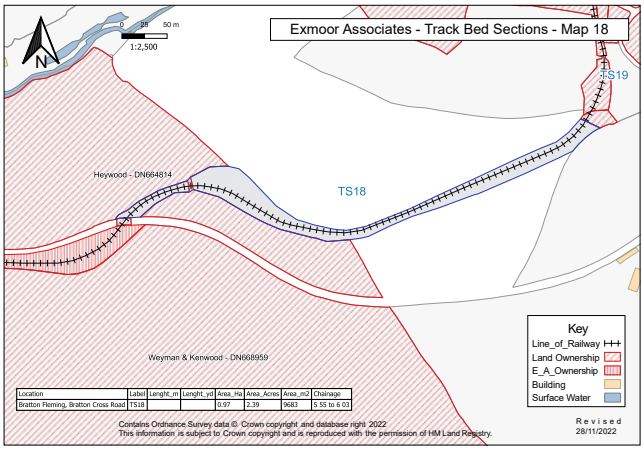
The newsletter for Exmoor Associates CIC Issue 37 March 2023

NEW TRACKBED ACQUIRED

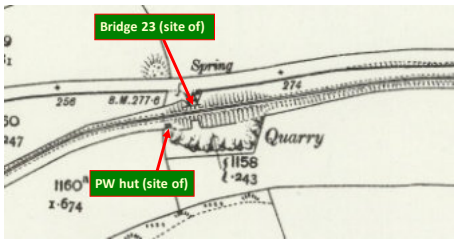
We are pleased to announce the purchase of two new sections of trackbed including a quarry, a stunning stone bridge and further land at Bratton Fleming Station.

We have exchanged contracts for the former L&B trackbed at Summerland Farm. This runs from Bridge 24 to the boundary of Chumhill and incorporates two bridges (occupation crossings) 25 and 26 (Holloway's Bridge). The Summerland trackbed, 559 metres long, is shown as section 21 on our linear block map and outlined in blue on Map 18 below.



As well as the trackbed passing through Summerland Farm, the recently completed land transfer includes the quarry in our Loxhore Bank trackbed section, section 19 on the linear block map. Just about discernible are the remains of the platelayers hut in the north west corner of the site.

Remains of Platelayers Hut



The quarry was excavated and used during construction of the railway to supply track ballast.

As can be seen from the photographs above it has succumbed to nature and is now very overgrown.

Above - Bridge 24 (Bratton Cross Road Bridge) in 1937 after the track had been lifted.

Above - Bridge 25 (Cattle creep) in 1985

Bridge 25 was the site of an accident on 26 February 1913 when a ballast wagon descending under gravity and carrying four men left the rails and turned over, falling down the adjacent embankment.
George Barrow was killed instantly and William Welch died a few days later from the injuries he sustained.
They are buried in Bratton Fleming churchyard.

Michael Heywood's father and mother originally owned both the quarry / trackbed and the trackbed from bridge 24 to Chumhill.

The exciting news that we have secured both of these belies the fact that this has been an ongoing process for over a decade since I first started negotiations.

Exmoor Associates has had its eyes on these for many years and I have stayed in regular contact with Michael calling at his house and making countless telephone calls to him. At all times I have been made very welcome and Michael has kept his word to sell us the Trackbed. During this time Michael's father passed away and then his mother.

Due to the lack of title deeds or paperwork, obtaining probate proved very difficult to the extreme. All this was further complicated by a change of solicitors and the need to provide sworn affidavits confirming that the farmland in question had been a long standing family asset.

Even now H M Land Registry are only likely to issue us with provisional registration subject to caution. The absence of title deeds, or any paperwork at all, does seem to be prevalent in North Devon particularly regarding the sections that have been in the ownership of farming families for many decades. and we are certainly finding our fair share of them! I wish to express my absolute joy in finally being able to bring you this news.

I am in further discussions with more land owners and will report back when I have news.

None of this could have happened without the tremendous financial support you have all given and continue to give, we now move on.

A very long trackbed walk is planned after our May meeting. I look forward to seeing you all.

Mike Buse

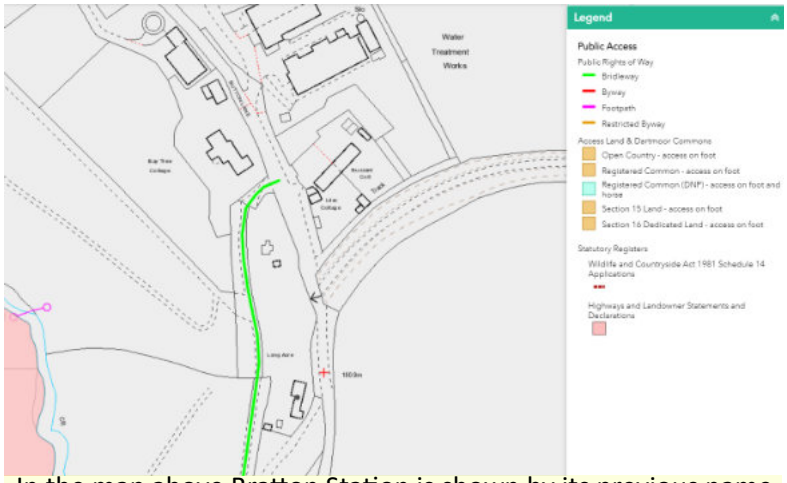
NEW LAND ACQUIRED

We are also pleased to announce that we have also recently purchased an additional strip of land adjacent to Bratton Fleming Station.

At first sight it might seem strange that we wished to purchase this strip but there are several good reasons why the directors thought it would be beneficial.

Mainly and most importantly Bratton Station's septic tank is situated along this strip and obviously it was not satisfactory having our septic tank on someone else's property.

The land was originally owned by the railway as part of the Bratton curtilage and the original concrete boundary fence can be seen on the westward side. It does also enable us to control the vegetation in this area.



In the map above Bratton Station is shown by its previous name "Long Acre".

The new strip of land is shown above edged in red. As you will see from the map left it runs adjacent to and encompasses part of the bridle way that runs from Button Lane.

The site of the septic tank (right) on the newly purchased land.

More details and photographs can be found in issue 35 of Trackbed Trails.

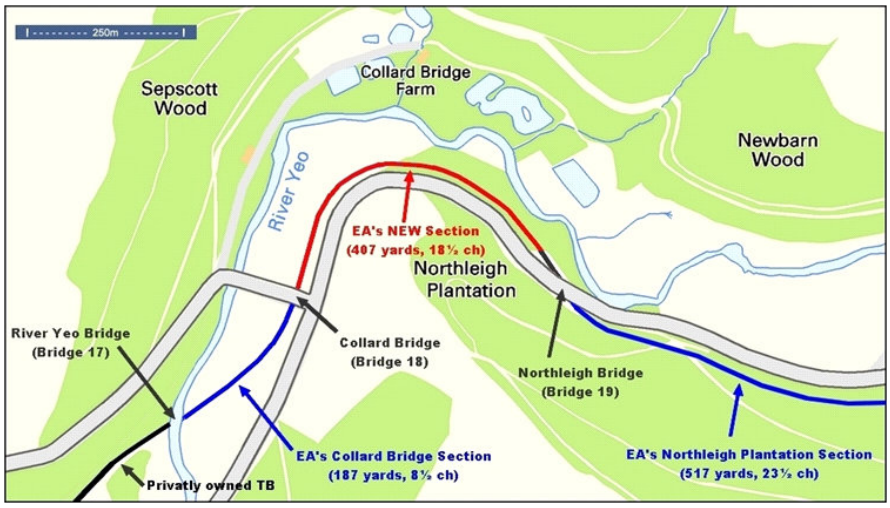
Other Snippets

The photo below is a rarity and has thrown up more questions. This is the first indication we have had that Snapper Halt was at one time known as Snapper Platform. The ticket is dated stamped July 27th 1925. Does anyone have any knowledge of this as this date is more than halfway through the railway's life and two years after the takeover by the Southern Railway?

MIKE MORANT COLLECTION

The Victorian postbox for installation in the wall at Bratton Station has now been shot blasted and primed ready fixing in place by our small but enthusiastic team of local volunteers.

Collard Bridge – a volunteer's story by Philip Heathcote



Collard Bridge is a trackbed section with which many of you may be familiar.

The initial section (from the bridge to the river) was purchased in 2003. Further land was purchased in 2015, up to the (site of) Skew Bridge (19), 1/3 mile in total as illustrated left.

May 2016

In early 2016, the trackbed was cleared of trees and vegetation for a considerable distance either side of the bridge, as illustrated right from the riverside end:

As a newcomer to the volunteer team, I first saw this site in May 2022. It looked very different!

In fact, taking an equivalent shot to that right was impossible as the trackbed was obscured by rampant brambles 4-5ft high and tree growth/re-growth. It was physically impossible to walk along the trackbed. The riverside end was the worst, as although the small group of volunteers had been controlling the growth along most of the section on an occasional basis from 2016-2020, at the time the pandemic struck in March 2020, the riverside end had not yet been cut back. The surrounding field was covered in a mixture of thick bracken, brambles and Himalayan Balsam.

Starting in June 2022, the volunteers decided to clear the trackbed from end to end to enable easier access and if possible, get it back to the 2016 condition. The surrounding field and cutting sides would be left for a future clearance effort due to the labour available.

Initially, a path was cleared from the car park to the trackbed, then through the bridge and northwards towards Skew bridge. Any small trees on the trackbed itself were removed along the way. This section supports lots of insect wildlife, as I can personally vouch for. The resulting path, seen from the bridge in September 2022 is seen below.

September 2022

The section south from the bridge to the river was then dealt with. The picture left illustrates the clearance partially completed in October 2022, with vegetation still in place at the far end.

When clearance was complete, we were left with many piles of bonfire-ready material on the trackbed (if the rain ever stops!). The next photo, taken in late November 2022, provides a comparison to the 2016 view.

The section will be kept under regular maintenance going forwards to ensure that the trackbed is kept clear.

There remains some work to do at the Skew bridge end of this section, as seen above (2022 views!). I hope we can make a start on clearing the trackbed during 2023.

As always, more volunteers are welcome to help us maintain and improve the land that EA now owns.

Changes to Directors' and officers' responsibilities with contact details

Membership database - membership@exmoor-associates.co.uk

Trackbed Trails publishing - trackbedtrails@exmoor-associates.co.uk

General enquiries - enquiries@exmoor-associates.co.uk

Finance - finance@exmoor-associates.co.uk

Volunteers - volunteer@exmoor-associates.co.uk

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