

Shrewsbury
Aberystwyth
Rail
Passengers'
Association



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The *Cambrian*, hauled by 76079, *The Pocket Rocket*, at Pwllheli. Friday 8th August 2008

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Chairman's Message

Ah the joys of travel on the Cambrian, my personal ppm since the start of this financial year has now dipped below an average of 50% up to the end of Period 6*. There's also been plenty of overheard comments on board about the state of the Class 158 units. Perhaps only East Midlands Trains Norwich to Liverpool service has such scruffy rolling stock in need of refurbishment on the network, and an equally as bad punctuality, yet passenger numbers rocket. Clearly the journey experience is not the primary driver and ATW benefits from external factors for growth (and revenue). Indeed EMT is in the process of refurbishing their Class 158 fleet so we're bringing up the field in Wales and the Borders - so much for ex-ATW MD Peter Strachan's "best in class" pledge for the franchise! In August Passenger Focus made public the Passenger Survey figures for our line, intended to inform the debate for an hourly service. Apparently top concerns amongst the 800 passengers surveyed were the poor punctuality and a lack of frequency of trains. There's people that think those concerns are just the agenda of a small user group: funny how the rest of the passengers on the line are "on message" with SARPA. Perhaps we're more representative than people give us credit for?

Still there is a plan afoot which once more promises to resolve the punctuality woes. At least this one is tangible, and clear evidence can be seen, unlike the promises over the last five years and before. In fact ATW's plan for implementation from the December timetable change is pretty ambitious, and if it comes off will deliver benefit across Shropshire, North and Mid Wales. Basically if you haven't seen it yet our trains will extend through to Birmingham International, and instead of turning around to come straight back to Mid Wales will instead head for Holyhead via Shrewsbury with trains from Holyhead turning around and heading for Mid Wales. This gives in the draft timetables a slightly longer turnaround time at International and dwell time at New St and a 10 minute wait at Shrewsbury. Times west of Shrewsbury are roughly similar but these extra minutes in England should allow for recovery from delay which the current timetable does not allow. So all will happen in the Mid Wales valleys?

As with all plans there are risks which need to be assessed to see if the plan is attainable. Before we look at them a big thank you to many friends and contacts in the industry who broadly agree with my analysis and have passed on suggestions and comments. So what are they?

Firstly if Network Rail fail to deliver the West Coast Main line upgrade by December, then Virgin and everyone else can't change their timetables and chaos ensues. Out of ATW's hands this one. Still the ensuing row played out on the national media will be interesting.

Isn't combining two (or more) service groups together poor practice? There's plenty of experienced railwayman that think so. When the Aberystwyth service is awful the Chester/New St turns run at 90% ppm as there's no link between them. Chuck extending to International, Shrewsbury to Chester on top of running on the North Wales coast together with the Cambrian, and you get a smorgasbord of things that potentially can go wrong spread over some 300 route miles, with other ATW service groups and four other operators services in the mix.

Are the trains reliable enough to provide the service? The last published NFRIP data showed that ATW's Class 158 fleet managed about 5500 miles between breakdowns that caused delays. The combined daily unit mileage of the proposed North and Mid Wales to the West Midlands services is roughly 8500 miles. Unless there's been one hell of an improvement you can almost guarantee a Class 158 will sit down on a daily basis somewhere in the circuit.

Can the infrastructure cope? It's all being done on the same track as now. The single track section between Chester and Wrexham is still there and we're still single line with long gaps between passing places west of Shrewsbury. The distance and running time between Talerddig and Newtown will still be the same in December as it is now. The spectre of knock on delays are still in the mix.

Are the rolling stock resources adequate? ATW want all the trains between Shrewsbury and Birmingham International to be 4 car in length. Because of the shortage of rolling stock in the franchise, to achieve this they must attach/detach units at Shrewsbury, and there was talk of cutting formation length west of Shrewsbury to attain this. The jungle drums are saying that "most" Cambrian services will still be 4 car or "off peak DOWN" will be 2 car. The talk from ATW is that we won't see Class 158's on Holyhead to Cardiff turns or Manchester to Cardiff anymore, and these will all be Class 175 operated so there will be enough 158's for Birmingham. As regulars on the Marches line know c. 20% of current services tend to be 158 operated, and there are not enough 175's available on a daily basis. This doesn't stack up. We could well be in the situation that depending on the daily fleet availability it could well be a lottery whether trains are 4 or 2 car west of Shrewsbury.

It's not only our line that needs extra carriages. ATW will be restoring the through trains between the North Wales Coast and the West Midlands that the SRA withdrew in 2004. Since then passengers have had to change mainly at Crewe. Come December this flow will be channelled via Shrewsbury, according to the Wales Rail Planning Assessment it was over 100,000 journeys per annum in 2004/2005. We all know passengers will opt out of choice for through trains. A 2 car train between Shrewsbury and Chester could well be an overcrowded one. There could well be a lot of shuffling of passengers with suitcases as a unit is detached at Shrewsbury. We also know that overcrowded Class 158's soon become late running trains as station dwell time rockets because the narrow end of carriage doors can't cope. And will 4 cars be enough between Shrewsbury and Birmingham? Existing passengers, North Wales to West Midlands flow, suppressed demand for direct trains to International as well as continuing growth plus those attracted by more carriages and hopefully better punctuality?

Will ATW have their commercial operation cake and eat it, or will passengers be worse off? Interesting times ahead.

Gareth Marston
Newtown, September 2008.

* Up to 14th September 2008. 139 journeys, 69 within 5 minutes of time. 12 more than 30 minutes late.

This is the quarterly newsletter of the Shrewsbury to Aberystwyth Rail Passenger Association Contributions are welcomed from members and non-members about the mid Wales rail scene.

Views expressed in it are those of contributors and not necessarily representative of the Association as a whole. Information provided is published in good faith, but the Association cannot accept responsibility for any loss or damage arising therefrom.

The Editor reserves the right to abridge or amend copy.

News in Brief

Signalling at Birmingham International

The signalling here has recently been modified, to facilitate the reversal of Arriva Trains, from Aberystwyth, and Chester, in the December 2008 timetable. Industry advance timetables show the changes in the system for December 2008. However as of 30th September the office of the rail regulator has not officially approved the plan.

Birmingham

Artists impressions of the design of the new Birmingham New St station have been released. Whilst welcome, we must note that this redevelopment is all above the railway, and the capacity of New St to handle trains and passengers remains untouched at platform level and the approaches. It will also cause huge disruption for many years. When the West Coast line was electrified in the 1960's services via Snow Hill were boosted so passengers could avoid disruption. Some simple solutions such as reinstating all the platforms at Moor St and providing a chord linking the Soho lines with the Stourbridge line so there are alternatives, are absent.

Shrewsbury

Wrexham Shropshire and Marylebone Railways report that loadings are as expected in their business plan and continue to grow. This autumn should see the introduction of their own refurbished coaches. No news as of yet on December timings.

Whereas the business predicted by WSMR has appeared, the punctuality problems predicted by ATW in their opposition have not. Rumours are abound that Virgin West Coast will extend back a Chester starter in the morning to compete with WSMR from Wrexham with a return working in the evening.

Trewern

A lorry driver and his passengers were very lucky to escape injury when the inattention at an unmanned level crossing saw the 1033 from New St hit a glancing blow on the lorry on the 10th September. Services in the middle part of the day were disrupted.

Caersws

The roof has been renewed on the part of the station building occupied by BASC however the contrast with the Network Rail part's roof is now very stark.

Weig Lane

An Automatic Half Barrier is Networks Rail's solution to raise line speed and improve safety.

Machynlleth

British Transport Police will be holding surgeries in the waiting room at the station on every last Friday of the month over lunchtime. 1100-1300.

West Coast Railways report better loading for the steam specials this summer despite the miserable weather, the 2 days a week when the service reached Pwllheli being particularly popular.

ERTMS trial

Already beset by problems with work behind schedule it now transpires that the first Class 158 taken to be fitted with the equipment does not have enough spare “hotel power” to power up the equipment which takes a out a whole luggage rack. Little sign of any solution is filtering out.

Two Network Rail Class 37 diesels, 97301 and 97303 have been equipped for ERTMS for use on the line.

Borth

No sign of removal or repair for the platform canopy.

Aberystwyth

Ceredigion County Council want to see the trackbed of the lines to Carmarthen and the Lampeter to Aberaeron branch converted to cycle ways.



The up empty stock from Aberystwyth, and the down Cambrian steam train, at Dovey Junction, c. 1010 on 8th August 2008. The remodelling of the station goes on apace.

1300 extra carriages not for us.

Or was that new: it's been announced so many times! It transpires that none of these will be for the Wales and Borders franchise. However East Midlands Trains will get 3, yes 3, cascaded Class 153 units!

The Competition Commission, ROSCO's, missing carriages and the DfT.

Having complained that their own creations the ROSCO's weren't playing fair and overcharging for rolling stock, the people at the Department for Transport launched a complaint to the Office of Rail Regulator, who passed it to the Competition Commission at a cost of plenty of new carriages not being ordered and years of delay.

The CC found that the DfT's own franchising policy was largely responsible for distortions in the market, which meant the ROSCO's weren't able to play like real private sector businesses and drive down cost through choice and competition. The CC noted that whilst passengers numbers were up 58% since privatisation the number of carriages was up by only 4%.

SARPA comment- so much for the ROSCO's being the big success story of privatisation. The Competition Commission was never going to view an industry with so much government specification and control as operating on free market principles anyway. We have our doubts whether leasing is the right means in a self contained industry anyway. As with most privatisation constructs it adds complexity, interfaces and costs that were never there in a natural railway. The ROSCO/franchise system (whoever's fault it is) has clearly failed to meet the challenges of providing sufficient rolling stock at affordable prices to meet the challenge of booming rail usage. Reform is long overdue.

Tram Train trial.

Whilst taking place far away in Yorkshire, the not so hidden agenda behind the DfT version is clear. The continental model of boosting local regional services into medium size towns such as Shrewsbury with more frequent services that could run on the streets is not being followed. Instead we're back in the early/mid 80's with the search for a cheap to operate, low track wear DMU replacement and we all know what happened last time- the Pacer.

Perhaps the real reason they won't increase the platform height at Aberdovey is that with the coast using tram trains a costly platform height reduction programme will be needed at the other stations!

Station usage

The Office of the Rail Regulator has released the figures for 2006/2007 station usage. As always these have to be taken with a pinch of salt. They show tickets sold from/to stations and therefore miss out rover ticket sales, ticketless travel whether intentional or unintentional, traffic from excursions and in our case doesn't show passengers travelling between the coast line and Shrewsbury (and beyond).

As always to use the figures and trends you have to understand what's behind them. So for our 7 stations the total footfall is now officially 609,800, though with the missed out categories added a figure around 700,000 would probably be more accurate,

and remember this is up to the end of March 2007, and since then there been a further 18 months growth with all the evidence pointing to accelerating growth in that period..

Since 2002/2003 footfall has increased by c.105,000 or 21.4%. So much for the decline predicted by the SRA in its Wales and Borders franchise specification! This has averaged 5.4% per annum, however between 2005/2006 and 2006/2007 growth was only 3.9%. In fact growth stalled at Aberystwyth and Borth but was close to 8% from the Montgomeryshire stations. Why? Remember that the period includes the infamous pollen summer of 2006 when pollen maliciously attacked ATW operated Class 158's. Revenue protection was not as tight due to irate customers and a drop in travellers because of the awful punctuality would account for some decline, but we also must remember that July that year saw the extra WAG funded carriages introduced. However these were only east of Machynlleth and didn't go to Aberystwyth. Can we speculate that the extra carriages allowed significant growth at Newtown and Welshpool etc. after the woes of the pollen season but because they didn't go to Aberystwyth the Ceredigion end did not see the same upsurge?

In the same period (2002/2003 to 2006/2007) the coastline has only grown by 1.2%. However the story here is one of falling school rolls – which is a big political issue in Gwynedd. The two main stations that generate the schools traffic are Barmouth, down by 26.5%, and Harlech, down by 25.6%. Yet growth in non schools traffic has just about counterbalanced this drop. It must be born in mind that the (Harlech) schools traffic goes up the coast on one train on a weekday morning and back down it on one train on a weekday afternoon. Whilst these trains may be quieter than five years ago the others have certainly got busier.

Loco hauled train between North Wales and Cardiff

A new service, funded by the Welsh Assembly, is proposed between Holyhead and Cardiff. The new service is likely to be 0610 Llandudno Junction to Cardiff, arr. 1049; the return 1905 from Cardiff to Holyhead, arr. 2352. It is thought that they will run via Crewe. The service would use Mk2 vehicles previously used on the Cardiff valleys service, and use Virgin Class 57/3 engines for the first twelve months, with an option for a further year. Arriva drivers are reported to be training along the north Wales coast. This has caused anger in Wrexham.

Megapower on the Coast line. The first visit of a Deltic to Pwllheli. 12th July 2008. Thanks to photographer, whom the Editor can't remember!



Electrification to Shrewsbury - the way forward for the Cambrian?

*With sections of the industry now seriously lobbying for electrification new contributor **Adrian Bailey** adds some thoughts for the Cambrian.*

Electrification is unlikely to happen on the Cambrian, even in an enlightened pro-rail, pro-economy and pro-environment world. However electrification to Shrewsbury from Wolverhampton can bring major benefits to the Cambrian as well as Shropshire.

First of all let's get the cost hysteria out the way, with the "It's all too expensive" scream of the excuse makers. Network Rail and ATOC reckon the cost of electrifying is £800,000.00 per track mile (which has sparked debate and some say even lower). Oxley to Shrewsbury is just under 30 miles of double track. A simple enough equation: add in a proper station refurbishment at Shrewsbury and chuck in a Shrewsbury Parkway station and a bill of £65 million is not fanciful. The so-called North West Relief Road around Shrewsbury was priced at £70 million. Look at who benefits from the two schemes – the entire population of Shropshire and Mid Wales will benefit directly and indirectly from rail electrification – one part of the centre of Shrewsbury will allegedly be less congested by the road. Roads are just too expensive. Rail schemes whilst costly in relation to roads are more affordable and give greater benefits.

So how would this work in practice? Well with pre series Intercity Express Passengers trains coming into service on the West Midlands section of the West Coast main Line, simply extending the pre existing hourly Euston to Wolverhampton service to Shrewsbury is easily achieved. Instead of the hourly fast service from Shropshire into the West Midlands being a 2 or 4 car DMU you'll have a full length Intercity train, allowing for growth in the market into the Midlands and catering for the gap that has been the lack of through services to London. The all stations London Midland hourly service and extra trains in the peak can be handled by EMU's.

What of trains from Mid Wales? The need for every train to go through to Birmingham no longer exists as services can be planned around meeting the Intercity service at Shrewsbury. No longer can the operator use the excuse of congestion in the Birmingham area for poor performance as they don't have to go there. Cambrian timetables will no longer have to be set by fixed slots into and out of Birmingham New Street. Currently at any given time ATW have 3 Class 158 units in operation east of Shrewsbury these can be freed up to reinforce services elsewhere or run additional services. Those concerned about changing at Shrewsbury will have a refurbished station to change at with more platforms and better facilities. A twin track railway can comfortably accommodate more than 2 trains an hour so running some through services to Birmingham is a possibility timed around demand peaks. Say 3 day.

In short, better connections to London, more reliable services, more capacity, extra trains and timetables that can be made to meet local need can be on offer.

The view from Milepost 62 with Brigadier John Faviell

If I hear the phrase “business case” again I will scream. In July a Transport Wales Official told the joint “stakeholder” (another abhorrent phrase) liaison conference in Machynlleth that there was no “business case” for an hourly service on our line, in August their position was that the “business case” would be looked at again once the infrastructure work was complete. So what exactly is a “business case”?

Back in the Third Crusade the leader of the Christian allies Richard the Lionheart had 3000 Saracen prisoners taken and massacred when the siege of Acre was lifted in 1191. It was not done as an atrocity. The “case” was that operating outnumbered in a 40 degree heat desert with very limited supplies of food, water and forage diverting precious resources to look after 3000 prisoners would seriously weaken the Crusaders ability to survive let alone fight. A brutal but clear example?

A simplistic explanation of current thinking is that you add up all the costs of doing something, and then add up the value of all the positive things that will happen by doing it. Divide the costs by benefits and if that ratio's positive then there's a case. It's called cost benefit analysis. Get to a BCR figure of about 2.0 and your scheme stands a good shout of being authorised budget permitting. The cost of doing something like laying on extra trains or civil engineering work you would think be easy to estimate based on past/current experience. Benefits are perhaps less quantifiable, like revenue based on projected usage and then some hypothetical values based on time savings, environmental benefits, fuel savings etc depending on what model you're using. Allow margins for cost overruns and other knock on costs and the whole thing can get quite complicated. The guidance for WAG's model called WEITAG runs to a 120 pages! In a perfect world this seems a fair analysis: however implementation in the real world is never as clean and pure as in the world of statistical theory.

First of all let's look at costs. Estimates are easy to get wrong as the English Highways' Agency amply demonstrates. Figures released by the Campaign for Better Transport show that recent Highways Agency projects have a nasty habit of over running in cost by an average of 83% - yes 83%. If the real costs had been used to make the “business case” how many of these schemes' would have been authorised? Current Government rules now use what they call a 66% “optimism bias” onto projected construction costs to allow for such things, but it still falls short of the Highways Agency's 83% average. Network Rail told WAG's Enterprise and Learning Committee Hearing into the reopening of Carno station that it would cost a high spec £5 million even though they knew they themselves were developing cheaper pre fabricated stations which they forgot to mention, and Carno Station Action Group wanted a modest station that they estimated could cost as little as £400K. Clearly Network Rail don't want a station at Carno and CSAG do!

Secondly take the benefits. The Ebbw Vale line passenger numbers are twice what was expected after six months of operation, and therefore revenue and other benefits a lot greater than predicted. The second phase allowing operation into Newport station and extension to Ebbw Vale town centre were not authorised on the basis of the lack of a “business case”. Campaigners point out that using the evidence of what has actually happened on the ground it appears the appraisal tools used to calculate the usage and benefits grossly underestimated them, and the “business case” does exist. Generally the demand forecasting models used in the rail industry are proving inadequate faced with the real world of surging demand for rail travel, and many in the industry feel that new appraisal methodologies should be used. Central Government have used the fact that the Tyne & Wear Metro had failed to reach its usage targets as a stick to

beat down calls for light rail systems elsewhere. The Tyne & Wear Metro was designed as an integrated system with buses interchanging in the outer suburbs to it. Come 1986 and bus deregulation the private buses operators stopped co-operating and ran into the city centre in competition with no chance for any interchange. The real problem was not an overestimation of the benefits, just that bus deregulation was a bad idea that undermined the business case.

Back on the Third Crusade. The Crusaders having defeated Saladin in battle at Arsfur in 1191 have a dilemma. The retreating Saracens poisoned all the wells and watercourses on the route to Jerusalem from the coast. Taking a large enough army overland to besiege and retake Jerusalem was now impossible. What now? Though head of the Christian army Richard I had to agree a consensus on the way forward amongst the many coalition partners. A favourite of staff college planners and military historians is his proposed amphibious strategy of taking the crusader army to Egypt and taking the Saracen power base of Alexandria. This has sparked much debate ever since. His case was that the Christians had control of the seas; the surprise move would catch the Saracens off guard; the Saracens would have to withdraw from Jerusalem and Saladin's political backing which was starting to become tenuous would collapse. Jerusalem could probably be reoccupied (the stated aim of the Crusade) without the need for battle and plenty of loot and pillage (the unstated purpose of most of the European Christian contingent) could have been had at Alexandria. However the Christian Settlers of the Holy Land were split into two factions - each feared the other would become predominant if they sailed to Egypt, and the French opposed mainly as they had the aim of undermining Richard, who was of course the Avignon King of what is now half of France. Most studies conclude the taking of Alexandria was possible and they stood a good chance of complete success. But with the allies operating their own agendas the Third Crusade ended in a draw.

Talking of agendas we hear from the Rail Minister Tom Harris MP that government is "modally agnostic" and wants people to have choice in modes of transport favouring no mode over another. If this is the case then why does the DfT appraise schemes using the loss of revenue from fuel duty if there is any modal shift from the roads or give greater credit to hypothetical time saved by road users than by those using other modes? The optimism bias referred to earlier ignores the fact that recent rail projects have come in on budget i.e. Ebbw Vale and High Speed 1. Campaigners in Sussex were shocked when the result of the study into reopening the Uckfield-Lewes line was announced, a Network Rail study found there was no business case. Many feel that the dice were deliberately loaded against the scheme. What's ruled in and what's ruled out as costs and benefits appear to be what swings things, and if you're the body doing the appraisal you hold all the cards. Despite part funding the study Town Councillors were incandescent with rage at what Network Rail ruled in and out according to Government rules, as they only had observer status.

Agendas don't always fall neatly into want and don't want categories. Industry Insiders suggest that ATW bumped up the cost of implementing our hourly service believing it was a done deal that would be waived through politically. Basically they said the resources to implement it would have to be all brand new, whereas in reality a significant percentage would come from better staff diagramming and reallocation of existing units. Instead of being a nice little earner the higher costs played into the hands of those in WAG that wanted to block the scheme and were able to ensure their cost benefit ratios were negative when a 41% optimism bias for operating costs was added on or so we're told.

Cost/benefit analysis is rapidly becoming a busted flush as its open to subjective values. Imagine we had a time machine and gave each of the Crusader factions the magic mathematical formula to win all debates. Would they all come up with the same result - of course they wouldn't! So how do we overcome this world where costs are bumped up and benefits played down?

Firstly politicians of all colours should not be so accepting of what they're told. There seems to enough of the right noises to suggest that they are willing to improve public transport - even if just for popularity reasons, but their basic lack of knowledge leaves them unable to question and challenge. Better political advice and in house knowledge from within their own parties should be sought. It must be as equally galling to a Politician that wants to make his or her mark to be told there's no business case for a scheme they can see the advantages to as the schemes campaigners.



Peter Glover

It is with much regret that we announce the death, on the 18th April, of Mr Peter Glover of Borth. Peter was a well known member of SARPA and frequently attended meetings for many years as the representative from Borth Community Council. He was a regular user of the line when he travelled to London. As such he was not reticent in giving his feedback on the performance of train providers!

Peter was very influential in the adoption of Borth Station in the early days of the scheme and went on to produce, along with fellow members of Ciwb Croeso and the Borth Mosaic group, two magnificent Mosaics on the platform at the Station. Peter was an erudite and entertaining commentator on the development of the railways-(along with many other subjects) and will long be remembered for his wit and, more importantly, his contribution to our community.

Railway website gets a revamp

The Cambrian Railways Partnership (CRP) working with local IT specialists, Cyberium, have revamped and re-launched their website www.thcambrianline.co.uk

www.thcambrianline.co.uk gives information to those who wish to use the Cambrian Lines for work and for pleasure providing advice on the most appropriate tickets, promotions and ideas for days out by train.

Gerwyn Jones, Rail Development Officer for the CRP commented *"Although I'm a bit of a technophobe myself I appreciate that this is an increasingly electronically focused world and as such the website plays an important part in our marketing plan. We hope the increased functionality and easier navigation of the site will mean that it is and useful resource for existing and potential customers"*.

“Rhyfeddod”

The Ultimate Mystery Tour

Saturday 2nd August 2008

A bright weekend with cotton wool clouds over the mountains saw an intrepid band of adventurers set out from Mach to explore the northern wilds of the Cambrian Coast. Each of the four participants knew what to expect and had a tenner in his pocket. Little did each of them realise that this was going to be a stern test of initiative of which the SAS would have been proud.

So it was that Col. Quark (mp 95.6), Private Maloney (mp 33.78) and Major Todger (mp 171.46) foregathered on the Pwllheli-bound platform to start the mystery tour by boarding the 09:05 ex-Mach bound for, well (the leader would know), any one of the 26 stations ahead.

Each proudly showed his Tocyn Taith and looked at one another when the conductor requested our destination. Someone had heard of Fairbourne - and anyway it was pronounceable - so that was it. Someone else was fantasizing about the custard at Tywyn, so when our party was joined there by Signal Sergeant Shrill and his dog Bandy (making it a famous five), there was little doubt that we would be returning to the Talyllyn 'ere the sun set.

Team building commenced in earnest at Fairbourne with each giving according to his skills and receiving of his needs. Coffee and cakes, tickets, model railways, the bog and some colouring with crayons were tried and we set off at just after 11:00 hours BST for the ferry terminal. Hauled by 'Sherpa', the journey included cool views of the mountains, a sudden tunnel, some sand dunes and lots of waving.

The terminal is a steeply shelving beach into which 'Emily's skilful skipper grounded her prow at full speed ahead. With the vessel thus safely held against a rapidly falling new moon tide, we walked the plank and went aboard. In no time we were alongside the stone steps in Barmouth harbour and disembarked close to the sailors' library. We joined the holiday throngs carelessly wandering the narrow streets of this smart resort and decided that Tywyn would be the next heavy rail destination - somewhat, it has to be said, to the chagrin of Bandy who had been looking forward to a good run along the cob at Porthmadog on the strength of his master's Tocyn.

At this point, we break off briefly from the travel narrative to explain that the platoon of (by now) merry wanderers were actually none other than a reincarnation of the Branch Line Re-Invigoration Society: a worthy corporate which is commemorated to this day in the little museum adjacent to the Mach-bound platform of Barmouth railway station. Its objectives being succinctly set out on a printed placard, thus:-

Do YOU need the RAILWAYS?

Aberystwyth - Newtown Shrewsbury/Crewe

Machynlleth - Barmouth - Pwllheli/Bangor

Barmouth - Dolgellau - Bala - Wrexham

The contact point was in Cuffley (Herts) near Potters Bar. Provenance est. c1962.

Riding the 12:49 ex-Barmouth the train was full and standing to Tywyn where the five alighted and headed the few minutes walk southwards for the 'Porter's Platter Refreshment Room' which forms part of Tywyn Wharf station. Here a full repast was enjoined including oggie, apple crumble-with-custard, and, in celebration of the Lambeth Conference just winding up in Canterbury, some Shepherd Neame 'Bishop's Finger' brewed in nearby Faversham.

The five caught the 14:30 from the Wharf station and went all the way to the hillside terminus of Nant Gwernol. This is quite a long journey on the wooden slats of an 1863 vintage passenger saloon. Tribute should be paid to Bandy, Dog First Class, who behaved impeccably and was recognised by the railway through his ONE DOG ticket. The journey was of great interest thanks to the Sergeant's sharing of lively comments on historical and signalling matters as we went up and down.

A twenty minute 'food' break at Abergynolwen on the return leg allowed for a proper inspection of the motive power and of the nearby children's facilities. We rolled into Tywyn Wharf in time for a quick look at the bookshop - the Museum had been visited during the previous month - and the mandatory saunter to the full-size railway station.

Bidding our farewells to the Signal Sergeant and Bandy, we boarded the 17:27 ex-Tywyn and returned past the wave-sculpted sands of the Dyfi estuary and the raised platforms of Dyfi Junction railway station. On arrival in Mach just before 6pm the platoon 'fell out' 'at ease' after a fascinating day - and wondered where the 'mystery tour' was meant to have been!

Footnote

'Tocyn Taith' is a Day Ranger ticket issued by Arriva Trains Wales and costs £6 for two zones. In this case, the zones were 'G' (= Gwynedd + Machynlleth + Aberystwyth) and 'A' (= Anglesey). The ticket can be bought on the train west of Shrewsbury. You can get to Mach(yn)lleth for this day out by arriving on the 08:42 using an ordinary rail ticket. This train runs from Birmingham New Street towards Aberystwyth leaving BNS at 0633 and Wolverhampton (0648), Telford Central (0704), Wellington (0710), Shrewsbury (0728), Welshpool (0751), Newtown (0807) and Caersws (0813).

Notes on Draft Timetable 75 December 2008

Monday to Saturday

As previously trailed nearly all ATW services on the Shrewsbury to Birmingham corridor will go through to Birmingham International. The basic pattern of 2 hrly from Chester/Aberystwyth remains the same.

Chester trains are extended back to Holyhead.

There are no through trains between the Cambrian Coast and Birmingham shown.

All Cambrian trains will additionally call at Smethwick Galton Bridge Low Level between Wolverhampton and Birmingham New St.

The first UP train is later than now (0525) but will not stop at all stations across Shropshire and runs as a Standard pattern semi fast from Shrewsbury.

The last UP train from Aber (1925) runs through to New St instead of terminating Shrewsbury.

The last DOWN no longer waits for the connection from Cardiff at Shrewsbury and runs standard pattern (2124).

The schedules have been padded out throughout the journey. Westbound there is a 5 minute wait at New St following departure from Intl, 9 minutes at Shrewsbury, there are extra minutes in the schedule between all stations in particular the time between services at Newtown currently xx07 westbound and xx40 eastbound, now shows as xx02 west and xx41 east giving 6 extra minutes between Talerddig and Newtown. The 5 charter minutes between Borth and Aber are still in the timetable.

Departures from BHM INTL are at xx09 past the even hours i.e 0809, 1009, departures from New St at xx24 past even hours i.e 0824, 1024 etc (9 mins earlier than

now), Shrewsbury at xx24 past odd hours i.e 0924 ,1124 etc(4 minutes earlier) and arrival at Aberystwht at xx20 past odd hours i.e 1120, 1320 etc. Journey time from New St is 2 hrs 56 mins.

Departures from Aber are xx25 past odd hours i.e 0525 ,0725 with similar padding en route arrival at Shrewsbury are at xx20 past odd hours i.e 0720 ,0920 etc. A wait of 9 minutes is again done before arrival into New St xx26 past odd hours i.e 0826,1026 etc a 14 minute wait then follows for arrival at BHM INTL at xx50 past even hours i.e 0850, 1050 etc.

London Connections – ATW are promoting BHM International as the change point there's a Virgin train to Euston on the hour so a 10 min wait at INTL. So the 0524 from Aber gives a 1014 arrival at Euston (arrives INTL 0850, Virgin departs 0900). The pattern then repeats itself Apart from the last through train at 1925 which goes as far as New St with a Euston connection arriving 0116.

Coming back from London the xx43 departures from Euston past the even hours should give comfortable 16 minute connections at BHM INTL to Aber trains. The last departure from the capital now at 1843.

WSMR are shown in the DOWN direction only. The 1317 from Marylebone will give a connection to Aberystwyth as arrival is at 1635. (49 min wait)
I will have to research WSMR times further.

Connections at Shrewsbury –
Manchester – xx53 northbound (33 mins wait) arrivals at xx41 (43 mins wait)
Chester/N Wales – xx17 into Salop (7 mins) xx25 northbound (5 mins)
Cardiff – now have to use Manchester trains at xx43 (23 mins) southbound, Northbound Manchester trains arrive at xx51 (33 mins) or Holyhead at xx15 (9 mins)
Crewe Locals – still on opposite hours to Cambrian trains.
Heart of Wales – still only 4 trains a day.
London Midland stoppers – arrive xx11 every hour (13 mins), depart to New St at xx47 each hour (27 mins).

Sundays

Frustratingly split into three periods labelled A, B & C. Information is given until the 15 May 2009. Minor minute differences here and there Period B only as far as New St.

The two hourly Monday to Saturday pattern is opted for but starting at 1125 as the 1st departure from Aberystwyth. 1124 being 1st departure from Shrewsbury.

This gives 5 trains a day throughout winter period.

SARPA Meeting dates and venues 2008

November	4 th	Tuesday	1900	Newtown Bell Hotel	December
	6 th	Saturday	1145	Aberystwyth	RAFA Club

SARPA AGM 2008

Despite the poor weather and a planned engineering closure, which in fact did not take place, a successful AGM was held in the Tabernacle, Machynlleth on Saturday 4th October. Approximately a quarter of the membership attended. The existing committee was re-elected en bloc. Two major motions were passed, with the membership's feelings running very strong on both. The secretive and inaccessible so called public consultations for TraCC's Regional Transport Plan were condemned. The proposal by Powys County Council to withdraw the choice of a Senior Citizens Railcard instead of a free bus pass was condemned.

Websites

Our website <http://sarpa.info> **Webmaster Angus Eichoff**
Website host is object4.net

Other sites of interest:

Arriva Trains Wales

www.arrivatrainswales.co.uk/

National Rail Enquiries

www.nationalrail.co.uk/

Train and Bus Information Midlands

www.centro.org.uk/wwwroot/HomePage.asp

LondonMidland

www.londonmidland.com/index.html

Virgin Trains

www.virgintrains.co.uk/default.aspx

Chiltern Railways

www.chilternrailways.co.uk/

Network Rail

www.networkrail.co.uk/

Railfuture/Railway Development Society

www.railfuture.org.uk/

Cambrian Rail Partnership

www.thecambrianline.co.uk/

The Association of Community Rail Partnerships (Acorp)

www.acorp.uk.com

Website of the new Wrexham to London company

www.wrexhamandshropshire.co.uk/index.html

North Wales Coast Railway

<http://www.nwrail.org.uk/>

Useful addresses

Arriva Trains Wales:

St Mary's House, 47 Penarth Road, Cardiff CF10 5DJ. Tel 0845 6061 660
Email: customer.services@arrivatrainswales.co.uk

Network Rail:

Community Relations, Railtrack House, Euston Square, London NW1 2EE

Newtown Station Travel

The Railway Station, Old Kerry Road, Newtown, Powys SY16 1BP. Tel. 01686 621966
E-mail newtownstation@btclick.com

The Association of Train Operating Companies:

ATOC, 3rd Floor, 40 Bernard Street, London WC1N 1BY

Wrexham and Shropshire: Great Central House, Marylebone Station, Melcombe Place, London NW1 1JJ. Tel. 0845 260 5233

London Midland

London Midland, PO Box 4323, Birmingham B2 4JB. Tel. 0121 6342040

Association of Community Rail Partnerships

Rail & River Centre, Canal Side, Civic Hall, Slaithwaite, Huddersfield HD7 5AB

Virgin Trains

Virgin Trains, Customer Relations, PO Box 713, Birmingham, B5 4HH. Tel. 0870 789 1234

Traveline Cymru for all public transport information

www.traveline-cymru.org.uk Tel.0870-6082608

Welsh Assembly Government

Rail and New Roads Division, Transport Wales, Welsh Assembly Government, Cathays Park, Cardiff, CF10 3NQ. Direct Line (029) 2082 6561

For Train Times and Fares Call:

08457 48 49 50 (24hrs)

0845 60 40 500 (Welsh Language Service)

0845 60 50 600 (Textphone)

For ticket reservations please call: 0870 9000 773

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