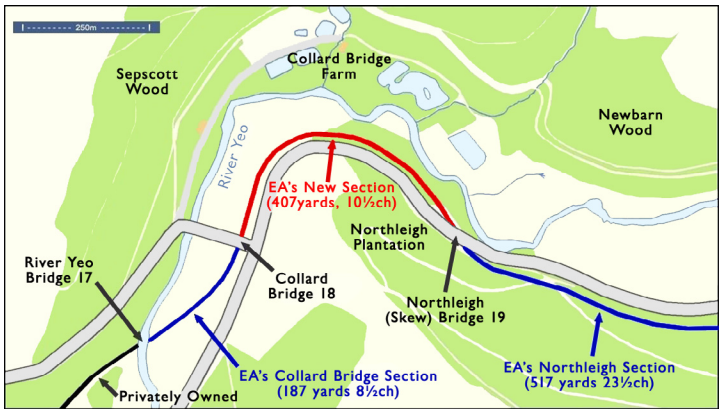
TrackbedTrails

The newsletter for Exmoor Associates Ltd

Issue 16, Spring 2016

NEW TRACKBED PURCHASES

Exmoor Associates is pleased to announce the purchase of an estimated 407 yard (18½ chains) section of trackbed between Collard Bridge (Bridge 18) and Skew Bridge (Bridge 19). The new section is opposite Collard Bridge Farm on the other side of the River Yeo and closely follows the course of the Goodleigh Road, bridging the gap between EA's Collard Bridge trackbed and the Northleigh Plantation trackbed. This acquisition follows on from the purchase in September, of 1,106 yards (50 chains) of trackbed at Loxhore. Gradually it's coming together!



NEXT MEETING - SAT 14TH MAY

Our next meeting for shareholders will be held on Saturday 14th May at Goodleigh Village Hall, commencing at 10 am. For those using a Sat Nav, EX32 7NN will take you to Longland Close which is just past the village hall.
As usual lunch will be provided, please let us know if you'll be attending and if you require a vegetarian option so we can advise the caterers. As always, partners and interested guests are welcome. There will be no particular agenda for this meeting, but the directors will announce the latest developments being progressed, followed by discussion on the way shareholders would like to see the company continue to move forward.

Weather permitting, there will be one of our usual trackbed walks after the meeting. This is the same date as the L&B Trust's Spring Vintage Weekend & AGM so take full advantage and why not make it a full day of L&B related events.

WORK ON THE GROUND

In October 2015, works continued at Snapper installing a lamppost on the platform, assisting Western Power Distribution during the re-positioning of power cables crossing the trackbed, and felling the trees growing through another power line. Also work was carried out as part of the flood defence work agreed with the Environment Agency.

▲ The latest acquired trackbed, seen looking down from the site of Skew Bridge during our trackbed walk in April 2006.
▼ The view rounding the corner towards Collard Bridge.

Our volunteer workforce is currently experiencing a shortage of hand tools to complete their tasks. If anyone attending the Shareholders' Meeting in May has any of the following old (but still usable) items to donate, please bring them along:
5 foot crow bar, Aggregate shovel, Aluminium ladder and step ladder, Bass broom (a heavy duty Garden Broom), Devon spade (a long handled Garden Spade), Garden spade, Garden fork, Heavy duty plastic buckets, Hoe, Jet wash with hose and lance, Rake, Steel fuel can and spout (military style Jerry can).

THE SOUTHWOLD TRACKBED: SHADES OF EXMOOR ASSOCIATES

The Southwold Railway Trust, a charity set up in 2006 out of the SR Society, has always had the principle charitable aim of restoring the 1879 narrow-gauge branch line between Halesworth and Southwold – just over eight miles. But several attempts to begin the restoration have been prevented by major opposition from residents, and by the intransigence of the local authorities and wildlife groups. During the course of these attempts, a parcel of land was bought with the help of members and sponsors: just over half a mile in length, to the north-east of Wenhaston, this has over a quarter of a mile of trackbed, with the rest providing the area for a necessary diversion and a site of the new Wenhaston station (the original being in a neighbour's garden). The project to re-instate the railway here, turned down by the council a number of times, is now under Appeal.
The Trust has also recently applied for planning permission to build a workshop with demonstration line, visitor centre, nature reserve, and miniature railway, adjacent to the trackbed at Southwold, and awaits the response. A complete Victorian mixed heritage train, as ran on the railway in 1879, is being built to the original – and highly-unusual – three-foot-gauge.

The accession of a new chairman in spring 2015 brought a change of emphasis to the Trust: James Hewett, the ex-chair of the Welsh Highland Heritage Railway, wished to re-emphasise the importance of the entire railway-building project. The SRT has always looked principally towards the Lynton and Barnstaple Railway as a shining example of how to succeed over many disadvantages: both trackbeds are in many different (and often inimical) hands – both railways closed early and have been gone and seemingly forgotten for many years – both were essential and successful means of transport through sensitive landscapes – the Exmoor National Park, and the Suffolk Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. Both had unusual locomotives and stock (in the case of the coaches, built by the same firm), and both were a very much loved part of their local history and environment. Even the opposition is very similar in its tone. And the present set-up at Woody Bay is very similar to that proposed at Wenhaston in its size, scope, and intentions: more than one SRT Trustee is a member, also, of the L&B - the cross-membership works both ways. The L&B workshops have been very helpful to the Trust in the rolling stock build, providing advice, expertise and components for the covered van currently in hand.

So the chairman invited Michael Buse, guiding light of Exmoor Associates, to speak to the SRT's Board of Trustees about how his group is buying L&B trackbed piece by piece, despite much initial opposition. Inspired by this, the chairman proposed to the SRT AGM in November that a similar Trackbed Purchase Fund and Project be set up: the Resolution was passed unanimously, and subsequently confirmed by an (also-unanimous) vote by Trustees. Several donations were immediately received, providing a healthy balance. The Trust is now working through the land ownerships (there has been much encroachment over the 87 years since closure), and publicising its plans to try to ascertain who owns the unregistered sections – which make up a substantial part of the whole. Parallel to this, the Trust is dusting off its (strongly-opposed) 2003 plans to rebuild, bringing them up to date, and checking on the various (relatively small) diversions which are necessary.

It would not be an exaggeration to say that without the sterling work of both the L&B Company, and Exmoor Associates, to provide an example of how things should be done, it is doubtful that this exciting project would have got off the ground. The SRT is of course envious of the L&B's original station buildings (none survive in the Blyth Valley), and particularly so of the motto "Perchance it is not dead, but sleepeth": Southwold, sadly, never had such an iconic "call to arms" for restoration. It is to be hoped that the SRT can follow in the L&B's, and Exmoor Associates', footsteps, and, benefiting from their example, be crowned with success in another "impossible dream".

WANT TO GET IN CONTACT?

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