Trackbed Trails

The Newsletter for Exmoor Associates CIC Issue 43 March 2024

Happy New Year !

Firstly, I would like to welcome all the new shareholders that have bought shares since the last issue of Trackbed Trails and thank you to everyone for your continued support; we have had an awful lot of work going on in the background and we will soon be sharing it with you.

A Reminder

Our Annual May meeting will be held on 11th May 2024 at our usual venue Goodleigh Village Hall EX32 7LU.

The hall doors will open at 9.30am when there will be tea, coffee, and biscuits available. All Exmoor Associates shareholders along with non-shareholders, and volunteers are most welcome to attend the meetings as usual. The Exmoor Associates meeting will commence at 10.00am followed by a short break then onto the Yeo Valley Trust meeting. Following that we will be providing a finger buffet, £5 donation, could I please ask that you let me know if you are coming so the catering team can have enough food, my contact details are on the back page.

In a change to our normal format, instead of a trackbed walk both Snapper and Bratton Fleming stations will be open from 2.30pm – 4.30pm on Saturday 11th May, and 10.00am – 4.30pm on Sunday 12th May.

Bratton Station

We are sorry to tell you that Andrew has now moved. However, Bratton will now be developed and made available for Exmoor Associates shareholders to rent. I for one will miss Andrew and Carol as I know many of you will, but I know they will be back and hopefully coming to stay again. What a wonderful tenant Andrew has been in raising the profile of Exmoor Associates.

Bratton Station Goods Shed

We are nearly ready to get Building Control in then we can start building the goods shed as and when we have the money. It is hoped to build the steel frame along with roof and walls in one go so that it is watertight, the volunteers can then work inside fitting it out. We will still have professional help when required. It will be so good to have our own base and to welcome you all to our covered space.

New Trackbed
I know many of you are waiting to hear about further trackbed purchases, so I can tell you we are currently negotiating to buy more trackbed and as soon as we have confirmation that they have gone through we will let you know.

Volunteers
We have a number of volunteers who do a sterling job looking after the trackbed etc in the south. They are led by Andy Hearn and it is great to see that Anne Belsey has joined them and certainly gets stuck in with the rest. If you would like to help Andy by donating to the Yeo Valley Trust, if you are unable to help physically, that would be great. Just say when making your donation that the money is for the volunteers' fund. I know how hard Andy works and, at the May meeting, we will be raising funds for the volunteers to buy various items they need to help them with what they do.

Chris Duffell has been working with us for some time and he brings a very high level of expertise to the team. We are slowly building a very professional unit which, if we had to pay for it, would make life virtually impossible for us.

Fundraising
As you are aware, the Yeo Valley Trust is tasked with raising the funds we require to purchase land, build bridges etc. This still allows for shares to be bought in Exmoor Associates but if you are a UK taxpayer you can donate to the YVT and they can claim a further 25% back through the Gift Aid scheme. We now need funds to buy trackbed and carry out the work at Bratton. If you can help us - however small or however large the amount – we can get on with the job; we are doing everything we can so over to you.

Finally, the Directors of Exmoor Associates look forward to seeing you on May 11th and I am sure you will have an enjoyable weekend with us.

Kind regards,

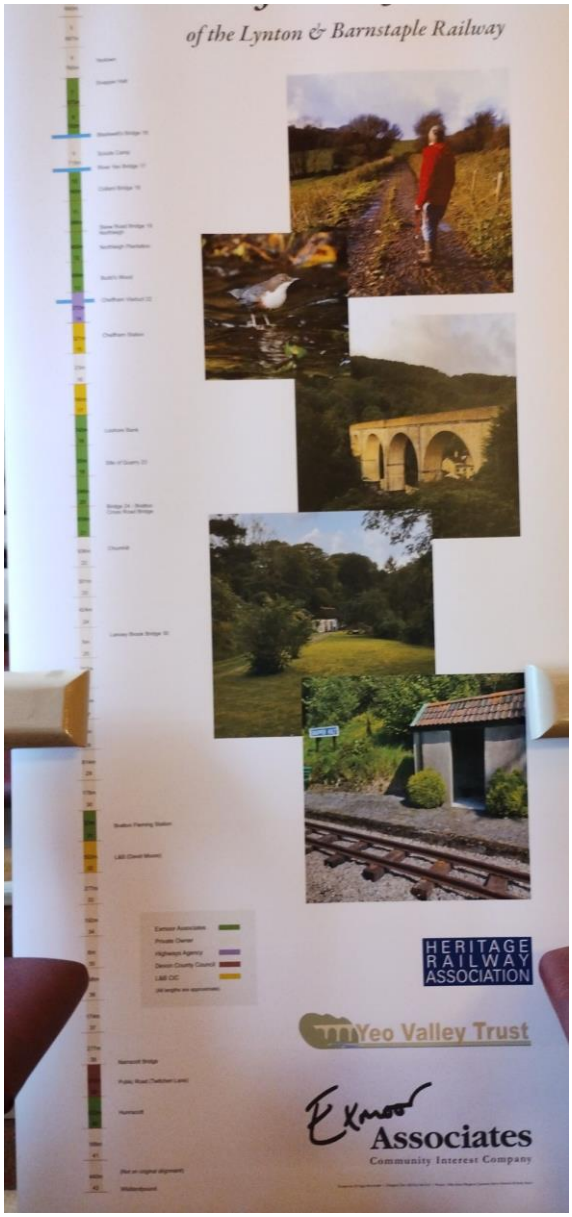
Mike

Festive Snapper

Our thanks to a local EA shareholder,
Peter Vaughan,-
who decorated Snapper Halt
for Christmas 2023

Barnstaple Model Railway Exhibition
16th – 20th December 2023

The exhibition had been organised by Barnstaple Town Council, under the stewardship of Miss Lucy Scarrott, the Heritage & Cultural Manager for Barnstaple Town Council, in collaboration with the Tarka Valley and Bideford Railway Groups, the L&B, and several North Devon Museums.



The exhibition was held at the Guildhall, adjacent to the newly-restored Pannier Market on Butchers' Row in support of North Devon Hospice, The Veterans Charity and Barnstaple in Bloom. The exhibition was designed to let local people explore Barnstaple and North Devon's rich railway past. From an L&B perspective it was an excellent opportunity to tell the story of 'our railway' using the new display banner as well as some of the information boards.

Pride of place had been given to a superb working 009 scale model railway layout of the L&B, including Town Station, Pilton Yard, Snapper Halt and Lynton Station, provided and proudly demonstrated by members of the Dartmoor 009 Railway Group (*pictures on following pages*). A most welcome advertisement for the L&B, for a public which may not really have appreciated the validity of "our" lost Little Railway to Lynton.

YVT Chairman Phil Heathcote picks up the story. "I found out about the exhibition through my wife, who volunteers for a charity in Barnstaple which works closely with Barnstaple Town Council. That charity received an email advising that such an exhibition was in preparation, and passed it on to me (knowing my interest). I then contacted Lucy to see if we could help (yes, we could). The first step was supplying our logo to add to the poster for the event. The second step was checking what they wanted - unfortunately there just wasn't going to be room for the Snapper Halt sign we own. The third step was contacting Barry to see if he could help."

Barry Marshall continues. "Phil had realised that I was in possession of items kindly purchased by Andrew Merritt for the YVT in May 2022, namely two L&B medals which had been presented to schoolchildren upon the 1898 opening of the L&B, and also a promotional pamphlet produced for the 1930 summer season by the Southern Railway for their seven-day season ticket offer on the southern network, including travel on the L&B and within North Devon. Phil tasked me with contacting Lucy in order to offer the loan of these items, but I also took the opportunity of including the loan of many of our photos from the EA display boards, unaware of how much material they really wanted, or would ultimately be able to display. Meanwhile, Phil had tasked Nik with the design of a promotional display banner (*see above*) based upon our "legend" ladder-map, which had previously been circulated within the YVT/EA, showing sections coloured in green. Phil collected this from the printers and it was placed at the back of the room.

Driver Lucy Scarrott brings her train into Lynton

When I visited the exhibition on the final day, I was pleased to meet Lucy, and to see that she had placed many of the photos which I had included on felt display boards alongside similar photos provided by other railways, the banner was in position and the medals were on display within one of the glass-topped cabinets. Sadly, she was unable to use the seven-day season ticket pamphlet.

I took a few photos on the day, including a couple of Lucy driving the train on the 009 layout. Lucy was grateful to receive my photos, adding that she had had no other photos of her

taken at the event. Lucy kindly sent me a few of her own photos, including birds-eye photos from the gallery, which she has also offered us to reproduce. One of Lucy's photos shows the banner in the background, and also our two medals inside the display cabinet. Eagled-eyed L&B regulars may recognise a couple of long-term L&B members and volunteers deep in conversation alongside the cabinet.

The charm and appeal of the line was clear to see from the models of Barnstaple Town Station, Pilton Yard, Snapper Halt and Lynton Station as well as the old photographs.

After the exhibition had closed Lucy said "it was fantastic to meet so many people" and that she was pleased with the feedback from visitors with a footfall of 1,000 over the five days – double the number of people expected.

And, thanks to Phil and Barry, Exmoor Associates and Yeo Valley Trust have strengthened an already superb rapport with Lucy and Barnstaple Town Council; hopefully a good omen for future cooperation.

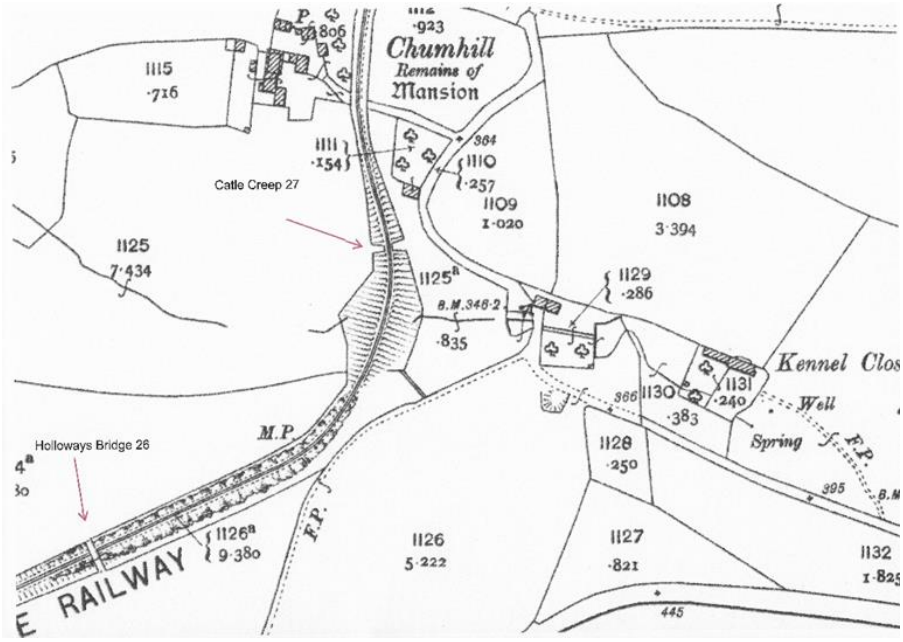
Barnstaple Town

Display Board

Pilton Yard : two views

Bratton Bank - Not

Keith Vingoe Explains



When Paul Gower, Barry Gray and I composed "*Yesterday and Today*" back in 1999, we described this photo as follows *"Freshly re-laid track on Bratton Bank in 1927.* Later research has thrown doubt on this being the location.

Looking at the image with fresh eyes, in the top left area can be seen the bent angle of a standard L&B style cattle creep. There is no structure like this in the vicinity of Bratton Bank. After much staring at a period OS map, the site is now believed the trackbed approaching Bridge 27, Chumhill Cattle Creep, just north of Holloway's Bridge – the masonry-arched bridge now owned by EA.

Taken by HGW Household in August 1927, the location of the photo is an odd one, as he would have had a short walk to obtain this view. As far as I am aware, Humphrey Household only took 14 photos on his 1927 author's first-hand experience of the L&B, chronicled in *Narrow Gauge Railways: England and the Fifteen Inch*.

Bratton Fleming Goods Shed 1935

Bratton Fleming Goods Shed was, most likely, the least-photographed building on the Lynton & Barnstaple line.

Photographs of the station and trains focused on the 'main line' and took no notice of the goods shed, over 60 metres down two sidings and away from the line as it curved towards Blackmoor Gate. The original buildings – two in line – were purchased from the contractor and appear to have been of timber construction before World War 1. By the 1930's they may have been built of masonry.

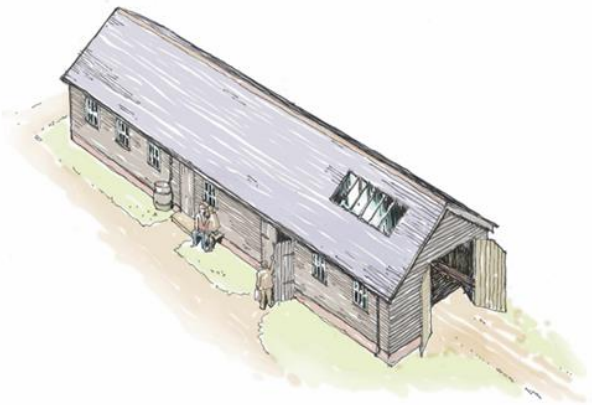
Today, Exmoor Associates are driving forward a scheme which will see the goods shed rebuilt (albeit to modern standards but visually reliable) and act as a base for an L&B centre in the Yeo Valley; a base for development activities, a museum and, of course, a statement of the restoration of the railway we love.

But

Whatever Happened to Bratton Fleming Goods Shed after 1935 ?

Michael Bishop takes up the story. "I heard somewhere in the '60s that the original Bratton Fleming goods shed had gone to the owner of the land on which the half-body of coach 6991 at Snapper sat. So, when on a visit to East Middleton Farm, Parracombe, to ask Mrs Nichols' permission to measure the coach body on her land, standing in her kitchen, I asked her about this story of the goods shed and its possible whereabouts. Her husband piped up '*in the yard*'. He appeared to be a man of few words, so I didn't ask for any further details but thanked them both warmly and then walked around the yard taking pictures of any building which might have been constructed of materials from the former goods shed."

Now we are looking forward to the day when the recreated goods shed (below) graces the yard at Bratton.



John James Baker, 1866 - 1936
Station Master, Bratton Fleming, 1898 - 1931

John James Baker was the longest serving Stationmaster on the L&B.

John James Baker
at Chelfham (above); at Bratton Fleming (below)

Originally the regular driver of the Jones Brothers horse-drawn Lynton to Barnstaple coach which ceased running the day the railway opened. He took up the post of Stationmaster at Chelfham on 6th June 1898. He left Chelfham in September 1904, to take up the post of Stationmaster at Bratton Fleming, a position which he held until his retirement on 30th September 1931 aged 65. He still frequented Bratton Station after his retirement, and was photographed there on the last day of operation and also at Blackmoor handing over the station books to Wilf Hann Porter/Signalman in Charge on Sunday 29th September 1935.

The earlier history of his family is based in the Lynton area, but in the farming community. John James appears to have been staying with his paternal grandfather at the time of the 1871 Census; in 1881 he is a 'Scholar' at Mount Sinai, Lynton, and in 1891 is a 'Coachman' (mail coach), residing at High Bray, Lynton. In October 1888 John James married Emma Priscott at Bratton Fleming. They had six children between 1890 and 1904 – sadly two died young.

John James wife, Emma, died on the 23rd of April 1913 at Bratton Fleming. He married again and his second wife became the Station Attendant at Bratton Fleming working under the jurisdiction of the Station Master at Blackmoor Gate.

The end of this story is a sad one. John James Baker died on the 22nd of December 1936 at Bratton Fleming. According to public records he hanged himself in the garden shed at Prospect House, Bratton Fleming – the Station Master's accommodation rented by the L&B and, presumably, the Southern Railway. It is said that the closure of the line affected him greatly.

John James Baker standing beside
the last train 29.9.1935

John James Baker hands over the
Bratton Fleming station books to Wilf Hann

Quarry House: Operation ThRoB (*The Rest of Bratton*)

At the time of writing, (27th February 2024) *Quarry House,* which is our southerly neighbour at Bratton Fleming Station, has still not been relisted for sale, according to Rightmove.

Operation ThRoB, which was begun to gauge support for the idea of attempting to buy *Quarry House* - section off the trackbed and station land – and immediately resell the building and gardens – by means of soliciting loans, looks unlikely to get close to the 2023 asking price of £1.25M. To have had a chance of success, it would have required 200 supporters each to lend £6k … but in the event, although we did have well over 100 kind individuals offering loans, we find we are still well short of the target.

It now appears that the only path open to us is to engage with the new owners of Quarry House (whoever they turn out to be) in the hope that they might be prepared to consider an offer for their trackbed and railway land.

Meanwhile, it remains to be seen what the asking price for QH will be in 2024?

Extending the Track Length at Snapper

When the show track was laid at Snapper in May 2019 it was always intended at some point to extend further in each direction to give a more 'complete look' for visitors sat or stood at the Halt. Estimates have been obtained for purchasing enough materials to lay up to another 5 x 30ft panels. Donations are now being sought to achieve this.

If you are wondering what the cost for this project will be it is made up of :

	£
50 x 1.2m jarrah top grade sleepers	1,884.00
40 tonnes clean ballast	1,287.84
2.25 x 200m Terram geotextile underlay	200.00
Hire of a digger/dumper and driver	540
300' rail	2,500
Total	**6,411**
That is under £45 per linear yard of track	

Want to support this project? If you are a UK taxpayer, please make payment to the Yeo Valley Trust who will be able to claim 25% Gift Aid on your donation. Their bank details are – Account Name ***Yeo Valley Trust***, Sort Code **40-52-40**, Account Number **00036083** and please state the money is for 'Snapper track'. Not a UK taxpayer? Still make your payment to the Yeo Valley Trust but they will not be able to claim the 25% Gift Aid. Paying by cheque? Please make it payable to **Yeo Valley Trust** and send it to *The Treasurer, Yeo Valley Trust, 27 Rushden Way, Epsom Downs, KT17 3LL*

We Want To Keep In Touch

When we send share certificates or Trackbed Trails, there are always one or two emails that no longer exist.
There are also a number that we post, but unless they are returned we don't know if you have moved.
If you change your email or postal address, please remember to let the Shareholder Secretary know.

shareholders@exmoor-associates.co.uk ☎ 07881 951400

Elmers Mill, Stane Street, Ockley, Surrey, RH5 5TQ

EA Regalia

We are pleased to be able to offer a range of bespoke embroidered regalia to help promote Exmoor Associates. The clothing company we are using offers pretty well any type of garment ranging from fleeces and hoodies, polo, sweat and tee-shirts, jackets and bodywarmers … you name it and there's good chance they do it … and in a whole range of colours too!

If you think you might be in the market for an item of two, please email **david@exmoor-associates.co.uk** with your wish list - and I will get prices for you.

Please note, this is not an official EA business venture; it is me acting as a private individual shareholder, offering something which might be of interest to others. It is not intended to be a profit maker; all items will be 'at cost'. If you can get your orders in quickly enough, I will bring any items to the Devon May meeting of EA; otherwise, very happy to post.
David Cameron

Exmoor Associates

Exmoor Associates

Contacts

email: enquiries@exmoor-associates.co.uk

Directors

Mike Buse	mike@exmoor-associates.co.uk	07776 202 105
David Cameron	david@exmoor-associates.co.uk	01277 353 272
Andy Hearn	andy@exmoor-associates.co.uk	01769 520 492
Richard Haste	richard.haste@exmoor-associates.co.uk	01347 878 581
Peter James	peter@exmoor-associates.co.uk	07881 951 400
Richard Landen	richard.landen@exmoor-associates.co.uk	07974 740 854
		(please use WhatsApp because of poor signal)
Phil Heathcote	phil.heathcote@yvt.org.uk	07771 451 964

www.exmoor-associates.co.uk

Registered in England Company Nº 04502895
Elmers Mill, Stane Street, Ockley, Surrey, England, RH5 5TQ

HERITAGE RAILWAY ASSOCIATION Exmoor Associates is a member of the Heritage Railway Association