



# LYNTON & BARNSTAPLE RAILWAY. NEWSLETTER

*L&BR Newsletter No. 80 April 2023*

## **News Updates from Woody Bay**

No firm date yet for delivery of the Tamper machine but it is packed for transport and should arrive very shortly. The tamper has been tested and proved and training in using it on site is the next step.

The station shop is now bigger and revamped inside - all newly redecorated with various bits of wiring tidied up, new sales room and refreshed counter space.

Progress with crew training has produced a number of new drivers and firemen.

Woodland improvements with nature and kids' trail ready for this year's visitors.

Lots of site safety work and improvements including new signage.

Another successful working weekend: the efforts of those attending and working away in all weathers is much appreciated – as always.

We are looking for more volunteers in general for this season, but especially in the shop and public-facing roles. We will be losing Mark to the Old Station House Inn and several staff to age and illness. Contact Stuart for details.

Anne Belsey has decided to resign as a director of the CIC. This followed some breaches of confidentiality on the board and criticism from other directors. Thank you Anne for your efforts in the time you have been on the Board.

## **The Lynton & Barnstaple Railway Team – a review**

**2019** - Visitor numbers to Woody Bay had fallen over the last few years from 52,054 in 2016 to 40,839 in 2019, and the prospects for the years ahead were stark. A list of possible revenue-generating actions was drawn up and discussed by the Trust and the CIC Board – it was crystal-clear that some of these initiatives had to be made to work if the L&B was to return a profit at all in the years ahead.

Meanwhile, the Railway was apprehensive of an Office of Rail and Road visit. There were a number of areas where improvement was needed and, although we were running a safe railway, we lacked evidence to prove it and an inspection might have been uncomfortable.

Added to that, the ORR was taking action elsewhere to tighten up their requirements for heritage railways. So it wasn't just a case of catching up, the required standards were being raised considerably.

Most of the team in place then is still in place now. There have been some changes and some very welcome additions but the majority of the team have seen this period right through. The team's achievement is remarkable.

**2020** - Covid hit. We were forced to furlough staff and we had to research and apply for grants, to read, understand and react to rapidly changing regulations and the law. The L&B's survival was on the line again.

The team worked out how we could manage, within the law, to keep a skeleton crew volunteering at Woody Bay, moving the Bagnall 2819 project forward and keeping the railway ready to reopen when the law allowed.

Finally, in July, we were able to reopen ahead of almost every other attraction in the area. Our heritage coaches with their separate compartments allowed us to accommodate passenger groups socially distanced and with a programme of disinfection, fogging and cleaning, we managed to welcome 25,451 passengers in the year.

**2021** - was the year of the Staycation. Covid again kept the Railway closed until April but from only 153 operating days, we attracted 45,312 passengers. The record numbers on the peak days required extra trains to be run with a corresponding strain on the volunteer crews, shop staff and caterers.

**2022** - saw the return of overseas travel and we were concerned that there would be a slump in UK holidaying. Many attractions had a very challenging year but we achieved 42,217 passengers from 180 operating days, which is well beyond the worrying total in 2019.

While the numbers tell the main story, behind them is the transformation of Woody Bay as a visitor experience. The evidence for this lies in the extremely positive feedback we are receiving through Trip Advisor and Google Reviews. The friendliness and helpfulness of the volunteers and staff attract the highest praise and Railways across the country would love to get reviews like ours.

**The Line** - A great deal of work has been carried out on the track in all weathers to keep it up to standard. Regular track walks are recorded and over 100 recycled plastic sleepers have been installed. Our new tamping machine has been completed (after a huge Covid delay) and we expect delivery very soon.

The locos have seen their share of effort with Lyn benefitting from a valve gear repair, new safety valves, an overhauled brake control valve and some improvements to the ejector. Meanwhile Axe has new firebox doors and a cleaned and serviced injector.

Coach 16 has had a full repaint and coach 7 is now undergoing the same full renovation. The paint shop team have a never-ending task while Tom, John and Michael have been dealing with day-to-day tasks while working away at Bagnall 2819.

**Behind the Scenes** - Throughout the site, improvements have been made to enhance the visitor experience. The woodland walk has been updated and we have a renewed ecological focus guided by Devon Wildlife Trust. We have a team who emblazon the station with flora much of which they produce from their new greenhouse(s) and the 16mm team have provided us with a garden railway which the visitors crowd round whenever it is operating. The shop is newly decorated, the toilets have been renovated and the whole site has been tidied up with new clear and consistent signage arriving at regular intervals.

The replacement of the green marquee put a tremendous strain on the volunteer team at Woody Bay and they put in hours of very hard work to get the tent down, the site ready for contractors and then the new tearoom painted and decorated. Their achievement is a first-class tearoom that is being so well enjoyed by our visitors and will underpin the railway commercially while we seek to extend to Blackmoor Gate.

Less obvious to the casual glance is the work that has been done to get working IT throughout the site; the improvement to sales data that allows us to know what we are selling and adjust our stock and prices accordingly; the deal with Google to help searchers find us on the web and the new website which is beginning to deliver online ticket sales and will go on to be more up to date and more informative.

But every bit as important as all those things that help us turn a profit is the work that has gone on to ensure we are not suddenly shut down. Hundreds of hours of work have been required to get a new, fit-for-purpose and ORR-compliant Safety Management System in place. Alongside that work, the team introduced HOPS to the L&B which is the heritage rail standard software for managing rosters, compliance, training and eventually assets.

Within HOPS, our training and assessment paperwork is now exemplary, and a host of other safe working risk assessments and procedures have been introduced. From proper PPE to new ladders and other access equipment, the team are doing their best to ensure that we do what we say with regard to safety. A fire risk assessment gave us more work to complete, with improvements to electrical wiring and significant improvements in storage of chemicals being needed. We have improved the paint shop floor and addressed concerns around the pit with new handrails, a deep clean and some better signage. There is still a lot more to do but we can be confident that we need not fear an ORR inspection.

**The Wider Picture** - We may have been thwarted in our current attempt to extend the line to Parracombe and that is very disappointing, but it clearly isn't the end. The dream of reopening the L&B is still very much alive and we are in a far stronger position than we were in 2019. We now own all the land as far as and including the Halt. We own the Old Station House Inn, we have an agreement to rebuild bridge 65 and we have raised around £750,000 so far.

The story of the last four years is a positive one that shows what a team of people working together can achieve and the first few days of the new season have seen very good numbers of visitors, which is great to see after a long winter of very hard but rewarding work.

We are a small team, and we would dearly love to have some more folk join us at Woody Bay in all areas of activity - although the shop and platform assistance are particular shortages. Please email enquiries@lynton-rail.co.uk or contact any of the Woody Bay team if you could help us at all.

The last four years are proof that if we work together, there is no doubt that we can and will get the L&B to Blackmoor Gate and beyond.

*Malcolm Smith - April 2023*

## **Further clarification as to why the section 73 planning applications were withdrawn**

Following receipt of a number of requests for additional information to that provided in February Newsletter No.79, this note gives further detail as to why the section 73 applications were withdrawn.

All technical matters and objection issues that had been raised during the public consultation period were addressed in the amended planning documents that were submitted in December 2022. The only reason why applications were reluctantly withdrawn was a technicality raised in a legal challenge by an objector's Counsel in June 2022 noting that in their opinion a section 73 application could not be used in this instance. The Trust obtained an independent counsel's opinion which supported the use of a section 73 in November 2022 but after careful deliberation, the Authority sided with the objecting Counsel.

A section 73 planning application is a procedure that may be used to amend a planning condition on an existing planning approval. This is the procedure that enabled the Trust to build Bridges 54 and 55 in 2019 in North Devon Planning Authority's area.

The Trust sought advice as to whether the Grampian conditions were enforceable or challengeable and counsel advised that it was only arguable and hence the outcome of a challenge could not be guaranteed in our favour. They strongly advised the Trust to work with the Planning Authority and to submit a section 73 application to amend the Grampian condition whilst respecting the underlying principles.

As noted above an objector's legal counsel considered that in their opinion, the way in which the planning documentation and approval was written prevented use of a section 73. The description of the development in the planning approval referenced additional information submitted in support of the application. This referred to the principle covered by the Grampian condition. Exmoor National Park and their counsel considered that the proposed phasing would change the principle and hence the description of the development, something that is beyond the power of a section 73. Had the Authority proceeded to determine the application it is highly likely they would have had to refuse it to avoid judicial challenge. It was at this stage that the Trust was advised by our lawyers and planning consultants to withdraw the application to ensure the planning record was free of any refusals.

## **Cost plans and financial viability**

### **Phase IIA Killington Lane to Wistlandpound**

There have been suggestions that the Trust has no business plan or cost plans to enable Option C to be evaluated. This is simply not true.

The railway's business plan was last updated in April 2022. This was submitted with the section 73 planning applications together with Arup's Economic Appraisal of the impact of Phase IIA on the local economy plus ENP's independent financial assessment by Nevin Associates. All of these reports conclude that the extension is economically viable and that there will be benefit to both the railway and the local economy.

These reports have been in the in the public domain since May 2022 and are available on the planning portal here:

<https://planning.agileapplications.co.uk/exmoor/search-applications/results?criteria=%7B%22query%22:%2262%2F50%2F22%2F011%22%7D&page=1>

The cost of Phase IIA is set out in the railway's cost report date June 2020. This is not a public document but it is informed by the huge amount of survey, design and technical detail that has been prepared to support the Phase IIA planning applications, section 73 applications, and the discharge of 40 pre-commencement planning conditions.

The total estimated construction cost of Phase IIA is £12million at second quarter 2020 prices. The length of the extension is approximately 4.3miles. This gives an all-in rate of approximately £3m/mile including abnormal infrastructure costs such as bridges, cuttings and buildings. Within this figure the basic cost of simple track bed preparation and track laying is approximately £1m/mile. The validity of our estimate has been tested through recent contracts and tenders.

Bridges 54 and 55 that were reinstated in 2019 were completed within our estimate. We also have a November 2022 tender for the construction of the new bridge 65 at Killington Lane that was also within our cost estimate. A current contract is underway

for the construction of an access road into Rowley Moor Farm which further reinforces and validates our understanding of current construction cost rates on Exmoor.

## Phase IIB and Phase III

We do not have detailed survey or technical information on either Phase IIB or Phase III but for the purpose of initial "Order of Cost" construction estimates the all-in rate of £3m/mile could be used (excluding survey, design, planning and TWAO costs) to give lower bound figures as follows:

Phase IIB Woody Bay to Lynton: approximate distance 3miles	£9m
Phase III Wistlandpound to Pilton: approximate distance 11 miles	£33m

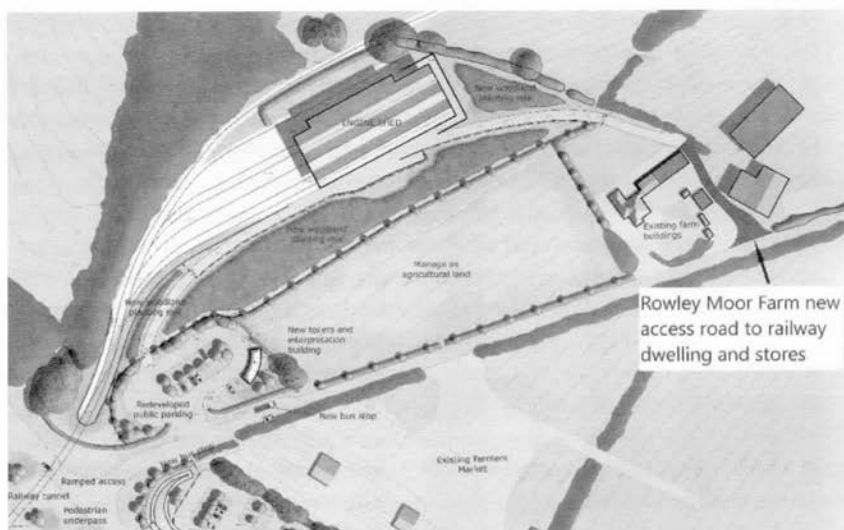
## Rowley Moor Farm access road

Work began during the last week of February, removing trees and pulling back the Devon hedge bank to improve visibility on to the A39. This had to be completed before March to avoid potential disturbance to nesting birds and we are grateful to our contractor Macplant for achieving this at short notice.

Construction of the new road is now progressing and is due to be complete on 5th May 2023. This will provide safe access to Rowley Farm to both the farm entrance and the house access, a new affordable dwelling for staff, our workshop and stores, and also in the future to the engine shed site. The road is designed to accommodate articulated vehicles and to enable their safe entrance.

**John Barton**

06/04/2023



**The West Somerset Railway and Lynton and Barnstaple Railway have arranged reciprocal travel arrangements for both our passengers and volunteers and staff from March 2023.**

**WSR 2023 tickets** (paper tickets) can be used at the L&B to obtain **10% off** the same type of ticket on either an adult or family ticket.

**Lynton and Barnstaple Railway tickets** can be kept and used on the West Somerset Railway for a **10% discount**.

**Staff / Volunteers** of both the WSR and L&B railways on production of a valid HOPs ID card are entitled to / will receive 'Privilege rate' 75% discount off a ticket price on the day on the opposite railways, one discount per HOPs card on both railways. (This is separate from the HRA 'Heritage Rail' pass scheme, but only one can be used at one time.)

We have had a leaflet swap to promote each other's railway and hopefully when the 'Exmoor Coaster' open-top bus extends past Woody Bay it will not only join the railways together but give the public many options for days out.

***S Nelhams – March 2023***

### **Consultation - The Way Ahead**

This consultation has now closed and the results are included in this mailing under a separate cover. Very interesting reading; thanks to all those who took part.

## 125th Anniversary Event – May 13th & 14th

As we mark the start of the 125th anniversary year of the opening of the L&B on the AGM weekend May 13th & 14th, we would like to offer two activities for Trust members only. Both activities are offered free of charge but donations are always welcome.

First, we will be offering footplate experiences on Axe throughout the weekend. These will be on a first come first served basis and those interested will need to be wearing suitable clothing and footwear (we will supply gloves as required). If you are interested, please inform the ticket office on your arrival at Woody Bay.

Secondly, we will be offering members a series of track bed walks over newly acquired L&B Trust land. The walks will be on Saturday 13th May and will involve walking on unmade ground and climbing styles so appropriate clothing and footwear will be required. We will be finalising the details over the coming weeks, but the walks are likely to be:

- Killington Lane to Cricketfield Lane
- Old Station House Inn to Wistlandpound
- Chelfham from the Goodleigh Road bridge towards Collard Bridge

We need to know numbers so that we can organise transport (there is insufficient parking at Chelfham) so there will be a free of charge ticket available via the online shop. If you are interested, please 'purchase' a ticket as soon as possible to allow us to assess the demand.

