunnel under the A30 was illuminated.

The train operation side of the event went very well with just the usual minor challenges around heating and lighting. The lengthiest delay was on dress rehearsal night when departure was delayed by 45 minutes to rectify those issues and then some rail adhesion problems meant the 70 minute journey ended up being 90 minutes long. Traction wise the plan was to use the 33 and 47 throughout, but the poor rail adhesion saw the 45 double heading with the 47 for the first 3 nights.

Later on the 45 replaced the 47 as a cautionary measure for a few trips when it developed a fault. On one journey the 47 failed near the end of the trip and the whole consist was pushed into Okehampton by the 33. Due to the 33 having heating issues the 45 and 47 double headed some trips. Throughout the event the 33 worked on every trip from the Crediton end of the train.

Graham Isom and “where’s my radio” Keith Netherton manfully performed the driving duties throughout, and Guard duties were shared between Don Bent, Dave Thompson and Rachael Wilson. Andy Turner was promoted(?) from BBQ King to Security, though he was soon nicknamed ‘Makro Man’ after numerous dashes to that store in Exeter. Sadly they do not offer a loyalty scheme there otherwise he would probably be on a cruise by now! Copious amounts of hot chocolate were made and consumed along with the ubiquitous Polar Express cookies. A large team of people worked hard to ensure that the event went smoothly and certainly most people looked thrilled by the whole experience.

There is no doubt that it is the busiest time of the year for the Dartmoor Railway and it is hoped that some of the people might return in the summer now they know we are here.

Future rail development on the Okehampton Line

Here we present two reports from recent meetings which were convened to discuss future developments for rail transport involving the line from Exeter to Okehampton which were held within a few days of each other in November/December 2015. The first was a public meeting in CREDITON organised by the Railfuture group, and the second was for invited stakeholders and organised by Devon County Council and held in Okehampton.

Railfuture meeting at CREDITON – 28th November 2015

Jon Kelsey

Several DRSA members were amongst the local politicians and members of railway stakeholder and interest groups who attended a packed Railfuture meeting at the Boniface Centre in CREDITON on November 28th. The meeting had a special emphasis on restoring a daily Exeter to Okehampton service, and the audience heard four interesting and enlightening presentations.

The first speaker was Railfuture's Gerard Duddridge, who outlined the organisation's goals for our line: a regular Okehampton - Exeter service, the Bere Alston - Tavistock link, and, more ambitious, closing the Tavistock - Meldon gap. Encouraged by other recent reopenings, other aspirations for Devon are to reinstate Barnstaple - Bideford, and to reopen some of the intermediate stations between Taunton and Exeter. Gerard discussed the possibility of park and ride stations either at Okehampton East or Sourton. The latter is Railfuture's preferred option, and could be implemented in advance of 'closing the gap' if Meldon Viaduct is OK. Intermediate stations on the DR are problematic as they are so far from the communities they serve; North Tawton being the best of a bad job as it is on a decent road and has a pub. Another improvement advocated by Railfuture is some doubling of the line between Cowley Bridge and Yeoford, to enable more frequent services between Okehampton or Barnstaple and the Waterloo line stations, in support of the Devon Metro project.

Next was DRSA member Dr Michael Ireland, the chairman of

Destination Okehampton. Although the group is an Okehampton Town Council initiative, membership includes other councils in the wider region (West Devon, North Cornwall, Torridge), as well as specialists. Their work is evidence driven, in the fields of tourism, economic regeneration and transport. Recent successes include contributions to national specialist publications, meetings with the Under Secretary of State Claire Perry and the Secretary of State Patrick McLoughlin, promotion and traffic study of the Sunday Rover service and membership of the Peninsular Rail Task Force (PRTF). They are challenging postponement of the Northern Route to Network Rail's Control Period 7 (2024-2029).

Michael expressed concern about the rumoured Devon County Council (DCC) proposal to operate a service between Okehampton and Yeoford, to connect with Tarka Line services. This has many disadvantages including the investment required at Yeoford station, the unsuitable rolling stock proposed and the passengers' preference for a through service to Exeter. Regrettably, none of the instigators of the scheme was at the meeting.

Vice-chairman and former chairman of the Tarka Rail Association (TRA), John Burch, spoke next. John pointed out the embarrassing success of the Tarka line, on which passenger numbers more than tripled between 2001 and 2014. Infrastructure limits much further growth; there is a need for longer trains and more loops, especially providing more capacity at the Cowley end and around Portsmouth Arms. John praised Network Rail's unsung improvements to the line, which is becoming more resilient. TRA is consulting on extending its domain to Honiton, in line with the Devon Metro idea and the possibility of Barnstaple (or Okehampton) services to the Waterloo line. Line speeds would improve with implementation of the proposal to convert Salmonpool Crossing from an ungated road crossing to automatic half barriers, though it is behind schedule. The current pressure on Newton St. Cyres could be relieved if Okehampton trains served it. John pointed out that we don't even know if the Sunday Rover will run in 2016 – a while ago he had been informed that DCC wanted services to run to Yeoford to connect end-on with the heritage trains on the Okehampton line. The mooted SW rail franchise could

include the Okehampton line; in any event, line ownership needs to be clarified. Class 158s are expected on the Tarka Line in a year or two, though an Okehampton service will naturally put more pressure on the existing rolling stock pool. Freight is a long-term TRA ambition which could be aided by extra pathways created by the Northern route.

There were several warnings in John's talk: timetable changes affecting Exeter connections, the effect of opening intermediate Okehampton line stations on nearby Tarka station usage, proposals competing for the same funding (e.g. Bideford), the pressure that a 7 day Okehampton service will place on track maintenance and signalling, and the idea that opening a rail service could mean closure of a bus service, with no net gain to the community. John raised a laugh mentioning that, although buses stop at Crediton station, there is still no bus stop sign there several years after pointing out this omission.

The final presentation was from Chris Austin, who has an extensive railway CV and is currently involved with Railfuture, the Avocet Line Community Rail Forum and the West Somerset Railway Trust. Mr Austin's theme was how to go about making a political case for rail improvements. He identified 4 key criteria: the business case, a sponsor to lead the process, funding and partnerships. He identified a number of changes which make the political environment very different than in the days of rail closures: demographic change, economic growth, rail demand growth, road congestion, parking constraints, railhead constraints and internet access which encourages younger rail users. Had the Okehampton route survived closure, it might now be as successful as the Tarka line, and we can look for lessons which can be transferred from the latter.

A business case can be developed from PRTF's work, the Greengauge report, the business case for Tavistock and analysis of the Tarka line. Analysis of Strengths/Weaknesses/Opportunities/Threats identifies negative issues of good road access to Okehampton and Tiverton Parkway, whilst positives are Exeter city congestion and parking, and rail reliability. Significant stages in a development strategy would be Bere Alston – Tavistock, Tarka line improvements, the Devon Metro

initiative, Okehampton reopening (to Yeoford or Exeter), closing the Meldon – Tavistock gap and then expanding capacity. Funding partners could be Local Enterprise Partnerships, Devon County Council, District Councils, Okehampton Town Council, other developers, Network Rail, GWR, BARS/DR and others. The line is unlikely to be funded by government alone.

To wrap up, Chris Irwin ran a Q&A session which raised the interesting suggestion that the 6-car Southwest Trains class 158 which currently lays over at Exeter could work to Crediton, then split, with half running to Barnstaple and half running to Okehampton. Devon County Councillor Richard Westlake observed that proposals for transport funding should be made to LEPs as early as possible. Mr Irwin enjoined delegates to seize the opportunity, and to speak with one voice.

Afterthought: it's interesting how, during the course of 2015, perception of the Northern route proposal seems to have shifted from being a faint possibility to an eventual inevitability. Let's hope this is realistic.

Okehampton Rail Forum Meeting - 1st December 2015

Sue Baxter

The Okehampton line has come under the spotlight since the sea wall collapse at Dawlish and long closure of that rail route to Plymouth. The Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE) has published a favourable report on the reopening of the whole line through Okehampton, and the Peninsula Rail Task Force (PRTF) similarly, within its aim of increased resilience for Somerset, Devon and Cornwall. In the light of all these events many people in Okehampton felt there was a need for stakeholders to come together in the town to build momentum for the project. In the final event the meeting was hosted by Devon County Council (DCC) at the Business Centre very close to the site reserved on the local plan for an Okehampton East Station.

DRSA representatives joined members from 15 other organisations. The purpose was to discuss the way forward for running local services between Exeter and Okehampton. The intention was to identify how groups and organisations which “hold the key” to making local services happen can work together to that end. There is a pressing need for these daily services to start well ahead of any projected reopening of the whole line. The inference was that, if the local communities could first help make this service happen, then central government would be encouraged to make future investments.

The meeting divided into three groups which each looked at the challenges and possible solutions to running a daily service, not least the finances at a time when DCC coffers are being squeezed ever harder. Then the focus was on the contribution that the different organisations could offer. The representatives were from a wide field including interested councils from as far as Bude and Crediton, our local MP, Great Western Railway (formerly First Great Western), British American Railway Services and Aggregate Industries. A further 60 organisations have expressed a wish in being involved in the process.

The next meeting in early 2016 will be of a smaller steering group, which will elect an independent chair. It was felt to be crucial to our success that we speak with “One Voice Okehampton”. Each organisation is to report back any contribution they can make in terms of skills, resource or capacity towards the aim of securing daily passenger services back to Okehampton.

All the effort to build the financial, economic and business case for the daily service will feed into the PRTF report in June 2016. This in turn will be making the case for the 2019 franchise to include these services.

The meeting was very positive, with a sense that after many years of trying to make the service happen, there is now a window of opportunity. The funding is certainly a big issue without central government input, but other possibilities were mentioned and are now being explored.

New Station at Cranbrook

John Caesar

On Sunday 13th December 2015 the new station at Cranbrook on the former LSWR mainline between Pinhoe and Whimble opened for regular service.

Cranbrook is a new town being developed in East Devon about 6 miles from the centre of Exeter close to the airport. The station, originally planned to open in 2013, was beset with delays and setbacks which saw postponement of the opening until the end of 2015. The new station is not very far from the station at Broadclyst which was opened by the LSWR in 1860 and closed following the Beeching cuts in 1966.



Southwest Trains unit 159014 pulls into Cranbrook with the third train of the opening day, the 10:31 to Exeter St Davids.

Becoming a skid-pan fan

Claire Volding, Network Rail

Okehampton is on the former Southern Railway route from Exeter to Plymouth. It's now a heritage railway, running only as far as the former quarry at Meldon.

During the summer, First Great Western runs a Sunday service from Exeter. The station remains in the glorious style of the old Southern Railway and takes the traveller back in time to the days of brass buttons, green flags and brief encounters. It was here that we sat under the platform's hanging baskets, looking at the Class 150 which had been supplied to facilitate our skid-pan training.

Skid-pan training, if you're not familiar with the idea, is one of the ways some operators prepare their drivers for the poor adhesion conditions that they may encounter in the autumn. While many companies choose to train their drivers using only simulators, First Great Western is among those that like to offer a real hands-on experience too. By smothering the railhead with various slippery materials, the drivers get the opportunity to feel the wheels lock under them and to know what it's really like to not be in total control of their train.

'Oh we have used all sorts of different things over the years,' chuckles one of the Driver Managers. 'Fairy liquid, water, oil...we've now found the perfect combination.' He pauses; I must admit I find myself drawn in to wanting to know what this ideal slippery material is. 'Chip fat,' he grins. 'Then a fine mist of water over the top.'

I suppose it makes sense: the chip fat is mimicking that Teflon effect that occurs when leaves mulch onto the rail and dry, causing contamination. The fine spray of water is recreating that wet rail effect, when beads of water sit on top of the railhead.

One by one, each driver takes a turn to drive the train down the specially prepared track. Each is given two attempts. For the first, they are asked to use normal braking techniques, whilst for the second they are instructed to put the brake controller immediately into the

emergency position and leave it there. When there is a need to bring the train to a stand as rapidly as possible, and the railhead conditions are poor, the advice is to use the second technique. This demonstrates first-hand that this is the better option.

As I sat chatting with the drivers, it transpired that some have been driving longer than others, yet almost all will soon be experiencing their first autumn. They explain how this opportunity is great preparation and great for lifting their confidence about the season ahead.

There are, however, a couple of downsides to skid-pan training: that each driver will feel the right conditions cannot be guaranteed by this method, and the ones who get an earlier slot in the day will probably get a better experience than the later ones. Also, the fleet team will no doubt be sad to see the amount of flats incurred by the locking-up of the wheels as the train slips.

‘You’re up!’ a driver manager calls at me. I am feeling fairly sick with nerves by this stage, even though I know an experienced person will be supervising me throughout. We go to the start line and I begin to drive the train. We pick up speed and I put the brake in Step 1. I look at the speedometer and it’s gone to zero, even though we’re whizzing along.

‘That’s how you know you’re slipping,’ the driver manager tells me. ‘Ease that brake in gently, take it off, and then ease it in again.’ I do as I am told and the train eventually slows, although I am half-way in the platform and I braked ages ago.

‘Now we’ll try it in emergency,’ he smiles.

We switch ends and sand is laid in front of the unit, so it can be returned to the starting line. I am ready, and in my head I say: ‘On your marks, get set, go!’ We pick up speed and then we start to slip again. This time I throw it into ‘emergency’. I feel helpless. There’s nothing I can do now except wait and discover the fate of the train. My panic is building. What if I don’t stop? But then we start to slow more quickly, and before I know it we’ve come to a stand. This time we

have stopped much sooner than we did before. I leap off the train grinning. The drivers I was chatting to before smile. ‘So when you signing up?’ they call at me.

The fact it was run so well by the driver managers at Exeter meant it was a great day out and beneficial to all... except perhaps to the train wheels, which went ‘clunkety-clunk’ under our feet as we drove back to Exeter.

This article first appeared in Right Track magazine Issue 12 and is reproduced here with kind permission. Right Track is produced by RSSB (Rail Safety and Standards Board) through cross-industry cooperation. Enquiries can be directed to righttrack@rssb.co.uk



Skid pan training at Okehampton on 4th October 2015 with Pacer unit 143617. Note ‘Crewe’ on the destination blind which is a place not served by First Great Western. Photo courtesy of David Hunt.

The Tarka Valley Railway

Jon Kelsey

The Tarka Valley Railway held an open weekend on September 5th & 6th 2015, and I spent a gloriously sunny Sunday morning at Torrington looking around. Passenger services to Torrington ceased in 1965, but freight lasted until the early 1980s. Both platforms of the station survive, along with the station buildings (as the Puffing Billy pub and restaurant) and a coal platform. The goods shed was demolished in 1970 and replaced with a fertiliser warehouse which is now occupied by a cycle hire company. The trackbed is owned by Devon County Council and forms the Tarka Trail cycleway, hence its immunity to 'development'.



TVR is pretty clear about its objectives, the goal being Bideford. In the meantime Plan A is the 300 yards to the first of 3 overbridges which cross the meandering Torridge in quick succession, as well as



laying 2 sidings to the west of the line. The Tarka Trail will have to be moved about 1 metre to the right to accommodate the railway, and a fence will separate the two. Planning permission has been granted, and the railway is in the final

throes of negotiating a lease agreement with DCC. A major boost came with the recent award of charitable status, based not just on the

interesting local railway history, but also the 15th Century Rothern bridge a short distance away, and the 19th Century Rolle Canal.

The only locomotive is a 1945 John Fowler 0-4-0 diesel shunter 'Progress', nicely scruffy but in working order and being demonstrated enthusiastically during the open day. It was donated to the railway having spent most of its working life at the North



Devon Clay Company's Marland Works. Its driver described it as having a hydrostatic transmission, but neither he nor I knew the difference between hydrostatic and hydraulic. The original Fowler engine has been replaced by a Leyland.



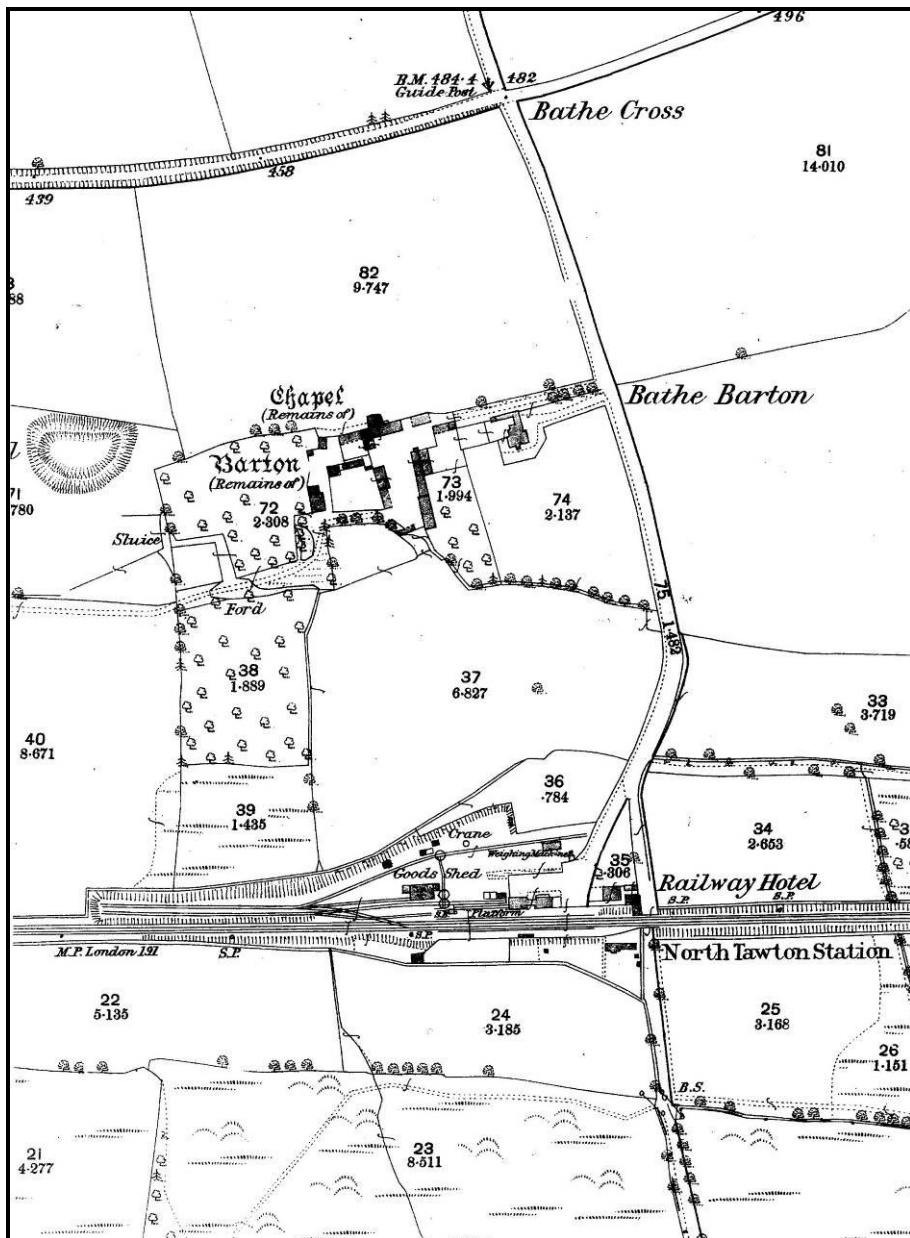
There is a Mk1 TSO with seating in about half of it, the other half being used for book sales and an enquiry desk. It looks to be in fairly tidy condition, apart from the roof. Appropriately there is a 1955 china clay 'hood', which looked very nicely restored when I first saw it several

years ago, but is now in need of a coat of paint. An LNER-style BR brakevan is sheeted over and partially dismantled. The most recent item of rolling stock is a tank wagon of unknown ancestry.

Everyone seemed very knowledgeable and friendly. It's well worth a visit. There's much more information on their website at <http://tarkavalleyrailway.co.uk/>

Old Maps (Part 2) - North Tawton station, 1886

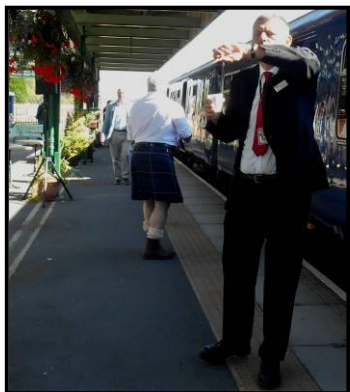
Jon Kelsey



Rosie's Diary – A Cautionary Tale with a Happy Ending

By Rosie

Do you remember the evidence of the dormouse's dinner at the Denbrook Crossing? It was that delicately carved hazel nut shell. Well we were passing North Tawton Station in November and I saw there was a road rail yellow monster about to go up the track with the crossing concrete beams. I hope that my furry friends had scurried along the honeysuckle high wires to a safer place.



Now my imagination was not working overtime when I say I saw a 2 legs walking on our platform in little more than a short, crinkly wool blanket. It was in October and he had the temerity to challenge my 2 legs as to what she was doing to promote our railway! What did he know? He came from an in between place called the Borders. As you can see he had to rush back on board the Community Rail Partnership special train

to get warm again. I wonder if he can pull the blanket down to his ankles?

A couple of weeks later I could have done with a warm up – but as you can see, the new safety doors on the verandah of the smart LMS brake van were closed and I didn't have a chance to warm up by the pot bellied stove which the guard was just firing up nicely. Once



upon a time I shared a hot (cooled down) pasty from the stove top. Ahruh!



It is very pleasant to meet up properly with acquaintances who have merely barked at one as one went by. Paddy has regularly acknowledged our trains, running along the fence beside North Tawton Station – checking that we didn't stay too long, (or that we could even keep moving!). Understanding the importance of the 150th Anniversary of the opening of North Tawton Station on 1st November 1865, he kindly took his two legs Jim Brereton on the train to

see Bow Station. It turned out to be of the same impressive Devon and Cornwall Railway style, and likewise reflecting the careful guardianship of 4 paws Jubilee.

I must also introduce to you Edna Webber who lived in Bow for 60 years – while her husband Norman was the signalman at Coleford Junction in the 1950's and 60's. (I've never seen a signalbox there – have you?). She was travelling on the 150th Anniversary train with her son Graham Bowden. His



granddad was the signalman at North Tawton (now do you know where that signalbox was?). Graham is now a signalman for Network Rail – I didn't find out if he still has a cosy pot bellied stove in his box.

So 2015 came to an end, and 2016 nearly started with a disaster. I and 5 fellow 4 paws and 2 legs Dartmoor Railway supporters were out for a romp and race up a valley beside one of the swollen rivers, while the

trains were resting. As you may know I do not choose to go into the water beyond tummy level, and so I was disdainful of a young friend who was swimming with gay abandon. But then to my horror she swam straight into the middle of the torrent and got washed down between the boulders out of sight. I was very distressed and barked my head off to encourage her to get out. Even I have swum strongly (when my two legs Sue pushed me in to get cleaned up from sheep pooh), so I was also trying to tell the two legs not to worry and to stay safe. Tall two legs didn't listen and went in up to his thighs. This was quite unnecessary as the clever little 4 paws fetched up downstream, out of sight, and ran back along the bank for more chasing and racing. Fortunately big 2 legs turned and spotted her behind him on the bank and he managed to get out. Time had gone so we missed the pub fire and dog treats, but we all got home, wet but safe and sound.



*LMS brake van (731411), FK (13436) and class 08 D4167 on 17th October 2015 hauling the train during the South Devon Railway group visit.
(Philip Wagstaff).*

Committee of the Dartmoor Railway Supporters' Association

Chairman: Philip Wagstaff

Secretary: Jon Kelsey

Treasurer: Christine Horner

Membership Secretary: Peter Flick

Volunteer Coordinator: Geoff Horner

Committee Members:

Sue Baxter, Dave Clegg, Tony Hill, Peter Ritchie

Association Contacts

General Enquiries: info@dartmoor-railway-sa.org

Membership: prflick@dartmoor-it.co.uk

Peter Flick, Copse, Exeter Road,
Sticklepath, Okehampton,
EX20 2NR

Tel: 01837 840670

Volunteering: volunteering@dartmoor-railway-sa.org

Secretary: jonathankelsey@btinternet.com

Treasurer: christine.horner@talk21.com

Museum: museum@dartmoor-railway-sa.org

Website: www.dartmoor-railway-sa.org

Facebook: www.facebook.com/dartmoorrailway.sa

