

The Dartmoor Pony *Express*

Chairman's Report

*(Originally prepared for the cancelled
March 24th DRSA committee meeting)*

Due to the coronavirus outbreak the usual pattern of working both for DRSA and for railway heritage sites across the country has changed as Government restrictions have been implemented. For DRSA it means that our volunteers and members cannot gather together for meetings or for working parties.

The National Rail Network has moved to a Sunday service as passenger numbers continue to fall. The emergency situation has had an impact on the timing of decisions around the future direction for the line between Okehampton and Exeter as GWR and Aggregate Industries (AI) staff have to deal with many unexpected issues in a changing landscape.

As Geoff has reported (*see membership report*), and other committee members have commented on, many members have renewed their subscription as a mark of their support for DRSA, supporting the association into the future. Our members see the challenges that we face and recognise the uncertainty for the future but they also want to support the association through their membership.

We are fortunate in having members who support DRSA through their subscription and advocacy. We also have a group of volunteers who give their time and

experience to the Association in practical ways. Whilst we cannot meet physically it is important that we keep our members in touch with each other and the website and the occasional email or postal updates help us with this.

We will need to plan so that we can move quickly to get volunteers together again once the emergency is over.

Whether we can hold the AGM in June is uncertain at this stage and our options will become clearer in the coming weeks. We will keep this under review.

Rev. Philip Wagstaff

Dartmoor Railway CIC asset sale and administration

The asset sale contains about 30 rail vehicles, including the Christmas Train stock, Thumper 1132, the vans and sleepers in the Platform 1 siding, and a few other coaches. Possibly the only vehicle worth more than the cost of removing it from the railway is the class 31 locomotive 31452, but there is speculation that it belongs to RMS, not DRCIC. The class 08 diesel shunter 08937/D4167 is to be retained by Aggregate Industries at Meldon Quarry.

The disposal of the DRCIC assets by an online auction by the sales agents (Walker Singleton) for the Administrators (FRP

Advisory of Leeds) is now postponed until further notice.

Any sales which eventually take place will require the rolling stock to be moved to Meldon for disposal. This is currently problematic because of the lack of operational management on the railway, and the likely flat batteries in the locomotives.

DRSA may be interested in acquiring some of the assets. For example the CCT or Ferry Van, currently located in the Platform 1 siding, would provide valuable storage space, and improve the appearance of the station once restored, subject to an agreement to keep them in the siding. Through contact with Aggregate Industries, Tony Hill has recently confirmed that the inner part of this siding belongs to Devon County Council.

The recently mothballed line between Coleford and Meldon Quarry is now back under direct Aggregate Industries jurisdiction. Meanwhile Network Rail has placed a sleeper with stop board across the line at the NR/Aggregate Industries Coleford 189 mile 79 chain (mileage from Waterloo) boundary.



Photographer: Graham Bowden

Reinstatement of Exeter service

With the expiry of the GWR franchise at the end of March, it was expected that there would be an announcement of a direct award to GWR, which would include formal confirmation of a regular weekday service between Okehampton and Exeter. This of course has huge ramifications for the future of the line, and it was hoped that it would lead to a clarification of DRSA's future options. On March 23rd, the coronavirus crisis led to the Department for Transport announcing the temporary suspension (could it become permanent abandonment?) of the rail franchising system, and our future became even less certain.

In the event of a public service operating on the AI-owned (and until recently BARS-leased) line, responsibility for track maintenance is a dilemma. Work is needed to bring it up to standard. Some light was shed on future plans on a day in early March when several observers spotted Network Rail engineers surveying the line.

Annual General Meeting 2020 & Committee News

The Annual General Meeting has been scheduled for June 10th, although this is provisional of course in view of coronavirus restrictions on meetings. A later AGM may allow more clarity on our future options. Sadly for DRSA, Philip Wagstaff is being moved to Kent and has indicated his intention to stand down as committee chairman, and Dave Clegg wishes to do likewise as long as it doesn't leave the committee undermanned. Philip

and Dave are our two longest serving committee members, and the only two traceable back to the early days of the Dartmoor Railway and the Friends organisation. Losing both of them at once is careless; we hope they will remain in touch and continue to provide valuable input.

C&W and SMT volunteer Paul Vodden was co-opted on to the committee at the last meeting on March 3rd.

Membership

Geoff Horner reports that membership is now approaching 170, which is not far short of the number we were at this time last year. This is an outstanding number in the circumstances, and we are enormously encouraged that so many members are with us for the long haul.

Volunteer Activity

Between the announcement of the asset sale and the start of the coronavirus restrictions, some tentative volunteer activity took place. The C&W team gained access to the Meldon workshop, and did a lot of necessary tidying before getting back to work on the SR brakevan LDS 55625. Nature's seasons don't stop, and the horticulture team got to work on the flower beds and grass banks. In anticipation of the probable departure of the GUV, the SMT has been clearing out its contents.

DRSA has increased security measures at Okehampton Station.

DRSA On-Line Shop

The DRSA shop at Okehampton has proved very popular over the four years that it has been open and has made an important financial contribution to the Association's funds. With the railway closed for the foreseeable future this source of income is denied to us. We are therefore trialling an on-line ordering facility for members who may like to still be able to purchase some of our souvenirs from the selection below. All prices include packing and postage.

<i>DRSA</i> book mark £1.65
<i>DRSA</i> Note book (blue, red, mauve or pink) £3.00
<i>DRSA</i> pen (red, blue graphite or black) £3.00
Magnetic fridge totem sign (<i>Okehampton, Meldon Viaduct</i> or <i>Dartmoor Railway</i>) £3.50
<i>DRSA</i> fabric wallet (blue, red or mauve) £5.00
<i>Dartmoor Railway</i> Teddy bear £5.00
The <i>DRSA Southern Withered Arm</i> DVD £16.50

Orders by telephone or email to Christine Horner, 01363 82383 or christine.horner@talk21.com

Please make payment by cheque payable to *Dartmoor Railway Supporters Association* or by bank transfer to Lloyds Bank, Dartmoor Railway Supporters Association, Sort code 30-96-23, Account No. 01073660

Raise funds for DRSA whilst shopping online

With the high street shops now out of bounds many of you will be shopping online. Before doing your online shopping please first visit:

<http://www.easyfundraising.org.uk/causes/drsa>

There you will find many retailers who will make a donation to the DRSA based on the value of your purchase at no cost to you.

Nearly £2000 has been raised by members so far!

Railtour Visit

Interestingly a double headed, class 33 worked Charity Charter train from London Victoria, organised by the Branch Line Society, reached the NR/DR boundary at 1610 on Sun 8th March (having been 'Topped and Tailed' from and back to Exeter Riverside yard) before returning to Waterloo. Some pictures of this 8 coach special train are on the DRSA website: <https://www.dartmoor-railway-sa.org/photos&fid=58>



Photographer: Paul Martin



At Yeoford . Photographer: Tony Hill

Weardale Railway Purchased

Once a member of the BARS group of companies like the Dartmoor Railway, the Weardale Railway has been purchased by the Auckland Project. More details here: <https://www.aucklandproject.org/news/future-secured-for-weardales-heritage-railway/>

Thanks!

The committee thanks you all for continuing your DRSA membership during this difficult period and will keep you updated of any developments as they occur.

We enjoin our members to observe the government's coronavirus rules and keep themselves and their loved ones safe in these difficult times.

DRSA Contact Details

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