



THE DARTMOOR PONY

**The Magazine of the Dartmoor Railway
Supporters' Association**

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Timber Train

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

FRONT COVER: On 24th October John Coxon chats with Graham Isom whilst Brian Mills (DRCIC) unloads cut timber from the DR Sturgeon flatbed wagon. Note the DRSA brake van proudly carrying out the sort of duty it was built for. *Photo: David Bell.*

BACK COVER: Top: Santa's brand new sleigh en-route to the North Pole on 21st November, via Meldon for some undisclosed reason. *Photo: David Bell.* Bottom: Class 50 locomotive 50049 at Crediton on 21st October 2019 on a driver route learning trip between Exeter and Yeoford, in preparation for GBRF working engineer's trains during the two week North Devon line closure from 26th October. *Photo courtesy of David Tozer.*

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Notes from the Chairman

Rev. Philip Wagstaff

As I write this November is nearly past and preparations are ongoing in our towns and villages as they are at the Dartmoor Railway for the Christmas season. We are nearly at the end of another year where DRSA and DRSA volunteers have supported the railway in many different ways.

Looking back over the year much has been achieved and DRSA volunteers have continued to work at Meldon on the rolling stock, the environment of the station has been enhanced by the station maintenance and gardening teams, the shop and the museum remain part of the visitor experience, and many volunteers and members have supported the railway in many different ways.

I was looking this week at the past editions of the Pony and its predecessor publication when I discovered that the first newsletter was issued in Spring 2005, which includes an article about the formation of the Friends of Dartmoor Railway. This means that next year marks the 15th year of the publication of the newsletter in its present form. At the start the railway produced the newsletters with the first 'Friends' newsletter making its appearance in 2007.

Looking through the back issues of the newsletter gives a snapshot picture of the way that the railway has developed and of the different ways that the supporter's association has been able to support the railway. We have been through challenging times and good times and we will do so in the future. Looking at the archive reminds me of the many friends we have made over the years and the things that have been achieved. To all the people, both staff and volunteers, who have given support, time, energy and experience to the railway over the past 15 years. Thank you all.

As we come to the close of this year may I wish you all a Happy Christmas and a peaceful New Year.

Membership Matters

Geoff Horner, Membership Secretary

At 10th November the association has a total of 210 members.

Since the last edition of the ‘Dartmoor Pony’ we are pleased to welcome the following new members:

- Andrew Maunders of Dunsfold near Godalming
- Kevin Burnell of Bristol

Either with this edition of the ‘Dartmoor Pony’ or very soon thereafter membership renewal forms will be sent out. Our thanks go to all our members for their support throughout 2019. Your support is very important to us.

It is our understanding that the current lease between Dartmoor Railway CIC and Aggregate Industries expires at the end of the year. At the time of going to press we have no information on what will happen next but as soon as we have definite information we will pass it on. Meanwhile we hope that you will continue with us next year and enable us to continue the work of keeping the Dartmoor Railway alive.

Events

Keep up to date at <http://www.dartmoor-railway-sa.org/events>

DRSA Socials – From 18:30, on the first Wednesday of the month. For all DRSA members, volunteers and DR staff. Taw River Inn, Sticklepath, EX20 2NW.

Rail Operations & Line Update

Paul Martin, Duty Manager

Line Update

Ongoing track work has mainly been remedial with the usual maintenance such as fishplate oiling, tree clearance, bridge inspections and new fastenings fitted. There has been some spot re-sleepering on the Okehampton-Meldon section.

Some urgent work was required before the OkeRail HST charter to Weymouth could run. This included a number of sleepers being replaced.

The relocation of 'Christmas Town' for the *Train to Christmas Town* (TTCT) event has meant the focus has been work on this new site near Fullaford. Apart from some tree clearance there has been levelling of the site. All machinery and the wooden buildings themselves all need transporting to the site by rail.

Traction Update

08937: *Bluebell Mel* has worked the heritage service on all non - event services, performing admirably. With the heritage season over it is engaged in regular engineering trains down to the Fullaford site using the Zander, Sturgeon and the LMS Brake Van. In some weeks this occurs daily on weekdays moving spoil and ballast. It's expected this will continue right up to event start date. Any work on the 08 inside Meldon shed will have to wait until the site is cleared so likely to be late January at the earliest. It's expected that the 08 will be on the Crediton end for the *Train to Christmas Town*.

1132 (Thumper Unit): The overhaul of 1132 continues at Meldon in the capable hands of the C&W crew.

31452: The class 31 has been used on all events trains. It will provide the main motive power and electric train heating (ETH) for TTCT.

Heritage Services

Heritage services between Okehampton and Meldon finished on Sunday September 29th. The season was generally a success with numbers slightly higher than previous years.

The FK carriage has had its exam so hopefully it can be used for heritage services in 2020. Lab 11 has now been moved to its winter location outside Meldon shed where it provides power for C&W work.

Events Trains

Events trains finished with some Afternoon Tea trains and Murder Mystery trains. These continued with the same shorter formation outlined in the last issue. C&W assisted in painting the food preparation area of the Courier coach.

The planned Halloween events trains did not run.

Train to Christmas Town (TTCT)

The rake for TTCT is already formed up in Okehampton station Platform 2 road. It is the same as last year with just a swap round of 2 carriage positions with in the rake to give better access to working toilets. The traction will be the same as last year with 31452 and 08937 doing the duties. Track issues have been cited for the change of location for Christmas Town. This means the TTCT will run between Okehampton and Fullaford on the ON/CN section. Correspondingly this also means there is no need for the 2 sections to be combined into one section as normally occurs at this time of year.

GWR Exeter Sunday Services

The service finished on Sunday 8th September with the last couple of weeks showing healthy passenger numbers. Overall the whole season of services was successful with numbers higher than 2018. Class 150s again dominated the service in the last few weeks.

Percy

Time for me to get involved in helping with Christmas train decorations again. There are always new jobs for me to do alongside my regular pest control duties. If you've been to the station recently you might have noticed I have a new totem sign above my cat flap entrance into the Signal Box. It's very smart as you can see from the picture..



As always keep up to date with me through my Facebook page!

Volunteer Activities

Geoff Horner, Volunteer Coordinator

With the exception of the forthcoming 'Train To Christmas Town' all Dartmoor Railway services have finished for this year and volunteer activities are now at a lower key. However some work still continues:

Some of our drivers/guards will be braving the winter weather working on the Christmas trains

The Carriage & Wagon group continue to make progress on our ex SR brake van. Interior primer/undercoat has been applied in the cabin and having laboriously chipped off the rust etc on the under frame a coat of zinc phosphate primer has been applied. The work on the motor car of 'Thumper' 1132 is finished and it is hoped that this will soon be reunited with the driving trailer outside the shed. This will enable our ex LMS brake van to come on shed for some maintenance and a repaint ready for next year.

The Station Maintenance group finds that the autumn/winter weather curtails the number of outdoor jobs that can be tackled. Also with the annual migration of the platform trolleys, barrows etc in to store in the museum rooms and the DRSA staff room/shop the scope for indoor work is also reduced for a few weeks.

Once again thank you all for your work on the railway throughout the past year and best wishes for Christmas/New Year. We know that our visitors appreciate your efforts to ensure that they enjoy their visit to the Dartmoor Railway

Station Gardening – November

Sue Baxter

What do we do when the weather closes in and gales start driving the rain in under the canopy? We retreat downwind with tea, coffee, scones and flapjack. We put the world to rights, try to see each others gardening point of view, and then chide each other to get on with a job! Mavis has been going through the various dried seed heads we have collected. The poppies were her greatest challenge. The wild species have tiny, but beautiful seed heads and minute seed. Penny has scattered some wildflower seed around the car park banks and others have been put in envelopes ready to go for donations next year in the shop. Our tallest platform plant this year has been a lovely feathery fennel which has been supported against a pillar. The seeds are only now beginning to dry.

Ann has again taken home begonias to overwinter and I have learnt much more about the process. She has only very lightly taken away some of the soil and chopped the stems down to 2 inches/5cms. Next she has them in the warmth of her kitchen and they dry out gradually as she turns them every other day or so. Then she will knock off the loose soil. She takes off the stems as soon as they have dried so that no mould can get to the corm. Dampness leading to mould growth must be avoided. Finally she wraps them in paper in well aerated trays, until the tiny buds start appearing.

Snakes Head Fritillary we hope will be the bulb of next year's spring. However it is a relatively uncommon native of damp meadows in southern England so we will be really pleased if it takes to our wild beds. Look out for the gently swinging, red/purple chequered heads.

Our compost bins are not very active. Regrettably I have come to the conclusion that adding the spent compost from the hanging baskets is inhibiting the breeding of worms and presumably other soil micro-organisms. It is probably due to treatment of the compost with intense, slow release fertiliser granules, some sort of slug repellent and insecticide. At Hatherleigh Market I have found three suppliers who

make their own compost or use organic peat free brands. At the moment they are still a rare breed. Peatbogs store on average 10 times more carbon per hectare than any other ecosystem. Having being growing for hundreds or even thousands of years they hold nearly 30% of all the carbon stored on land. But when you see lovely tempting plants it takes willpower to first ask what the plants are growing in. We must be prepared to say that we decline to buy, that leaving the peat in the ground is most important to hold the line against climate warming. Which reminds me, we have still only had two very brief frosts in the middle of the night so far this autumn (as of 10/11/2019).



Fritillaria Meleagris, © Michael Apel:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Fritillaria_meleagris_MichaD.jpg

Okehampton-Exeter Summer Sundays train service 2019

Tony Hill

This service of four trains each way provided by First Rail's Great Western Railway Train Operating Company and financially supported by Devon County Council ran on Sundays from 19th May until 8th September inclusive.

Reliability and punctuality were very good and, combined with good weather and an increasing awareness of this service, passenger numbers increased, in comparison with 2018, by 1,300 to a total of 7,800.

Many passengers and rail staff remarked on the well-kept appearance of Okehampton station; this is a great credit to the dedicated DRSA volunteers involved, who regrettably receive little official recognition for their hard work.

Interestingly on several Sundays Exeter based traincrews were specially rostered for Okehampton line route learning duties; no doubt for the future. Invariably they can't understand why (and they are not alone) it is taking so long to restore a regular service to Exeter?

The special Sunday bus service between Gunnislake and Okehampton stations, connecting at both ends with trains, and financed by Cross Country Train's Community Fund, gradually increased its patronage after a very poor start.

It is planned for this service to run again in 2020.

North Devon Line Closure 26th October to 8th November 2019

Tony Hill

The now widespread practice of closing a line for several days, even weeks (almost unheard of at one time unless for a major bridge works etc.) took place on the North Devon line between Crediton and Barnstaple with trains being 'bustituted' by double decker buses (some even came from Scotland!). Yeoford was served by a minibus shuttle from Crediton.

The North Devon line, like most in the South West, now only carries passengers; having shed its mails, parcels, newspapers, milk and all manner of freight traffic etc. once carried.

The main works in this latest closure along the line were the relaying of 2.25 miles of track in the Yeoford area with new ballast, rails and concrete sleepers installed by a very modern track laying machine with several Road-Rail vehicles. Interestingly a couple of hundred yards of the old track was composed of bull head rails on chaired concrete sleepers of 1948 vintage; they have done excellent service; the better ones will likely have a further use on heritage railways.

There were numerous engineer's trains conveying new sleepers and ballast to site and taking spoil/spent ballast and the old track away to Westbury where Network Rail have a materials recycling depot.

Other works along the closed line were the retimbering of three small river underbridges, raising and resurfacing of Eggesford up platform and 'traxcavating' and re-ballasting the formation between Umberleigh level crossing and the station to improve drainage. This involved the track having to be first lifted out and on completion reinstalled; again Road-Railers were used.

A few 'nice to have but not essential' things were done along the line under a GWR Community Rail initiative in partnership with the Tarka Rail Association and the Devon & Cornwall Rail partnership.

These included refurbishment of the Yeoford station waiting room and library, and provision of large directional signage at Copplestone and UMBERLEIGH stations that feature otters; an animal, 'Tarka', that has been heavily commercialised but rarely seen in the wild by passengers!



Network Rail's modern self propelled track laying machine seen at work near Yeoford on 27th October 2019.

Photo courtesy of Matthew Clark.

DRSA Shop

Platform 2

We welcome donations of railway books, railway miscellanea, model railway items, paperbacks and hardback books, railway DVDs and videos.

Contact Christine Horner for further details:

christine.horner@talk21.com

Launceston Steam Railway Visit - October 30th 2019

Jon Kelsey

This summer the Launceston Steam Railway has been hosting Adrian Shooter's 1889 built Darjeeling Himalayan Railway locomotive no. 19B. Its last week of service provided the Station Maintenance Team with an excuse for an impromptu awayday.

I couldn't believe it was 14 years since I'd last visited the LSR. It's only 30 odd miles from Okehampton, and a fascinating railway, but inexplicably slightly below the radar. It is a 1' 11½" gauge railway laid on the trackbed of the standard gauge North Cornwall Railway - the line from Halwill to Padstow - for two and a half miles along the River Kensey to New Mills. At New Mills a farm park provides a tourist attraction in better weather. Once there was a plan to double the mileage with an extension to Egloskerry, but this is now unlikely to occur. The present Launceston station seems authentic but is actually a modern construction, a short distance west of its ancestor, of which there are few remains.

The initial trigger for creating the LSR was Nigel Bowman's acquisition and restoration of the 1883 Hunslet locomotive 'Lilian'. There are now two further Quarry Hunslets at Launceston - the 1898 built 'Covertcoat' and 'Dorothea' from 1901, the latter the result of a near-miraculous restoration by Kay Bowman. Practically all engineering is done in house, even boiler making.

Interesting (former gasworks?) buildings house a museum of transport and engineering which we needed more time to explore. Apart from lots of interesting railway bits, there is also a collection of early motor cycles, and several cars, e.g. a Trojan van, and a very authentic 1930s chain driven Frazer-Nash which turned out to be a replica built by Mr Bowman and a colleague in the 1980s. It's not slickly presented, and you have to dig around for yourself, but that's part of the charm.

When we visited on October 30th there was an hourly train service. (The run to New Mills takes about 15 minutes). The DRSA group had

one run behind 'Covertcoat', then a couple behind the Darjeeling locomotive. If anything the former seemed to perform better, although there was one less carriage on for the Hunslet. Finally, everyone's day was made by a cabride on the final run behind 'Covertcoat'.

Despite relentlessly filthy weather it was a brilliant day out at an interesting, refreshing railway. The staff (there are no volunteers) are friendly and knowledgable, and there isn't a hi-vis jacket to be seen. It is now closed for the winter, but go and visit in 2020. There's so much more than can be described in a few paragraphs. They have a website at launcestonr.co.uk.



1889 Sharp, Stewart built Darjeeling Himalayan Railway 0-4-0ST no. 19B, at New Mills (Tom Baxter).



'Covertcoat' at New Mills. The cab and tender are modern additions.
(Tom Baxter).



The highlight of the day for the DRSA group was a cab ride on 'Covertcoat' on the last train of the day. The hardier half of the group travelled on the tender-first leg (Sue Baxter).

Rosie's Diary – Discerning or Discriminating Railways

by Rosie

Today I am going to share with you my observations on the quality of the welcome I have received over the years on trains.



However first I would like to mention the visit paid to us by Millie and her friends. She was a stately senior English Bulldog. I am very proud of the way we were able to accommodate her in her dogcart in all parts of our train, and for free, with her younger companion. She particularly enjoyed riding in the

open on the verandah. She was so invigorated that on her return to Okehampton she deliberately overturned her cart so that she could amble down Platform 2 on her own 3 legs! Her shoulder muscles were quite something!

Anyway by now I think you will have noticed the rather splendid collection of my train tickets that my 2 legs have safely filed away over the years. From them you can see how my experiences were shaped. Unfortunately I have been universally excluded from First Class compartments. As far as I am aware it is because they have carpets and fine upholstery which they do not consider enhanced by my white fur. A shame because biscuit trolleys always seem to start there.


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You can also see that Gwyrfai, the latest observation car to grace the Welsh Highland, thoughtfully provides a dropped line to its windows



which would enhance my view of squirrels in the Beddgelert forest. However although I adopted my most respectful and appealing pose in front of chairman Dafydd Thomas, a special pass was not forthcoming.

In Wales I am a ci, and in the Netherlands a hond where my dagkaart cost a substantial 3,10 euros. My 2 legs spent a considerable time hunting it down at Rotterdam. After the first day on the network nobody

asked me to scan a card at the gate so I travelled free for a week, a very good deal. Whereas one day was £3 on the Ffestiniog! On the Welsh Highland the guard recognised my importance when reminded that I was head of trackside rodent control and issued a 100% Discount. But can you imagine which low/short class of 4 legs has let

our side down leading to a ticket instruction not only to keep off the seats but off the tables!!!

Two Railways seem to be confused at first as to whether I have legs or wheels but The Battlefield booking clerk sorted it. Churnet Valley remained confused! Another confused Railway Company is the Dart Valley, but for a different reason. As you can see I steamed down the *River Dart* and I was allowed to patrol everywhere including the galley. Plenty of open air scents, reminding me of the pleasure of travelling on the verandahs of our LMS Brakevan, but without the smell of fish. More about fish behind our brakevan later!

Undoubtedly the railways which best recognise our value are the Bluebell and the Launceston Steam Railways. The former has a space for my name which meant that the guard could directly introduce himself to me and likewise I was quick to respond when he needed me to remove my tail from the gangway. At Launceston it was not I who was judged, but my 2 legs. My ticket was valid only if I was accompanied by a caring, loving owner. Fortunately both Pip and I had such companions. Pip, my senior by 4 years at age 16, relies on Paul to be her ears since she was deaf from birth. She has had a stroke but never missed a chance to get in and out the train, with a gentle lift on the harness. Pip has a lovely thick coat and was braver than me. Nevertheless with head down in the pouring rain she did not appreciate the finer points of the shunt round at Newmills Station. I stayed in the shelter.



Back to the fish. Well I am told that wagons were given fish names because BR already had the codes!!! Anyway, after being passed up for a cabride you can see first a Zander about to pass me followed by a



Sturgeon. The Zander had a vast quantity of spoil with which it was loaded years ago (hence the bushes) to level the site for the Christmas Town up the line beyond Sampford Courtney.

In real life zanders are a tasty delicacy a bit like perch, of considerable size and can be vicious. A couple of weeks later you can see the Sturgeon wagon

has had huge tree trunks removed and replaced by parts of Christmas buildings fabricated at Meldon. I was not engaged to do rodent control on this project so I just hope the woodwork does not suffer from a squirrel attack.



Committee of the Dartmoor Railway Supporters' Association

Chairman: Philip Wagstaff

Vice-Chairman: Sue Baxter

Secretary: Jon Kelsey

Treasurer: Christine Horner

Membership Secretary & Volunteer Coordinator:

Geoff Horner

Committee Members:

Tom Baxter, Dave Clegg, Tony Hill

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