The newsletter for Exmoor Associates CIC Issue 35 October 2022

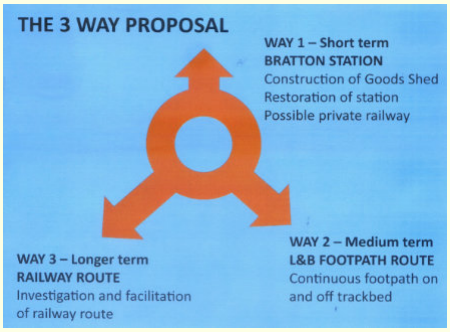
Presentation & Meeting held on 24 September at Goodleigh

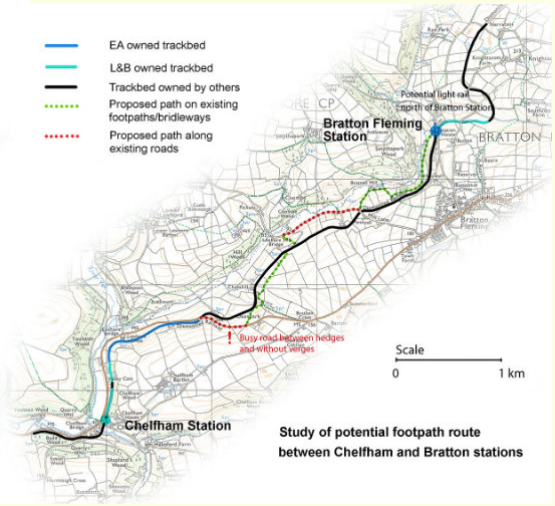
A significant part of the the meeting was a slide presentation by Charles Gardner and Andrew Dakin on land usage in the Lynton and Barnstaple railway corridor, called the "3-Way Approach".

They proposed collaboration and cooperation with the L&BRT to achieve an agreed way forward for the whole route.

The 3-Way Approach

Indicative recreation and movement strategy





Study of potential footpath route between Chelfham and Bratton stations

The presentation material should be referred to for any detailed proposals*, but in high-level summary the 3-Way Approach consists of:

- Short Term: Restoring Bratton Fleming station and providing a heritage/museum focus there.
- Medium Term: Creating footpath links (including permissive footpaths on sections of trackbed) and potentially a base for VeloRail operation in the lower Yeo Valley
- Longer Term: restoration of the entire railway route from Pilton Yard to Lynton.

*If you are receiving this Trackbed Trails electronically a copy is attached. The full colour presentation runs to thirty pages therefore we are not automatically sending it out to those shareholders to whom we only have contact by post.
A copy is downloadable from the news page of our website and we can send out a printed copy to any shareholder who would like to respond with comments. We would appreciate a voluntary donation of at least £4 to cover the cost of this, contact the Company Secretary to arrange this, details at the bottom of the last page.

Subsequent questions and discussions from the meeting attendees included

- Whether Council engagement was needed? (Yes)
- Would Chelfham viaduct ownership be transferred? (Not until it was required for railway operation. Chris Duffell advised that the L&BRT has good relations with the Highways Agency body that currently owns the viaduct. Maintenance is to be done and improved gates are to be fitted at both ends to improve access for maintenance)
- Footpaths on the trackbed create precedent for walkers and will make it difficult for railway restoration (Charles Gardner stated that legal advice would need to be obtained before any such permissive footpaths were implemented)

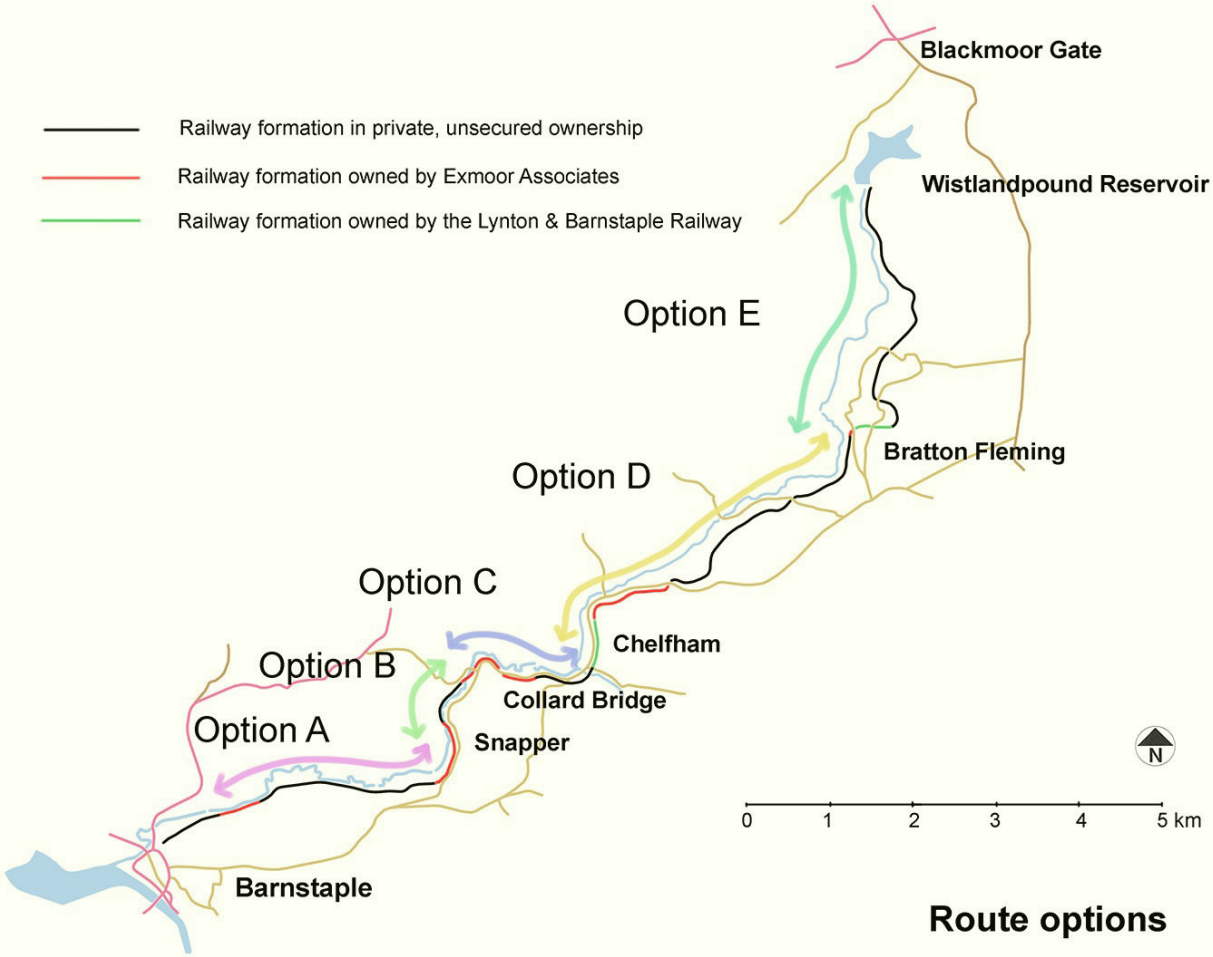
The Gardner / Dakin presentation is an independent report on possible ways forward commissioned by the directors of EA and the YVT trustees. It is intended as a discussion document and we would ask as many shareholders as possible to respond via email or post with their views.

Exmoor Associates is your company and your views are important.

Please keep responses brief and to the point. Apart from "Way 1" (Bratton Station) it is very much a medium to longer term view of how the L&B railway could be progressed.

Certainly some of the proposals are quite innovative and have already attracted strong views.

The directors of Exmoor Associates CIC and the Yeo Valley Trust trustees are not making any recommendations regarding the proposals put forward in the presentation but will do so following feedback from shareholders. It is our intention to publish responses at a future date. Please indicate if you would be happy to have your name published alongside any comments.



Report of the meeting held on 24 September at Goodleigh

From minutes taken by Phil Heathcote with additional text, updates and photos by Barry Marshall, Adrian White, Mike Buse, David Cameron, Andy Hearn, Tony Brown, Charles Gardner, Tony Hobbs, John Buck, Andy Merritt and Michael Bishop.

Mike Buse as chairman opened the meeting, welcoming everyone. Directors also present were Andy Hearn and David Cameron with Phil Heathcote as acting Minutes Secretary. Also present were 64 shareholders and 10 guests.

Apologies for absence

Apologies were received from Tony Brown, Richard Haste and Councillor Ian Roome due to other commitments.

Financial Report

Compiled by Tony Brown and presented to the meeting by David Cameron.

In summary, EA now has 467 shareholders and an issued share capital of £610,000.

Tony repeated that he looked forward to the Yeo Valley Trust successfully completing its registration with the Charity Commission and would urge all shareholders to consider what they would wish the long term destination of their shares to be. Shares can be transferred to an interested friend or relative at any time, or left as a bequest in your will. They can also be donated to the Yeo Valley Trust at any time.

All of these transfers are generally free from charges or fees. Further information can be obtained from the EA and YVT company secretaries.

Matters Arising

A New Sound System

The new sound system was in use and this meant that everyone could hear this time. Mike encouraged everyone in the room to donate towards the cost and subsequently a collection was made.

L&BRT Members Forum

Chris Duffell noted that for L&B Trust members there is a forum organised for the 12th November at Woolhanger Manor.

A Signal for Bratton Station?

Dave Stockwell brought along a signal arm and a finial made for Chelfham and explained that he could facilitate the provision of a similar one for the replacement starting signal at Bratton Fleming. The cost would be approximately £1,100 so he suggested an investment in that.
A show of hands was taken and indicated that most people in the room thought this should go ahead. The Trustees / Directors will look into and action this.

The photo adjacent shows Chris Lane with the Chelfham signal arm.

A Report from Bratton Station

The septic tank had been emptied (the first time for possibly 10 years!) and surveyed on the Friday before the meeting. It is just about adequate for the current occupancy of Bratton Station but a decision will have to be taken regarding when to replace it and if so, with what.

At present, rainwater from the station feeds into this; this is unacceptable and will have to be changed.

The VR wall-box has been delivered to Bratton to await installation.

Photo: Mike Buse

Photo: Andy Hearn

Photo: Andy Hearn

Photo: Andy Hearn

A specialist dowsing survey has recently been undertaken by Anne White to establish where the footings for the original Goods Shed were. These will not be re-used for the new building build but have been marked out on the ground for visitors to see.

Photo: Mike Buse - Anne White with Dowsing Rods

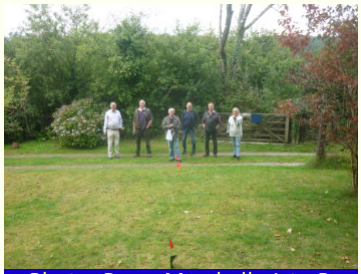


Photo: Barry Marshall - L to R Andrew Naish, Adrian White, Michael Griffith Jones, Mike Buse,Philip White, Ann White

Photo: Barry Marshall - Flags in position marking the old foundations

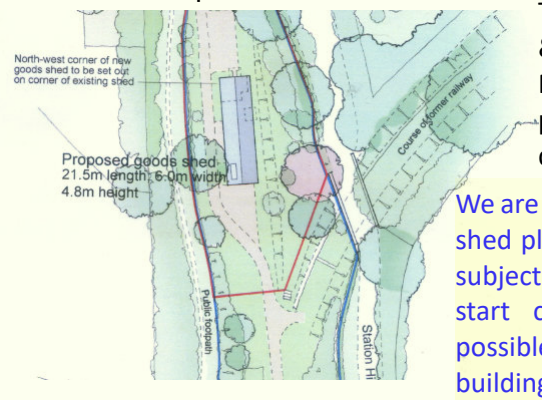
Photo: Barry Marshall - Flags in position marking the old foundations

Adrian White writes….

As a sceptic of the dowsing process [I think we all were! Ed] I was keen to see my friend, Anne White (no relation to me!) in action.

I was fascinated to see the dowsing rod move in what appeared to be the outlines of the old goods shed. I can categorically say that Anne had no part in the rod moving but was purely a medium for the rod.

The area as defined by the rod would appear to be similar to the known size of the shed and it does, of course, remain to be seen how accurate Anne's findings are to the actual area when the groundworks begin for the near replica shed.



The outline of the existing sheds & garage can be seen at the North West corner of the proposed goods shed in the drawing on the left.

We are expecting a decision on our goods shed planning application very soon and subject to Building Control approval will start construction work as soon as possible. We need an experienced building site manager to oversee the works. Any volunteers?

Photo: Barry Marshall - Flags in position marking the old foundations

Following the meeting attendees were invited to walk the recently acquired Budd's Wood trackbed

A Walk In the woods - Andy Merritt writes

For me a highlight of any trip to North Devon is spotting a bit of the former L&B line. Over the years I have managed to either walk or at least identify many parts of the line, although I still have many miles of trackbed and numerous features still to see. Since becoming an EA shareholder, I have been on quite a few of the trackbed walks organised by the Directors and it has always been an adventure, quite often a very muddy and wet adventure!

I have always thought that walking the route of the line really does help you understand what it must have been like to travel on the line, albeit in some sections you do have to use your imagination more than others. When walking the route, you get a better idea of what the passengers would have seen and it puts the railway into the context of the geography of the area.

After the latest meeting on Saturday 24th September shareholders and supporters had the opportunity walk the newly acquired section through Budd's Wood, which according to Mike and Tony's excellent trackbed maps was going to be another 489 metres of 'new' section to walk plus also the opportunity for me to walk at least part of the 450 metres of the EA owned Northleigh Plantation section for the first time.

Photo: Andy Merritt

Photo: Andy Merritt

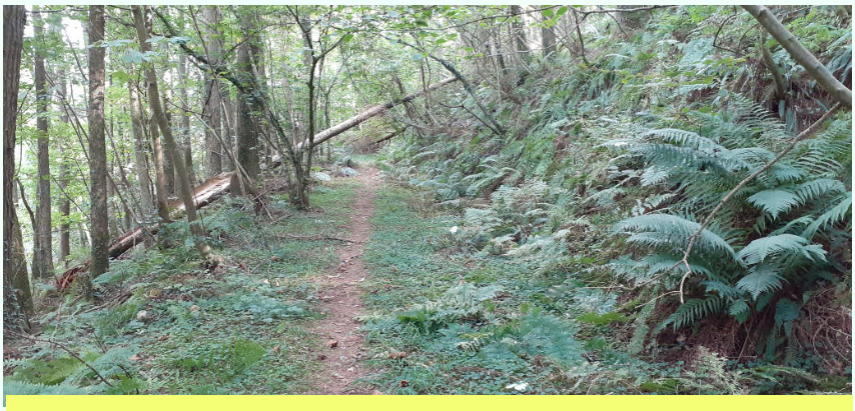


Photo: Andy Merritt

Photo: Andy Merritt

Shortly after 2pm a number of intrepid walkers gathered by the Goodleigh Road Bridge (Bridge 21) probably much to the bemusement of the people using the narrow road. After waiting a while, a number of us scaled the small bank up onto the trackbed using the very temporary steps carved out of the mud. After walking through a small section of slightly overgrown ground the trackbed was actually quite clear apart from some fallen trees and bits of undergrowth.

Photo: Andy Merritt

There was an added bonus compared to many of the sections of trackbed that I have walked and that was the firm ground underfoot, complete with some ballast! As this was the first time, I had walked this section I hadn't really appreciated how close the trackbed was to the main road and river below, although I'm still not sure what the skeleton of a vehicle was doing perched on the trackbed!

The walk was very pleasant and as you walk towards Barnstaple you do notice the trackbed level falling as you get nearer the road level below. I managed to walk the majority of the EA owned section towards the site of Skew Road Bridge although I didn't manage to do the last bit due to some large puddles and mud on the trackbed.

After the walk I went to visit the beautifully restored station at Chelfham, which really is a credit to the small team who have achieved so much, and also did the trackbed walk including the currently accessible part of the EA owned section at Loxhore Bank.

Andy Hearn adds….

As we knew when we purchased Budd's Wood there is a Tree Preservation Order that covers the whole woodland. After contact with the local council it was recommended that we contact the Forestry Commission and a meeting took place to discuss the way forward. Initially it was decided that we would apply to the council to do a basic tidy up and removal of fallen trees and small trees under a certain size, it was also decided to apply for a felling licence to remove some of the commercial size Larch in the future.

A couple of days later these plans were put on hold due to the fact that part of the woodland was found to be classed as Ancient Woodland and contact between the Forestry Commission and The Woodland Trust was made regarding an Ancient Woodland assessment. This assessment has now been carried out and we await the results before we proceed any further on how to tackle the management of Budds Wood

This should enable EA to apply for a licence to clear some of the trees. It is expected that revenue from sale of the Larch trees would more that cover the cost of felling and removal. It is a difficult site to access with logging machinery.

Comments from the floor indicated that several shareholders have relevant knowledge on woodland management. It was noted that grants should be available to manage the woodland sustainably.

Volunteers' Report

Not much has been happening of late at Snapper and elsewhere since the last Trackbed Trails.

Phil has been busy at Collard bridge cutting his way through undergrowth along the top of the embankment whilst at Snapper Rob has been having a general clear up.

Graham has been busy under bridge 15 re-fixing loose and fallen stones and repointing any damaged lime masonry, one of the mile posts has been rubbed down, repainted and replaced and the other is going through the same process.

There are lots of current and future projects at the various EA sites so more volunteers are always welcome.

Photo: Andy Hearn

Photo: Andy Hearn

Photo: Andy Hearn

Land Acquisition Report

Mike Buse reported that the Land Registry ownership of Budd's Wood has had to be re-submitted due to lack of deeds from the vendors and problems with the evidence provided by the previous owners.

EA is at the Solicitors stage with the purchase of two new sections of trackbed, they are all progressing (slowly) and discussions are on-going with further land owners for both trackbed and adjacent desirable land.

As always, further funds are needed to enable EA to take advantage of any opportunities that arise.

Yeo Valley Trust Update

Tony Hobbs gave an update on the current YVT position and its raison d'être.

The reason for the YVT is that under the L&BRT plans, Barnstaple is considered right at the tail end. The YVT position is solely to focus on the southern section, and especially Barnstaple.

The YVT is grateful for all the donations so far. These will in the future hopefully benefit from reclaiming Gift Aid. Circa £48,000 has been donated to date (£18,000 in the first year and £30,000 in this year to date).

EA and YVT may need to discuss future ownership of sections of Budd's Wood, to facilitate any future grants.

So far, the YVT has supported: Bratton Fleming roof finials, Bratton Fleming Goods Shed planning application (fees), Bratton Fleming Goods Shed fund, Bratton Fleming Post Box acquisition, Snapper Halt sign acquisition – which could go into a future museum in Bratton Fleming Goods Shed when built.

Tony then explained the Charity Commission position:

The first application was rejected with the Charity Commission giving the YVT detailed reasons why.

A second application has now been submitted following advice from a consultant, with revised Objects similar to all other heritage railway charities, including opportunities for cooperation and collaboration with other bodies e.g., L&BRT.
It is hoped that this second application will be successful, so please now consider legacies in wills to the YVT of money, assets or shares in future.

Bruce Oakley was introduced to the meeting. He is assisting with the YVT finances with his background in finance and computers, including MS Access and Excel skills.

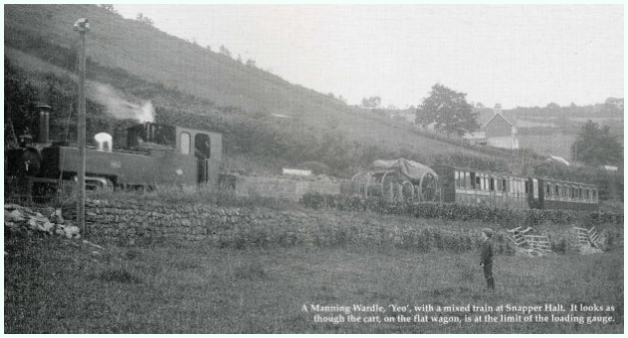
Snapper Halt Original Running In Board

The original Snapper sign recently acquired by the YVT was on display at the meeting along with a replica Chelfham sign. The intention is that it will eventually go on display in the goods shed / museum at Bratton Station.

Photo: Barry Marshall

Photo: Barry Marshall

Photo: Barry Marshall


A Manning Wardle, 'Yeo', with a mixed train at Snapper Halt. It looks as though the cart, on the flat wagon, is at the limit of the loading gauge.

Photographs of the running in boards at Snapper are quite rare but we are now fairly sure that there were two. The photo on the right is the only one we know of showing the Barnstaple end board.

Photo: Michael Bishop's Collection

Spreading the word locally…….

The set (of display boards) at Goodleigh was collected after the EA meeting by Andrew Naish, our tenant at Bratton Fleming, who, together with his partner Carole, attended that Thursday's open teas session at Bratton Fleming Village Hall to meet up with their neighbours and to spread the word about EA and the Railway.

Most of the session on Thursday was spent in discussion with the already-converted, however the general feeling was one of polite but genuine interest and support.

Still spreading the word…….

Barry Marshall attended the Model Railway Exhibition in Bude Saturday 27 August, with the Exmoor Associates' Display Boards, and an array of L&B & EA promotions. Chris Lane and Barry had been approached at the Bear Street MRE a few weeks previously with an offer to attend at Bude, but unfortunately Chris was away that week end, so Barry did it solo.

Barry had only arrived home from holiday on the Wednesday, Thursday was a matter of catching-up, and on Friday he was due on shop duty at Woody Bay station.

We thank Barry for his sterling efforts in promoting the L&B cause and would ask that if anyone in the North Devon area is able to assist at future events let Barry know at events@exmoor-associates.co.uk

Barry with the display stand at the Bude Model Railway Exhibition

Barry arranged for Anne Belsey to have that set of EA boards after the Gala since she had booked space at the Exeter Garden Railway Exhibition at the Matford Centre in Marsh Barton on 29th October. She had arranged for no fewer than five volunteers to help her man a joint L&B and EA stand.

Our thanks to Anne for her support of both the L&B and EA.

The end of an era……

……..and the beginning of another

A personal and rather indulgent reflection on the last twenty years by Tony Brown. [editors privilege - feel free to skip this section]

We have just experienced the end of the second Elizabethan era and are entering the third Carolean age (the term is derived from Carolus, the Latin for Charles - even in my seventies I can still learn something new). I was five at Queen Elizabeth's coronation but the only thing I really remember is a party thrown for the local children at the rugby club premises.

By coincidence Exmoor Associates and the Yeo Valley Trust are also entering a new era. EA is now a Community Interest Company and the YVT soon to become a Community Interest (charity) Organisation.

I started EA with Mike Buse, Mike Selby and Nik Barrie (now Reuther-Hols) as directors in 2002, progress is fairly well documented via back issues of Trackbed Trails, available to download from the News page of our website. Issue 28 incorporated a summary of trackbed acquisitions and is a useful read for newer members.

All four founding directors are still involved in one way or another and we have all stood as directors and / or trustees of the Lynton & Barnstaple Railway Trust / L&B Railway Company / L&B Estates Company at various times.

You will have read on pages one and two the proposals being put forward by Charles Gardner and Andrew Dakin which could herald the start of a new era for Exmoor Associates, the Yeo Valley Trust and indeed the whole Lynton & Barnstaple Railway . Please let us have your views on this consultation document, this is your company and everyone's opinion is important to us.

Very recent events such as the energy crisis, raging inflation and a war in Europe indicate that the whole world is in a similar position of impending change and reappraisal. Likewise the L&B Trust at Woody Bay Station is on the brink of a new era. After twenty years of running between Woody Bay and Killington Lane it is really good news that at long last and according to the recent L & B newsletter the purchase of The Old Station House Inn at Blackmoor Gate is imminent and we are all hoping that the National Park will lift the Grampian rights and finally allow the railway to extend to Parracombe.

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