

Shrewsbury  
Aberystwyth  
Rail  
Passengers'  
Association



# Newsletter No. 47

August 2009



Three engines - three peaks. The Cambrian Mountaineer “Three Peaks Challenge by Rail” down train at Bow Street, 9th May. Lead loco is 97301, followed by 37676 Loch Rannoch. At the rear was Class 50 loco D444. Photograph: Denis Bates.

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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.

## **Chairman's Message**

Deciding on the theme for these quarterly offerings is sometimes a dilemma: should I try to be as topical as possible, or stick to an issue that I want airing? Should the interest be local or from further afield? Stick to commenting on current service issues or outline the case for expansion? Try to be neutral and impartial or delve into the politics behind it all? Controversy? Truth? A crusade about one issue? The current message has morphed several times with plenty on offer for me to comment about. However two events recently have helped me make my choice.

Firstly ex-Wales and Borders MD Chris Gibb now at the helm at Virgin Trains has commented on how the day to day fire fighting of operational issues caused by the botched West Coast Main line upgrade has distracted Virgin from other issues.

Secondly a trip I took on Tuesday 30<sup>th</sup> June. I was travelling back from Wrexham, and having stepped off the Holyhead to Cardiff train at Platform 7 at Shrewsbury slightly late at 1522 I sauntered over to Platform 4 to see how the train back to Newtown was doing – it should have arrived at 1519. Sure enough a 4 car formation was at the south end of Platform 4 but by the confused milling about of passengers and departure indicator saying it was the 1731 to Birmingham International I knew something was up. Staff were walking through it asking passengers to move and people on the platform were enquiring about where the Aberystwyth train was. They were told it was waiting on Platform 5 (which was empty). The units had come in from Birmingham forming the 1409 from International to Aberystwyth until everyone was turfed out at Shrewsbury. The plan appeared to be that the units off the 1330 from Aberystwyth would head back to Aberystwyth and the passengers would swap over. The 1330 didn't appear until 1532 – several minutes late and only 2 car. You can imagine the chaotic scenes as passengers crowded the 4 doors leaving the poor souls trying to disembark facing a crush. It seems one of the units that should have formed this service had failed back in Wales and "control" had decided that come what may the later 1709 from International to Holyhead had to be 4 cars, hence the swap over - though communication of this was totally absent.

It was a sweltering day in the mid 20's – I had not worn my suit, but was in black trousers and a blue short sleeve shirt with tie. I had a small rucksack and a larger black holdall. I hung back from the throng and started to plan what to do in Shrewsbury for 2 hours. At this point – not for the first time – I was mistaken for a railway employee and a man in his 50's wearing shorts decided to verbally lay into me. He had flown back to Birmingham from abroad, had family and several suitcases with him, and what he thought was reserved seats all the way to Aberystwyth. I'll spare you the detail but to be fair he had a right to be pissed off – wouldn't you?

After calming the man down I found I could squeeze into and stand in the vestibule at the front end. The couple in their late 20's next to me had come all the way from Turkey overland. They told me that this was their first late and overcrowded train. They had sailed from Zeebrugge to Hull, and finding that hiring a car was cheaper than buying two walk on rail tickets from Hull to Newtown, they had joined at Telford. It only cost them 9 Euros to go across Greece! Somehow we only left Shrewsbury 12 minutes late; I stood all the way to Newtown and my back was soaked in sweat. I went back into the office making a mental note that this was a bad one and then decided just before 1700 to see how the train was doing. According to the National Rail Enquiries website it was due Aberystwyth 1729 – within 5 minutes of scheduled arrival at 1726 and therefore an on time train – the miracle of charter minutes! It struck me that despite several hundred people having a very bad experience that this service would be ticked off as being ppm compliant! Indeed the franchise agreement box was ticked also, as overcrowding was not predicted and therefore never mentioned, as the resources allocated to the franchise were considered sufficient. So despite exhibiting several of the weaknesses in the current UK rail system, would this experience even register as a problem anywhere in railway management? There was no one from Passenger Focus in sight doing a passenger satisfaction survey. SARPA's postbag indicates that bad experiences like that above are still part of the norm as far as many travellers are concerned on a regular basis.

The irate man in shorts had made the point that do railway managers ever travel on their own trains? A few years ago we could say they did, but as many have pointed out, the current crop at ATW are of the lesser spotted variety certainly away from Cardiff. The weekly ppm spreadsheet at the senior management meeting does not tell the true story. As a man who did sample his product on a regular basis has pointed out, poor day to day operations constantly distract from other issues. I started this message by drafting a vision of why rail was so important to be invested in and expanded on even in the current financial climate as its part of a long term economically sustainable future. Instead of looking to the future the shortcomings of the here and now drag us back once more. It's no surprise that the Commons Transport Select Committee feels that TOC's take passengers for granted.

Gareth Marston  
Newtown, Montgomeryshire  
July 2009

## **News in Brief**

### **Telford station**

Network Rail, London Midland and Telford and Wrekin Council are all contributing to a £800,000 refurbishment of Telford station. The main building will be reglazed, automatic doors installed, and disabled access provided to the toilets. More seating will be provided in the booking hall; the canopy over Platform 1 extended. The down platform will have a new shelter. Work on these improvements will begin in early 2010 and should be completed by next summer.

### **Accident at Fairbourne - Fairbourne Railway to the rescue**

On the 27th June, a collision occurred at the Beach Road crossing in Fairbourne, between an Arriva 158 and a car. The car driver was airlifted to Aberystwyth; her injuries were not life-threatening. The Fairbourne Railway marshalled all their available stock to provide an 11-coach train, to transport the railway passengers to Penrhyn Point, and the ferry to Barmouth.

### **158 units removed from coast line by road**

Observers on 15 July were taken by surprise at the sight of the two coaches of 158 837 heading east along the A55 'North Wales Expressway' road, each loaded on one of Allely's heavy transporters. The vehicles were loaded at Porthmadog and were heading for Doncaster Works for attention. During a routine oil sample test, the results came back as showing signs of contamination (metal filings in the transmission oil) to the transmission / drivetrain. On further investigation the magplug (A magnetic sump plug) had pieces of metal and filings stuck to it. To prevent any more damage and/or a complete unit failure, the unit was moved by road.

[From the North Wales Coast website]

### **Arriva Cross Country**

As we go to print National Express have given notice that they will relinquish the East Coast Main line franchise in December finding the premium promised in the franchise bid impossible to pay. Arriva's Cross Country franchise is widely predicted to be the next in line as the operator struggles to find 10% per annum revenue growth needed to pay for the franchise premium in the recession. Arriva reported revenue growth down at Cross Country to 2.4% for the year to May 31 and Arriva Trains Wales 8.7% for the year to May 31. We understand that other franchises operated by the same operator may be forfeited if they default on one. So far no news on how this would pan out for ATW.

### **London**

There has been confusion over restrictions on tickets for passengers traveling to/from west of Shrewsbury on the Cambrian with some recent instances where TOC staff have been advising that valid tickets are not valid. We have checked this out and the only restrictions on Off Peak marked tickets travelling to/from London Euston are that you must not arrive there before 1014 or depart there before 0930. Off Peak fares are valid on the 1643 departure from Euston which is in the evening peak. If you are challenged we would advise politely reminding TOC staff that whilst you understand that the ridiculous rules can be confusing for all concerned travel to/from Euston from west of Shrewsbury is one of the few areas left without draconian restrictions. Do not be confrontational but firmly stand your ground making a note of the train, time, day and name of staff member. We have written to both Virgin and ATW to remind them to train their staff properly on such validity.

Carrying a copy of this newsletter may be useful. If problems persist ask the person challenging to forward a copy of the ticket ruling from the fares manual justifying their actions to SARPA Chairman Gareth Marston (they will not be able to do this).

**Shropshire**

Shropshire MP's have joined forces to oppose ATW's plans to run services to Marylebone. They say that the much maligned operator should get its own house in order in its franchise area, and are also worried about unfair competition for Wrexham and Shropshire, as taxpayer funded assets would be used by ATW.

**Shrewsbury**

What station refurbishment programme? Is the question being asked as progress is almost non-existent. The wire mesh that prevented pigeons gaining access to the underside of the canopy has been removed and droppings have returned. The local MPs are complaining about the condition of the station allegedly the gateway to the town.

Network Rail's Electrification Route Utilisation Strategy has identified extending the wires from Oxley to Shrewsbury as having a business case as part of a rolling programme of national electrification. The current hourly West Coast Express from Euston to Wolverhampton would be extended to Shrewsbury, and Wales and Border franchise DMU's banned from east of Shrewsbury.

**Welshpool**

Progress on the reinstatement of double track south of the town can be seen with well over two miles of track re-laid.

**Newtown**

Has been unlucky with a number of incidents that could have had more serious consequences. The windows on the former Cafe Loco property were all broken just before the tenant officially gave up the lease, then some drunks used ballast from an engineering train as missiles to break the windows at Newtown Station Travel. On the 23<sup>rd</sup> June the 1805 arrival was pelted with glass bottles thrown from behind the DOWN side waiting shelter, the miscreants running off into Treowen estate. A passenger was hit on the arm by a bottle which fortunately didn't smash.

A letter in the local newspaper the County Times has seen Newtown Station Travel and Peter Compton praised for their service and the wish expressed he won't retire.

Passengers parking cars are reminded that the Pryce Jones car park opposite the station is private property. Whilst the gates are open at 0630 in the morning the security guards close them at 2210 after the last shift worker from the Optimum call centre goes home. Whilst there's nothing to stop you parking you wouldn't want to arrive off the last train to find your car locked in as some people have.

The Newtown Textile Museum, in a row of weavers' cottages at 5-7 Commercial Street, Newtown, is this summer, until September, showing an exhibition of pictures and documents relating to the notorious Abermule railway accident of 1921 in which two Cambrian Railway trains collided head-on on the single line. The artifacts are normally kept in store. Admission is free, and opening hours are from 2 pm to 5 pm Mondays, Tuesdays, Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays.

## Caersws

An official PPM figure in the low 90's may have ATW crowing but users in Caersws are finding the slack timetable and the early closing of the automatic barriers are leaving them stranded trying to get from the car park to the platform. Turning up 5 minutes before departure at an unmanned station is not unreasonable said one disgruntled potential passenger who was caught out and missed her train.

## Carno

Carno Station Action Group have found getting any progress on reopening Carno station has first to overcome bureaucratic finger pointing. A year on from WAG's Enterprise and learning Committees hearing in Carno, the group have discovered that TraCC have done no work towards assessing the group's business plan, citing lack of money and resources from WAG. WAG naturally of course expected TraCC to do all the work. CSAG point out that they put together the business plan using voluntary time.

Meanwhile the Association of Train Operating Companies has suggested reversing some of the Beeching era closures in England, concentrating on settlements of population of 15,000 plus as a having a viable potential customer base to justify business cases. Of the 106 settlements in Wales with a population over 4000 no fewer than 45 of them have no railway station.

## ERTMS

Stakeholders at the joint line liaison Committee's meeting on the 10<sup>th</sup> July were told by Network Rail that they expected to test ERTMS between Harlech and Pwllheli by the end of October 2009, but roll out on all the Cambrian lines was not scheduled until Easter 2010. This means that an hourly service could only be introduced in May 2010 at the earliest, as the new loops need the new signalling system to be operational. On a brighter note it was unexpectedly announced that they had found a solution to fitting ERTMS equipment for use with Steam specials. A support coach would have the majority of the equipment fitted. It was also stated that it may take decades to roll out the system UK wide.

In connection with ERTMS installation, Class 97/3 locomotives, with two yellow painted Mark 2 coaches, have recently been undertaking crew familiarisation trials between Shrewsbury and Aberystwyth. For photos of these see Richard Jones' website: <http://railphotos.demeseo.com/c1686279.html>

## Stop press - Cardiff

Deputy First Minister Ieuan Wyn Jones launched the 5 year National Transport Plan on the 15<sup>th</sup> July. Whilst mega expensive road expansion schemes in South Wales were scrapped and the road lobby chucked its dummy real investment in public transport were missing from the plans. There was also a lot of John Prescott-style rhetoric about integrated transport. As we all know delivery is always more important than promise. A full look will appear in a later newsletter. Overlooked by the media but spotted in the consultation document was a commitment to introduce an hourly service from Aberystwyth to Shrewsbury by 2011.

## **It can be done! Business can be conducted using public transport**

Assembly Members have come into criticism recently from the press for not using public transport for official business. AM's defended themselves by claiming public transport was not convenient or frequent enough or they lived in rural areas where it was non-existent. One AM claimed he had to go to more than one meeting in and around Cardiff and the car was more convenient. Later we heard that Assembly civil servants spent nearly one and a quarter million pounds a year hiring cars from Europcar to conduct business. An Assembly spokesman said that civil servants were encouraged to use public transport. Commentators noted that it was within the power of both Assembly Members and Civil servants to invest in and improve public transport. An editorial in the Western Mail noted that many people use the excuse of poor public transport even when relatively good services were available.

So can public transport be used to conduct business or not? SARPA Chairman Gareth Marston shows us how to do it.

How would you go about getting to two meetings one in Cefn Mawr (a large village 8 miles south of Wrexham) and the other in the centre of Chester as I did recently? Mr A N Other Mileage Claimer would jump in his car, turn on the satnav and drive, he would probably drive right into the centre of the city and park at the NCP car park too. From Newtown the mileage is c. 130 (@ 40p per mile), and the cost of parking would result in a travel claim to his employer for nearly £60.00.

This is how I did it for £22.00 - a North Wales All Zone Pass (it used to be called *Tocyn Faith*) allows use on trains and buses in North Wales for 1 day. Bought on the day as well!

0846	catch 0730 ATW train from Aberystwyth to Birmingham International.
0925	arrive Shrewsbury
1003	catch 0645 Wrexham and Shropshire service from London Marylebone to Wrexham.
1035	arrive Ruabon.
1041	catch from Ruabon Station Drive 1022 2C Arriva Bus from Wrexham Bus Station to Cefn Mawr.
1055	arrive Cefn Mawr
1205	catch 2V Arriva Bus from Cefn Mawr to Wrexham Bus Station.
1217	arrive Ruabon High St.
LUNCH	walk back to Ruabon station
1254	catch 1109 ATW train from Birmingham International to Holyhead.
1319	arrive Chester station. Get free shuttle bus to Foregate St in City Centre.
1622	catch 1423 ATW train from Holyhead to Cardiff Central.
1717	arrive Shrewsbury
1727	catch 1609 ATW train from Birmingham International to Aberystwyth.
1805	arrive Newtown.

EASY!



## Back to the Future at Newtown

Gerwyn Jones  
Cambrian Railways Partnership

THE RAILWAY AT NEWTOWN 1859  2009 Y KHEILFORDD (N Y DRAENEWYDD)

It was a case of looking back *and* to the future at Newtown Railway Station on Tuesday 9 June as an event took place to celebrate a 150 years of the railway serving the local community. There was a party atmosphere with live music, a taste of Wales in the form of free Welsh cakes, a free souvenir postcard and even a 'royal' presence with a Queen Victoria look-alike complete with staff!



As well as train passengers enjoying the activities, the event was well supported by representatives from a number of local bodies including Newtown Town Council, Newtown Civic Society, Powys County Council, Shrewsbury to Aberystwyth Rail Passenger Association as well as almost 100 pupils and staff from St Mary's Primary School and Ysgol Dafydd Llwyd. The pupils, who had produced fantastic Welsh flags for the event, so they could wave at passengers on the trains as they arrived and departed the station, contributed to a great atmosphere. Their presence and enthusiasm for the railway also ensured that as well as celebrating the past there was great hope for the future of the

railway at Newtown as they would be the railway passengers and possibly staff of tomorrow.

Following an unveiling ceremony of a specially-produced slate plaque the Mayor of Newtown, Joy Jones, said '150 years of service has been provided through this station. When you stand and think of all the people that have used the station over the years it has certainly been a great asset to Newtown. The station has seen many changes from steam trains to diesels. Passenger trains, goods and mail trains and of course during the war there would have even been the troop trains. With the new improvements to the train service it will continue to be used for many years to come.'



The celebratory event featured a stall of rail related promotional material and a performance by one of the UK's finest accordionists and writers of new acoustic music, Jamie Smith, entertaining passengers and other visitors to the Station. Jamie's appearance proved to be very popular and is one element of an initiative called 'Music on the move' forming part of Live Music Now! Wales and the Gregynog Festival's outreach programme.

The event was a real team effort and a great example of what can be achieved when individuals and groups from a community work together.



**Train Times:** The current pocket timetable, valid until the 12th December. It lists both weekday and Sunday trains.

Listed are visitor attractions which offer a discount for those travelling by train: Shrewsbury Castle, Powysland (Welshpool) and Newtown Textile Museums, Centre for Alternative Technology, Borth Animalarium, Theatr Harlech, Harlech and Criccieth Castles, and Portmeirion.

## **SARPA response to ATW December 2009 to May 2010 Timetable Consultation**

Our association notes that in its recent National Transport Plan the Welsh Assembly Government has indicated that an hourly service will be introduced between Aberystwyth and Shrewsbury "by 2011". We look forward to seeing draft timetables in due course. An hourly service should rectify many of the functionality failings of the current timetable on the Cambrian that are suppressing demand, as well improving frequency and attractiveness. We will leave these well worn and long standing arguments to one side for this consultation.

Our comments for this timetable centre around connections at Shrewsbury from trains arriving from the Cambrian. WE ARE VERY ANNOYED THAT YET AGAIN KEY CONNECTIONS ARE NOT MADE BY A MINUTE OF TWO. Despite the "jungle drums" saying the problems had been rectified, the draft timetable shows the same problem as before:

Namely on the odd hours starting at 07xx.

A Cardiff train departs at 0720

A Holyhead via Wrexham train departs at 0724

The train arrives from Aberystwyth at 0725.

Many of our members comment on passing the Cardiff train between Shrewsbury station and Sutton Bridge Jnct. and stepping off the train at Shrewsbury to see the tail lamps of the Holyhead train disappear.

Missing the Holyhead connection is very problematic for business travellers as that extra hour wait really knocks about flexibility for them. The Standard Pattern Timetable and franchise bid promised that Shrewsbury station would be an interconnecting hub. Clearly it is not one with this timetable.

We have also noted that the current timetable has introduced a great deal of slack between Newtown and Talerddig. This has resulted in trains presenting themselves early at Caersws on a regular basis. This results in the new automatic barriers being lowered - delaying road traffic by up to 5 minutes as the train sits at the platform awaiting right time departure, and also in passengers who are in the process of parking their vehicles in the station car park the other side of the crossing being blocked from gaining access to the train.

We kindly suggest that losing some of this slack may help make the trains connect at Shrewsbury especially with the Holyhead train.

### **The response from ATW's Head of Franchise and Stakeholder Management Michael Vaughan**

Thank you for taking the time to provide feedback on the above.

I note your continued dissatisfaction with the connections from Aberystwyth and this has been discussed with my train planning colleagues. We entirely understand your aspirations in this regard and we do try to improve connections across the board so that journey opportunities can be improved at our key hubs. On examination for this timetable, we feel that we are unable to make the changes you have suggested at this time. We may however realise opportunities that may be provided following the successful commission-

ing of ERTMS early next year, the hourly proposal and any further linespeed improvements that may be introduced. We note your observations regarding the 'slack' in the timetable and, again we will examine these factors in the context of ERTMS.

I am sorry if this response is not as positive as you would have liked but, once again, I thank you for your keen interest in this matter.

### **Our response...**

Thank you for quick if unsatisfactory response. Of course the views I expressed are on behalf of our Association, which includes the Town Councils along the line as well as individual members and not just a personal viewpoint. Though I have to confess as being a regular business traveller to North Wales - it's my biggest individual bug bear about the service at the moment. Which I'm sure you'll agree given the state the Cambrian service was in back in the Summer 2006 it's come a long way.

Stretching our minds back to 2002/2003 many of us remember the promises of the Arriva bid team about interconnecting timetables (and other things!). Indeed many non rail savvy stakeholders believed they were getting a Swiss style Tahktarplan. Indeed when the franchise winner was announced the interconnecting timetable promise was about the only positive note from the thin gruel that is the Wales and Borders franchise agreement. When the Standard Pattern Timetable was launched in December 2005, Shrewsbury was a hub with connections of a few minutes to Holyhead and Cardiff from scheduled Cambrian arrivals.

Therefore we view this not so much as an "aspiration" but as a broken promise of something that was provided for a period.



Walkers and pupils of Ysgol Dyffryn Ardudwy on Route No.5, between Dyffryn Ardudwy and Talybont. See More tip top trailways launched: p.18.



A clear blue sky, sand and holidaymakers on Aberdyfi beach as an unidentified ATW 158 passes by on the 30th May, with the 1209 Birmingham International to Pwllheli.  
Photograph: Gareth Marston.

## **CAMBRIAN RAILWAYS BARGAINS AND BEACHES LAUNCHED**

**Gerwyn Jones**

A new initiative was launched at Aberystwyth Railway Station on Monday the 8<sup>th</sup> June to promote travel to some of the area's top visitor attractions and beaches by train.

The '**Cambrian Beaches and Bargains**' leaflet features 19 attractions and a number of the best beaches close to the lines who's admission is either free anyway or a discount is afforded to those who travel to them by train.

Speaking at the launch Mark Williams, MP for Ceredigion, said *"I'm delighted to be able to support the Cambrian Railways Partnership's 'Cambrian Bargains and Beaches' venture. It fuses both the love of the railway and the need to use and promote public, sustainable transport with the importance of promoting our local tourism centres across the Cambrian lines. With summer fast approaching, now is the time when visitors and local residents alike are more likely to hop on a train for a ride along the coast and any discount scheme available that can help them get even more value for money, will I'm sure, be greatly welcomed!"*

The launch event featured a stall of rail related promotional material and a performance by one of the UK's finest accordionists and writers of new acoustic music, Jamie Smith entertaining passengers and other visitors to the Station. Jamie's appear-

ance proved to be very popular and is one element of an initiative called 'Music on the move' forming part of Live Music Now! Wales and the Gregynog Festival's outreach programme.

Gerwyn Jones from the Cambrian Railways Partnership commented *"Being a 'Cardi' myself I am always pleased to find a bargain – we hope that this new promotion will encourage local people as well as those visiting for the day or longer to combine a journey on the train with a visit to one or more of the attractions and beaches. The leaflet highlights how much there is on offer – the only difficulty might be to find the time to do everything! We are very fortunate and grateful also that such a talented musician as Jamie, in partnership with the Gregynog Festival, has been able to create a great atmosphere for us to launch this new scheme"*.

The **'Cambrian Bargains and Beaches'** leaflets are available from local Tourist Information Centres and Staffed Railway Stations as well as other outlets on the network. They are also available for download from

[www.thecambrianline.co.uk](http://www.thecambrianline.co.uk)



Though it's gone quiet since the recession - a warning of what could happen to Aberystwyth station if the so called masterplan reappears. The not-so-central-anymore Wrexham Central station tucked away behind a retail unit on the 30th June, with a ATW 153 unit awaiting departure to Bidston. Photograph: Gareth Marston

## **From the Shrewsbury-Chester Rail Users' Association**

The **Shrewsbury-Chester Rail Users' Association** has been closely following progress of the Wrexham & Shropshire's new service to London Marylebone, and the abortive bid from Virgin to come up with a rival service. The group regrets W&S's need to pare down the service, and wonders what the Office of Rail Regulation will make of yet another proposal for a London service, this time from Arriva Trains Wales originating at Aberystwyth. Two SCRUA members report in detail on their journey to London using the W&S: "an interesting routing ... in the near forgotten luxury of a Mk 3 coach", adding that the attentiveness of the staff both via the flow of information over the tannoy and in face to face conversations was something which other operators might learn to adopt. Another item of interest reported in SCRUA's "Severn Dee News" is the recent signing of an agreement between the Cambrian Railway Society and Shropshire County Council on terms for the lease of the 8-mile branch to Oswestry, which could pave the way for the return of a passenger service.

### **Passenger counts at stations**

Railfuture would like your help, please

Over the years, Railfuture branches have organised or assisted in passenger counts, often finding that passenger numbers are higher than the official figures based on ticket sales, as published by the Office of Rail Regulation. Further counts are planned for the summer, and it may even be possible to hold simultaneous counts at a number of locations to improve the quality of data gathered. Action is being coordinated among Railfuture branches, and we would like to hear from any rail user groups willing to assist. Are you planning your own passenger survey later this year or has your group already conducted a survey over the past 12 months? - if so, would you be willing to share the results with Railfuture? Alternatively, could your members help out with a Railfuture survey in your area, perhaps at a station of your choosing? If you have any helpful suggestions or think you may be able to assist, please reply to: [ruglink@railfuture.org.uk](mailto:ruglink@railfuture.org.uk)

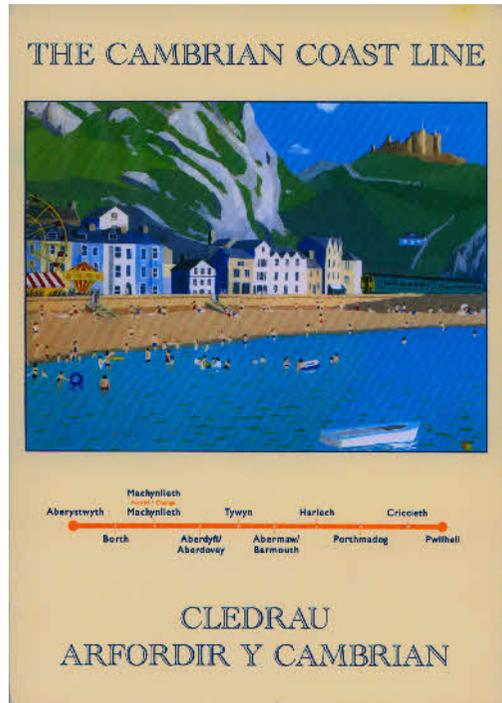
### **The North-South Railway again**

Another version of the proposed north to south Wales railway has recently been aired by Yr Ein Blaenau, and apparently backed by Plaid Cymru. This would run from Bangor through Rhyl, Ruthin, Llangollen, Welshpool, Newtown, Llanidloes and Brecon, on its way to Cardiff. This differs from that previously suggested (Newsletter No.45) in that it lists Llangollen on the route. Presumably it would go from Corwen to Ruabon, and thence via Oswestry to Welshpool. Other articles show what would be a very long tunnel through the Berwyns, joining a reinstated Tanat Valley Line. [From *Railway Herald* Issue 185.]

## Scenic Wales by Rail

**Scenic Wales by Rail** is a new bilingual map of Wales, showing scenic routes, with a description of each (available from manned stations). Curiously, it omits the North Wales Coast Line, the Borders Line south of Shrewsbury, and the South Wales Lines east of Swansea (they are shown on the map). Each of the lines described has a Community Rail Partnership.

Also at stations, is another postcard, “The Cambrian Coast Line”, with an interesting juxtaposition of images along the coast: Harlech Castle, and an amalgamated sea front with an ATW train about to travel on the sea wall, in Dawlish style.



## FIND CHEAPER RAIL FARES

Did you know that you can “Find cheaper rail fares” from the Transport Direct journey-planning website: [www.transportdirect.info](http://www.transportdirect.info)? Type in your start and destination points and the times you want to travel, then wait for the search engine to come up with a range of fares and their availability. Transport Direct claims to have just recorded the 50 millionth user of its website tools. In a recent survey, 92 per cent of users said they find the Transport Direct site easy to use; almost half of users were given a quicker route for a familiar journey. Real time information on road and rail disruption allows travellers to avoid unnecessary delays to their journey while extensive maps show the locations of bus stops and train stations, and also suggest where traffic congestion may occur. - *DfT press release*

## **The view from Milepost 62 with Brigadier John Faviell**

I have not claimed a penny in expenses during the compilation of this column!

Let's get the recent shenanigans of our beloved Members of Parliament in perspective – at most a platoon size strength gang of super reprobates have claimed the equivalent of an average annual salary for stuff they did not deserve. Of course they all believe they have done nothing wrong and have followed the rules. Nearly 50 years ago now a party was in power that was secretly funded by one lobby group to the tune of maybe a quarter or a third of their income. A minister with huge personal and family financial conflicts of interests, aided and abetted by far from impartial civil servants, brought in a man to conduct a hugely flawed and inaccurate review that resulted in a third of this nation's railway lines closing and two thirds of its stations. Literally hundreds of thousands lost their jobs, and communities had vital transport links destroyed, many of which have taken decades to recover from. No thought for the future, congestion, health or the environment and least of all the economy. How the road lobby rubbed its hands with glee as Britain was tarmaced over and encouraged to buy motor vehicles. Ernest Marples, David Serpell et al. all believed they had done nothing wrong as well, and any dissent was either bought off or mock enquiries set up that twisted evidence and refused to hear valid arguments. A sickening chapter in our Island's history. Let's face facts: what's known as the Beeching era was corrupt. It was all done to encourage profit amongst private organisations – not fair profit from hard work but by manipulating people's choices so that they bought more vehicles, consumed more oil and needed more roads built. Completely selfish.

An organisation calling itself the RAC Foundation has recently sent out a press release claiming that rail money should be diverted to roads. This reminds me of the oil crisis in 1973 – key filling stations were earmarked to receive deliveries and were to only provide petrol to key workers such as Doctors etc. The Army was on standby to help guard/regulate these key locations. I decided to do a recce mission with the Battery Sergeant Major and a couple of men, so if the occasion arose we knew our allocated positions and could plan accordingly. Hendrix the dog came along too - a mutt that was part Border Collie had been picked up by a Gunner in Singapore and had stayed with us ever since. At one station there was already a bit of a queue and the owner was trying to limit motorists to £1.00 of petrol each. Being British most folk were queuing patiently. Then from behind a nearby hedge we heard a commotion – Hendrix had sunk his teeth into a businessman crawling along with a petrol can in his hand trying to jump the queue! The indignant man was retrieved and started shouting "I'm a member of the RAC I have a right to this petrol you know"! Selfish behaviour once more.

Then the local police turned up. Gunner Donnelly rapidly took Hendrix off into the village and we identified ourselves to the local plod. Quick thinking by the BSM persuaded the now irate and in pain RAC man he'd been bitten by a German Shepherd, which was nothing to do with us and had conveniently last been seen heading in the opposite direction to Gunner Donnelly and Hendrix. The queuing motorists stayed quiet too! Clearly the pain was making the RAC man delusional: he was now claiming to be a friend of the Chief Constable and very important in the local community and how dare anyone/anything prevent him from having his own way. The man was taken to hospital proclaiming his own importance and given a rabies jab which I understand is almost as painful as having rabies itself.

Apparently the words were unprintable when CID turned up at the local USAF base a mile or so from the village in the direction identified by the BSM. German Shepherds were their guard dog of choice for the camp perimeter and they kept about 30 of them! Our petrol loving friend obviously belonged to the right funny handshake brigade and Hendrix had to keep a low profile until we were posted. I've always wondered how much police time and effort was wasted instead of looking out for criminals. Which just goes to show how self interest and patronage are counter productive to society as whole. Hopefully a press release indicates that the modern RAC does not yield the influence it once did.

Three Cocks Cottage  
July 2009

## 1984 or 2009?: The View From Austria

[A letter from the *Guardian*, reproduced in the Pembrokeshire Rail Travellers' Association Newsletter.]

During a recent visit to London, a nasty incident occurred, which killed interest in taking any further trips to this city. As I was taking pictures of a double decker bus with my son, we were approached by two policemen. First we were told it is forbidden to take pictures of anything in conjunction with transport. Then our names, passport numbers and London Hotel address were noted. After that we were forced to delete all the pictures on our cameras – whether they were of transport or not. These deletions were not only enforced destruction of private property but an infringement of our privacy. I understand the need for some sensitivity in an era of terrorism, but surely its naïve to think terrorism can be prevented by terrorising tourists?

Editor: Is this indeed the case? And does it apply to our photographs of the railway? In the case of London, I'm sure there are postcards available with pictures of London buses.

### Going the rounds...

At last Gordon Brown decided to throw the towel in and resign.

His cabinet colleagues decided it would be a worthy gesture to name a railway locomotive after him. So a senior 'Sir Humphrey' went from Whitehall to the National Railway Museum at York, to investigate the possibilities.

"They have a number of locomotives at the NRM without names," a specially-sought consultant told the top civil servant. "Mostly freight locomotives though."

"Oh dear, that's not very fitting for a prime minister," said Sir Humphrey. "How about that big green one, over there?" he said, pointing to 4472.

"That's already got a name" said the consultant. "It's called 'Flying Scotsman'."

"Oh. Couldn't it be renamed?" asked Sir Humphrey. "This is a national museum after all, funded by the taxpayer."

"I suppose it might be considered," said the consultant. "After all the LNER renamed a number of their locomotives after directors of the company, and even renamed one of them Dwight D Eisenhower."

"That's excellent", said Sir Humphrey, "So that's settled then. Let's look at renaming 4472. But how much will it cost? We can't spend too much, given the expenses scandal!" Well, said the consultant, "We could always just paint out the 'F'."

## **MORE TIP TOP CAMBRIAN TRAILWAYS LAUNCHED**

The Cambrian Railways Partnership has launched four new walks in its award winning Cambrian Trailways series.

Developing on the popularity of the leaflets launched last year which won a national Chartered Institute for Logistics and Transport award, these new routes following recognised rights of way between the stations have been produced:

- No.5 Dyffryn Ardudwy – Talybont
- No.6 Llanaber – Barmouth
- No.7 Aberdovey – Tywyn
- No.8 Newtown – Welshpool

A launch event was organised to showcase and raise awareness of the new walks on Friday the 1<sup>st</sup> of May 2009. The launch involved participants from a wide range of local businesses and bodies such as the Ardudwy Regeneration Group, Tourism Partnership Mid Wales, Mid Wales Tourism, Gwynedd Council, Ramblers Association and Arriva Trains Wales amongst others including pupils and staff from Ysgol Dyffryn Ardudwy walking route No.5 between Dyffryn Ardudwy and Talybont.

Local Community Councillor Bill Moss, Chairman of the Ardudwy Regeneration Group said, *“We hope these new leaflets will encourage people to visit the area specifically to undertake the walks as well as appealing to people who are already coming to the area as an added attraction and means of seeing more of the wonderful countryside than they may have otherwise. Holding the launch in the area also helps raise the profile of another local initiative to develop the longer distance route: The Ardudwy Way”*.

Gordon and Dot Hayes from the Wirral who have visited Benar Beach Touring and Camping Park, Talybont for over twenty years also took part in the walk, Mr Hayes commented *“We really enjoy and look forward to visiting this part of Wales - as keen walkers these new leaflets are an added attraction”*.

Provided in the Trailway leaflets is a detailed strip map for each route and other useful information including the wildlife that may be encountered, points of historical interest and the availability of refreshments and how to source accommodation locally.

Speaking at the launch Gwynedd Councillor Eryl Jones-Williams warmly welcomed the initiative, *“Today’s launch is another example of how the local community is further developing its relationship with the railway. We have an active Station Adoption group at Dyffryn Ardudwy and Talybont that is working with Arriva Trains Wales to enhance the stations and their appearance; this work coupled with initiatives such as the Cambrian Trailways will make a real impact in promoting the area in general as well as the railway”*.

Gerwyn Jones on behalf of the Cambrian Railways Partnership commented, *“What we have found from feedback on the initial four walks is that they appealed to local people as much as to visitors to the area. In extending the series we have included two shorter walks of between three and four miles as well as two more challenging ones of between ten and fourteen miles to appeal to a wider spectrum of walkers”*.

The new leaflets are available from local Tourist Information Centres and Staffed Railway Stations on the network. The entire set of eight, along with other information relevant to the Cambrian Railways is also available to download from [www.thecambrianline.co.uk](http://www.thecambrianline.co.uk)

## Websites

**Our website** <http://sarpa.info> **Webmaster Angus Eickhoff**  
**Website host is mid-wales.net**

**Other sites of interest:**

Arriva Trains Wales	<a href="http://www.arrivatrainswales.co.uk/">www.arrivatrainswales.co.uk/</a>
National Rail Enquiries	<a href="http://www.nationalrail.co.uk/">www.nationalrail.co.uk/</a>
Train and Bus Information Midlands	<a href="http://www.centro.org.uk/wwwroot/HomePage.asp">www.centro.org.uk/wwwroot/HomePage.asp</a>
LondonMidland	<a href="http://www.londonmidland.com/index.html">www.londonmidland.com/index.html</a>
Virgin Trains	<a href="http://www.virgintrains.co.uk/default.aspx">www.virgintrains.co.uk/default.aspx</a>
Chiltern Railways	<a href="http://www.chilternrailways.co.uk/">www.chilternrailways.co.uk/</a>
Network Rail	<a href="http://www.networkrail.co.uk/">www.networkrail.co.uk/</a>
Railfuture/Railway Development Society	<a href="http://www.railfuture.org.uk/">www.railfuture.org.uk/</a>
Cambrian Rail Partnership	<a href="http://www.thecambrianline.co.uk/">www.thecambrianline.co.uk/</a>
The Association of Community Rail Partnerships (Acorp)	<a href="http://www.acorp.uk.com">www.acorp.uk.com</a>
Wrexham and Shropshire company	<a href="http://www.wrexhamandshropshire.co.uk/index.html">www.wrexhamandshropshire.co.uk/index.html</a>
North Wales Coast Railway	<a href="http://www.nwrail.org.uk/">http://www.nwrail.org.uk/</a>
Circular tour of North Wales by rail	<a href="http://www.penmorfa.com/Cambrian/">http://www.penmorfa.com/Cambrian/</a>

## SARPA Meeting dates and venues 2009

August	No meeting			
September	Saturday 5th	1200	Tywyn	Talylyn Railway
October: AGM	Saturday 10th	1230	Newtown	Montgomery Club Broad Street
November	Saturday 7th	1200	Aberystwyth	RAFA Club
December	Tuesday 1st	1845	Newtown	Bell Hotel

## 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](mailto: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](mailto: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](http://www.traveline-cymru.org.uk) Tel.0870-6082608

**Rail Franchise Performance Manager** Rail and New Roads Division, Transport Wales, Welsh Assembly Government, Cathays Park, Cardiff, CF10 3NQ. Direct Line (029) 2082 6849

### 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

## Officers of the Association

**Chairman:** Gareth Marston: 64 Churchill Drive, Barnfields, Newtown, Montgomeryshire. SY16 2LH. Tel. 07969 526833

E-mail: [gmarston@live.com](mailto:gmarston@live.com)

**Vice-Chairman:** Ivor Morris: 2 Dingle Rd, Welshpool, Powys.SY21 7QB. 01938-554463

**Secretary:** Vacant

**Treasurer:** Peter Gatward, c/o Technium Aberystwyth, Y Lanfa, Trefechan, Aberystwyth, Ceredigion SY23 1AS. Tel. 07989471261. E-mail [pgatward@hazres.com](mailto:pgatward@hazres.com)

**Newsletter Editor:** Denis Bates, 86 Maesceinion, Waun Fawr, Aberystwyth, Ceredigion SY23 3QQ. Tel. 01970-617667. E-mail [deb@aber.ac.uk](mailto:deb@aber.ac.uk)

**Shrewsbury Rail Users Federation Representative:** Roger Goodhew: 12 Granville St, Shrewsbury, Shropshire. SY3 8NE. Tel. 01743 358873.

**Committee Member:** Angus Eickhoff: The Forge, Whitehouse Bridge, Welshpool, Powys. Tel. 01938-553572. E-mail [angus@anguseickhoff.co.uk](mailto:angus@anguseickhoff.co.uk)

Association email address: [sarpa@linuxmail.org](mailto:sarpa@linuxmail.org)