

TOP LINE

Packed With
Summer Events



The Magazine of the Pontypool and Blaenavon Railway

Number 112

Autumn 2009

£2.00

Timetable

Trains usually operate a half-hourly service from 11:30 to 16:30. Intensive services run on special events—check our website or call for details.

Fares

Furnace Sidings to Whistle Inn Return—£3.00 Adult

£1.50—Children (aged 3 to 16)

£7.00—Family Ticket (2 adults + 2 children)

Calendar of Events 2009

	S	Su	M	T	W	Th	F	S	Su	M	T	W	Th	F	S	Su	M	T	W	Th	F	S	Su	M	T	W	Th	F	S	Su	M
APR														10	11	12	13					18	19						25	26	
MAY	2	3	4					9	10						16	17						23	24	25					30	31	
JUN								6	7						13	14						20	21						27	28	
JUL								4	5						11	12						18	19						25	26	
AUG	1	2		4	5	6		8	9		11	12	13		15	16		18	19	20		22	23		25	26	27		29	30	31
SEP								5	6						12	13						19	20						26	27	
OCT																													31		
DEC								5	6						12	13						19	20	21	22						
JAN								2	3																						
	Steam Days												Diesel Days												DMU Days						

April 12 & 13	Easter Bunnies	June 28	Garn Lakes day	Sept 12 & 13	140th Anniversary Gala
May 3 & 4	Teddy Bears Picnic	July 11 & 12	1960s Beer Festival	Sept 26 & 27	Southern Region with Altitude
May 24 7 25	Country & Western Week-end	July 25 & 26	Diesel Gala	October 31	Ghost Train
June 6 & 7	Little Engines Weekend	August 15 & 16	Ivor the Engine	December Dates	Steam Santa Specials
June 20 & 21	Model railway Show and fathers Day	August 30 & 31	Transport Rally	January 2 & 3	New Year DMU Specials

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Well behaved dogs are welcome to travel on our trains and you will always find a bowl of water on our stations.

Please note that fares may differ for Special Events

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TOP LINE—THE MAGAZINE OF THE PONTYPOOL AND BLAENAVON RAILWAY

NUMBER 112 AUTUMN 2009

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EDITORIAL

As I put the finishing touches to this issue of Top Line I can already look back at what has been an amazing season that, even with the credit crunch, has seen passenger figures 15% higher than 2008. What has struck me throughout the year has been the quality of team work that has gone in to making things happen. People from all departments pull together to make sure the railway runs smoothly, one week they'll be on the pway, next week fixing diesels or crewing the train. A prime example of team work was at the diesel gala when the failure of 73128 could have thrown a spanner in the works but volunteers from all areas pulled together, refused to be beaten and produced our best gala yet (see page 20).

The teamwork extends to all levels, there is the higher level team work involved in jointly marketing the railway with the other Blaenavon attractions and then there are the smaller teams that are almost invisible. I am always amazed by the number of people that offer help and assistance when I am compiling Top Line, even if they are not members of the railway. Requests for information, articles, proof reading and spell checking (thanks dad). Like the railway this magazine is very much a team effort and I'd like to thank everyone who has helped with the railway and the magazine.

On quite a few railways people exist in their own compartment and don't help out others, the only compartments on the PBR are those in the coaches.

Regards Alistair Grieve

Front Cover—Without a doubt the star of 2009 has been No. 19 which has worked faultlessly and tirelessly throughout the season doing everything that has been asked of it and more. A big hit with both volunteers and passengers No. 19 is seen here, unusually on the front of a train, blasting out of Furnace Sidings during June's Little Engines weekend.

DEVELOPMENT. John Down

There's no doubt that I am a man of not a few words, and our editor has done well to cram all my verbiage in – albeit at the cost of reducing the related images to little more than thumbnails. I really will try and rein in my comments in this issue, safe in the knowledge that those on the inter-thingummy-wotsit can always look up the detail on our website. Our editor might then allow more space for photographs (*Plenty of space this time—Editor*).

I'm very much aware that at the moment, lots of projects and jobs that were started months and sometimes years ago are approaching completion. Some are very close indeed, and whilst they are not yet 'in the bag' as I write, they almost certainly will be by the time you read this. So, I've had to make a few assumptions and hope that you will forgive me if I get some of the timing wrong by a week or two.

Funding

I suppose you've all seen various sketches on TV and scenes on arty-crafty films where some god-like being moves his minions about on a giant chessboard. It's rather like that with TCBC and the HoV programme. What I can say is that following discussions it seems that replacement of the Varteg Road Bridge has been funded and physical work is planned to start in April 2010. Funding for the Big Branch has suffered a slight hiccup, but is just about on stream again, and now, at least we have a clearer idea of where we are going, and, hopefully, with a slightly extended completion date.

Step 1.2



Bridges – All the bridges are complete and PBR have laid the rails across them. There is an outstanding job to fit guard rails across Bridge 14, but administratively and technically this is a PWay job, rather than a bridge job. As agreed with Messrs Griffiths and TCBC, PBR has received some useful funds for undertaking the track re-laying work across the bridges, and this will be used to progress other projects. The bridges below Bridge 12, (the rail-over-rail bridge), were completed by Capita Symonds aided by contractors Griffiths of Abergavenny.



Top left—Bridge 12, now complete and just awaiting the relaying of the trackwork. A far cry from its previous worn out look.

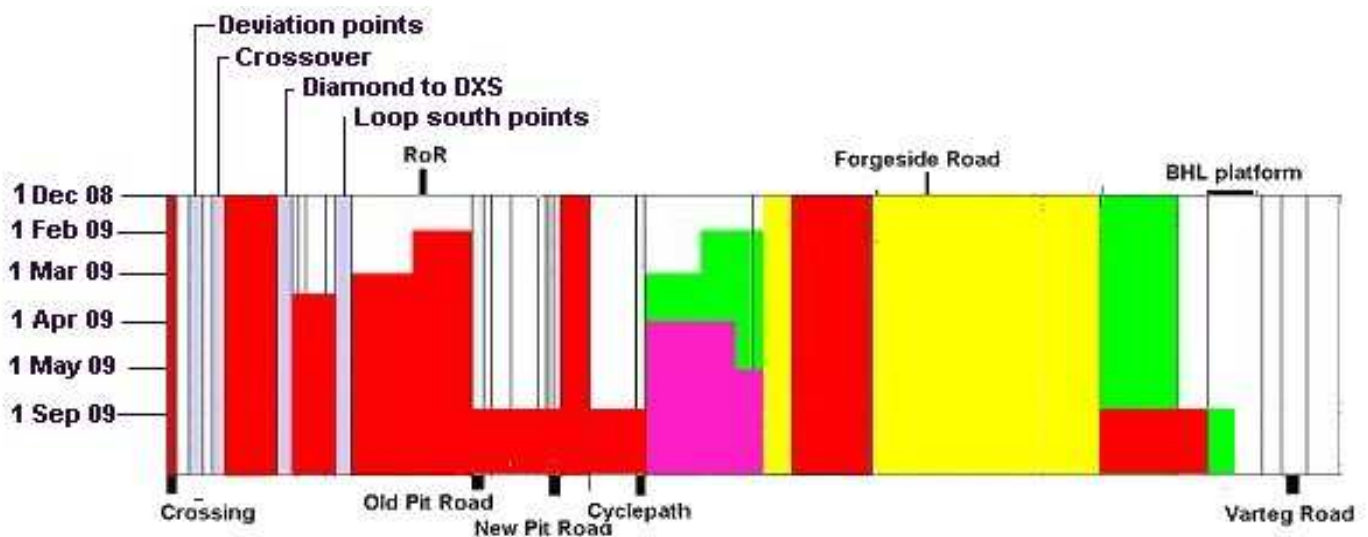
Left— Bridge 13 showing the massive girders under the original span. Although, at first, we had serious misgivings about these modifications, we feel the final product has not lost too much of its heritage appearance.

Bridge 12 was let to Cambrian Transport and it was this bridge that finally led to a time overrun of about a month, so that it was almost the end of June by the time we managed to get under to undertake the bulk of the re-railing further down, nevertheless, on 18 July, and without ceremony, our PWay train traversed all of bridges 12,13,14,16 and 17 – the first since 4 January.

Track – Although progress has been a little slower than expected due to poor weather, a succession of special events and problems from the bridges as noted above; when the team are there, a succession of minor miracles is worked. Over the months the method of working has evolved from Saturdays and Sundays to Thursdays and Sundays, and this works well. The first train to reach BHL was at 1614 on Sunday 2 August.



Left—It's a still, sultry Sunday afternoon, just north of BHL platform around 4 o'clock. The minidigger clambers aboard the Weltrol wagon (hidden behind the engine). A few minutes later, at 1416 to be precise, the train consisting of Weltrol, Shark and Pooley Van, arrive at the platform. The train disgorges a horde of thirsty PWay workers, all anxious for tea served by the New Works crew, resident (and up till then, marooned), at BHL. John Down



Here is the track progress chart, probably within an issue of its final presentation, and close to outliving its usefulness. But look how little at 1 September 09 is not red, purple or yellow, that is, not laid or re-laid in concrete. Even BHL is shown half green which means the sleepers have been dropped ready for the exchange. All that remains are some very short sections south of the crossing, BHL platform (five panels) and a short overrun south of BHL (three panels). Beyond that nothing is scheduled and certainly nothing will happen till the Varteg Road Bridge (bridge 19) is replaced). All the campaigns are complete and reference to them has been removed, however the points south of the level crossing have now been identified as they will feature large in the next issue or two.

So far as the resleepering exercise is concerned, only the platform at Blaenavon (High Level) station (BHL) together with a short overrun, and the three panels immediately north of BHL, which will become the BHL north loop points in a few years time, remain. This will then see the enormous sleeper replacement programme completed. Apart from a host of small jobs, the major PWay jobs then remaining will be the replacement of damaged rails, point re-timbering (though some of this can be deferred till after 'opening day', next April) and the fitting of facing point locks. Four facing point locks are on site waiting to be fitted. Another exciting development is that the use of a Plasser Theurer tamper is being considered for use in late autumn for both the extension and the existing running line, though this will be an expensive job, and its cost impact must be carefully considered.

Station at Blaenavon (High Level) – Whilst the completed platform is properly part of Step 1.2, any substantial buildings built there really belong to the unfunded Step 1.4, however there has been some modest 'funding diversion' which has seen Big Pit branch funding (Step 1.5) re-directed. Although this approach has been approved by TCBC, it can only be used in small doses. However, to date, the cost of the building has been well contained. So, with the massive job of emptying the cellars in the station building completed, the floor joists were soon installed and a temporary floor screwed down. It then became possible to return to the walls, and build them up to their full height. Heavy concrete lintels have been fitted to the doors, windows and cellar windows. Thirty two roof joists and fittings are on order and about 900 slates will be ordered shortly. With a following wind (or rather lack of any wind!) we should have the roof on before the end of October.



Although progress has been unsteady at times, comparison with the photo on page 6 in TL111 shows that 'little but often' has yielded impressive results. Here the walls have risen to the height of the canopy supports and a further nine inches (as shown by the three isolated blocks on the right) will see the roof line established. The roof will then be constructed. We very much hope before the end of October – the aging New Works team cannot be expected to face another winter without shelter from the wind. The building looks rather forbidding at present, but will improve immensely once its wooden cladding is installed. John Down

It has also been possible to do some exploratory digging around platform 2 at BHL. The new platform will be right alongside the cycleway; however it will be about 21 inches (525mm) higher than the cycleway which will bring some interesting stylistic challenges.

We were fortunate in finding a supplier who was prepared to provide genuine creosoted fence components to the LMS drawing and these are to hand. We have found a contractor who is willing to cut out the mortices in the posts, something the original suppliers were unable to do. We hope to have the fence up before the end of November.

There's a little bit of re-work to do, in order to repair damage caused by vandals, and some titivation required on the front wall, but the platform itself is fine. After that, there are several jobs outstanding.

We must complete a short stone wall between the station building and the site of the signal box. All the gas lighting equipment is to hand and a fitter has inspected the job. We are just waiting for his cost estimate from him to lay the gas pipes, though we will install the posts. We will also need to make final tweaks to the wall we have built around the site of the signal box. It has also been possible to get Western Power Distribution to come up and survey the site, and they have recently provided a proposal and cost estimate in order to bring electricity to BHL

Fences – It's a long time since we spoke about fencing, but as we approach the end of the extension work, the fencing along the line of the railway will come into sharp focus. The first area to receive attention will be on the down side, south of Forgeside Road Bridge (Bridge 18). The area immediately south of the bridge has been used as a 'rat-run' mainly by youngsters for a number of years. The situation there makes it possible for a youngster hidden by the bulk of the bridge to run, unseen, in front of down trains. Accordingly, for about 50m along the down side, the area will be fenced by palisade fencing, whilst the purpose built footway through the fence on the other side (which provides access to the cycleway) will be permanently blocked. Beyond the palisade fencing, standard post and wire 'stock' fencing will extend about a further 100m to a foot crossing that we intend to retain. Gates of special design must be used here, together with the correct signs.

From the earliest days of the railway the LNWR instituted a private path between platform 1 at BHL and Barnfield Terrace at Forgeside. This path is still much used by local residents, and although without legal status, we are anxious to retain the path as a service to the local community. Although the path veers away from the railway so that it would be quite impossible to approach the railway by anything other than determined effort, there is still a formal requirement to separate it from the railway by means of a fence. Accordingly the standard stock fence will extend effectively to the bottom of the ramp at the north end of platform 1, BHL, a distance of about 300m. This work should be well under way by the time you read this.

Progress on Step 1.3 (Improvements at Furnace Sidings)

Progress under this heading is confined to the Hinckley footbridge at present with the second tower now being pulled to its upright position. Its stair flight walls are here (stored on Platform 2) but, unlike tower 1, these must wait until the tower is finally bolted down which cannot happen until the main deck is in place. Welding on the main deck is well advanced, with our resident welding team cutting out and replacing large areas of plate, together with the bottom angles. It is planned to lift the main deck into place in late October. It is even possible that we might have the wooden steps and decking in before Christmas, even without the tower2 steps. What a novel viewpoint it would make for our photographers during Santa Specials.



Tower 2 of the Hinckley footbridge teeters in mid-air as it is gingerly inched into something approaching its final position on Furnace Sidings, platform 2. Unlike tower 1 on the other platform, it cannot be finally bolted into position until the main span is bolted between the two towers. The picture was taken in late July but it will be late in October before the main span is finally bolted into position. John Down

I touched upon the Barry Town footbridge in our last issue. The formal exchange is now complete, and inspection of the remains will decide in what order they are to be taken to DB Engineering at Barry Docks for reconstruction. In some respects the bridge is too large for our needs and there are too many flights on one side - one too many for us - so some modification is inevitable. We also need to develop some novel techniques for restoring the damaged newel posts. We also had a chance to inspect the Merton footbridge in late June. Apart from a cracked casting, this bridge appears to be in remarkably good condition, and with very little corrosion. At present it is heavily overgrown, and we are waiting for the grass to die back a bit before work on the recovery starts in earnest.

Step 1.5 Big Pit branch

Some work has been started on the up loop just south of the crossing at Furnace Sidings, where about 150 sleepers have been replaced. The job employed our well rehearsed wood to concrete conversion techniques, however it was undertaken primarily to recover check rails, rather than to develop the branch.



Big Pit – here we come! Looking back to Furnace Sidings some of the first 150 or so sleepers that have been laid on the Big Pit branch, and await ballasting. The old sleepers are stacked on the left awaiting recovery. This is urgent work, but not as urgent as the completion of extension to Blaenavon, so work can only proceed when the opportunity arises. John Down

The other element of work that has been started, completed and paid for, has been the reconstruction of the Rail-over-Rail bridge, Bridge 12, as noted above, and this is an important chunk of the of the Step 1.5 programme. We are all pleased to see this work done – something which, a few years ago, was dismissed as being quite, quite impossible. The timbers, rail and concrete sleepers for the branch have all arrived and are safely stored, though there was a need to plunder some of the sleeper stock to complete the conversion programme on the run down to BHL, so we will have to order some more. Although we have been maintaining a weather eye on the situation, the chance opportunity to secure a suitable accommodation for the Big Pit branch stock in the Up Exchange Sidings (UXS) came unexpectedly to market. We were lucky to be able to purchase it at a sensible price, and the main steelwork has been delivered to Furnace Sidings with the panelling expected in a week or two. We are now waiting for the summer growth to die back a bit before some vegetation removal in the UXS. This will allow more detailed surveying to be undertaken, so that the precise route of the branch can be determined.

Despite trying to plan things in some detail, the stars, or whatever, sometimes form conjunctions from

which unexpected ideas emerge. As it is, heritage components are appearing on the horizon that suggest that it might just be possible to build Big Pit, not just as a tiny platform, but as a tiny platform with an overall roof, using columns recovered from a London terminus! This is still far from certain, but it has an important advantage – it might release the accommodation planned for the UXS for use by main line coaching stock – and nobody can deny that our coaching stock needs more protection!

The wider view

I thought it was time I put my overworked crystal ball away, and looked at the situation in which we are going to find ourselves in the next few months. I am writing this in the first week of September. As I noted above, during the next few months many small steps will see completion, and the plan has been that by the end of December we will be in a position to invite the Railway Inspectorate to look at the work. We have decided to call this 'day-0'. According to their response we will undertake any rectification work in the earnest hope that we can be ready to open on 1 April – we will call this 'day-1'.

In terms of things we must complete before Day-0 we need to complete the sleeper replacement programme, and to install some facing point locks, do quite a lot of lining and packing and replace damaged rails. Along the lineside we need to install fencing, one or two gates and erect signs. Before day-1 we will need to change some point timbers, possibly most along the main line. There are local fences to install at both BHL and FS on the platform ramps. The platform at BHL has been ready to go since April, but there is no statutory requirement to complete the building at BHL, but from the operations standpoint, and before day-1 we will need to find somewhere from which to sell tickets and to provide some minimal shelter.

This is the broad plan. I intend to prepare a narrative account around the end of September, describing the work that we have completed since the RI's previous visit last year and what we intend to complete by day-0 and day-1 just in case there are some glaring omissions and also to seek a pre-emptive blessing. This will give us some idea of what day-1 will bring and hopefully enable us to make a steady transition to operations. We will also need to describe in some detail just what sorts of operating regimes we intend to employ, though this is strictly outside the remit of development.

On top of all this I have yet to seek the view of the RI concerning the use of open-wagons on the Big Pit branch. What with one thing and another we could be seeing quite a lot of the Railway Inspectorate in the next few months!



The Up Exchange Sidings (UXS) as they currently are, this will require plenty of work to prepare the land. As can be seen there are still some remains of the old track work in situ. The Big Pit branch should run alongside the embankment to the left whilst in the right background can be glimpsed the 3CIG 1399 in the Down Exchange Sidings (DXS). The mainline to Blaenavon runs at a much lower level in between the two.

Traction Report and Rolling Stock



Looking more like a diesel depot than the Top Shed, 37216 and 73128 undergo attention to their body work during early July.

With the previous few issues of Top Line bringing the story of the railway and the Blaenavon extension plans up to date we can now turn our attention to the traction and rolling stock, a vital part of any railway and without which we would not be able to run.

73128

Following the fitting of new batteries 73218 has proved a reliable performer throughout 2009. Unfortunately just when we thought the problems were behind us it promptly went and failed right at the start of the diesel gala with a fault in the wiring. This was subsequently traced to the auxiliary control circuit which had burnt out and damaged a few of the surrounding wires. Investigation found the cause was a burnt out control motor in the switch gear on the traction side. It had burnt out with the cam in the mid position therefore two circuits were energised causing the burnout. Thankfully the work to repair the fault was not major and the 73 was planned to be back in action in time for the Southern Region Gala. Such are the pitfalls of 45 year old diesel locomotives.

The 73 has also undergone attention to the body work and a full repaint of the EW&S livery, so it looks a lot smarter than when it first arrived. As detailed in the diesel gala section it has also been named OVS Bulleid CBE, a name it carried from 1991 to 1997.

37216

37216 remains in the Top Shed undergoing bodywork although it did appear at the diesel gala and was put to use the following weekend as well.

Class 31 D5627

The 31 has seen some use but there are still problems with the air system. These were fixed enough to work at the diesel gala and it has seen operation with the 3CEP 1198 although it still cannot hold the vacuum to operate the coaching stock brakes. It was officially named Steve Organ GM at the diesel gala.

37421

The 37 has seen operation although the vacuum pump is currently inoperable so it can only work with air braked stock, this should be resolved before too long.

1249

Llanwern suffered a broken spring during August and has had to sit out the remainder of the season out of action whilst a new spring was made at Bridgenorth on the Severn Valley.

1387

The Hudswell is still out of action pending completion of the repairs to the exhaust system, a smoke filled cab is not much fun.

Bill Caddick

Bill Caddick has yet to turn a wheel due to problems with the gear box.

Trecatty

The engine is currently being stripped down and is proving to be in a better condition than first thought.

The remainder of the industrial fleet is in storage and is being worked on as time permits. Once the main diesel fleet is up and running then more attention can be given to these.

1118

The thumper unit was in regular service throughout the summer although the power car remains locked out to the public until the internal refurbishment is completed.

Rolling stock

The coaching stock has remained in operation throughout the summer with running repairs and general maintenance being carried out.

The TSO, 4300, has been moved into the top shed for some major attention when it was found that the corridor vestibule floor and vestibule end connection needed urgent repair. The decision has been taken to attend to all the necessary work in one go followed by a full repaint into the "blood and custard" livery of British Rail. This marks a complete change for the railway in terms of colour scheme and once completed the RMB and BSK and SK will receive a similar make over to provide a fresh "new" train hopefully for the 2010 opening.

On the wagon front the grampus wagons have received temporary new floors and will be having their fitness to run exams prior to their use on spoil trains from BHL.

Harry



Sitting quietly at the entrance to the main yard for several years has been a little blue 0-4-0 saddle tank which people seem to pass almost without notice, busy in their tasks or heading for the bigger working engines. However this little engine deserves a second look as it is quite famous and after a gap of several years restoration has recommenced.

The locomotive is "Harry", an Andrew Barclay 0-4-OST built in 1924 (works number 1823) and it gained fame when it became one of the last working industrial steam locomotives in the

United Kingdom, working at Crossley's scrap yard, Shipley, into the 1980s. With the introduction of high capacity air braked wagons, which required an air braked locomotive for shunting, "Harry" was retired from service in 1984 and after visits to the now closed Peak Rail site at Buxton and the Middleton Railway, Leeds, arrived at the Pontypool and Blaenavon Railway in 1992.

Work on Harry has seen the locomotive lifted, its wheels re-turned to profile, and new bearings for the axle boxes. Extra work has also been undertaken on the main springs, with many new parts made. Attention has now turned to the boiler, although it is an unknown quantity, and may require extensive work. With this in mind, the identical boiler from Tom Parry (works number 2015/35) has been despatched to Filer & Son, on the Isle of Wight. The plan is to make a new boiler for Harry, using Tom Parry's boiler as a template. Explained Ian Smith, owner, "Tom Parry was already stripped down, so it made sense to send this boiler first, and exchange boilers upon its return". Filer & Son are well known Isle of Wight engineers, and this is their first standard gauge boiler.

Once Harry is restored, attention will turn to Tom Parry. The locomotive is heavily stripped down, but is surprisingly complete, with all fittings, etc. Both Harry & Tom Parry are possible candidates for the Big Pit branch service, which is due to commence in 2011.

No. 19



During the Little Engines weekend No.19 heads towards the Whistle Inn.

No. 19 has proven to be a real star performer working faultlessly throughout the year in all conditions and proving more than capable of the task in hand. Even with 3 coaches on damp rails she still sails up the hill.

Despite being worked hard it has yet to miss a booked day's service although it did come close when planned maintenance work over ran and we had to put the Thumper unit out one Saturday. However with the work completed during the day, No. 19 was rolled out, coupled up to the Thumper and worked the last two trains in tandem, which, as far as we know, is a preservation first.

37 421



In Top Line 106 and the article on 37216 I wrote about the class 37s and mentioned the sub class 37/4 which were introduced in the mid 1980s for passenger work in Scotland and Wales working with electrically heated coaching stock. Well now we have own member of the class, 37421, which arrived at Furnace Sidings on July the 1st. Unlike 216 it was built for English Electric under licence at the Robert Stephenson and Hawthorne works in Darlington and delivered new to British Rail in

February 1965 as D6967 and originally allocated to the Eastern region of British Rail at Darnall and then Wath before a move to Stratford depot in East London in 1967. There it remained until 1978 (by now as 37267) when it was allocated to Laira depot Plymouth although this was only a brief stay as it was transferred to Landore depot, Swansea, at the start of 1980. With its steam heat boiler it became a regular fixture on passenger services to West Wales as well as working services from Cardiff and Bristol.

In 1985 it was selected for the 37/4 conversion program and was transferred to Eastfield Depot, Glasgow in March of that year. As 37267 it saw some action on the West Highland Lines to Oban, Fort William and Mallaig before entering Crewe works in June for the rebuild, conversion to eth (electric train heating) and renumbering to 37421. Upon completion of the work the locomotive was transferred to Inverness depot for working the far north lines to Kyle of Lochalsh, Wick and Thurso but not before it made its first trip on the North Wales Coast line working the Crewe test train to Llandudno, a portent of things to come.

From then on it became a regular on the far north services, which is where I first made my acquaintance with it, although it did occasionally venture “across the top” on services to Aberdeen. With the replacement of the loco hauled services by Sprinters at the end of the 1980's, 421 was transferred in 1990 first to Eastfield and then to the Railfreight petroleum sector based out of Immingham depot on Humberside where it was named "Strombidae" (common name True Conchs) which is the taxonomic name for medium to large size sea snails. Being allocated to a freight sector did not however curtail its passenger work as there was still plenty to go round and 421 could be found working summer services to Aberystwyth and Pwllheli, rush hour services in the North West from Manchester to Blackpool and Southport and in 1991 the final Aberystwyth—Euston Cambrian Coast express.

A transfer to Crewe in 1993 saw a renaming to “The Kingsman” (after the Kings Regiment and complete with regimental crests) and confirmation of its passenger credentials by a move to the Regional Railways North West pool. As the passenger train diagrams changed 421 was still there at the front line working services to Southport, Blackpool, Liverpool, Holyhead, Crewe, Birmingham and even fitting in a the occasional trip to Weymouth. I became well acquainted with 421 during its time on the

North Wales Coast services and enjoyed many spirited runs from it and its colleagues between Birmingham and Holyhead. In May 1999 421 lost an equalising beam from a bogie whilst crossing the Britannia bridge on a North Wales Coast service, which resulted in the whole of the Crewe allocation of 37/4s been stopped for examination. As a consequence any class 37 available was pressed into service to cover the trains, one of the first been our very own 37216.

In June 2000 421 pitched up at Cardiff and enjoyed a 3 month spell on the Rhymney services before a return to the North West in August. Following the demise of the loco hauled trains on the North Wales Coast 421 was transferred back north to Scotland although this time to Motherwell depot primarily to work the sleeper services to Fort William. In 2002 however 421 was sent back south to provide motive power for an additional Wolverhampton – Aberystwyth service on the 22nd July and its return to Birmingham two weeks later in conjunction with a conference being held at the resort. This was the first loco hauled service train out of Aberystwyth for 10 years and needless to say I and many others had the day off to enjoy the ride (and the superb sound effects up Talerddig bank).

421 then went south to Cardiff for a two month stint on the Rhymney and Fishguard services before heading back north again to take up its duties on the sleeper services , its final working being the 19:50 Fort William—Edinburgh on the 4th November 2004. Withdrawn in 2007 the locomotive was purchased in December 2008 and moved to the yard of Allelys hauliers at Studley in March of this year where it has undergone remedial work to get it operational. Final work is to be completed at the PBR, although with the owner's attention being directed primarily at 37023 (which will arrive in due course) the body work will not be attended to immediately. When it is, a repaint away from the current EWS red and gold is planned.

The addition of 421 strengthens our fleet, gives us plenty of capacity for the future and will be a real attraction, especially paired up with 216 or 023. Strange as it may seem the PBR now has the largest fleet of 37s in Wales, not something I ever expected to be able to say.



Above—37421 stands at Aberystwyth on the 5th August 2002 with 1Z36, the 12:10 Aberystwyth—Birmingham additional service. Alistair Grieve

The Shark



The week before the 37 arrived we had another arrival, this time for our wagon fleet, in the form of a shark brakevan number DS62863. Unlike normal brakevans these are equipped with ploughs which can be lowered on demand and are used to spread freshly laid ballast over the tracks, as such it's going to see a lot of use with the dogfish as we work on the extension and the Big Pit branch.

Whilst Sharks can still be seen today on the national network (albeit in ever decreasing numbers) ours is somewhat larger and

has the ploughs between, rather than outside of the axles. This is because it is of a Southern region build, from a South East Chatham Railway design and predates the BR ones by some considerable margin. The restoration was almost completed before it arrived and when complete this brakevan is going to be a very useful asset to the railway and as it is fully fitted it could also see service for brake van rides.

RUNNING LINE NEWS. Andy May



Above—track work on the running line takes place come rain or shine, the season it's been mainly rain.

The running season is well under way again and quite a lot has been achieved in the maintenance of our main running line.

As reported in previous issues of Top Line, we have had considerable help from Greenlight Rail and Training, however this help has dried up over the last few weeks due to the reduction in practical training courses. In the meantime our own permanent way department, in some very appalling conditions (see left), has been hard at work carrying out the essential repairs required. This entailed the replacement of really bad rotten sleepers at the top end of the line and packing of the worst dipped rail joints. There are still a lot to be done but the worst of the problems have been sorted. And a better ride on the train should be felt by our passengers.

Features and articles wanted

I'm always on the look out for contributions , either articles or pictures so if you wish to contribute please email me at TOPLINE@PBrlly.co.uk or write c/o the Railway Shop. If you just have an idea let me know and we can work something out.



Teddy Bears Picnic

After the excellent start to the season it was good to see that the passenger figures at the Teddy Bears Picnic kept up the trend. The Saturday and Sunday figures were better than 2008 and it was only the poor weather on the Monday that meant we only matched 2008 figures rather than exceeded them.

Another superb costume from Brigette Thomas for the teddy bear, at least they were warm on the Monday if no one else was. It may be a simple event to put on but the responses from the children and adults always make it a worthwhile weekend.



Cowboys 'n' Engines

It was a beautiful late May bank holiday weekend in the hills overlooking Iron Mountain City. The traders at the Deadwood Gulch depot had a busy time and everything was going smoothly.

Suddenly 2 large bangs rang out, the Rusty Hill Gang were up to their old tricks of holding up the trains again. They boarded the train planning to make their escape at Rosie's Saloon with the gold, but they'd reckoned without Sheriff Knock.

After a brief gun fight he caught the miscreants and threw them in the jail (the guards compartment). Alas they escaped at Deadwood Gulch and the whole sorry tale started all over again (on the hour, every hour).



Little Engines Weekend



Whilst we have enjoyed some very hot weather this summer we have also had our fair share of damp and grey as well (well it wouldn't be Blaenavon if we didn't). Unfortunately one of those days coincided with the first day of our little engines weekend and so it was rather a quiet day.

The Sunday was much better and consequently we had a lot more people although the promised masses from a sponsored walk round the garn lakes never materialised as it had been cancelled the night before and no one told us. As we had got a lot of extra stock in the tea room and put three coaches on the train to handle the crowds we were not impressed. Needless to say the organisers were informed of our displeasure!

We have taken away lessons from the weekend and already have ideas for 2010.



Top—Davinia (from Devonport) and Princess discuss the rather damp weather at Furnace Sidings.

Middle— Lennie (from Llanwern) assists Davinia up the hill.

Bottom—On Sunday Davinia had to leave early leaving number 19 to handle the last two trains of the day. Here in the best sunshine of the weekend Number 19 makes a vigorous departure from Furnace Sidings.



Garn Lakes Day



Unlike the past 3 years the sun shone and the rain stayed away for the annual Garn Lakes Country Fayre on June 28th. Held around the lower Garn lakes it's always a popular event with plenty of stalls and activities highlighting the countryside and local crafts and traditions as well as dog shows, kayaking, archery, face painting etc. There's plenty to enjoy and as an added attraction there's us running alongside the lake and this year with steam too.



We proved to be a very popular attraction with the trains full as people paid us a visit and enjoyed the ride. The tea room and on train buffet both did a roaring trade and the Real Dairy Ice Cream cart proved as always on days like this to very popular, a quick trip having to be made back to base for more supplies at one stage.

As the day showed what a difference the sun makes.



Diesel Gala



The July 25/26 Gala promised to be our biggest ever with 3 mainline diesels in operation, 2 rakes of stock and on the Sunday 2 loco namings. As usual things didn't quite go to plan due to 73128 failing early on the Saturday with an electrical fire which put it out of action for the weekend.

It could have spoilt the whole event but instead it only spurred the volunteers on to greater things. First off they converted the 3CEP 1198 to loco hauled operation (as opposed to push pull) and got it working with 37421. Then they turned their attention to the class 31 and got that working enough to operate in partnership with 37216 much to the surprise and pleasure of the passengers.

Whilst the gala timetable may have been thrown out the window and things were not as advertised the fact that we kept things running and kept everyone informed gained us a lot of praise.

Throughout all this 37216 kept on running. It may not look the best at the moment but mechanically it's sound and soon will have a paint job to match.

We had a lot of positive feedback from the passengers and next years promises to be even better.



On Sunday we had two naming ceremonies to carry out (so of course it rained all day), with 73128 and the 31 D5627 involved. The 73 was re-dedicated “OVS Bulleid CBE”, a name it carried from 1991–1997, by John Fry, president of the Bulleid Society. OVS Bulleid was Chief Mechanical Engineer of the Southern Railway from 1937–1949.

Although the 73 may have failed, it still looked the part with a mostly complete paint job looking far better than the weather-worn one it has carried for the past year. This was mainly due to Roger Radcliffe from Alycidon Engineering who worked throughout Friday and Saturday nights to get it ready in time. An indication of the work everyone put in to get the gala together and keep it running.

D5627 finally had its official naming of Steve Organ GM by Steve himself. The name was a thank you from loco owner Les Emry to Steve for all the hard work he had put in getting the workshops and buildings built at the Chasewater Light Railway where the 31 was previously based.

Here's to 2010 and Blaenavon, more diesels, more miles, more gradients and bags more fun.

Middle—Les Emry, John Fry and Alex Hinshelwood.



1960s Weekend and Beer Festival



Our second 1960s weekend was combined with the beer festival to provide more attractions and on the Saturday the class 31 was making its public debut sharing trains with No. 19. Sadly things didn't go to plan as a fault with the air system saw the 31 taken out of service in the evening and it sat out Sunday on shed (which was very frustrating as it was such a sunny day).



Whilst the beer tent was fairly quiet during the day, the evening 1960s disco (courtesy of Russell Lark) was very popular with many of the volunteers taking the chance to relax and have a good time. To spare their blushes no dancing pictures are included. Another good sign was the increasing number of people who came up from Blaenavon and Brynmawr to enjoy the fun, some had been before, for others their first time.



On the Sunday 104 became a little piece of history as it was the first locomotive to cross the newly reopened bridge 13 (under the watchful eye of the p/way crew). And a visitor from the disco popped in to the tea room to say it was "their best night out in years". Already people are asking when the next one is. Party on!

Ivor the Engine



Ivor the Engine was back again over the weekend of the 15/16th August for his 3rd annual visit and what a great time was had by all. Unlike the washout of 2008 the weather was much drier and kinder (although there was some rain around on Saturday) and we saw over 850 passengers through the gates.

The Green Meadow Community Farm from Cwmbran were back again with Bluebell the Donkey and the ever popular petting zoo. On the train was Mrs Porty who was busy reading stories and, on the Sunday only because of the rain on Saturday, we had face painters and a very popular bouncy castle at Furnace Sidings.

Visiting figures were no doubt helped by an appearance on the BBC Wales Weather on Friday night when Derek Brockway did the weather live from the railway (and had a footplate ride in to the bargain). Trains themselves were top and tailed with Ivor and No. 19 producing a stirring site storming the hill (see back page), the first time this had been done at the PBR. Another excellent weekend and plenty of very positive feedback, many people staying all day to enjoy the fun.



Above—Derek Brockway does the BBC weather from the PBR. Shakira Mahabir



Transport rally



August Bank Holiday was our ever popular transport rally and despite the dull and damp weather it could not keep the people away, although figures were down on the previous year.

There were plenty of exhibits as usual although some remained away due to the weather, slow open topped cars are not meant for the wet. But as is the norm quite a few others appeared on the day to make up the numbers.

On the Monday we had had hired the double decker PD2 for the day and that proved popular as it did the circuit from the railway around town via Big Pit, The Iron Works and the Heritage Centre.

The tea room and buffet were very busy keeping everyone fed and warm and again another successful PBR event.





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Eastern Valley Memories 1—an occasional series

The below feature came from Hugh Lewis who now lives in Purley on Thames and was inspired to write this after finding a copy of Top Line Vol 7, No. 4 (Winter 1986) in his late father's collection. This contained a feature on the 'The Twenty Golden Mile Railway' running up the Swansea Valley via Pontardawe, eventually reaching Brecon, written by his father.

This is written from his memories of Saturdays spent in the yards and signal boxes of the Eastern Valley. He used to ride often on the locos in the Pontnewynydd yards and on one occasion shunted a train of wagons, while the Driver & Fireman sat on the bank on a sunny afternoon.

I thought I'd use this to start an occasional series of articles on the Eastern Valley so if anyone has memories of the railways or just life in the Eastern Valleys and they wish to share them then they could be featured here.

The Pontnewynydd Brake Vans. Hugh Lewis

As a pupil at West Mon School from 1945 to 1952 I used to travel daily from Pontnewynydd to Blaendare Road Halt. During this time I became interested in the Railway and spent many Saturday afternoons in Pontnewynydd Junction Signal Box and on the footplate of the pannier tanks, which shunted Pontnewynydd & Cwmffrwdroer Yards.

Because of the yard layout, the loco in Pontnewynydd Yard faced bunker up the valley to give the driver better visibility of the shunters, while the Cwmffrwdroer loco faced smokebox up the valley. The Cwmffrwdroer loco handled the traffic for Tirpentwys Colliery and the Graigddu Brickworks on the Cwmnantddu Branch. This latter Branch used to serve the Blaenserchan Colliery until it was severed by a landslide, I believe just before World War 2.

Both branches were single lines, controlled by Branches Fork Signal Box with a single line staff being issued for each branch. The wooden staff carried an inscribed brass plate for the branch and the end of the staff carried a key, which unlocked the catch point at the end of the branch, where it entered the Colliery or Brickworks. Both branches were very steep inclines, about 1 in 20 and all movements were made with the loco propelling the vehicles up the branches in case of a breakaway. Shunting Dummies were provided at each yard but a brake van was used up the branches or for moves between the two yards. The brake van was used to provide weather protection for the Shunters and because the van was coupled next to the loco for the propelling movements the special Pontnewynydd Vans were built with a low pitched roof to give the Driver good visibility to the end of the train. A Shunter would normally ride in the leading wagon, where he could be seen by the Driver should it be necessary to give a stop signal if there was an obstruction on the line.

The vans were fitted with footboards and handrails for the shunters to travel short distances for shunting moves and inside were fitted with lateral bench seats and a small stove. They were built with a veranda at each end, again with bench seats. They were 12 tons tare and built to diagram AA8. The vans were numbered 17590191194195.

Some notes on the Internet state that they were 'cut down to clear low bridges' but this is incorrect as the Class C pannier tanks and occasional goods van moved up the branches were built to standard loading gauge. Only two vans were required but the two original vans were replaced by two new vans I believe, around about 1948, hence the 4 numbers.



Partially built model of Pontnewynydd Brake van as built by Hugh showing the unusual shape. Hugh Lewis.

The Cwmffrwdoer van was used on the two branches while the Pontnewynydd van was used for transfers to the upper yard and on trips to shunt Pontypool Crane Street goods yard. Occasionally this van would be used on freight moves to Blaenavon Low Level Station. On these moves the van would be marshalled at the end of the train.

When required the upper yard pilot would run down to the lower yard and the two locos would haul a longer than usual load of empty wagons to the upper yard. This would provide the unusual sight of the two locos coupled bunker to bunker working quite hard, as the layout outside Pontnewynydd Junction Box was the lowest point between the two yards.

The normal load working up to Tirpentwys Colliery was 14 empty wagons but on one occasion I recall that 16 wagons plus van were being propelled up the branch and on dry rails the loco came to a stand without slipping, with the safety valve blowing. One of the Shunters walked forward to the colliery with the single line staff to unlock the catch point, so that the colliery loco could drop down the branch to provide assistance.

The normal load up the other branch to the brick works would be 4 or 5 wagons and on the last return trip of the afternoon it was common practice for several of the brick works staff to hitch a ride on the van to return to Cwmffrwdoer. There was no surfaced road running up to the Brick Works.

I recall that there was a pub part way up the branch accessed only by a footpath and on a Sunday, when pubs were closed in Wales, a lookout was provided at the gate of the garden to look out for strangers, while a bar service was discreetly provided.

None of the books that I have shows a photograph of one of the Pontnewynydd Vans, but D.S.M Barrie's History of S Wales Railways, Volume 12, on page 12A, shows the result of a runaway on the Cwmnantddu Branch in 1955. One of the vans can be seen next to the loco under a wagon. This may well have been the last trip for this van. It should be remembered that in the 1950's most mineral trains did not have a continuous brake fitted and wagons had to have their hand brakes pinned down by Shunters or Guards before commencing their descent of the Valley Lines. It was up to the Driver to decide when enough brakes had been pinned down for him to descend safely. Sometimes they got it wrong with disastrous results.

The Steam Loco Drivers of the South Wales valleys were a special breed and 50 years on, today's Drivers with fully fitted air braked trains operate in a different world.



The Volunteers

As always, where would we be without the volunteers who turn up come rain and shine. They man the buffet, the tea room, the shop, staff the trains, drive the locomotives, ensure the events run smoothly, maintain the locomotives, rolling stock, track and buildings, even dressing up when the occasion calls for it. And all with their time given freely and getting nothing more than a constant supply of tea and coffee and a sense of achievement in a job well done in return.





Directory

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Left—sometimes people ask how we get the locomotives to and from the railway, well this lovely shot Of 37421 arriving by Thomas Edwards should answer that.

There are several specialist firms around that can do the job, some only handle the smaller stuff but the others like here, deal with the big toys. Just count those wheels.

Back Cover— It's not quite Shap or Beattock but Ivor the Engine and No. 19 still manage to put on quite a show as they storm up the hill to the Whistle Inn, and with the wonders of Photoshop it almost looks sunny.

Welcome New Members

William O'Keefe	Canton	Chris Newbury	Hendon
Alfred Morgan	Blaenavon	Matthew Callaghan	Newport
Andrew Fayers	Pontnewynydd	Johanna Ekorness	Canton
Shakira Mahabir	Maesycwmmmer	Robert Birch	Redhill
Rhys Morgan	Ebbw Vale	Phillip Howell	Abertillery
Kevin Richards	Bettws	Denise Richards	Bettws
Simon Davies	Abergavenny	Jean Arnold	Pontyclun
Peter Dunning	Llanrumney	Michael Davies	Abertillery
Edmund Cave	Ebbw Vale	Anthony Cave	Ebbw Vale

Membership

Membership of the Pontypool and Blaenavon Railway Company costs £12 per year for adults and £6 per year for associate members (second member at same address) at the time of writing. Junior members (under 18) become members of the supporting Pontypool and Blaenavon Railway Society.

Each member receives a copy of our regular magazine "Top Line" (published three times a year) and "Bottom Line" (our bi-monthly news-sheet) and full Company members receive six free rides on the passenger service. Membership is essential if you are interested in becoming a volunteer on the Railway as this gives you full insurance cover in case of any accidents. We tend to ignore train rides made by regular working volunteers - especially if they buy tea on the train!



The Railway is managed and operated exclusively by volunteers who are all members of either the Railway Company or Railway Society

Volunteers on the Railway are split broadly into the following categories:

- Operations
- Permanent Way
- Locomotive Department
- Carriage & Wagon Department.
- Civil Engineering Department

For more details ask anyone of the volunteers or write to the address at the front of the magazine. All are welcome and we can no doubt find a job for you to do if you wish to become a working member.

Parting Shot

