

The Lynton Line – Issue 2 Nov 2020

An occasional newsletter intended to keep local residents informed about activity on the Lynton & Barnstaple Railway, including events, behind-the-scenes work and rebuilding.



Open Again – July to November 2020

2020 has been a very different – and difficult – year for individuals, families and businesses, and the Railway is no exception. Services began on 16th February and came to an abrupt halt on 19th March. During this period we carried 1605 passengers – typical for the early part of the year. There were highs and lows, and as lockdown seemed increasingly likely there were a few days when no trains ran because of lack of visitors.

With many people seeking holidays in the UK this year, we wanted to re-open once permitted to, and expected the summer to be busy, but just how busy? After a great deal of preparation by our band of socially-distanced volunteers in June and July, we reopened on 18th July, and continued to 1st November. There were occasionally no passengers for the 1600 train, but on several days in August an extra lunchtime train was needed to clear the queue of waiting visitors. One day, we carried 453 people. We are more fortunate than most heritage railways as our Victorian carriages are designed to be easily converted to separate compartments (see photo, right), so we could meet COVID restrictions without the need for face coverings whilst on the train.

This year we carried 23710 passengers, and over the summer 19% more than the same period in 2019, and October saw numbers up 56% on 2019. The smiles on passengers' faces as they



left us said it all – a half-day out without the need for advance booking, travel as a family group, and then enjoying refreshments together provided a welcome reminder of normality! This was a considerable achievement for our small band of volunteers who worked extremely hard all summer. They deserve our sincere thanks.

Funding Support

Although we were busy during the summer, we had lost four key months of business to COVID lockdowns. We therefore welcome the award of £79,300 made to us by the Government's "Culture Recovery Fund for Heritage". This money will provide the funding we need to carry out essential maintenance work ready for the start of the 2021 season.

Support works both ways, and (recognising its responsibilities as a Community Interest Company) the Railway has invested in the Share Offer for Parracombe Pavilion Stores & Café.

Working Parties

Our usual working weekends attended by supporters from around the country have not been possible this year, but small socially-distanced groups of local volunteers have undertaken specific tasks.

As well as work on track and rolling stock prior to re-opening, July saw a group clear and restore the picnic site next to the layby on the A39 at Rowley Cross. In the past year or two, water damage to the path made this inaccessible, but now it is accessible again (with socially-distanced tables) to passing visitors. Devon County Council transferred this piece of land (and some trackbed) to the railway some years ago, on the understanding that we maintain it.



Rowley Cross picnic site - usable once more

Another team has worked hard to improve the floral displays around the station, using locally-purchased plants. Also, thanks to a donation from a member, over 300 bulbs, including English bluebells, winter aconites, wood anemones, mixed daffodils, narcissi and tulips have been

planted on our woodland walk, after clearance of brambles, briars and stinging nettles. We are looking forward to a dazzling display in the spring.

Ash Die-back

A global pandemic does not make other issues disappear.

The owner of Hednacott (adjacent to Fairview in Churchtown, Parracombe) contacted us with concerns about the possibility of trees on the railway embankment falling on his house, due to ash die-back. As the site is within the conservation area, a walk-through was arranged with Exmoor National Park, and it was agreed that many of the trees from Fairview towards the infilled cutting before Parracombe Lane, on both sides of the embankment, were at risk of falling.

Subsequent walk-throughs with a tree surgeon took place on 10th and 18th November to assess the situation, marking each tree that needs removing or cutting back. The results have been passed to the Railway's Environment & Conservation Trustee for action.

The owner of Hednacott, and Parracombe Parish Council, have both been kept fully up to date with these developments. It is hoped that once approvals from Exmoor National Park are received, the work will take place in the New Year.

Further inspections have taken place at Chelfham, identifying more trees in need of attention.

Geo-environmental Survey Work

The Railway's engineering design team have placed an order for geo-environmental survey work on the route between Killington Lane and Wistlandpound Reservoir.

This work is required to satisfy an Exmoor National Park planning condition for the railway's reinstatement, and the scope of the work to be undertaken has been approved in advance by the ENPA planning department.

The first of these surveys is scheduled to start in mid-December at Killington Lane and Parracombe Lane. Each of these surveys is planned to take about a day, and will involve pits being dug either side of the former railway bridges at these sites. The purpose of this work is to ascertain the nature of the fill in the former railway cuttings either side of the bridges. Primarily this will identify any hazardous waste present and the nature of the subsoil relevant to bridge reinstatement and repairs. Each investigation will involve a small team overseen by a specialist geo-environmental consultant.

Thanks are due to the Veronica Awdry Charitable Trust (Veronica Awdry is the daughter of the Reverend W Awdry, author of the *Thomas the Tank Engine* books) for a grant of £1500 to help fund these ground investigations.

Bratton Fleming Station Purchased

Exmoor Associates, who purchase and manage land for future railway use, became the owners of the former Bratton Fleming Station and adjacent land on 3rd November 2020.

Several hundred supporters of the L&B generously donated to the appeal to buy the station, as well as many who gave through the crowdfunding website *JustGiving*. The station had recently been advertised more than once, but each time we understand the buyers had withdrawn before completion.

In the short-term, the station will be leased out as a private home, meeting costs and maybe even generating a surplus to put towards the railway's reinstatement.

An Exmoor Associates director proudly holds the keys to Bratton Fleming Station



Planning Matters

The Railway has recently submitted two planning applications.



At Woody Bay it is proposed to replace the current temporary "tea tent" with a more permanent building on the same site in the style of a Southern Railway wooden station. This will improve the venue for visitors, particularly in the winter months.

At Chelfham, we would like to replace the derelict cabin in the woods above the station with a modern timber lodge building that is suitable to be let out as holiday accommodation.

Star of the Small Screen

There is great interest nationally in our Railway, and we regularly receive requests to film segments for TV programmes featuring the line. Apart from BBC News footage of the re-opening of Woody Bay, the first of those filmed this year to be shown is Channel 5's *Walking Britain's Lost Railways*, presented by Rob Bell. The film crew visited Snapper Halt, Chelfham and Woody Bay during the summer, and the programme was shown on 27th November 2020. If you missed it, it can still be viewed on the *My5* catch-up service.

Feedback

We welcome your feedback on this newsletter, and will answer any additional questions you may have. Contact our Operations Director Clive Robey clive.robey@lynton-rail.co.uk.