Trackbed Trails

The newsletter for Exmoor Associates Ltd

Issue 10, Spring 2011

Exmoor Associates now owns Snapper Halt

The purchase of the halt, land and trackbed completed late in 2010 - so we are now able to officially confirm we own it. During the winter, local volunteers have been working on site most weeks to clear the overgrown station site. We then also held a larger work weekend in February.

The completion of the Snapper purchase means that we now own 1.85 miles of trackbed over six separate sections, making us the single largest owner of L&B trackbed. It also means that three stations (including Woody Bay and Chelfham) have been secured.

To make it easier to understand who now owns what, we have added a map to the 'Property' page on our website. To view the map you will need to have Adobe Flash installed. As things progress, we will update it!

Snapper Open Weekend

We will be holding a Spring social event over the weekend of May 14th & 15th, coinciding with the L&B's Vintage Weekend and their AGM. We will hold a get together at Loxhore Village Hall at 10am on Saturday 14th May, postcode EX31 4SU, plenty of parking in the village hall car park. Lunch will be available for those who come - please advise Tony Brown or Mike Buse in advance if you would like to book a lunch including if you would prefer the vegetarian option.

There will then be an "open weekend" at Snapper over both Saturday and Sunday to give all our shareholders and supporters the chance to view the recent (and ongoing) restoration work that has been taking place. There is limited parking at Snapper, so we want to encourage shareholders and supporters to spread visits over the weekend and car share where possible to avoid all arriving with cars at once. Parking is available through the double gate entrance near to 'Snapper Mead'. Alternatively, cars can also be parked in Goodleigh and you can follow the path down to Snapper from the junction with Coombe Close.

The site at Snapper will be open on both May 14th & 15th from 12-5pm. During the Sunday afternoon we will have a BBQ at the station (weather permitting 12-2pm).

News Bites

E-mail Addresses

We want to be able to easily keep in touch with all shareholders without having to spend large sums of money on postage.

We now have email addresses for around 50% of shareholders - if you haven't told us yours, or if it has changed, please get in touch and let us know, or email us at trackbedtrails@exmoor-associates.co.uk.

L&B Magazine 93

We have had a significant number of our shareholders contacting us regarding the article on our purchase of Snapper Halt published in L&B Magazine 93, all expressing disquiet that the trustees should have seen fit to sanction such comments.

In February, the Exmoor Associates directors therefore sent a formal complaint to the Lynton & Barnstaple Railway Trust regarding this. We feel that the comments made towards the end of this article were inaccurate and misleading. We feel that such comments can only serve to harm relations between the Trust and Exmoor Associates, and far more significantly they are potentially extremely damaging to the whole project.

As at the date of publication (early April) of this copy of "Trackbed Trails" we are dissappointed not to have had any response whatsoever from the Trust.

Snapper Restoration & Conservation

The major news following our purchase of Snapper has to be the sterling efforts made by our volunteers and supporters in starting to restore the Halt to its original condition and the clearing of the trackbed to provide easier access. Part of the latter has included the formation of a small area of hard-standing inside the gate to provide safer off-road parking.

The main event was held over the weekend of 26th & 27th February with remarkably fine weather and an impressive turnout and complete with an on-site barbeque and a soup kitchen provided by Jackie and Tony Williams. Work had commenced in the weeks prior to this and indeed is still continuing. If there is anyone else locally who would like to help with our ongoing land management work days then please get in touch.

There have been far too many involved in the works to name but you all know who you are and your efforts really are appreciated. The photographs give a much better idea of what has been achieved than these words can. Better still, if you can make it, come along to Snapper and see for yourself on the 14th/15th May.

Personal Perspectives
- Pat Hobbs

On the 15th September 1930 my parents-in-law journeyed by train from their home town of Bridgwater to Lynton, walking down Sinai Hill with their one suitcase in the fading light of late evening. They were both 26. It was their wedding day and the start of 59 happy years together. The Lynton and Barnstaple Railway, on which they finally travelled that day, was remembered by them and spoken of with pleasure and affection in later years.

In 1966, thirty-six years on, Tony and I spent time trying to find the disused railway track with little success. All I remember of it was a tangle of overgrowth in a few accessible places, the impressive "bowl" and motte and bailey of Parracombe and the old Woody Bay station. It was a disappointment that so little could be found and walked.

Although I have championed the conservation and preservation of the natural and built environment for over 40 years, railways held only a passing, if nostalgic, interest for me. I was therefore taken aback to find our visit to Snapper on the 11 March both exciting and inspirational. For the first time in my rather indirect association with the L & B, I was able to visualise the Railway as it might have been. The curving track is plain to see, the original ballast remains, Snapper Halt with its platform is as it must have been and a rather fragile-looking cattle creep, Bridge 15, survives All this is impressive and yet it was the remains of the plate-layer's hut which gave realism to the scene. Men worked here. Is this how Mum & Dad would have seen it 80 years ago? It is easy to imagine it might be.

It was too much to expect, given the raw exposure after the recent work, that I would be able to conjure up a living entity with the hiss of steam and the creaks, rumbles and laboured chuffing of a locomotive leaving Snapper but what has been achieved in such a short time on this newly-acquired length by foresight, persistence and team work is quite remarkable. I feel that it is the start of rediscovering the full section of the line from Barnstaple to Wistlandpound. Chelfham Station is largely intact within its 1950's hideous extension, and its interior and windows should be preserved. Chelfham Viaduct is a majestic and beautiful monument. EA must continue what they have so successfully begun, for without the trackbed there can be no railway.

I do not know whether the L & B ever will be rebuilt in its entirety or even in a viable part, or whether this will remain a dream, but even if that never comes to pass I would hope that the trackbed could be walked and enjoyed by future generations, who would be able to imagine and appreciate not only the Railway and the life it had but the glorious countryside through which it passes. That indeed would be a valuable legacy to bequeath.

It is my strong belief that, for this to be guaranteed, any purchased trackbed should be protected in perpetuity in some way so that if the possibility of rebuilding ever does present itself the formation will be ready and waiting. Until then let everyone enjoy the privilege of access to the splendid Yeo valley. It must not be lost again.

Surrey Group Name Board

In January 1994, members of the Surrey Group unveiled the new Snapper running in board at their annual meeting. Fabricated by the London Sign Company, manufacture was funded by the group. Shortly after, the Hole Ground scheme fell through and the sign lay in store for 17 years. At a meeting of the group following completion of the Snapper purchase by EA, they agreed for the sign to be errected in it's rightful place... The photo shows director Nik Barrie with Surrey Group member Barry Marshall at Snapper Halt in February.

What Next?

There is still a lot of tree clearance and maintenance to do with fallen trees to cut up and clear, one of which took out the 11,000v power line last year, and we also need to get specific fencing works done. The main field is on the Yeo flood plain and will inevitably be under water at some stage most winters. During the summer we will continue to improve the drainage over the trackbed and site, without compromising the land's intrinsic value as a habitat. For these reasons we are holding back on letting out the main field for grazing for the time being.

EA at Warley 2011

We are pleased to announce that we will have a presence at the Warley MRC show at the NEC on November 19th & 20th.

Exmoor Associates will be there supporting Exmoor Transport Ltd, as their restored locomotive "Gertrude" will be displayed as a centrepiece at the show. "Gertrude" was partly rebuilt at the L&B's former workshop in Bratton and completed at the nearby Exmoor Steam Railway, making a brief appearance at Woody Bay as a bare chassis before restoration.

The event also involves Oakwood Press (who's Andrew Kennedy has done most of the historical research on the engine), a Stewarts & Lloyds display (owners of Bilston Steelworks where "Gertrude" spent most of her industrial working life) and the Welsh Highland Heritage Railway (where the loco is based).

EA is not linked to ET, other than through shared directors and volunteers, however the Warley Show at the NEC will be a great opportunity for EA to further raise its profile and build further support – and at one of the most high profile spots in the show too.

Personal Perspectives

- Mike Buse

Negotiations for the purchase of Snapper Halt began back in 2003 with meetings and correspondence with the then owner Mrs Nicholls.

As part of this I arranged with Mrs Nicholls to walk the trackbed. That January, all the EA directors, along with Paul Gower, John Hedderly and David Moore, explored this wonderful section. Near to bridge 15, lying face down in the mud, was the bridge number 15 - still intact - a remarkable survivor from the railway's closure.

Following a phone call to Mrs Nicholls she very kindly agreed that I could have it if I could remove it, needless to say thanks to Paul Gower we retrieved the bridge number and it now resides at Woody Bay.

During these early years we recognised how wonderful it would be to own this stunning section in the Yeo valley, but despite how hard we tried we were unable to acquire it due to the sentimental value it had for Mrs Nicholls.

Some while ago I visited Brian Nicholls who farms near Parracombe with trackbed extending a long way back to Blackmoor Gate. By then he owned the land at Snapper, as his Mother had recently passed away, he was fully aware of the interest the railway had in the land but until the legal matters had been finalised we had to wait, I did feel our chance would come however.

So it came as no great surprise to get a phone call from the land agent asking if were interested in purchasing the fields containing the Halt and trackbed - of course we were! We now started a lengthy negotiation, despite how hard I tried Brian did not wish to sell just the trackbed, and the land was split into two lots. In the end we decided to try to purchase them both so once again we started fund-raising. With articles in Heritage Railway supporting us, the finance was raised and we are now working on the site, a real gem and a charming place to visit and enjoy.

Negotiations continue with other land owners so further fund raising appeals will be in the pipeline, if you are pleased with this recent achievement you can purchase shares at any time.

Finally a big thank you to all those that contributed to the purchase of this section. I would like to propose a really big thank you to all those that have been working on site clearing, sorting and tiding.

Hopefully we will see many of you at the informal gathering over the 14th & 15th May, I believe we are rapidly gaining momentum and all being well 2011 will have yet more surprises in store.

Talk with us...

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