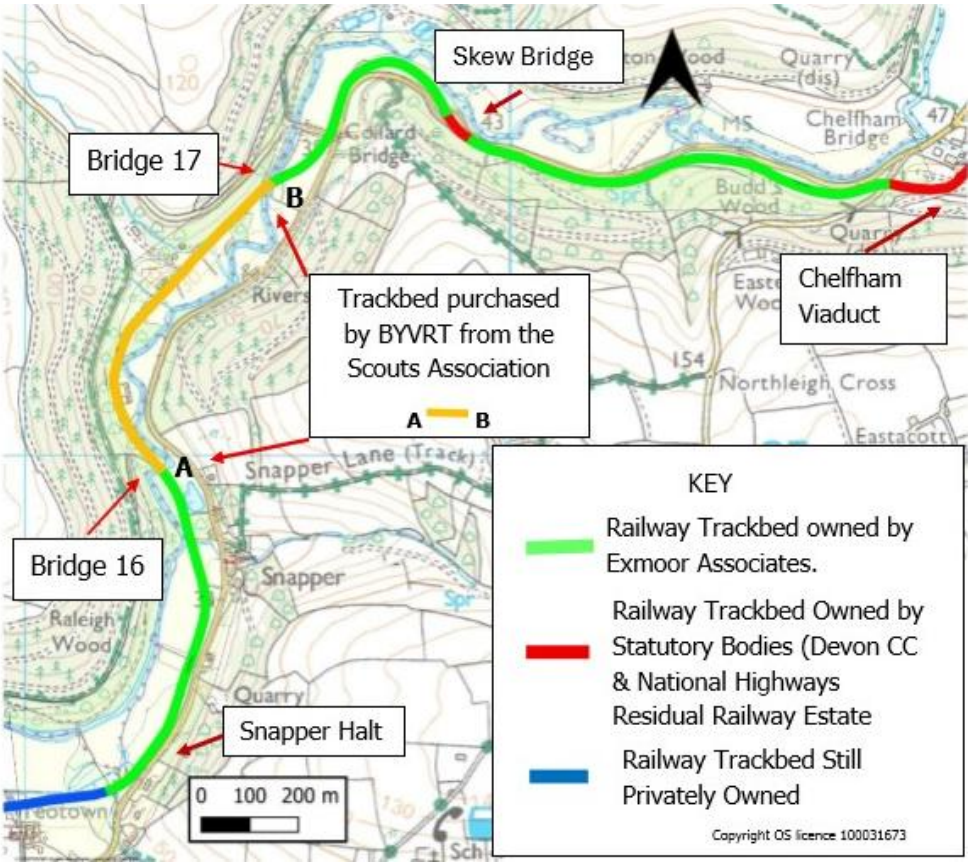
Trackbed Trails

The Newsletter for the Barnstaple & Yeo Valley Railway Trust
Issue 48 January 2026

Great Start to 2026 – A Significant Trackbed Acquisition

We Have a Way Through the Scouts Site

- ✓ A rail route through the Scouts Association site between Snapper Halt and Collard Bridge is now in our ownership
- ✓ 718 metres (785 yards) of trackbed acquired
- ✓ EA and B&YVRT now own a 1.9mile continuous length of trackbed from Snapper Halt to the south end of Chelfham viaduct (except for getting through Skew Bridge)



Please be Aware
Until further notice, access to the route through the Scouts site is only possible as part of an organised group

A Message from the Chair

Great News:
Collard Bridge Scout Site Agreement Secured!

I am delighted to share with you a major step forward for the B&YVRT. After more than two years of careful negotiation, planning, and collaboration, we have finally completed the purchase of a 718-metre length of railway route through the Collard Bridge Scout Campsite thanks to an agreement with the North Devon Scouts.

This purchase will link with sections of trackbed already owned by Exmoor Associates, creating a continuous stretch of route (subject to bridge reconstruction) between Snapper Halt and the restored Chelfham station of over 2 miles. This is a vital addition to the long-term plan to acquire the historic Lynton & Barnstaple Railway route south of Wistlandpound and, in time, the full line between Barnstaple and Lynton.

The Scouts have been extremely cooperative throughout, and the agreement ensures they can continue their full range of activities while enabling the future railway to pass safely through their site. We will now begin detailed surveys and design work.

This is an exciting milestone which brings us a significant step closer to our long-term goal. Thank you for your ongoing support, which makes progress like this possible. We will of course need more funding, and to explore other sources of funding (including grants) as we develop our plans. This will not be easy, as there are many other organisations seeking funds, but North Devon needs projects like ours which could bring significant benefits to the area in future.

Phil Heathcote
Chair of Trustees, Barnstaple & Yeo Valley Railway Trust

2003
Exmoor Associates Directors exploring the trackbed in the Scouts site

Raleigh Weir Today

Raleigh Weir

Snapper Halt

Snapper Halt Path

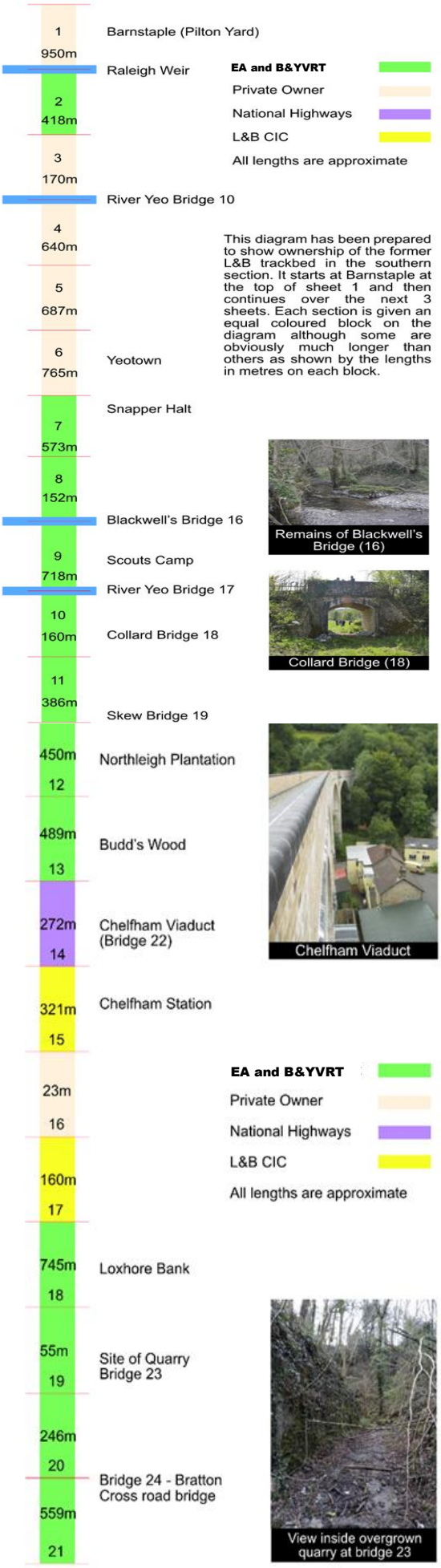
Weir at Collard Bridge

Chelfham Viaduct

Chelfham Station

Loxhore Bank

View under bridge 24 looking towards section 21



Remains of Blackwell's Bridge (16)

Collard Bridge (18)

Chelfham Viaduct

View inside overgrown quarry at bridge 23

Mike Buse writes …

What a start to 2026!

We have waited a long time to announce the purchase of the Scouts section of the Lynton & Barnstaple Railway. This journey started about twenty years ago when I first made contact with the scout leaders at Collard Bridge. They listened to what we were proposing and were very pleasant but it was very early and we didn't get a deal so we moved on.

Exmoor Associates had not long purchased its first short section of trackbed at Collard Bridge, 160 metres N° 10 on the linear map, along with the field on the other side of the road, which not long after I was able to swap for 450 metres N° 12 on the linear map. How good was that? And Exmoor Associates was truly up and running.

Negotiations to purchase the Scouts section – started by Tony Hobbs – have been ongoing for the last two years; by a million miles the most complicated deal we have ever done. My grateful thanks to Phil Heathcote for his local contact with Dan, the exciting forward-thinking local scout leader, and his team. Finally, to Chris Duffell, who has led the technical work to get the railway through the scout site – truly stunning, and no less than we have come to expect from Chris.

Please take a look at the linear map to see how this section of trackbed joins together with what we already own, along with Chelfham viaduct and Chelfham station etc.

Mike

A Personal Note To You All

Many of you will be aware that I have been involved since 1979 with the L&B, EA and now the B&YVRT. I have always given my best to help get this wonderful railway up and running in both the north and the south.

Over the past twenty-three years with Exmoor Associates, you have all supported us with your kind purchase of shares, with which in turn we have bought trackbed, stations etc.

With the new B&YVRT we have an opportunity to speed up the purchase of available trackbed, with the benefit of 25% Gift Aid on donations from those paying UK Income Tax. We can also benefit from the receipt of legacies free of Inheritance Tax. This is already making a vast difference to our income. Even if you do not pay Income Tax, please consider making a donation as this would be equally important to us.

As you will see, we now own the route through the Scouts Site – an outcome many thought impossible. There are further sections of trackbed currently with our solicitors, and I am closing in on other sections as well.

Inevitably all this requires finance, and currently there is nowhere near enough to purchase all the land and to develop an operational railway on the southern section of the L&B route.

During 2025 I travelled the 300-plus miles from my home to North Devon numerous times, requiring my staying over for several weeks on EA business. Please don't get me wrong, I have thoroughly enjoyed it. I am down again on the 5th February for a further meeting at North Devon Council Offices, and then meeting with many owners of L&B trackbed.

Many of you will remember when, back in 2017, the L&BR Trust approached Exmoor Associates about selling of their two sections of trackbed in the northern section: the section at Higher Bodley between Killington Lane and Parracombe Lane Head, and the section from Blackmoor Gate to the road bridge at Wistlandpound. EA's shareholders cooperated by exchanging enough shares for the L&BT to obtain the first section at no cost. The second section was purchased from us by the L&B Trust at the price paid for it back in 2004.

Currently, discussions are taking place with the L&B Directors/Trustees regarding the transfer/purchase to B&YVRT of Chelfham Station, trackbed and woodland owned by the L&B CIC, as well as the section purchased by the L&B Trust above Bratton Station.

I look forward to seeing many of you at our May 16th meeting. We will have one new trackbed walk – maybe two or even three by then – so please bring your walking boots.

Further details of the meeting will be coming out in a future Trackbed Trails.

So could I kindly request that if you intend coming down to Devon you book somewhere to stay asap, as I have no doubt this is going to be a bumper weekend and I would hate you to miss it.

If you are attending the meeting, cheque books are not compulsory as we now have a card machine, and the folding stuff is still taken by us. (For our younger supporters, 'folding' = 'notes'. You all know I have to say that.)

Finally, a big "thank you" to my fellow EA and B&YVRT directors, and also all those helping to put this railway back together.

We have put together an incredibly professional team to deliver a railway in the south; they will also need financial help; please keep your eyes open as details on this will be appearing in forthcoming Trackbed Trails.

This is a massive project, but you can all play a part. If you have skill sets that you can offer, please get in touch with us and we can have a chat about it.

I sometimes wonder if this is a dream to have so many great people working towards making this happen, but I can confirm it's real and it's happening.

Kind regards to you all, and let's make 2026 a real year to remember.

Take care everyone, **Mike Buse**

The Scouts Site : 130 Years of History

From 1896 to 1935 – 39 years – the route the B&YVRT has purchased, through what we all know as "*The Scouts site*", was the trackbed of the Lynton & Barnstaple. The southern boundary of the site is at Blackwell Bridge – Bridge 16. The picture below, taken on Blackwell Bridge, is of an Otter Hounds meet – presumably on a Sunday when no trains were running. The camera is looking towards Snapper, and the start of the Scouts site is behind the camera. Blackwell Bridge is one of the bridges between Snapper and Chelfham which will need rebuilding before trains can run again over this section.

Below, we are now into the Scouts site with a train passing through the area, as seen from the footplate of one of the Manning Wardles.

Well, this is where the money went ....

ALL THEIR OWN:

A 21 ACRE CAMP SITE

by Chris Machin

IT'S NORTH DEVON SCOUTS' bigges ever project . . . and their £20,000 new camp site looks set to make them a centre of nationwide attention.

The 21 acres of grass and woodland a Collards Bridge, four miles from Barnstaple at Snapper, gives them a district base o their own for the first time.

And from next year it will be open to visit from scout groups all over the county with the positioning and facilities offered by the site certain to make it a popular choice.

"It's perfect scouting country," says the scouts public relations officer and camp site committee member, Mr. Kev Behan. "And it means we can now run all our competitions as they were intended to be run instead of on football fields."

Profits from the district's successful Gang Show have given funds the boost they needed to make the greatest single investment in North Devon's scouting history.

For the past six years the show has been contributing £1,000 a year and last year it paid in £2,500. Other organisations have also made donations, including £1,000 from the King George V Jubilee Trust.

The land, used for many years for grazing cost £17,500 and the remaining money is being spent on drainage, installation of a water supply and eventually on modern sanitation.

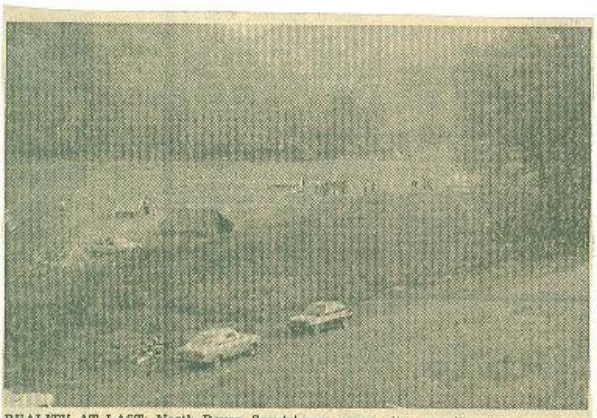
Local troops are already using the site for camping and evening training. Though close to Barnstaple's medical and other facilities it has an air of seclusion that makes it well suited to traditional scouting activities.

"We are determined not to spoil it in any way," adds Mr. Behan.

A rota of local troops has been formed to carry out routine maintenance of hedges and grass. And the site is being run by a committee of representatives of all sections of the movement in North Devon, the supporting group, the Scout Fellowship, and outsiders to add expert advice.

"It is something we have needed in North Devon for a long time," says Mr. Behan. "They have been planning a camp site since the 'forties. Now, thanks to the Gang Show and other fund raising work, it has become reality.

● A reunion for everyone who took part in the 1983, 1984 and this year's Gang Show has been arranged for Friday, September 27, at Park School, Barnstaple.



REALITY AT LAST: North Devon Scouts' new camp site near Barnstaple in the planning since the 1940s.

DOING BATTLE: North Devon Scouts in competition at an event named after their new camp site near Barnstaple

After the track was lifted in 1936 the area became woodland and grazing land. And thus it remained for the next 49 years.

In 1985 it was acquired by the North Devon Scouts Association (the name 'Boy Scouts' was dropped in 1967) as a campsite and area for outdoor activities available to Scout troops from all over North Devon.

The cutting from the North Devon Journal in July 1985 reports on the acquisition of the site and shows one of the opening day's events.

To raise money to purchase the site, the Scouts ran a series of highly popular Gang Shows. The one held in 1984 raised £1,000 – that's £4,600 in today's money. How much could be raised for trackbed purchases by *Mike (Buse) and his Minstrels*?

2026 – 90 years after the track was lifted, and 91 years since the last service train ran through the Yeo Valley. The trackbed awaits the B&YVRT to bring about the re-birth of the late lamented Lynton & Barnstaple Railway.

Giving Could Not Be Easier : Here Are The Options

You have a choice of funds for your donations :
General Fund, Trackbed Fund, Bratton Fleming Goods Shed Fund
If you do not specify a fund it will go into the General Fund

Make a One-off Donation

Make a bank transfer to:

Bank name: *CAF Bank*
Account Name: *Barnstaple & Yeo Valley Railway Trust*
Sort Code: *40-52-40*
Account Nº: *00036083*

or

Send a cheque (payable to *Barnstaple & Yeo Valley Railway Trust)* to:
Barnstaple & Yeo Valley Railway Trust, 6, West Yelland, Barnstaple EX31 3EY

Make Regular Donations by Standing Order

The bank details are:

Bank name: *CAF Bank*
Account Name: *Barnstaple & Yeo Valley Railway Trust*
Sort Code: *40-52-40*
Account Nº: *00036083*
Reference: *To include your full name so that B&YVRT can identify the payment*

Leave a Legacy

If you are considering making a gift to the Trust in your will (a legacy) it is important that you get the advice of a solicitor. The law about wills and legacies – and related tax issues – can be complicated, and if you write your own will without legal advice there is a risk that your wishes may not be carried out in the way you intended.

If you are thinking about leaving a legacy you need to consider what kind of gift you wish to make. The options include:

- You could leave the Trust a specific amount (a pecuniary legacy)
- You could leave the Trust the whole or a percentage of what remains of your estate after specific gifts have been made and expenses paid
- Another option is to provide that a part or all of your estate should benefit a relative or relatives during their lifetime(s), but will pass to the Trust after their death(s).

Whatever you choose to do, it is important that you mention the full details of the Trust as follows:

The Barnstaple & Yeo Valley Railway Trust (registered charity number 1202037).

You might wish to leave the B&YVRT a legacy to be used for a specific purpose

Please contact the Treasurer to discuss your wishes. It may not always be practical to carry out a particular request, and this can give rise to difficulties if it is written into your will. In any case the Trust's needs will change over time, and it is very helpful if you can allow the Trustees as much flexibility as possible to find alternative ways in which your gift may be used if necessary. A solicitor will be able to advise you on the appropriate wording to allow this.

If you would like more information or would like to discuss your wishes, please contact The Treasurer: Jacki Wright, Windswept, Ruden way, Epsom Downs KT17 3LL : 07714 712351 : email treasurer@byvrt.org.uk

Whichever option(s) you decide upon,

Thank you for your Support

Contact us

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Barnstaple & Yeo Valley Railway Trust

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HERITAGE RAILWAY ASSOCIATION

Exmoor Associates is a member of the Heritage Railway Association

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