

The Dartmoor Pony *Express*

DRA Annual General Meeting

The Dartmoor Railway Association AGM is now on Thursday 29th September 2022 at 17.45 at the Ockment Centre, Okehampton, followed by a British Transport Films show, finishing at 19.45. Hot drinks and a snack will also be available. The timing takes into account those who might want to arrive on the 17.15 train and leave on the 20.30 service.

News in Brief

It is a real pleasure to see a huge variety of passengers every day on Platform 3. We are amazed by how early so many passengers arrive; usually quite happy to sit on one of the three benches, reading, texting or on one occasion playing the guitar. The largest item we have assisted was a double bass.



It was mistakenly taken over to Platform 2 to join the train and had to be rushed unceremoniously back again to Platform 3. So convincing is our two-platform station that several people have assumed that there

is (already/once again) a Down and an Up platform for the London trains!

The statistics for the 2 hourly service were impressive, being 240% up on the forecast figures used to build the business case for the line. Also a 50% increase in passenger journeys from Crediton, reflecting the more frequent service the town enjoys as all Okehampton trains stop there.

Volunteers have continued to open up Platform 2 on Wednesdays, Saturdays, Sundays and Bank Holidays. The general public, DRA members and friends have enjoyed having the railway bookshop, light refreshment room, Arthur Westlake museum and superloo all available. We have Great Western Railway (GWR) timetables, Devon and Cornwall Railcard application forms, as well as good visitor information about Okehampton and the Granite Way. It has been a real pleasure for the team to help the public with their enquiries, which some of us have been officially trained to do on a 'GWR Customer Relations course' at Newton Abbot Station.

After the official opening in November last year, there was a lull in site work, but it continued in the spring, most notably with the full extension of the car park towards the east and the old engine shed - although this is still to be finished as another ecological survey and licence had to be granted. The car park area is mostly made-up ground using material excavated from

the south side of the site into Dartmoor to create the level area for the goods shed and sidings around it.



The station building roof has been extensively but subtly refurbished reusing all the good weathered slate on the more visible north side. Then there has been much more electrical work done all round the premises and the correct lamp posts put up in place as those ordered finally arrived. All parts of the construction work have been affected by Covid, Brexit, and Ukraine so making consistent progress has been challenging. Once Network Rail (NR) contractors had delivered the basic infrastructure, GWR contractors have taken over to bring the station interior up to a really good specification. You can see the work in progress, which includes revealing the parquet floor where it still exists and keeping the quarry tiles in the toilets. Our monthly tenants meetings chaired by GWR's Ian Mundy have changed to weekly station refurbishment ones, and we continue to be very pleased to be consulted, sometimes on a daily basis, by Simon Ballinger, the onsite manager for HPS. Tom Baxter has been able to ensure that Southern Railway paint codes are adhered to, and lamps and door handles are sympathetic in style to the late 1950s.

Devon and Cornwall Rail Partnership have found grant funding for fitting out the ticket office, booking hall and waiting room in heritage style. We have already taken delivery of a new bench, a copy of our original Southern waiting room bench. As I write, the final painting of the roof light in the ticket office has just been done; an unseen (but previously leaky), extremely high and useful window allowing sun into the centre of the building.



DRA are still in dialogue about our various leases with AI (Aggregate Industries), NR, GWR and Devon County Council (DCC). There has been movement on one at Okehampton to look after the bay platform and another to look after Meldon Viaduct station on behalf of NR.

But very sadly at Meldon we suffered vandalism to some 20 windows in our carriages on the sidings.



After an initial attempt to prevent the Dartmoor horizontal rain from getting into them with tarpaulins, these are now boarded up. However we have been able to secure all our own equipment in the former permanent way shed at Meldon.

Additional survey work has gone on in the section of track now owned by NR from Okehampton to Meldon. A NR design will be drawn up to provide for AI quarry traffic as and when stone is extracted. The work will include the upgrade of the track for the two miles - also essential for a renewal of the heritage service.



At Okehampton station regular work has included painting of benches, and barrows (one will go into our new Platform 3 shop) and the museum room. Minor but significant work has been on the footbridge, weeding the bay platform track, and strimming the approach road banks, and watering, refreshing and replanting the tubs. Sufficient watering has been achieved during the blistering heat by volunteers doing a shift at dawn! To highlight the original coaling block feature in the car park one more garden is being planted. The cleanliness standard of the station is often commented upon. Dedicated volunteers such as Geoff Brooks and Alan Harris deserve a special tribute for that.

So, whether baking cakes for our customers, or calming distressed passengers who have arrived to catch non existent trains on strike days, to catching up with those who travelled on our line in the past, life is full and varied about Okehampton station!

The next significant happening will be reopening the main station building with the fully refurbished Bulleid Buffet being run, not by the Youth Hostel, but by Leanne Knight. She is local, enthusiastic and well known for her cakes and pasties. She is currently having these served from her Barista catering van at the front of the station. Her vision is for people to walk into a cafe where images bring the past of the station alive.



Dartmoor National Park are ready to fit out the Information Centre and DRA have a shop fit design ready to be installed. The date may be 24th September when there is a Destination Dartmoor community event at the station.

Your Committee apologise for the unavoidable postponement of the AGM due to several members going down with Covid. A full Dartmoor Pony magazine will go out as soon as possible after the rescheduled AGM.

Sue Baxter