

TOP LINE



Back To
Blaenavon



REOPENING SPECIAL

The Magazine of the Pontypool and Blaenavon Railway

Number 114

Summer 2010

£2.00

The Railway is now open to Blaenavon High Level, the standard timetable applies for most occasions although it may change for special events. Please check the website for details.

1Standard Timetable For 2010 —Different Timetables May Apply at Special Events								
Blaenavon High Level		11:00	12:00	13:00	14:00	15:00	16:00	17:00
Furnace Sidings a.		11:10	12:10	13:10	14:10	15:10	16:10	17:10
Furnace Sidings d.		11:15	12:15	13:15	14:15	15:15	16:15	
Whistle Inn a.		11:18	12:18	13:18	14:18	15:18	16:18	
Whistle Inn d.		11:22	12:22	13:22	14:22	15:22	16:22	
Furnace Sidings a.		11:25	12:25	13:25	14:25	15:25	16:25	
Furnace Sidings d.	10:40	11:40	12:40	13:40	14:40	15:40	16:40	
Blaenavon High Level	10:50	11:50	12:50	13:50	14:50	15:50	16:50	

Calendar of Events 2010																															
	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							2	3	4	5	CLOSED FOR ENGINEERING WORK																				
MAY	1	2	3	CLOSED FOR ENGINEERING WORK											15	16	CLOSED FOR TRAINING										29	30	31		
JUN				1	2	3		5	6						12	13						19	20						26	27	
JUL	3	4						10	11						17	18						24	25					31			
AUG		1		3	4	5		7	8		10	11	12		14	15		17	18	19		21	22		24	25	26		28	29	30
SEP	4	5						11	12						18	19						25	26								
OCT								9	10																			30	31		
NOV																													28		
DEC	4	5						11	12						18	19															
	Steam Days												Diesel Days												DEMU Days						

April 4/5	Easter Bunnies	July 3/4	Model Railway Show	Sept 25/26	Southern Region With Altitude
May 2/3	Teddy Bears Picnic	July 10/11	1940s Weekend and Beer Festival	October 9/10	Class 37 50th Anniversary
May 15/16	Cowboys 'n' Engines	July 17/18	Diesel Gala	October 30/31	Ghost Train
May 29/30/31	Official Opening Blaenavon High Level	August 14/15	Ivor the Engine	November 28	Steam Santa Specials
June 12/13	Little Engines Weekend	August 29/30	Transport Rally and 1960s Weekend	December Dates	Steam Santa Specials
June 26	World Heritage Day	Sept 4/5	Charities Weekend		
June 27	Garn Lakes day	Sept 18/19	Autumn Gala		

Sample Fares

Day Rover —£4.50 Adult £2.25—Children (aged 3 to 16)

£12.00—Family Ticket (2 adults + 3 children)

Different Prices May Apply at Special Events

TOP LINE—THE MAGAZINE OF THE PONTYPOOL AND BLAENAVON RAILWAY

NUMBER 114 Summer 2010

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EDITORIAL

We've done it, we've done it, we've done it! Blaenavon High Level and the extension are now open for business. And I'll stop before I get too carried away, but in case you missed it—WE'VE DONE IT! On May the 29th the Blaenavon extension opened for business, after all the hard work, all the struggles, all the frayed nerves, the countless tea and biscuits the moment finally came and what a moment. The weather may have been damp but the spirits weren't and the smiles on the volunteers faces made it clear just what an achievement this was.

Other railways may get the head lines and all the news pages with details of their ongoing work but make no doubt about it, this is an achievement that ranks alongside them. Over 2 years hard work and 27 years in the making this was a weekend worth waiting for and what a weekend. The trains were packed with passengers, the volunteers were full of smiles and as for the steam locomotives, what can I say but superb. The sight and sound of 71515 and No.19 blasting up hill was one not to be missed. After years of the extension being open to engineering trains, photo charters and members specials only it's now open every weekend we run, to everyone.

We owe a huge debt of gratitude to everyone who has worked on the railway over the years including those who sadly are no longer able to see what we've accomplished. They would have been proud of what we have achieved. The extension has brought in a lot of people and if that's not enough news that City of Truro is due to attend in September has really caught the imagination of the public. Many already putting that weekend in their diaries, this looks like it's going to be our year at long last.

In a change to the normal layout of Top Line I've put the reopening feature at the start as I think it deserves top billing, wouldn't you agree?

Regards Alistair Grieve

Front Cover . A sight for sore eyes as 71515 gently simmers in the platform at Blaenavon High Level on Sunday the 30th May during the reopening weekend.

Reopening Weekend

Well it may have been two months later than planned but after 27 years what's another 2 months? On a rather wet and damp Saturday the 29th May 2010 No.19 rolled into the platform at Blaenavon High Level Station with the 10:40am departure from Furnace Sidings and so arrived the first scheduled passenger train since 1941. With the Railway Inspector having given preliminary approval on the 17th May pending completion of necessary paper work it was all hands to the pump to get things ready but with everyone working flat out (fencing and painting completed the previous evening) everything went as planned and the weekend went without a hitch.

Whilst No.19, driven by long standing member Peter Drummond, brought the first train in, the honour of driving the first train out with 71515 was given to founding member Mark Vrettos, whose letter to the Newport Argus in 1979 set the whole thing off. It may have been a long wait but it was definitely worth it and whilst Saturday may have been dull and damp Sunday and Monday were anything but and by the end of the weekend we had carried over 1100 people. What a start to our new railway!

To see what those passengers actually thought of the railway I can do no better than the feedback provided here by Warwick Davis who spent all three days on the train selling raffle tickets.

"A big hearty Thank You to all those who have made the extension possible through many hours of hard work, sweat, blood and I expect a few curses. I know some of those involved but not all and there would be so many to name. I say thank you on behalf of members but most of all on behalf of the public who turned up over the three day opening event.

The Public - yes. Over the days 29/30/31 of May I probably had more contact with the travelling public while selling raffle tickets than most. Children, parents, grandparents - pre-school to well past retirement and enthusiasts wanted to talk about the railway. What is next? What is long term? How about Pontypool and so on. The interest was staggering. Thank goodness for cups of tea to stop my throat and mouth becoming a Sahara desert. Passengers had come from Reading, Yorkshire, Truro, Cardiff and Swansea - besides locals who had never been before; many saying they would be back. People who had been years before could not believe it was the same place.

Words used included wonderful, brilliant, fantastic, unbelievable, what a difference; will be back, feels like a proper journey now, great scenery; hark at the engine noise, listen to the engine; look forward to next stage. Also talk of the future events.

I began asking what had brought them out over the three days. Some I recognised turning up each day. the comments were: been some where else and called by; driving by and saw the smoke; in Blaenavon Town and heard the sound, saw the train and came for a ride. The use of steam had brought others; locals on a day out and others up from the Valleys. Some mentioned the ITV news and others had seen Fishlock's programme (see *page 13—Alistair*). One couple only lived in the cottages overlooking the railway and had never been before. Many things helped to make the weekend a success and even the Saturday rain did not deter people.

I am sure the weekend can only propel us forward with more heart and encouragement. Take a well earned pat on the back as it has taken a long time to get this far and the team work can keep us in good stead for the future. Finally I was even asked about Santa. Word and advertising is certainly promoting **Pontypool and Blaenavon Railway**". Warwick Davis



Above—the ticket says it all, no longer are we confined to the Furnace Sidings to Whistle Inn section, now we have reached Blaenavon. It's been a long slog but we've done it.

Top—It maybe a dull and damp start to the day but history is made as No.19 rolls into the platform at Blaenavon High Level with the 10:40 from Furnace Sidings, the first scheduled passenger service since 1941.

Middle—To commemorate the new service Mary Mahabir (owner of 71515) throws some champagne over the buffers of 71515.

Bottom—Things did get a bit better in the afternoon as the rain eased off and here passengers inspect 71515 having arrived from Furnace Sidings.

As can be seen here, there is currently no run round loop at BHL so steam services will need to be top and tailed. Normally this will be with the 08 (see page 16) and 71515 but for the reopening weekend it was No.19 and 71515 that did the honours.





Above—71515 and No.19 stand at Blaenavon High Level on Sunday 30th May with an afternoon train.

Below—Sunday afternoon and 71515 chugs along the cutting at Forgeside





Above—Also on Sunday as 71515 storms up the hill to the rail over rail bridge and the fearsome 1 in 28 grade.

This spot from the rail over rail bridge is a great place to watch the trains as they climb uphill.

Below—Judging by the size of the grin Phil Williams is having a good time as No.19 heads down hill to BHL.





Above—During filming for ITV Wales News on the Friday 71515 comes out from under the rail over rail bridge.
Below—Watched by spectators on the Big Pit access road the train rolls down hill past the exchange sidings.





Above—an “Austerity” at speed as 71515 races towards the Whistle Inn on Monday afternoon.

Below—a much more sedate picture as the train approaches the Whistle Inn on Monday







It's been a long hard struggle but the finished extension has definitely been worth the effort. The sight and sound of 71515 and No.19 as they attacked the hill was stunning but to see the packed trains and the smiling faces on the passengers and volunteers really made it something special.

Pictures by A. Grieve and Andy Knock. Railway by everyone.

Easter Bunnies



With the railway shut for the rest of April to concentrate on the final track work for the Blaenavon extension the Easter Bunnies were held for all 4 days of the Easter weekend. Following the precedent set by the Ghost train the brake area of the BSK was decorated, although this time as a much more cheerful Easter Bunny Warren. There were games, quizzes and even food tasting—rabbit pooh anyone?



On the Sunday the Festival Park Owl Sanctuary in Ebbw Vale brought some of their birds over for the day and they proved a very popular attraction. The little fellow below seemed less than enamoured with the whole thing and spent most of the day growling at everyone!





On the Friday the weather was poor in the extreme with at one stage horizontal driving snow. The weather improved on the Saturday (although it did rain quite heavily at one stage) but the day was brightened by a film crew from ITV Wales filming for an episode of Fishlock's Wales (shown April 26). On the left Trevor can be seen interviewing Traffic Manager Alex Hinshelwood (the one with the cap).



At the end of the day the train was taken to Blaenavon High level to round off the days filming, thankfully by this time the rain had stopped.

With sunnier and drier weather on the Sunday and Monday we had plenty of passengers and at the end of the weekend almost 700 people had travelled with us. A great start to the season.





May Bank Holiday

The early May Bank Holiday weekend is traditionally the time we hold our Teddy Bears Picnic and whilst that was again the case on the Sunday and Monday the Saturday was also a hive of activity. On the previous Wednesday the Austerity finally arrived from the Flour Mill and on the Thursday Class 08 D4157 (see p16) arrived from the Gloucestershire and Warwickshire Railway so both were being put through their paces.



The Austerity underwent several successful light engine test runs to BHL but when it was put under load a fault was found resulting in it being taken out of traffic immediately (see steam news p25). The 08 on the other hand had a more successful day working the passenger trains without a problem.



On the Sunday and Monday the Teddy Bears Picnic went ahead as planned with No.19 as motive power, whilst the BSK was now a sheltered woodland glade full of teddies. No doubt buoyed up by Fishlock's Wales going out the week before, the passenger figures were very good with over 539 people carried. This did also mean an equivalent number of picnic bags and jam sandwiches had to be made up!

Cowboys 'n' Engines

After the success of our first two events, and the track record of our previous Cowboys 'n' Engines weekends we had high hopes for this year. However those hopes were somewhat misplaced as it turned out to be rather a quiet weekend with just over a 100 passengers carried over the two days.

Despite this the volunteers who weren't involved working on the line still managed to have a good time, with Bernard Moreton And Ray Simons both entering into the spirit of things. On the positive side the weekend marked the first time 71515 was in action and it worked the service faultlessly. As can be seen from the faces of Jon Goss and Phil Williams they were enjoying them selves being part of the first crew to man 71515.

Whilst the service trains were worked in our normal format of coaches being propelled to the Whistle Inn, a test run was undertaken Sunday evening in the new format, top and tail with D4157. With 3 coaches and the 08 in tow 71515 produced a stunning display as it pounded up the hill from Blaenavon to the Whistle Inn. The weekend may have been quiet, the finale wasn't!





With no run round loop initially installed at Blaenavon High Level all passenger trains (unless multiple unit or push pull) will need to be operated in a top and tail fashion with a locomotive at either end. Obviously engines like the Austerity 71515 cannot be expected to pull something as large as the class 37s and a rake of coaches up the hill week in and week out. Also, apart from 104 our industrial diesel fleet is not really up to the task either, and even the indestructible 104 is getting tired. So we have hired in an ex British Railways class 08 0-6-0 shunter D4157 (08927) from the Gloucester and Warwickshire Railway for the season.

The class 08 may not be the most glamorous of locomotives but if ever a class of engine can be described as work horses then they most definitely fit the bill. British Railways commenced building of the class in 1952 and by the time the last one rolled out the workshops in 1962 there were, with variations including classes 09 and 10 some 1,193 of them in total. They could be found all over the network and even today there are still quite a few in mainline as well as industrial service. The design actually dates back to the mid 1930s with experiments by the various rail companies to produce a diesel shunter. After various trials with different engines and drive mechanisms, it was the English Electric 350HP 6K diesel engine and diesel electric traction that won the day and was retained for the 08.

D4157 has a small place in history as it was the last one ever built (although not the last one numerically) when it was completed at Horwich works in December 1962. It had a very long career on the rail network and was not withdrawn until 2004 when it was placed in store before being sold into preservation in 2007. The class 08 is not new to Blaenavon as the NCB regularly used to hire them from British Rail to cover for their own shunters and D3255 spent several weeks onsite, after withdrawal in 1973, before moving to Bargoed colliery. Also from 1972–75 two of the LMS equivalent, the class 11, numbers 12122 and 12099 were engaged in working trains from the Black Lion Disposal Point at Waunavon to Furnace Sidings, so it's not an unfamiliar sight and won't be again.



Oakfield B&B



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DEVELOPMENT NEWS Alistair Grieve/John Down

It seems as though the past few issues of Top Line have contained page after page of development news and that it seemed to be a never ending story as we worked to open the extension to Blaenavon High Level. Well, thankfully the majority of work has now been completed and at last we're running trains to BHL. Of course we must bring the story up to date and then there'll be the development of the Big Pit Branch to discuss, but that, as they say, is another story.

Trackwork

The main focus of work has been on the trackwork and associated lineside equipment. Whilst the funding issues discussed in TL113 had caused work to slow down it was the severe weather at the start of the year that really stopped our progress. After all it's very difficult to carry out work when you can not actually get to site due to the snow and then if you do get there your worksite is buried under several feet of the stuff. In order to regain time contractors were brought in to assist in the final stages. We had always planned this, but the extent to which they were employed was rather greater than first envisaged



The rails in the middle have brightly shining ends, showing that grinding has been in progress. The difference in level on the nearest line of rails shows how little wear there is on the 'new' rail when compared with our original rail. Special staggered fishplates have since been fitted to smooth out the difference .

As briefly mention in TL 114 the first contract was let to contractors KG Price of Cardiff in late December to replace burnt rails, and then adjust the rails to form correctly positioned and gapped rail ends. It had been planned to let this contract somewhat earlier, but delays in securing funding frustrated our plans. Bad weather ensured this work didn't start for another month.

Burnt rails may sound dramatic but it harks back to the days when the line had been used to carry coal, and was classified as a 'mineral line'. This permitted relaxed standards to apply to track laying. In particular when it was necessary to cut a 60ft length of rail to something shorter, it was permissible to burn off the rail end using oxy-acetylene.

However, since the Hither Green rail accident in November 1967 when 49 people were killed as the result of a broken rail end, the use of oxy-acetylene for cutting has been absolutely forbidden on passenger lines. Rail-ends must now be sawn with saws, or cut with cutting discs. Although we knew there were a few 'burnt' rail ends, as the sleeper replacement work approached completion it was clear that the total would be large, and no less than 43 rails had burnt ends. Fortunately an excess of rails had been ordered for the Big Pit branch when steel prices were low, so the financial impact was not perhaps what it might have been.



In early January a second contract was let to the same contractor to replace the timbers and replace points (known in the trade as 'switch & crossing (S&C)) south of Furnace Sidings. In particular:

- (a) the deviation turnout
- (b) the facing crossover (down main to up loop)
- (c) turnout to Down Exchange Sidings and related diamond crossing
- (d) loop turnout south

Top—The up side of the crossover – note the finished product! Here the timbers are being inched into their final position. Next the rails and chairs will be inched into place, holes drilled and the chairs screwed down.



Left The S&C at the entrances to the exchange sidings is quite complex, and included a diamond crossing. Over the years successive modification had resulted in a very poor alignment, and it was considered easiest, with the effort now available, to lift everything and start again. Both John Down

This was a slightly more ambitious programme than first planned since the facing crossover was to have been removed. The usefulness of the Down Exchange Sidings, which were brought into use in May

2008 for the purpose of stabling stock, had become clear however, so that, after due consideration of the cost, the facing crossover was retained.

Over the years timbers had rotted, cast fittings ('the chairs') had fractured, and things had crept out of alignment. Under S&C rails are held to gauge by timbers rather than sleepers. Where sleepers are wood – particularly in stations where appearance is important – they are made of softwood. However S&C timbers are hardwood, and anything up to 25 feet long – so they are heavy – very heavy. The use of hardwood is justified because we don't want to re-lay and re-align any more S&C in our life-time. So the choice was clear, get in heavy men with heavy machinery – and they did the job in a fraction of the time we could have managed. Unfortunately more chairs were found to be damaged than originally thought, so new ones have had to be cast which meant access to the Down Exchange Sidings had not been regained by the end of May, trapping in both the Thumper and the 3CEP EMU.

With the contractors working on the trackwork there were still plenty of outstanding jobs for the volunteers to do however:

- (a) removal of some largish tree roots from the trackbed by machine which were too large to move by means of pick, shovel, crowbar and profane language
- (b) clearance of ditches (including work associated with clearing November's landslip)
- (c) installation of buffer stops and a sand drag south of Blaenavon (High Level) station
- (d) installation of a properly engineered foot crossing near Forgeside,
- (e) installation of a properly engineered foot crossing immediately south of Blaenavon station
- (f) installation of facing point locks on all the points noted above.
- (g) installation of railway signs, no trespassing, whistle boards etc



Above - working on the new foot crossing (Glatorfean Crossing) at the south end of Glantorfean Terrace, the crossing at the north end having been closed off for safety reasons.

Left—the new crossing in place, complete with signs. This provides a much safer and more welcoming environment than the previous open and muddy one that existed before.



Following completion of the trackwork the whole line (including the current running line) needed to be ballasted and some 2000 tonnes of ballast from Machen quarry were used. The Dogfish ballast wagons and Shark brake van were finally put to the use they were purchased for and proved invaluable in getting the job done properly. Following completion of the ballasting two more jobs were awarded to contractors, as noted below:

- (a) Tamping and Lining (by contractors Railway Support Services)
- (b) Ballast Brushing (again, by Railway Support Services)

Middle— the ballast pile at Furnace Sidings is slowly reduced as Phil Williams and Pete Drummond collect another load for the ballast train. The telehandler was brought in as it was much easier to load the trains with it, the 3CX would have been at its limit.



Bottom—ballast laying at Blaenavon high Level, as can be seen the dogfish lays the ballast in three lines which can then be spread by the shark as required.



Left—an usual sight at Blaenavon High Level as the tamper slowly reaches the end of the line. Alex Hinshelwood.

The tamper not only lifts and packs the ballast but also aligns the tracks to make sure they are parallel and level. This not only ensures a smooth and level ride for the passengers but also reduces wear and tear on the track and rolling stock.

Middle—the new sand drag at Blaenavon High Level. There is no suggestion that in summer we'll be holding a sand castle building competition and offering donkey rides here.



Sand drag and buffer stop.

Obviously we need to mark the end of the line at Blaenavon, At the Whistle Inn we just have a buffer stop, but the severe down hill gradients mean something more substantial than this is required at BHL to ensure that the trains stop when required. Running off into the bushes is not allowed. So in front of the buffer stop we have a sand drag, like an escape lane on a mountain road, which will provide sufficient friction to stop or at least substantially slow any runaways. This is an operating necessity but hopefully one we will never need.



Fencing

There has been a lot of work undertaken by the contractors to put all the additional fencing in place. One of the longest runs was that from BHL to Glantorfean Terrace formalising the footpath that was already there, this runs from the Platform end at BHL to the new foot crossing. Palisade fencing has been installed at the north end of the terrace to prevent access to the now closed crossing whilst at Furnace Sidings new wooden fencing has been installed around the crossing to keep the public away from the track.

Above—the new fence running from the foot of Blaenavon High Level platform all the way to Glantorfean Terrace. The footpath has been in place for many years and is a popular walking route so the new fence keeps the path open and the public clear of the railway.



Left—Forgeside Road Bridge, the foot crossing mentioned previously was directly at the foot of the bridge abutment and anyone crossing it would have been hidden from the southbound trains by the bridge itself, a very dangerous state of affairs. This has now been closed off by sealing up the fence on this side of the railway and putting in a short section of palisade fencing on the other side to prevent anyone trying to breach it.



Blaenavon High Level

Work has stopped on the station building at BHL whilst volunteers were diverted to other tasks to get things ready for the opening. A general tidy of the station site has been undertaken, the cavity under the station closed off with chicken wire, fencing installed, the platform edge repaired and a new foot crossing installed. Hopefully it won't be too long before we can recommence work and produce a station building we can all be proud of.

Even with trains now running there is still plenty of work to be done, tidying up the lineside, completing the S&C, relaying platform 2 etc And then of course we move onto the Big Pit branch, but after BHL anything is possible.



This project is mainly financed by the Welsh Assembly Government through the Physical Regeneration Fund, Heads of the Valleys Programme & Torfaen County Borough Council

Ariannir y prosiect hwn yn bennaf gan y Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru Drwy Gyfrwng Cronfa Adfywio Lleol, Menter Blaenau'r Cymoedd & Bwrdeistref Sirol Torfaen

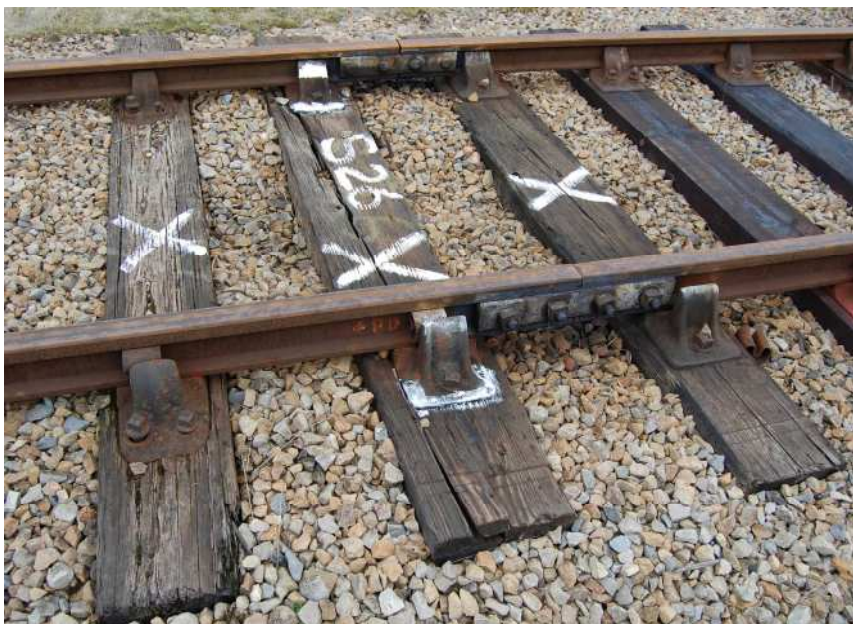


Features and articles wanted

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

Running Line News .Andy May

On Saturday 6th of march I managed to conduct a survey of the Main Running line, the results of which I have put together in an action plan for the Practical Trainers of Greenlight Rail and Training, who have for the past two years been assisting us with the maintenance of the main running line from Furnace Sidings to Whistle Inn, as part of their practical training program.



Frost damaged sleepers on the running line. Andy May

As expected after an extremely cold winter there has been some considerable frost damage to the sleepers causing some of them to break apart. In one area of up the line five sleepers around one of the rail joints had broken up causing the joint to dip and was a priority to be done before the start of this years running season. Other work will be the continuation of packing the dipped rail joints near the top end of the line and the replacing of loose or missing keys.

Long term we hope to replace the wooden sleepers as on the running line with concrete sleepers as per the extension and then frost damage should be a thing of the past.



Near the end of last year, the practical training courses dried up which meant that our permanent way department had to address some of the more urgent problems and repairs, Thankfully this wasn't the case this year as our permanent way department needed to focus all their resources to complete the extension to High Level in time for the BHL extension opening.

As well as ballasting on the new extension the current running line has also received a much needed ballasting. The dog fish and the shark being put to use as designed. With the track tamped as well, this years passengers should enjoy a very smooth ride.



Ballasting by the Whistle Inn, fresh ballast can be seen below the dog fish.

Diesel Locomotive & Plant Report. Jon Goss & Team

Well the pressure is still upon us but our new members have kept their cool and pressed on. There've been a lot of changes both plant and locomotive wise, but despite glitch after glitch we have waded through.



Plant

Mark and Patrick Jenkins have battled with the plant and are now also drifting to helping with the loco's.

The JCB 3CX is proving that it can not only dig the ground for the water pipes and clear the snow but also it happily fills up the steam engine's coal bunker.

The small dumper has been fully overhauled and painted and is now in traffic whilst the cement mixer has been overhauled and is now easier to start

The small dumper is put to good use as the PBR synchronised ballast shovelling team practice their latest moves.

Mainliners:

73128: With the thermostat having been changed and the auxiliary circuit seen to we now have to repair a leaky exhaust but none the less we are battling on and hope to have the locomotive in service very soon.

37216, 37421 : Both have had attempts to bring them back into use but alas both for some unknown reason have sustained damage to their heat exchangers. We have already sent the one from 37421 off for repair

31203: Sits patiently awaiting its turn for reactivation after the winter.

D4157 (08927): Arrived 29 April and has performed well, a few niggles presented themselves upon arrival but they were beaten out very rapidly. This is planned to be the main diesel power for the extension runs on normal running days (top and tail with the Austerity).

Industrials

D1249 / 104 "Llanwern" : Has been happily used as the back bone for the P-way

D1387/ DL16 : With the exhaust deafening everyone around it and the electrics confusing the worst of us, it does at least move under its own power. A new silencer is being hunted for and the electrics are being examined.

Bill Caddick : Has been moved into the Top Shed for repair work and a repaint back into Manchester Ship Canal livery. It wasn't originally planned to get round to working on Bill so quickly but the locomotive has been requested to attend the Middleton Railway's Manchester Ship Canal Gala in September, hence its queue jumping.

DEMU 205115: Has sadly been put on the back burner. After the repair of the electrical problem an inspection found a broken rocker in the engine. We now await the C&W to finish the passenger area before we look at repairing the engine. We already know where to go and who to speak to, to get the parts and get it fixed.

EMU Preservation Society (3CEP 1198). Albert Mutton



Darren Franklin works on the underframe of DMSB 61727. The grey in the foreground is the refurbished shoebeam. A Mutton.

EMUPS work is concentrating on window surrounds in 61737 and we have got hold of trolleys for snacks etc to be sold on board. Next on the list is to scrounge a wheelchair ramp from City Thameslink. We are also looking into removable tables for 61736 so the unit can be used on wine and dine type trains.

We have also helped provide the line with Victorian columns for Big Pit station, plus signalling supremo Paul Smith has taken delivery of a CD/RA indicator and we also have available an OFF indicator. These last came from the Blackfriars rebuilding.

EMUPS director Robert Burch is looking into EU funding that might ultimately pro-

vide a shed for 1198 and other stock in the DXS so the increasingly urgent welding work can take place at the line.

Steam News. Alex Gourlay

Having been the stalwart of last years operations No.19 will be taking a back seat this year as the Austerity 71515 will be the backbone of the 2010 steam operations. No.19 is to remain with us until at least October and does have several booked running days as well as being back up steam locomotive; a duty it performed at the Teddy Bears weekend as 71515 was unavailable following the discovery of a fault upon undertaking a loaded test run. Having passed its yearly boiler test No.19 is all ready for the new season although you will now find it in the Top Shed as 71515 resides in the Bottom Shed.

The big news of course is the arrival of the Austerity 71515, which came straight from the Flour Mill on the 28th April. Whilst it ran successfully running light engine, including several trips to Blaenavon High Level on the 1st May an attempt at a loaded test run that evening uncovered a fault with the main steam pipe and elbow and it had to be called off before it started. Working with the Flour Mill, the fault was resolved over the weekend of the 8/9 May along with a few other snagging jobs and it successfully entered service at the Cowboys event the following weekend. An intensive day of training to Blaenavon on Sunday 23rd May allowed the crews to get used to the locomotive and our new railway. An advantage of the bigger locomotive is the much larger footplate than No.19 which will enable us to carry out more footplate training throughout the year, so if you're interested in training please come and speak to me.

In other steam news the parts for the other Austerity on site, long term resident No.8, have been sent away for restoration; the boiler going to Bridgenorth on the Severn Valley Railway and the chassis to the Flour Mill.

Rolling Stock News



After many years operating trains with 3 coaches the completion of the TSO 4300 will see 4 coaches available for use and hopefully during 2010 this will become 5 when the BCK (Corridor Brake Composite) 21034 is overhauled. This has been made possible due to a bequest left the railway by a former Member Dennis Vivian (who was a good friend of Gwyn Tudor). Overhauling 21034 will then allow us to take our stalwart BSK 35494 out of traffic for overhaul.

Whilst 35494 is all second class 21034 contains first and second class compartments and like the TSO is to be turned out in Carmine and Cream (Blood and Custard) colours. The coach was built by Metropolitan—Cammell in 1954 and upon withdrawal was used as a mainline support coach for the steam locomotive Clan Line from 1985—88 before being sold to the West Somerset Railway in 1989. Withdrawn from traffic in 2000 it was moved to the East Somerset Railway for overhaul but instead the decision was then taken to put it up for sale and it moved to the PBR in 2005. When finished it should provide another high quality coach for passenger travel and be a vehicle Dennis would be proud of.

M&M 14, GWR 6479



Accompanying City of Truro during its visit to the PBR will be our very own ex GWR coach number 6479. This is a unique coach within railway preservation and dates back as far as 1895 and the Manchester and Milford Railway. A grand scheme to link the two places which only got as far as a rambling cross country route between Aberystwyth and Carmarthen.

The under frame was part of coach no.14 built by the M&M in 1895 at Ashbury in Manchester. Upon take over by the GWR it became number 7900 before withdrawal in 1908.

Whilst the body was scrapped, the under frame was retained and a new body built at Swindon works in 1910, this time becoming an inspection saloon, number 6479, for the Gloucester District Engineer. The coach could be used either attached to other passenger trains or on its own and would carry the engineer, other railway personnel and invited guests around the network, allowing them to study their empire at close hand.

In recent years the restoration of the coach has been put on the back burner as more pressing matters have arisen but now the restoration has restarted with renewed vigour. This year the coach celebrates its centenary and the opportunity to pair it up with City of Truro is too good to miss. With its all round views it is bound to be a popular vehicle and as the railway moves forward it will be the ideal way to show guests around the railway.

Shop News



Following several months of hard work by the volunteers the refurbishment of the Society shop in the centre of Blaenavon is now complete. It reopened for business on Saturday the 20 March with all stock transferred from the temporary residence next door the previous evening. The new shop is a lot more spacious and welcoming and has received many positive comments from customers, good news indeed.

Latest Special Edition Wagon—Blaenavon



With the Dapol wagons now sold out, this is our first Blaenavon wagon from Bachman, suitably weathered. Available from the railway shop and Eric's Emporium at Furnace Sidings.

Price is £7.80 + P&P

The Society Shop 13a Broad Street, Blaenavon—01495.792263

The only model shop in the valley, open 11:00—17:00 (16:00 on Saturdays)

Members get a discount on purchases

Corrections Time

As the eagle eyed amongst you may have noticed I had the picture of 37216 in the last issue of Top Line dated 2009 when as I know full well it was 1999. Also thanks to Wayne Perham for pointing out the spelling mistake in the 5643 feature, it should have been Pontnewydd and not Pontyneywdd as I put. Mind you as Wayne points out, at least I got the right location (if misspelt), after all it can get very confusing as there, in the area Upper Pontnewydd, Lower Pontnewydd and Pontnewynydd, all of which at one stage had railway stations. Pity the poor ticket clerk.

GWR 175

2010 marks the 175th anniversary of the birth of the Great Western Railway and to celebrate this there are a series of events being held at various heritage railways, all co-ordinated by STEAM, the museum of the Great Western Railway, at Swindon.



Now you may wonder why a railway of London North Western Origin is celebrating the anniversary of the GWR and no it's not an excuse just to party. Simply put, the history of the railways of South Wales is inextricably linked to that of the Great Western Railway and this is a celebration of that, Blaenavon itself was an outpost of the Great Western Empire with its branch from Pontypool to Blaenavon Low level, whilst our own line made an end on connection with the GWR at Abersychan and Talywain Station. And it didn't take long for the GWR to make an impact on the line, the freight traffic was still in the hands of the LNWR but the GWR began to run the passenger service from Newport and Pontypool to Brynmawr until its cessation in 1941.

Whilst the GWR finally succumbed to nationalisation in 1948 the closure of the line as a through route in the mid 1950s ensured that, with all freight trains now coming up the valley from Pontypool, they would be in the hands of pure ex Great Western Engines. And Blaenavon also had a key part to play in the Great Western Empire as the Tyre Mill at Forgeside produced the steel tyres for a large number of the GWR steam locomotives including the legendary Kings.

For the first time the PBR is on the national stage, joining the likes of the West Somerset Railway, Gloucestershire and Warwickshire Railway and Didcot in celebrating the GWR. Heady stuff indeed.

Coming Soon—City of Truro

I still can't believe that the engine I'm writing about is actually coming to the Pontypool and Blaenavon Railway, after all City of Truro is a thoroughbred express engine, part of the national collection and a railway icon. Yet it is a measure of how far we've come in the past few years, that not only can we dream about asking if we can have such engines but the fact that people will say yes. After all if you don't ask, you don't get, well we asked and we got!

With 2010 being the 175th Anniversary of the Great Western Railway it seemed only fit and proper that our September Steam Gala celebrate this fact, and as we missed out on a proper opening event we had to do something really special. Whilst looking around at various engines the idea was floated about getting City Of Truro, although we didn't hold much hope. However when the National Railway Museum was approached they said yes, must to our surprise and pleasure. Of course as this is its first visit to a preserved railway in South Wales that can only have counted in our favour.

City of Truro was built in 1903 at the Swindon Works of the GWR as one of a series of 4-4-0 express locomotives, the City class, designed by G.J. Churchward. Originally numbered 3400–3409 and 3433–3442 and later renumbered 3700–3719 City of Truro carried the number 3440 and then 3717. Already making a name for themselves with some fast running City of Truro wrote its name into the record books when on the 3rd of May 1904 at the head of the Ocean Mails express from Plymouth to Paddington it achieved the then unheard of 102.3 miles an hour on the descent of Welling-ton Bank, the first steam locomotive to break the 100mph barrier. To this day there is still some conjecture on whether or not City of Truro did actually achieve and pass 100mph, but whatever happened it was still a record breaking run.



City of Truro simmers quietly under a threatening sky at Didcot. Taken on the 3rd May 2010 this shows the locomotive now carrying its new paint scheme and number.

In 1931 City of Truro , by then carrying the number 3717 was withdrawn but remarkably was saved for prosperity not by the GWR but by the London and North Eastern Railway who placed it on display at their railway museum in York. In 1957 the engine was returned to service to work special trains on the Western Region of British Rail but as a pannier tank now carried the number 3717 it was renumbered to its original number 3440 and repainted into the elegant Victorian livery with red frames.

Retired from traffic for a second time in 1961 it became part of the National Collection based at the National Railway Museum in York, again becoming a static exhibit. The 150th anniversary of the GWR in 1984 saw 3440 restored once more to take part in the celebrations whilst its latest restoration was undertaken in 2004 to mark the 100th anniversary of its record-breaking run. In its elaborate Victorian livery it has become a familiar and popular sight both on the mainline and on heritage railways.

When in service however the locomotive only carried the livery for a short time before being painted into the more basic GWR standard engine green with black frames and the words Great Western on the tender. As part of the GWR 175th celebrations a repaint of City of Truro into this livery is being sponsored by Steam Magazine along with a renumbering to 3717 and it is in this guise that the locomotive will visit us.

Not only is this the first visit of City of Truro to a South Wales preserved railway it is also the first visit of a working tender locomotive to the PBR and an express locomotive at that. After a diet of tank engines over the years the steam crews are all looking forward to the visit, and they're not the only ones.

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Torfaen

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Back Cover— The view from the Coity Tips as 71515 and No.19 slog it out up the hill towards Furnace Sidings. The view is one thing but coupled with the sound it's something else again. This should really put us on the map now.

Welcome New Members

James Roberts Woolwich, London

Andrew Maddock Griffithstown

Volunteering

With the railway now open to Blaenavon the need for working members is now more critical than ever. Don't worry if you can't spend more than the odd day here or there helping out or don't think you have any skills to offer we can always find something for you to do and full training is given if you want to learn a particular role e.g. guard, shunter etc. There is no age limit either so all are welcome and who knows you may find yourself learning a new skill or even brushing up on old ones, Whatever happens you'll definitely making new friends and have a good time doing it . If you want to volunteer just ask the staff and take it from there.



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

