Trackbed Trails

The newsletter for Exmoor Associates Ltd Issue 1, Winter 2004/5

Firstly, thank you to everyone for their patience over the last few months. Following feedback this autumn we have now decided to start issuing an Exmoor Associates newsletter, which will be sent out around every four months, helping us to achieve our aim of maintaining a high level of communication with all our shareholders and supporters.

This year has proved to be a very busy year for the Exmoor Associates team. We have taken much time to meet land owners and in some cases set up negotiations on possible land purchase. Several very valuable contacts and relationships have been made and we are now working to build on these over the coming months. The loss of the Chumhill site earlier in the year was an unfortunate blow, especially as, on paper, it did appear possible for us to raise the required capital. Despite this, we have quickly managed to pick ourselves up and substantial progress has been made, both in negotiations on land, and also politically.

We have high hopes for the months ahead, and it is our intention that Exmoor Associates will continue to go from strength to strength. Our team will be continuing to strive for the best and we'll be working hard behind the scenes to expand on what we've got. There will be nothing we will need more to achieve this than your continued support and that of others.

Thank you to everyone who has helped us during the past few months and we hope you have a fantastic new year!

Nik Barrie, EA Chairman

EA Buys Blackmoor Trackbed

Following a series of talks with one of the landowners at Blackmoor, we have now agreed on the purchase of quite a significant section of trackbed. The section stretches for two thirds of a kilometre between Wistlandpound and Blackmoor, giving Exmoor Associates an approximate total of one and a half kilometres of the former Lynton & Barnstaple trackbed in its possession.

The trackbed, which includes two bridges will remain unfenced and will continue to be used as part of the farm until such time as it is required for future reinstatement of the railway. The formation remains in very good condition and an initial report back from Chris Fry (bridge engineer at Atkins Rail, who has been kindly assisting us with our work) suggests that the first of the two bridges will only require basic work to return to use.

The final paperwork for the deal is currently with the solicitors at time of print, however we remain hopeful that it will be swiftly completed early in the new year. We would like to remind everyone that this trackbed passes through private farmland and that whilst we now have ownership of the trackbed, nobody can be permitted to access the trackbed unless prior arrangement is made through Exmoor Associates. When visiting the area, please respect our neighbours rights and keep to public footpaths.

Land Management

One of our annual tasks is the physically demanding but highly satisfying hedge laying and land management working party.
On December 4th a compact team of highly motivated volunteers (okay 2 of us) braved the cold and wet to kick off the first of the 2004/5 hedge laying working parties. The existing hedging was trimmed and repaired, allowing it to be extended in the afternoon. Initial work was also done on scrub bashing on the bank, and some work was carried out on dead hedging near the river to improve the site boundary. This has the added benefit of eliminating the need for burning or offsite disposal, which are only used where other methods are not possible or deemed inappropriate.
We would like to have another 'bash' before the spring, details to be made available soon. If you would be interested in assisting in the future for a day or even just a few hours, get in contact with either Tony Brown or Nik Barrie, no special skills required, just enthusiasm.
If you can come and help it would be most appreciated and seeing the results at the end of the afternoon really does give you an inner glow of satisfaction (honest!)

Above - before and after. Even a few hours' work can make a massive difference! In these photos we see the stretch of hedge along our main road boundary, which has been repaired, trimmed and extended. Over the coming seasons we would like to extend the laid hedge all the way to the far end of our field. New volunteers are much needed for next year and will be made most welcome! Watch our web site for details of future working parties, or alternatively contact Tony Brown or Nik Barrie to ask to be sent details as they become known.

Part of our land at Collard bridge is contaminated with Japanese knotweed and we have started a rolling 3 year treatment programme for this site. This weed is one of a number listed under Schedule 9 of the 1981 Wildlife and Countryside Act, it being an offence in the UK to plant it or otherwise cause it to grow. It is a highly invasive weed reproducing primarily through its root system, which may reach 18 metres (60 feet) in length, and quite capable of growing through tarmac, concrete and paving, doing extensive damage as it spreads. It is now a major problem in many parts of the country. We are now doing all we can to reduce, and hopefully one day eradicate it from our Collard Bridge site. We are also monitoring other sites of infection along the L&B route and are able to help with advice for anyone who has problems with contamination.

Above (left) - Snowdrops near Snapper. Here we see the trackbed in winter at Riversmead. In the winter, Knotweed dies off and here we see a relatively small patch of dead canes. This can take up to three years to decompose can can form a dense litter that suppresses competition from native flora.
Above (right) - The banks either side of the trackbed in the background here at Chumhill are densely covered with Japanese Knotweed and it is well established, growing up to 3 metres high.
Please always be careful not to spread this invasive plant, make sure you avoid taking vehicles on to areas of infection and please do not try to help by pulling it out - this will only cause further spread!

Annual Accounts

The company's accounting year ends on March 31st.
Copies of the accounts for 2004 will be available for inspection at the shareholders meeting in March but below we have outlined a brief summary for those who only want to read the highlights -

Called up share capital (Shares paid for and issued)	£46,500
Total assets (Cost of land at purchase price + money in bank)	£44,380
Accumulated losses (Overheads)	£2,120

Our overheads mainly consist of company formation cost, solicitors fees, accountants fees, printing of leaflets, postage, etc. As we have no income all overheads in effect become losses. It may be possible in the future to lease some of our land to be able to recoup or mitigate our overhead costs.
Please bear in mind that this is a historic record, as you may have already been told , issued share capital is now in excess of £65k!

Shareholders

We now have 57 shareholders and / or subscribers split between 42 full shareholders and 15 subscribers. We have so far achieved an issued share capital of £67.5k, however we urgently need more supporters if we are to continue with our trackbed purchase.
This year we have done well, however we need to continue to build on our successes over the coming months. We hope to be able to conclude negotiations on several deals over the next year and there always remains the possibility that a section of land or property may become available at short notice.
At the moment about 1 in 30 of the L&BRT membership are also shareholders or subscribers with Exmoor Associates. If all of our existing shareholders could recruit one other, we could increase this ratio to about 1 in 15 and be in a position to buy substantially more trackbed.
If you are able to help us, please do. We particularly need to try and attract new shareholders and supporters. If you know anyone, please make sure you pass on our details! If you would like to pass a leaflet on to a friend, we still have several boxes, so please get in contact!

Assisting the L&B

Exmoor Associates acquired 200 ex-SR concrete fence posts in early 2003 following the re-fencing of the Exeter to Barnstaple 'Tarka' Line. They have been kindly stored for us over the last year free of charge in Chapelton, near Bishop's Tawton.
In July the posts, which had been previously earmarked for use in fencing newly acquired trackbed for EA, were sold to the Lynton & Barnstaple Railway Company. The sale was at the request of the L&B and will allow them to fence the next section of trackbed near Parracombe.
Exmoor Associates are pleased to be able to again assist the railway in progressing this exciting project.

News Bites

Bratton Trackbed

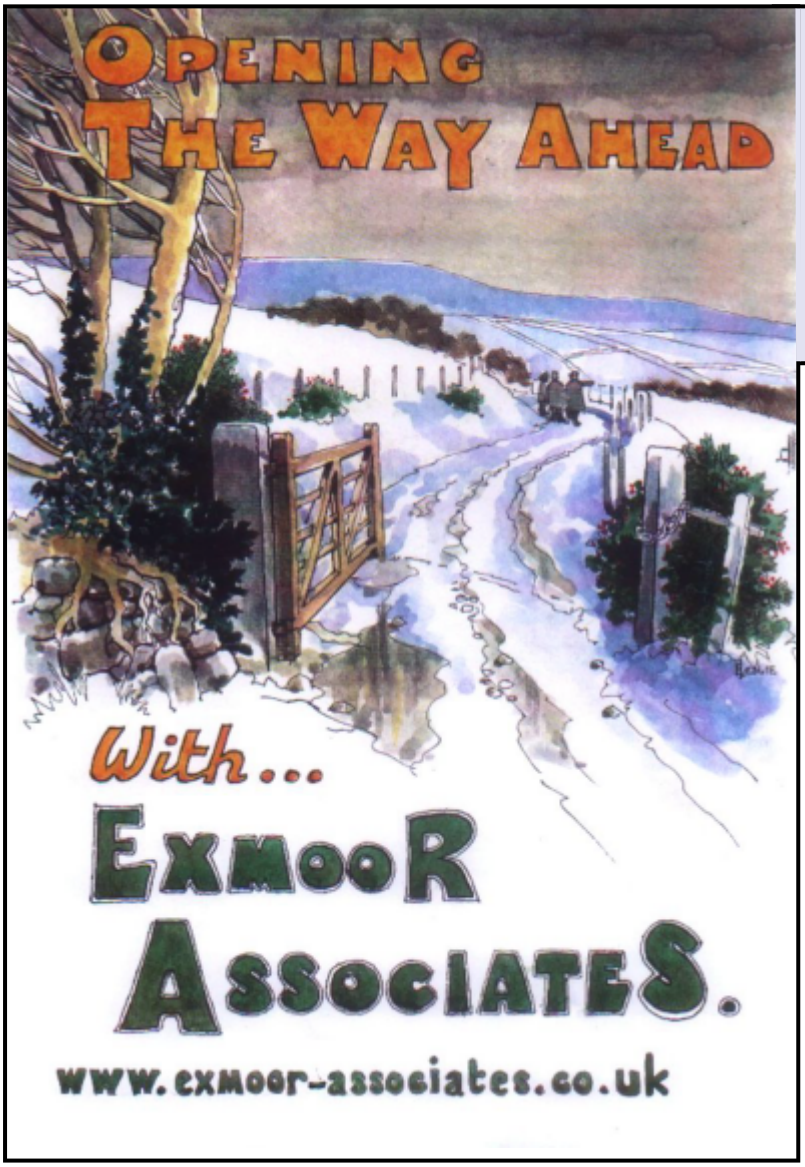
A number of you will have walked or ridden along the section of trackbed owned by David Moore at Bratton Fleming. Arrangements had been started for Exmoor Associates to purchase this section from David and then lease it back to him, allowing him to continue running his 7¼" steam railway along the trackbed. Following lengthy talks with David and the solicitors, he has now changed his mind about selling. We are assured that he will continue to look after the trackbed for any possible future reinstatement scheme.

Chelfham Canvas

The last time we wrote to shareholders it was to canvas opinion on the possibility of us offering to buy the Chelfham trackbed from the Lynton & Barnstaple Railway Company. By doing so, it could potentially assist them in either funding progress at the Woody Bay site or buying more land so as to facilitate further extension.
The result was a split vote 31% against, 31% in favour, 25% undecided, 13% didn't respond. In view of the divergence of opinion, the directors have chosen not to pursue this line of enquiry at this stage.

Calvert Trust

Early in 2004, Exmoor Associates became a corporate member of The Friends of the Calvert Trust (Exmoor). We would like to show our ongoing support for the work done by the Calvert Trust and we look forward to being able to work more closely with them in the future.
Last year, Exmoor Associates directors met with Calvert Trust representatives to discuss the long term possibility for the future reinstatement of a mutually beneficial railway transport link. In doing so, we have also been shown plans that they already have in place for the development and extension of their operations at the centre.
We recognise the excellent work that is done by the centre throughout the year and we are keen to do what we can to offer our support.



Poster Campaign

Our poster publicity campaign continues to build on the success of the first posters, which we launched this summer. In December a special one-off set of very attractive winter posters went public. The winter poster (shown left) has been painted by local artist and project supporter, Eric Leslie, to whom we are most grateful. It can be seen now at Woody Bay Station where it has been put up for the start of the 'Santa Special' season.

Can *you* help?

As a non-trading non profit making company we constantly are struggling to keep our overheads down. The directors all work on a voluntary basis without expenses but there are some costs that we cannot eliminate.

So on the basis of 'if you don't ask you don't get' can anyone help with any of the following?

Conveyances - There is always an on-cost of at least several hundred pounds when we buy a section of trackbed, are there any benevolent solicitors out there?

Annual Accounts - Any tame accountants who could prepare the company accounts for presentation to Companies House and the Inland Revenue from a set of account balances each year? This is not too onerous as there are not many transactions!

Insurance - No one it seems wants to insure farmland for third party liability (unless you own a farm). We are investigating ways to overcome this but any suggestions or assistance welcome.

2005 Shareholders Meeting

The next shareholders meeting will be at Bratton Fleming Sports Club on **Saturday, 19th March** starting at 10.00 am. A complimentary buffet lunch will be provided, contributions towards the cost will be welcome on the day!

The meeting will present us with an opportunity to provide an update on what's happening, and also allow everyone to meet and ask our directors any questions.

In the afternoon we will be leading a trackbed walk along two stretches of the L&B trackbed, not normally accessible to the public. Details for the walk will be given at the meeting from where we will travel to the start point. Anyone intending to join us, please bring warm clothes and footwear suitable for muddy conditions. Don't forget your camera...

Events & Activities

We are currently working on a possible event to be held the day following the shareholders meeting (Sunday, 20th March). This may or may not prove to be possible at time of going to press, however further details will be made available if it does materialise, both through the web site and at the meeting at Bratton.

Have you got any ideas for fundraising or social one day events? If you have an idea that could bring benefit to the company and others in the surrounding area, please get in contact because we always need new ideas!

If you have any ideas, comments, questions or suggestions please always feel free to contact the Exmoor Associates management team! Tony Brown *(secretary)* 020 8550 9183, Nik Barrie 07862 249279, Mike Buse 01206 734030, Mike Selby 01737 358120; or e-mail to enquiries@exmoor-associates.co.uk