

TOP LINE

Steaming into
2009

Silver Jubilee Special -Part 2

The Magazine of the Pontypool and Blaenavon Railway

Number 110

Spring 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)

£7.50—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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TOP LINE—THE MAGAZINE OF THE PONTYPOOL AND BLAENAVON RAILWAY

NUMBER 110 SPRING 2009

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EDITORIAL

As I put the finishing touches to this latest issue I'm very excited as this will be the first ever all colour, all glossy issue. It was not long ago that Topline was just a few pages of black and white, John Down took it to the expanded 32 pages with colour and now thanks to the kindness of the society we're going full colour and glossy at the same time. As the railway is expanding and growing so is Top Line.

Not only is there the new look magazine to get excited about but also what is happening at the railway. The 2nd half of this issue is devoted primarily to the superb Silver Jubilee Gala in September when we saw packed trains, a big steam engine on the line and TV coverage beyond our wildest dreams. We then followed this up with the arrival of number 19, a part in the Coal House TV show and our best ever Santa Specials. Despite the Credit Crunch we are obviously doing something right, we carried 18% more passengers in 2008 than 2007 and the Santa's were up 15%, lets hope we can keep that momentum going for 2009.

2009 is looking to be another busy and exciting year, as John Down's development report shows we've a lot of work going on and with more funding released we'll not only be in Blaenavon in 2010, but Big Pit in 2011 and we could have a station building as well. Alongside this we have another packed events calendar and with steam throughout the year it should be busier than ever. There are still outstanding items to arrive at the railway e.g. 37023 and we're currently looking at a guest engine for our September gala, this year celebrating 140 years since the line opened to goods in 1869. I can't say too much just yet but the one we have in mind like 5619 is another iconic class of steam locomotive and will no doubt be welcomed by everyone.

These are very exciting times at the PBR, I hope you enjoy them and the magazine, I know I will

Regards Alistair Grieve

Front Cover 5619 makes a stirring sight as it storms up the hill towards the Whistle Inn during the excellent 25th Anniversary Gala—see pages 16 to 25. Alistair Grieve

DEVELOPMENT – John Down

Funding

We're coming into the last week of January, and it's difficult to know just what to say in the face of the changes that have been wrought over the last three or four months. To help me, I normally look at what I wrote in the previous issue. It was whilst doing this that I realised the futility in trying to describe, in any detail, the funding landscape in which we find ourselves. In TL109 I tried to give a rather detailed, matter-of-fact account of how the funding stood. I'm afraid I wasted not only my time, but yours as well – the situation has changed beyond recognition, albeit, broadly, for the better.

The most immediate driver for change has been the cost of the bridges. In my last report I noted that the costs had been rather high but had drifted back to quite acceptable values. Since then there have been several re-designs and a huge escalation in costs. These would have swallowed up everything in the extension fund (that is, Step 1.2) – including PBR's share for the track work, station and fences. What's worse they were threatening to plunder the Big Pit branch money (Step 1.5). You can imagine that I protested quite strongly! As a result there are now three identifiable funding streams. These are Step 1.2 (extension to Blaenavon (High Level)), Step 1.5 (Big Pit branch) and a stream which doesn't involve us directly, but which will mop-up the overrun on the bridge costs and, in addition, pay for the rebuilding of Bridge 19 (Varteg Road bridge) – which was shelved from the original Step 1.2 because it was too expensive.



Despite being shelved nearly a year ago, Bridge 19 now appears to have a much brighter future. Funds for limited for some design work in 08/09 have been identified, and, indeed, work has already started. This bridge will receive sufficient in the next two years to completely rebuild it. The cycle track, which shares the existing deck is likely to be on a separate lightweight structure. JD

As it is this 'mop-up' stream has not yet been granted, but TCBC have committed themselves to it, and will approach HoV for the funding. And it is most unlikely that it will be refused.

So now where do we stand? The chart below shows, for the first time, a four year spending plan. The following, perhaps, needs some explanation:

- the totals of 07/08 and 08/09 sum to £530,350, which, if you recall was the amount awarded for Step 1.2. The £93,547 was what we were going to take from Step 1.2 for 'our' work, that is, track, BHL and fencing.
- the total for the second row is the cost of the Big Pit branch and is £748,000. As a reward for our now demonstrable capacity to manage projects, it will be managed by PBR and we will choose our contractors.
- the total of row three is the overall cost of the bridges (including Br19 (Varteg Road)) – an astonishing £789,435 ! the grand total is £1,356,982

	07/08	08/09	09/10	10/11
PBR (Step 1.2)	NIL	93,547	NIL	NIL
PBR (Step 1.5)	NIL	44,372	229,628	200,000
Other contractors	100,000	292,431	147,004	250,000
Totals	100,000	430,350	376,632	450,000

For the first time for many years, we can put the municipal begging bowl away for a while, as immediate development is now funded. There is the £650,000 lottery application to progress for the visitor centre, as well as further development both north and south (Phases 2–6). Step 1.5 (Big Pit branch) has funds till April 2011 *and must therefore be completed by that date*. We have much to do!

In TL109 I noted that the Step 1.5 funding stream would also fund some Step 1.3 bits – mainly part of the footbridge at Furnace Sidings and the station building on Platform 1, Furnace Sidings. Also, that whilst the relatively small Step 1.4 (Infrastructure Improvements at BHL) looks a long way off in terms of funding, it may be possible to deploy funds from elsewhere quite soon.

So these are the major elements in the funding. I have not tried to illuminate all the highways and by-ways, and there are all sorts of little opportunities which can be exploited. For example, PBR has done work directly for one of the contractors and has been paid handsomely for such work. And that's just about all I want to say on funding, now we have, hopefully, reached a reasonably stable situation. Doubtless, you'll be pleased to hear that I probably won't have quite so much to say about funding in TL111.

On the ground

Perhaps much more interesting is what is happening on the ground, and I hope this section can describe the many changes that are taking place

Progress on Step 1.2



Bridge 14 without rails

Bridges – What a saga this has been. Work was planned to begin in September, and be finished by Christmas, but the designs suffered several major changes, and were not completed until mid-December. Finally on 5 January 2009 the main contractors, Griffiths of Abergavenny began work, with completion planned for mid-May, though, with good progress it could be a month earlier than this. Bridges are being done south to north. First was Bridge 17 (actually just a little culvert) and the work was completed in not much more than a week. Next came the cycleway bridge, bridge 16. This is now a sorry looking sight with rails lifted, timbers out and just a rusting skeleton in place as grit blasting is taking place. The New Pit Road bridge, bridge 14, is shortly to have a large scaffolding underneath it and traffic lights in place whilst some preliminary work has begun on Bridge 13. The rails and chairs on all four bridges have been removed by PBR, and as I noted in the previous section this was 'a nice little earner' for railway itself. This money is not development money, but is money that PBR volunteers have earned. Several goodies are likely to appear on the scene over the next six months, and it will be down to their efforts.



A peep under the tent covering the cycleway bridge (bridge 16), shows the alien scene of the rails timbers and wooden decking all gone. Across the picture are the cross girders, bead blasted to a matt finish and awaiting repair and repainting. JD

Apart from some 23 sleepers laid in Furnace Sidings platform 2 last November, no work had started on Step 1.5, and indeed it should not have so done, until April 2009. However, because of the late start on the bridges, expenditure has been delayed thus to make up

the planned spend in 2008/09 PBR offered to bring forward its Step 1.5 spend. As a result the first of three contracts was let to Cambrian Co (owners of 73133 that was with us in 2006) for the repair of the Rail over Rail bridge – bridge 12 – on 21 January. There is a need for a bit more work of this kind in order to soak up the full £44K brought forward, but this is well in hand. What is certain is that the main line is well and truly in tatters now, with the workforce on the platform at Blaenavon (High Level) completely marooned until mid-May.

Track – After a slow start track renewal suddenly accelerated to a remarkable pace. To an extent this was due to the heavy summer operations program, but we also had to wait for funding streams to clear, to purchase a digger, to buy new tracks and to fit them before the real work could begin. Finally,



Loading sleepers at Furnace Sidings with the mini digger

on 4 October the work of lifting and dropping the concrete sleepers along the line was started, and, over the next few weeks, many were dropped between Tyre Mill Signal Box and Forgeside Road bridge, as techniques developed. So skilled had the team become that they could almost do the job in the dark – and indeed they did – several times. The minidigger has proved to be absolutely reliable and central to both sleeper dropping and sleeper replacing. Not only that but significant work has been made in opening up the drains down the line as far and even beyond Bridge 12, though it will be some months before we can go further south. If ever money was well spent, then this is a prime example – in fact we've even toyed with the idea of getting another.

As an illustration of just how much work has been done, we have used up all the 732 sleepers we originally had, plus an extra 480 that have now been delivered from the Severn Valley – indeed we are outstripping Severn Valley Railway's capacity to supply us. TL109 noted that 300 wooden sleepers had just been purchased. Since then the total has been increased to 600. All of the concretes and many of the woods have been taken down the line and dropped at the correct spot for replacing the rotten wooden sleeper alongside. As I write the score stands at 134 woods laid and 321 concretes laid, a total of 455 from the total of about 1500. This is a very satisfying dent in the workload, but with access beyond Bridge 12 cut for the next three or four months, it's still going to be touch and go, if we are to complete the track in time.



The PWay team, in pouring rain, having already taken out 24 wooden sleepers, and replaced them with a similar number made of concrete, ready themselves to drop a ton of rail into the 24 chairs that make up a 60ft length of track. That completed, they will then cross over and do the other rail. This team can relay anything up to four panels a day. We must be the envy of many railways, many far larger than us. John Down

Having learnt the valuable lesson that buying appropriate tools and equipment is money well spent, we were delighted to hear that a couple of vacuum braked Dogfish had come up for sale from our friends at the Dean Forest Railway. So within a couple of weeks two arrived on 17 January to bring our total to three. This will be very useful, as once the sleepers are replaced, we then have to line and top the track, and finally add a 'top coat' of new ballast. We had one Dogfish hopper, but 25tons doesn't go very far, and we'd had our eyes on the DFR's collection for some years. As it happens, track work, drain clearance work and work at BHL are all throwing up large quantities of spoil so we have hired two 20 ton Grampus wagons from Cambrian Co. This will also help us build up the bank behind platform 1 at Furnace Sidings in readiness for the new station building. Incidentally we have also taken a delivery of 160 tons of ballast from Hanson at Machen Quarry.

Station at Blaenavon (High Level) – Up until now, perhaps the most obvious visual manifestation of our expansion efforts has been the appearance of platform 1 at Blaenavon High Level (BHLP1). Once again, the start was delayed until we had the minidigger to plough off the top soil and grass – and until we had resolved the lizard problem (TL 109). Things really got under way on 12 October 2008, when in an all too brief Indian Summer, work got underway, when a sizeable team dressed in almost

tropical wear worked away in glorious sunshine. Unfortunately, with falling temperatures and shorter days, enthusiasm dwindled – but not before the bulk of the front wall had been re-laid and almost all the extra height gained. I say almost as it was then necessary to build up a further fraction of the thickness of a block in height by laying a levelling course, and this, in turn, needed shuttering to be installed and then taken down again. All in all, labour intensive work.

It was not all hard work and gloom, some careful planning and cutting, with joists laid in just the right position saw the deck in front of the signal box laid in a morning. Not only did this immediately obviate the need to teeter along a plank in order to pass from the south end of the platform to the remainder, but it immediately established a level datum from which the rest of the platform could be set. We promised in TL109 that the characteristic LNWR milepost showing 4¾ miles from Brynmawr would be re-positioned – and so it duly was, albeit with minimal ceremony. It's just as well that it was minimal – since we've 'planted' it too deeply, (quite forgetting about the increase in platform height) and it will have to be tugged out and re-planted if it is to stand proudly at something approaching its original height.



Looking north at BHL we see the 23m of coping stones cast at the south end of BHL. On the right the pin kerb establishes what will become the tarmac area of the platform. In the middle distance the wooden platform in front of the signal box has been rebuilt, whilst in the far distance the BHL team continue casting new coping stones and laying what was left of the original ones. On the left, space for the up loop has been cleared and the remains of platform 2 front wall is coming into view. The brickwork from the signal box has been recovered from the pit it was pushed into upon demolition so will be reused here at BHL. John Down

Behind the platform coping stones will be a ten feet strip of tarmac before it terminates in a pin kerb edging – it is surprising that once these are laid, how the dimensions of the platform become plain to see amongst the previous wreckage. We then plan to erect a typical LNWR station fence. Seven traditional station lamps are planned, and we are talking to the original manufacturer of such lamps regarding the possibility of illuminating them with gas. Although the BHL crew are small in number, things were often enlivened by the Pway train bringing down volunteers, the minidigger and building supplies. With the line now cut in several places the team are now isolated for the next four or five months – on the other hand, they are closer to the chippie in Blaenavon than the Pway gang!

Progress on Step 1.3 and Step 1.4

The new platform 2 has settled down, and has yet to be used. It looks a little bare at present, and the flat area behind it remains to be soiled and grassed over. We also need to install the rustic style path which will take passengers past the little pond with its sparkingly clear water. Overall, in terms of appearance there is little new to see, as the pressure to complete Step 1.2 is absorbing every scrap of volunteer effort. The footbridge tower has been fully bolted down now, but the weather has prevented any effort to clean it up and paint it, however we have now found not only a willing painter, but two. Meanwhile, off stage at Barry Docks, the platform 2 tower has been drilled ready for re-assembly and one of the two flight walls has been completed to a high standard. Meanwhile, some Step 1.5 money has been released and will be in full flood after Easter. This has allowed us to look at the station building in detail again, and we expect to be surveying and digging foundations within the next few months, manpower permitting. To allow this work to proceed the existing van body, which has served the railway well since its earliest days will have to move a few yards southwards.

We said in TL109 that Step 1.4 (Infrastructure Improvements at BHL) is awaiting funding and going nowhere, but that is not entirely true. During one of the Pway teams visits to BHL described above, they were asked to dig up through the site of the platform 2 line, in order to get the digger onto the platform 1 from the south end, without the need to take a 3-ton machine over the decking. Inspired,

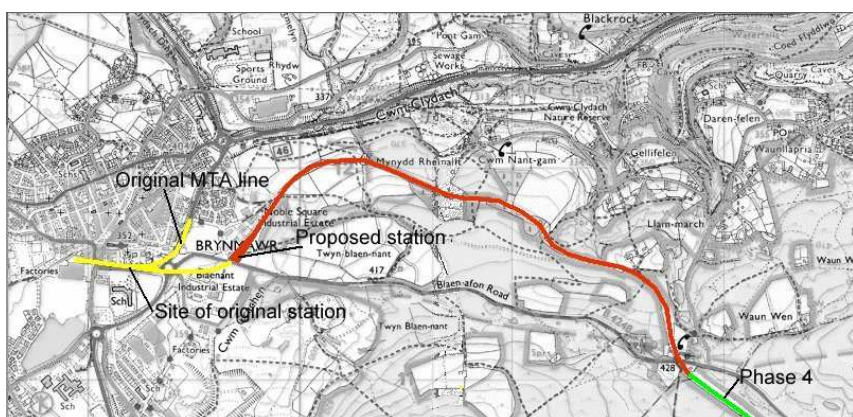
they not only completely cleared the area in a day and half, and sent several dozen small willow trees up in smoke, but with a little care succeeded in exposing the long lost, and presumed essentially non-existent, platform wall. Measurements suggest that the ground behind the platform will have to raise by 22 inches and a dwarf wall will need to be built between the platform and the nearby cycle track. Although there is less platform wall than on Platform 2, it is essentially free of vegetation and technically straightforward. There is an awful temptation to 'do' this platform whilst the team are there. We have the technology.....!

The situation regarding the Barry Town footbridge is now slightly uncertain. A further photo survey was made, and measurements taken. Undoubtedly the bridge needs extensive repair work, as well as modification to fit the BHL site, but architecturally it's a gem. We've left our offer, which is very generous having regard for current scrap prices, on the table. The matter is now squarely in the lap of its owners.

Crystal ball gazing.

So what will the future be bringing on the development front? The simple truth is we are largely a hostage to fortune, especially when others are largely controlling the funds we use to develop. What will now happen, mostly as a matter of course, is that the line will extend to Blaenavon (High Level). There will be a platform there with a basic shelter. A footbridge will appear at Furnace Sidings, and in the foreseeable future a decent station building and platform 1 Furnace Sidings. In the medium term we will see the middle shed and some railway into it, and the top shed extended about 100 feet (though these are not formally, development items). By Spring of 2011 regular shuttles should be leaving platform 2, Furnace Sidings, trundling around the Up Exchange Sidings to a short platform close to Big Pit's overflow car park. The shuttle trains on this line are planned to be 'collier's trains' and will consist of a brake van and one or two china clays. Then there is the HLF funded visitor centre. This is planned to be in two parts – a workshop in which visitors may view work on rolling stock, and sited on the down exchange sidings, and the visitor centre proper which has been sketched out to sit on the site of the bottom yard, but which may well be sited somewhere quite differently – and of course Step 1.4, mentioned above. Also, as noted above, TCBC have committed themselves to sorting out the Varteg Road bridge - gateway to Phase 2

And then it all gets a bit cloudy. In mid January I met a representative from Sustrans SE Wales in a meeting chaired by Mike German AM to discuss how we can meet the challenges presented by the cycleway which currently lies atop the track on the route described as Phase 2 (to Varteg) and Phase 3 (to Talywain) – and the effect that the threatened breach at Big Arch will have on Talywain station and Phase 6 extension to Wainfelin. It was barely a week later whilst I was marshalling thoughts in my



The extension from Whistle Inn to Waunafon (Phase 4) is likely to involve some difficult negotiations. For the longer future, the meandering route between Waunafon and Brynmawr (Phase 5), will raise many land ownership issues, quite apart from several significant engineering works. John Down

mind about these challenges, that I had a call from WAG asking me to give presentation to high ranking politicians, Blaenau Gwent officers and members, and senior HoV officials about plans to extend the railway to Waunafon (Phase 4) and Brynmawr (Phase 5). Truth to tell I have been badgering officials over there for several years, and hopefully the plan has been included in to the Local Development Plan, but I had not expected them to take our plans quite so seriously, quite so soon. Verily have I been hoist by my own petard. So.... which way will we go first. If only we could tell!

A Taste Of Things To Come



Following on from the development report here's two shots to wet the appetite. On the left the class 31 standing just north of Blaenavon (High level) as seen from Broad Street, Blaenavon and above 104 stands in Blaenavon (High Level) itself. The excellent and highly recommended Oakfield B&B (see below) is only 100 yards (or 4 doors) down from the station itself. A very convenient location indeed.



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Devonport Dockyard Number 19



In 2007 we tried desperately to get a steam locomotive for the 2008 season but were unable to do so. This year we tried again but every avenue we explored seemed to become a dead end until out of the blue when we had just about given up the Bodmin and Wenford Railway stepped in to save the day with Devonport Dockyard Number 19, a Bagnall 0-4-OST.

*Engaged in Sunday PWay work
No.19 overlooks Blaenavon*

Works number 2962 the locomotive was ordered by the Admiralty in 1949 and delivered to Devonport in 1950 although it wasn't long before the writing was on the wall as the first diesels were delivered in 1956. Unlike most Industrial steam locomotives it was fitted with a very useful vacuum brake from the outset as it was used to handle the internal passenger trains at the dock yard. Much like the colliers trains in South Wales these consisted of wagons and vans with seats in them. Number 19 lasted in service until 1965 but due to its young age and good condition when taken out of traffic was used as a steam generator to service the dockyards needs. Finally withdrawn in 1968 the locomotive was purchased for preservation and moved to Bodmin in 1969 where it has remained and worked ever since, with the occasional trip to other railways.



Having been completely overhauled and returning to traffic in 2007 the BWR found that Number 19 was just too small for their expanded services and so has had little work since coming back. Keen to see the locomotive used rather than sat in the shed the BWR have hired out Number 19 to the PBR at least until the end of 2009 allowing us to have plenty of steam action in the coming year.

So quick was the deal done that less than 2 weeks after being offered the locomotive it was touching down at Furnace Sidings and following a steam test on the 12th October was in service on the 15th for filming of the next series of the BBC Wales Coal House, hauling the M&M coach as a wartime passenger train with evacuees (see page 28). Okay, so it's not prototypical but we're not complaining.

Bernard Morton and Alex Hinshelwood enjoy the sunshine on a lovely October the 12th as they take a break during the test runs of No. 19.

New Arrivals

The Vanguard Diesel



We would not be the PBR without our collection of industrial diesels and since TL109 we've added two more. In November along came this somewhat unusual engine as it started out as a steam locomotive. The locomotive was originally built as a vertical boilered chain driven steam locomotive by Sentinel of Shrewsbury but in 1964 it was rebuilt by Thomas Hill at their Vanguard works, Kilnhurst in South Yorkshire.

Whilst the body and engine are all new the frames and chain drive etc are the original steam locomotives and as works number 136C the locomotive went to work at the ARC Whately Quarry, Frome Somerset. After withdrawal the locomotive was saved by the North Somerset Heritage Trust for the proposed Frome - Radstock railway but when that stalled it moved to the East Somerset Railway. Unfortunately the locomotive owners were recently asked to remove it from the railway and the PBR were more than happy to offer the group and locomotive a home.

When restored to running order the locomotives air brakes will be very useful in shunting the railways fleet of emus and working the Big Pit Shuttle. Whilst not numbered or lettered at the moment when complete it will carry the ARC number 2 and the name William Ellis who was a founder member of the Somerset & Avon Railway Association, the original organisation established c1988 to re-open the Frome-Radstock line and whom the locomotive was named after whilst at Radstock.

Trecatty



Trecatty stands in the snow at Furnace Sidings

In 1975 Trecatty was joined at Cwmbargoed by two ex BR class 11 shunters 12099 and 12122 which had previously worked at the Black Lion Disposal Point, Waunafon, tripping wagons to and from Furnace Sidings. Trecatty has now completed the return move.

Whilst several of our industrial diesels have a South Wales connection all are related to the steel industry so its nice to have one with connections to the coal industry. Trecatty is a Ruston & Hornsby 0-6-0 DM works number 421702 and was built in 1959. It spent its working life for Taylor Woodrow at their Cwmbargoed Disposal Point near Merthyr Tydfil handling coal from local open casts, primarily the one at Trecatty. With British Rail taking over the site in 1980 Trecatty found little use and in 1986 it was preserved at the Gwili Railway. Out of use for quite a few years now it has been purchased by two members of the PBR's diesel department and is to be restored in due course to its Taylor Woodrow colours and will provide a useful and historic addition to the fleet.

TSO and Dogfish



Above - The Dogfish shortly after arrival. Andy Knock

Left- The TSO at Barry Island. Alex Hinshelwood

In January we also took delivery of a new coach, Tourist Second Open (TSO) SC4300 from the Barry Island Railway and two Dogfish ballast wagons from the Dean Forest Railway. The TSO is a welcome addition to the coach fleet and will enable us to strengthen our passenger trains as needed and also to take out other coaches for servicing without compromising the service. Whilst the Dogfish will be put to good use ballasting the extension and other assorted track relaying. As we move forward and expand these are vital components in the future of the railway. The TSO was paid for by development work whilst the Dogfish were paid for out of the development budget.

The Go-Kart



The above picture shows the 4 seater at Furnace Sidings in December. Even the diminutive Gower Princess towers over it .

Okay so it's not really a go kart but it's a very apt description of the 4 seater PWay personnel carrier that was acquired by a consortium of 4 members in December. These are built to ferry PWay workers around work sites and can also tow trolleys with equipment on which will prove very useful during the work to open BHL as it means equipment can be transported without the need for getting a train ready. Built in 2003 it was spotted by one of our members on e-bay for a bargain basement price and since arriving at the railway has already paid a visit to BHL with all 4 owners on board! The rumour is that it's to be named Excelsior after the starship commanded by Captain Sulu once of the Starship Enterprise.

Magpies at Furnace Sidings. Andy May

This is not a report on the feathered variety but the light-fingered type. During the summer someone attempted to remove the Furnace Sidings north ground frame resulting in severe damage to it. Luckily it seems they may have been disturbed by members of the model railway club who were arriving on site at the time, however the damage done meant that special measures which included a speed restriction had to be placed on the north loop point on the main line.

During the last few months I have been working on the ground frame to get it back into working order, which included resetting the foundation for mounting the frame and resetting the foundation for the crank. Work still to be done is the replacement of the Annett's locking system and ridding.

Thanks to My Son, Findlay May for helping me to dig out the foundation with his trusty little spade and to Wayne Evans and his Team for setting the concrete.



Above—the new settings for the ground frame prior to the pouring of the concrete. Andy May

Green Light Making Tracks. Andy May

As reported in the last issue of Top Line, Green Light Rail and Training consultancy working in association with Neway Training Solutions, have been hard at work carrying out running maintenance and repairs on our main running line.

To date the main line has gone through a spot re-sleeper program, which has entailed the replacement of the worst rotten sleepers, so far two thirds of the total length of the line have been attended to. Also whilst this was being done they managed to re pack some of the badly dipped rail joints between track panels.

Other work done by Green Light was the drilling and plating up of the rail end joints of the deviation point leading into the main compound, and the realigning and re packing of the deviation itself, which was badly in need of attention.

Again all the work done by Green Light, has saved time and manpower for the Railways Permanent Way department, which is concentrating on the extension to High Level.



Above—Trainees undergoing trackside instruction on the railway.



Above—much needed work being carried out on the deviation point (i.e. the lead into the yard).

A Massey Ferguson's Worst Nightmare. Rhys Davies

Known locally for competing in the PBR's "Demolition Derby" tournament, this is my first article for the magazine. The reason I'm writing this is because as of January 26th 2009, I will be studying nautical science in Walsash Academy of Maritime Studies, in Southampton, so it means leaving Wales, my friends, family, and also, you lot on the PBR behind. Well, most people know I started as a volunteer in 2004 at the age of 15, and what can I say, it's been one hell of a ride. The railway has changed so much in those 4 years. When I first started, if you asked me would we EVER have a class 37 on site, I would question your sanity. But Norman's 37 arrived, proving to not only our critics, but to us as well, we are heading for bigger things.

Now here we are on the verge of 2009, we have steam once again, and with thanks to everyone's hard work, our little railway is moving up in the world. I am a bit gutted that I won't be able to be as active in the PBR as I was, but I'm sure you'll see me again when I'm on leave. No, you haven't got rid of me forever, and I'm sure each time I come back, the railway will have changed so much I won't know where I am!

But the whole purpose of this article is basically to say, a big thank you to everyone! A big thanks to Alex Hinshelwood for the chances to work on the footplate, a big thanks to Jon Goss for coming to my rescue multiple times in the JCB, and most of all, a big thanks to the whole team for making working on the PBR such a pleasure. There have been highs and lows, but I look back on joining the railway as one of the best things I ever did. It taught me so many things that school could never teach, thanks everyone!

Above—Rhys in his nice new clean Merchant Navy uniform

Below—Rhys in his not so new not so clean PBR p-way uniform



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.

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A Mystery Solved



In Top Line 109 one of the locomotives that featured from the early days was “Woodpecker” which left the railway many years ago and became an exhibit at the Avon causeway Hotel in Hurn, Dorset.

This solved a mystery for Hampshire member Adrian Willats who had seen and photographed the locomotive earlier in 2009 but was unable to find anything about it. Shown above is Adrian’s photograph of Woodpecker numbered as 1885 along with Metro-

Cammell 1960 built Pullman coach number 340. For the record the locomotive is a John Fowler 0-4-0 Diesel Mechanical works number 22871, built in 1939 and Adrian says the food served in the hotel restaurant was excellent as well.

Testing Times at Furnace Sidings



As well as the usual railway equipment you’d expect to see at the PBR if you’re around on a weekday you may see something very different. The railway has now entered into a contractual agreement with Philmor Rail of Usk to provide facilities for them to test/evaluate and demonstrate their range of road/rail equipment. One of the requirements for any vehicle to operate on Network Rail is that it must be capable of being operated on a 1 in 30 incline. With the PBR’s grades steepening to as much as 1 in 28 in places it is the perfect place to test this.

The company is owned by GOS engineering based in Blaenavon and who knows we may even get to borrow some of the equipment. Now wouldn’t that be useful?

Silver Jubilee Gala September 2008

To celebrate the 25th year of continuous operation we held a Silver Jubilee Gala over the weekend of the 13th and 14th September with special guest engine GWR 0-6-2T 5619 from the Telford Steam Railway. As with any event there's always the element of doubt, will it go smoothly, will it be dry, will the people come? With a very damp August we were, as you can imagine, very nervous, but throughout the previous week the advanced forecasts had been getting better and better and in the end the weather was dry and sunny for the weekend and whilst not as sunny for the photo charter was still dry.

The Friday was also dry which was good news as not only was it steam test day but it was also the day that both BBC Wales and S4C were coming up to film the return of 5619 to the valleys. The filming included shots of the trains and interviews with the crews with the resultant clips being broadcast during prime time evening viewing. The BBC slot included a live section from the railway with TV presenter Sian Lloyd and Celebrity TV weatherman Derek Brockway.

The coverage that both channels gave the railway was above and beyond what we could have expected and the results began to show almost immediately on Saturday morning with people arriving way before the first train. The decision to run a 20 minute frequency timetable paid handsome dividends as at times the 3 coaches were full and standing. In total 1356 passengers were carried over the weekend with 832 on the Saturday and 524 on the Sunday, which except for the Thomas Weekends is the railways best ever weekend. Even the ice cream man had his best ever day of the summer on Saturday and having sold out had to get the ice cream factory to open specially so he could stock up for the Sunday.

Throughout the weekend 5619 put on an amazing show as it pounded up the hill to the Whistle Inn, the noise echoing back off the valley sides was one to remember. On the Saturday evening a members special was taken down to Blaenavon High Level Station where the members enjoyed a sumptuous buffet provided by the Whistle Inn whilst overlooking Blaenavon itself (see back cover). Throughout the weekend 73128 had been on the rear of the train to provide braking for the return journeys which in effect meant 5619 had the equivalent of 6 coaches in tow as it worked up hill. This meant the locomotive had to work really hard and the runs from BHL were stunning as 5619 really attacked the grade. A crew from the Flour Mill where 5619 had been restored said they had never seen a 56xx work so hard before and they described the railway as "challenging". Something I think we already know.

On the Monday and Tuesday we played host to the Compo Club for another photo charter, this time using both passenger and freight stock. It was touch and go whether the freight stock would be ready in time but completion of the Top Shed roof enabled the wagons to be repainted in time with Mick Parker completing the lettering on Friday afternoon whilst the BBC were still filming. Again 5619 put in a superb show to give some memorable images and all the participants went away happy with many complimentary comments.

All in all it was one amazing weekend and worth all the hard work that everyone put in. To see the car park packed and people lining the trackside to capture the train in action was something else. Special mention must go to the train crews who worked tirelessly throughout the weekend and always had time for the passengers showing them round the footplate and answering the questions. It was a fitting celebration to an amazing year.



As with many of our major events the Friday before hand as often as busy for the volunteers as the actual event itself as they get everything ready . Our Silver Jubilee Gala was no different but not only were we getting everything ready for the event but we had the BBC and S4C filming as well.

Left - With S4C filming star of the show 5619 is given a good cleaning ready for the weekend.



Far left - Sian Lloyd and Derek Brockway chat for the camera on a live broadcast as Alex Hinshelwood and Bernard Morton look on—Andy Knock

Left - With the BBC filming on the other side Mick Parker completes the lettering on the MOS van, one of those saved from Gloucester docks earlier in 2008.



Our TV stars pose with the BBC professionals. From L—R Alex Hinshelwood, Andy May, Derek Brockway, Sian Lloyd and peeping out the back Bernard Morton. Andy Knock



Above —The weekend also saw many long standing members enjoying the goings on. All pleased to see not only the crowds but an engine like 5619 putting on a show on the railway they started. From left to right Ian Smith, Tim “I can still get into my engineers uniform” Goss, Andy May, Mark Vrettos, Martin Herbert and Barry Powell pose for the camera.

Below — 5619 makes a vigorous exit from Furnace Sidings to the delight of the onlookers





Steam in the valleys as 5619 puts on a show passing the Garn Terraces (above) and nearing the Whistle Inn (below).





Left — The sumptuous buffet provided by the Whistle Inn. The food was excellent and thoroughly enjoyed by all although it could have fed 1000 let alone 100.

Below left—5619 was not the only steam engine in action as Russell Larks 5 inch gauge steam was also in action. Seen here the loco and train approach the refreshment room whilst in the background 5619 approaches the Whistle Inn.

Below —On the Saturday John Richards had his head shaved to raise money for the station fund raising over £300 in the process. Rhys Davis does his best Sweeny Todd impression as Johns long hair is consigned to the history books.

One of our key events each year is the August Bank Holiday transport rally so we invited some of the exhibitors along to help us celebrate, their continued support year on year is always appreciated and helps the Transport rally to get bigger and bigger.

Some of the exhibits are seen below.





On the Sunday afternoon a simple ceremony was held to dedicate the bench commissioned in honour of life long member Gwynfor Tudor who sadly passed away at the start of 2007 and is still remembered and missed by all.

Top Left—Norman Clymer and Angela Porter say a few words in memory of Gwyn

Middle left—Gwyn would have approved.

Bottom—The volunteers gather round to remember Gwyn and celebrate his life.

Below—Gwynfor Tudor . Steve Key





On the Monday and Tuesday we again played host to another Compo Club charter with 5619 and a selection of trains. Gower Princess also featured as it posed with the tank wagon on the rail over rail bridge.

Whilst the weather wasn't exactly sunny it was at least dry, allowing the photographers plenty of opportunity to get some memorable pictures.



With a constant supply of tea and biscuits from the refreshment room (courtesy of Angela Porter and Mary) to keep everyone, photographers and crews alike going everyone had an enjoyable time and many were already asking when the next one would be.

We are still new comers in the world of the photographic charters but we are already making a good name for ourselves and people are now beginning to see what we already know, we have one amazing railway, with a group of very dedicated volunteers who know how to be professional but still enjoy themselves and put on a good show.





Opposite Page Top—In typical Welsh valley scenery 5619 brings a morning train into Furnace Sidings.

Opposite Page Middle—having stopped to pick up passengers 5619 makes a vigorous departure as it heads north to its next stop at the Whistle Inn.

Opposite Page Bottom—As 5619 heads north on another passenger service the farmer waits for it to pass before delivering hay to the horses in the opposite fields.



This Page Top—the farmer has left his tractor to attend to some work whilst a freight train for Brynmawr storms past in the back ground.

This Page Middle—5619 gets to grips with the 1 in 28 climb under the rail over rail bridge as it brings an Eastern valleys passenger service up the valley. Meanwhile 200793 Gower Princess shunts a loan tank wagon on the high level line.



This Page Bottom—From the Coity Tips a panoramic view as 5619 blasts up the valley with a Brynmawr bound freight whilst 200793 Gower Princess toys with a single tank wagon on the Big Pit branch.



Above — There's hardly a ripple to disturb the reflection as 5619 heads north past the lower Garn lake.

Below — Night time at Furnace Sidings as the crew and shunter discuss the days events





It goes without saying that without the hard work and dedication from the volunteers none of this would have been possible. A big thank you to you all.

Pictures Alistair Grieve and Ian Loasby



Christmas Cracker—2008 Santa Specials



As December neared and the TV and newspapers became filled with nothing but doom and gloom and talk of a recession and a credit crunch we did start to worry about how well our Santa Specials would do. However we need not have worried as the passengers came and they kept on coming.

The passenger loadings were 15% up on 2007, we had our best Santa day ever on the 14th with 405 people carried and for the first time ever even had two Santa's on the go to accommodate a large pre-booked party. Thanks to a lot of hard work and juggling everyone was accommodated although at one stage poor old Santa did begin to run out of presents and he had to send his helpers off to get more for the children.

Number 19 proved to be a real star, effortlessly handling the trains with steam to spare and courtesy of the steam heat making the coaches cosy and warm. Proving to be very economical on coal it did become a competition to see which crew

could manage the day on the least coal. Andy May and Phil Williams claimed themselves victors having used only one bunker of coal, even if it did mean scraping it right out!

We had lots of exceptionally good feedback, from the quality of the sherry and presents, to the friendliness of the staff, the value for money and the enjoyment of the whole experience. It was a real Christmas cracker.





And where would we be without the volunteers and the Staff at the Whistle Inn who made it all happen? Over the 8 days and 86 trains, 54 volunteers in all gave up their free time to put on a real festive event and make these Santa Specials the best yet. Thank you one and all.



Coal House at War at the PBR



A very popular BBC Wales series has been the Indus films produced Coal House filmed in and around Blaenavon and set in 1927. For the second series they moved forward to 1944 for Coal House at War and on a damp and blustery October the 15th they were filming at the railway.

Using No.19 and the M&M coach the train did several run pasts for the film crews up and down the line before two trips with the evacuees Andrew, Roberta and Leah who were interviewed whilst on the train.

At the Whistle Inn they were met by Mary Hammond-Jones from the WRVS who was to escort the children to their new host families. Also on site a pill box was built for several scenes featuring the Home Guard, although this was shot at night so I didn't get any pictures.

Thanks go to Andy May, Alex Gourlay, Andy Knock and Bernard Morton for crewing the train (and getting their 15 minutes of fame).





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OOPS

Many apologies to Roger Lewis for my incorrectly crediting the front cover shot of Nora and Brookfield to Pete Drummond rather than Roger. Sorry Rog.

Left—You do need to be quite flexible to get into some of the nooks and crannies on a locomotive but Mark Vrettos shows an incredible amount of flexibility here as he works on 5619. Photo George Pope

Back Cover— Pure magic as 5619 stands under a moonlit sky just outside Blaenavon High Level on the members special. In the background can be seen the lights of Blaenavon.

Welcome New Members

Kenneth Stephens	Caerphilly	A Harris	Blaenavon
Alan Hartland	Rica	Peter Nicholson	Burnham on Sea
William Chambers	Ebbw Vale	Paul Harris	Pontllanfraith
Richard Barnet	Kidwelly	Gwyneth Evans	Kidwelly
B P Webb	Abercarn	S Webb	Abercarn
David Griffith Jones	Cwmbran	C J Powis	Abertillery
Roger Berrisford	Isle of White	Norman Davis	Newtown
Matthew Evans	Malpas	John Hall	Pontymister
Gareth Hopkins	Bassleg	Ryan Jenkins	Roose
Roger Maynard	Griffthstown	Huw Parfitt	Blackwood
Jonathan Spencer	Pontlliw	David Tapper	Wales

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

