

Marlow & District Railway Society

Please reply to:

THE MARLOW DONKEY NO.31

CHAIRMAN'S NOTES

JUNE 1984

Next year the 150th anniversary of the Great Western Railway is to be marked by a series of steam-hauled excursions, Open Days at major rail centres, and even by special brews of "GWR 150" beer. In no way can these activities approximate to a Shildon or Rainhill form of celebration, but we may rest assured that this particular "birthday" will be a very special occasion. To read at the same time of the demise of Swindon Works in the near future and the consequent redundancies is extremely bad - but inevitable.

Mr. Alun Rees, CME of the Severn Valley Railway, who gave a most interesting talk at our May meeting, caused many eyebrows to lift. He suggested that Dai down in Barry Island should consign his last remaining hulks to the torch. Certainly the efforts to resurrect the remaining 70 locomotives from this graveyard are laudable but foolish. Mr. Rees said many wrecks would stand under tarpaulins in weedy sidings for years to come. I have just read David Shepherd's latest book, "A Brush with Steam", and can now appreciate the immense difficulties of those groups who "adopt" an engine or two and then struggle both physically and financially against immense odds. Robert Adley MP would have liked ALL the Barry locomotives preserved with a Government grant, mothballed like redundant battleships, and then presumably resold. Have we over-preserved, I ask. Yes, I believe we have, but our heartfelt thanks to all those stout-hearted enthusiasts who have ensured a good, representative collection of steam veterans.

There are this year a great number of excursions involving a journey on the threatened Settle and Carlisle line. As you will read elsewhere in this Newsletter a dozen of our members recently enjoyed a (possibly) final trip on these tracks. Because of fire damage created by "A4" 4-6-2 No.60009 and the continuing drought, our train was obliged to be headed by a preserved Class 40 diesel. I hope some more "club outings" of this type can be arranged. In earlier years our Society made many such forays.

Bob Reid, the successor of Sir Peter Parker as Chairman of BR, proudly announced that in 1983 the railways made an operating surplus of £62 million. Mr. Reid's progress from assistant yardmaster at Edinburgh to his present post indicates that this time we have a real railwayman. There are problems ahead. Let us hope Bob Reid can cope with both the Bucktons and the Serpills in the next three years.

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1984 PROGRAMME OF MEETINGS

- July 19th - "Restoration of the Kennet and Avon canal".
Graham Horn of the Kennet and Avon Canal Trust.
- August 16th - Evening visit to the Kennet and Avon Canal (and local
hostelry) times to be notified.
- September 20th - "Some of the Steamier Corners of the World"
Frank Saunders Films from South America, India and
the Far East.
- * October 18th - "Wagon-Lits Past and Present".
John Price Cooks Continental Timetables.
- November 15th - "150 Years of Irish Railways and 20 years of RPSI".
Les McAllister of the Railway Presentation Society
of Ireland.
- * December 20th - "Films from the Archives".
Tony Hall - Patch Assistant Curator of the Science
Museum.

* Topics to be confirmed

SUMMER EXCURSION

A few seats are available on the coach to Loughborough on Sunday 8th July
Adults £6.00 Child £3.00. Details and Bookings to Mike Walker on
Marlow 3899.

CHRISTMAS DINNER

The Christmas Dinner will be held at the Chequers on Saturday 22nd December.
Further details in the next "Donkey" or from Mike Norris on Marlow 5227.

H.W. Tesco's 9.15
P.R. 9.35
Ayles 10.00

£6.00

TRADING WATER FOR STEAM - Edgar W. Lewcock

Listening to Mr. A. Ree's interesting and informative talk on the Severn
Valley Line and in particular his reference to Boiler maintenance prompted
the thought on what happened "across the pond" in the days of steam with
operating conditions rather different to those in Britain.

Anyone reading Mr. Hewison's recently published book "Locomotive Boiler
Explosions" will have noted that in Britain, those that occurred in the
19th Century were, in the main, due to design weaknesses inherent in "Lap
Joints" between boiler plates which were overcome by the use of Butt riveted
joints and better inspection programmes. Explosion in the 20th century were
a rarity although curiously some imported American Locomotives - the wartime
2-8-0 class - were involved due to the water gauge isolation problems.

TRADING WATER FOR STEAM - continued.

It comes therefore as a surprise to many people that in the U.S.A. explosions happened fairly regularly right up to the last year of steam. The writer discovered this while looking through the Bureau of Locomotive Inspection reports of the Inter-State Commerce Commissions. The period examined was from just before the 2nd World War until just after. Quite a number of these explosions were major with boilers being blown clear of the frames and running gear occasionally landing on the track ahead and de-railing the train!!

In the fiscal year 1938 - the first year examined - five explosions occurred killing five people and injuring three. In one case the boiler landed 486 feet forward, damaging the rails and finished 741 feet from the explosion point.

If five explosions seems a lot then it is interesting to note that this was the least number of explosions recorded in any previous year except 1933 when five explosions also occurred.

In 1939 - six explosions occurred, in one of which the brakes were unbelievably undamaged and the passenger train ran on 5.62 miles before rolling to a stand!!

In 1940 there were eight explosions and after this when America entered the War matters got rapidly worse due to the pressure of keeping trains on the move. Eleven explosions occurred in 1941 and these rose to thirteen in 1942. The worst year on record was undoubtedly the fiscal year of 1943 when twenty five or just over two per month occurred. A list of the locomotives involved is shown at the end of this article.

What caused the problem? Well, in the overwhelming majority of cases it was shortage of water for various reasons. The Americans drove their engines hard and with a lot of single line working, there was a push to "keep going" even when the water disappeared out of the gauge glass! Thus allowing the firebox crown sheets to collapse. Additionally fusible plug were not fitted to many engines. (Trevithick was the first man on record to fit one, he also built the first locomotive!) They didn't fit many tender water level gauges either!

It seems incredible that locomotive crews would risk their lives to "keep rolling" but in one explosion the cab had a placard of previous boiler explosions and an instruction from the Vice President of the line "Do not trade water for steam - if you are losing water with feed water pump and injector working, stop and investigate. If you are unable to correct - remove fire avoiding damage to crown sheets".

And that says it all!!!

Locomotive Explosions in Fiscal Year 1943

<u>LINE</u>	<u>LOCO</u>	<u>DATE</u>
A.T.S.F.	1631	26-11-42
B & O	1223	13- 9-42
	4240	19- 9-42
	4621	20- 1-43

Locomotive Explosions in Fiscal Year 1943 - continued

<u>LINE</u>	<u>LOCO</u>	<u>DATE</u>
Milwaukee	2640	14- 5-43
D. & H.	813	14- 8 42
Erie	4220	20- 7-42
G.N.	3225	23- 1-43
I.C.	1367	27- 8-42
Lehigh	3183	21-12-42
L. & N.	1231	9- 7-42
	210	2-12-42
Missouri-Kansas	753	21-11-42
Missouri-Pacific	1317	4-12-42
Nashville	405	17- 1-43
N. & W.	1204	7- 7-42
Pennsylvania	520	14-11-42
	4188	5-12-42
Rapid City	15	1- 7-42
S.A.L.	249	13-10-42
	224	3- 6-43
Southern	6627	3- 6-43
Spokane	Loco of G.C. & WR.	30- 9-42
U.P. (LA & SL.)	6070	30- 9-42

Yes, there is one short but this is as published in the Report!

"CUMBRIAN MOUNTAIN EXPRESS" - 7th May, 1984

We have all from time to time read in our railway journals of the uniquely scenic route followed by trains on the 80-mile stretch between Settle and Carlisle. Ais Gill, Dentdale, Ribblesdale and the Eden Valley are places in a remote part of the Pennines where re-built Scots, Black 5's and Jubilees used to be seen in steam days toiling up the "Long Drag". When Mike Walker offered to organise a trip for club members on an SLOA charter train he very soon formed a group of twelve enthusiasts.

"CUMBIRAN MOUNTAIN EXPRESS" - continued

Our party gathered at Watford Junction on a bright chilly morning. As 8.06 we were on our way. Anticipation of a fascinating ride behind steam between Carnforth and Carlisle was sadly dashed. NO STEAM! Previous steam-hauled specials had burnt embankments, trees and even signalling equipment. The countryside was tinder-dry and the Forestry Commission were adamant - there must be no more steam engines on this route until the drought ended. The disappointed travellers were mollified to a certain extent by a forty-five minute inspection of Steamtown at Carnforth and five pound refund.

"Sir Charles Hallé", a Class 86 electric, kept excellent time and we arrived in Carnforth to be greeted by whistles from "Flying Scotsman" and Black 5,5407. Both were in steam and ready to head our train through Clapham to Hellifield. However, everyone made for the footbridge to be confronted by "Lord Nelson" and two huge locomotives imported from France and Germany.

Meanwhile D200 with the original "lion and wheel" symbol had backed on to our 12-car train. This diesel, also marked as Class 40-122, took us right through to Carlisle.

We curved right at Carnforth East Junction and enjoyed a delightful 28-mile trip to Hellifield, past woods and spinneys full of bluebells and primroses. We were able to dismount and stretch our legs again while the train was reversed. Helliford Station has seen better days. The letters MR in the iron scrollwork recalled its builders. The Midland Railway must have considered this an important station years ago. Though boarded up the buildings are in good condition and there were no indications of vandalism.

The train now retraced its earlier course through Long Preston until we reached Settle Junction. We were there at last, ready to climb up the line, possibly the most spectacular length of track in England. In 1876 this was opened as the Midland's challenge to the LNWR who had chosen their route to Scotland by means of climbing Shap Fell to the west.

We passed the pleasant little town of Settle and soon crossed the 24-arch Ribbleshead Viaduct. For mile after mile photographers were perched on walls and grassy banks training their lenses on our train. Many were disgusted to find we were diesel-hauled. Their gestures required no words. Dent Station is the highest main-line station in England - 1150 feet above sea-level. Near this station we had a twenty-five minutes photographic stop to gaze across the fells at the sheep and scattered farm-houses. On such a lovely afternoon we could only guess at snow at Blea Moor, high winds at Garsdale and the everlasting rain and mists that the drivers and firemen used to cope with in such a waste of wintry desolation. Today it was dry. The trackside grass and trees were burnt, waterfalls had no water, the stream beds were just lines of boulders.

A second stop was made at Armathwaite. We would have preferred to get down at Appleby Station, but this opportunity to walk along the line was very welcome.

The countryside was now very different, water in the ponds and streams, plenty of trees, altogether a lush area after the bleakness of the Pennine fells.

"CUMBRIAN MOUNTAIN EXPRESS" - continued

We ran into Carlisle at 4 o'clock, the wrong way round. Our elderly diesel was taken from one end of the train, another Class 86 - number 318 was attached for our home run at the other.

The return journey was uneventful. We arrived in Watford Junction twelve minutes early after a journey of 617 miles. We were extremely dissatisfied about the lack of steam haulage but in all fairness it had been a lovely day out. Our thanks to SLOA (or should it be DLOA?) and to Mike for his organisation

BOOK REVIEW - Ron Brooks

A rather unusual batch this time - but the Editor said books about railways.

'THE ARMoured TRAIN' by G. Balfour BATSFORD £9.95
0 7134 2547 4

This most informative book traces mostly the British use of the armoured train from the Boer War to the Second World War. The mind may boggle but there was a fully armoured train on the R.H. & D. and in the Boer War lengths of rope were found to be quite effective armour on engine boilers - one had to be called HAIRY MARY!

'RAILWAY BRIDGE CONSTRUCTION' by F.A.W. Mann HUTCHINSON £5.50
0 09 108630 2

'RAILWAY BRIDGE MAINTENANCE' by F. Turton HUTCHINSON £4.50
0 09 108920 4

(Two Volumes)

All you ever wanted to know about bridges and their maintenance, from the humble station to the Yangtze, but never knew who to ask. Worth their cost for the illustrations and you never know when you might have to build a railway bridge!

'RAILWAY STEAM CRANES' by J.S. Brownlee Published by the Author £3.00
0 9502965 03

It seems incredible that this encyclopaedic treatise was so cheap and had to be published by its author. It modestly claims to cover them all (in Britain) and I believe it. Working drawings, photographs and tables galore.

'THE IRON ROAD' by C.J. Allen JOHN F. SHAW (1928?)

If the books reviewed above are specialised then this is the standard general work. The copy I read (courtesy of Ernie) was awarded in 1928 as a first class prize at a Sunday School. It is still first class but lacks the colour illustrations of its present day equivalent (to be reviewed later). On page 139 you can see how these transatlantic geniuses had got wireless into the Canadian "International Ltd" with headphones for all concerned.

'BRITAINS BIG FOUR'

WINCHESTER (1958)

The cover plates give a map for each of the SOUTHERN, LMS, GW and LNE railways, but still after 30 years none of this new fangled wireless in British trains. Each 'region' has a potted history with a detailed appendix of the constituent lines. An excellent starter for a history of railways in Britain.

"THARS TROUBLE ON LINE!" - Alan Wheeler

I entered Maidenhead station as normal, after a long day at the workhouse, and up onto platforms 4/5 to see a Class 50 and its Inter-City train at a stand on platform 2 - the fast up. Looking down the line towards Twyford I could just see a HST at a stand at the next signals. Tuesday 3rd April was going to be interesting. Wandering along the platform towards the loco 50.017 "Royal Oak" I saw a ganger lookout on the other platform from whom I learnt that the crossing from main to relief lines just east of the station had failed. Looking towards it I noticed a DMU at the relief down signals, plus a track gang. The time 17.25, the driver of the class 50 already on the platform goes to the signal phone and talks, replacing the phone, he raises his arm to the guard and climbs aboard. The signals are still RED, but he pulls forward and slowly disappears towards London. A minute or two later the HST in a great cloud of black smoke starts towards Maidenhead. The DMU is still at the signals as the HST comes to a stand in the station. The 17.28 up DMU arrives and departs, shortly followed by a fast freight. The down DMU starts to move towards us, to arrive at 17.35, it turns out to be the 17.04 to Basingstoke, normally on time. The HST moves forward, signals still RED. The somewhat late 17.04 DMU departs to be quickly followed by the Parcels Service DMU pulling into platform 3 - a normal routine, only $\frac{1}{2}$ hour later than normal. A station announcement tells passengers waiting for the next Reading train to cross from platform 3 to 4, it rapidly arrives to the apologies of BR for the delay of the 17.24, now timed at 17.45. Our branch line train is due off at 17.38 following the arrival of a fast down from Paddington at 17.35, but not today. We get the start buzzer at 17.48 and as we pull out so a HST, somewhat rapidly passes through on the up relief line, less than 1 minutes after the down stopping DMU had cleared it. Oh well it made a change from the normal running pattern.

TWENTY-FIVE YEARS AGO - R.D. Bowen

Modernisation was really affecting the railways in the summer of 1959. The most significant event was the introduction on 15th June of electrified services to Ramsgate via the Kent coast line between Faversham and Dover and on the branch from Sittingbourne to Sheerness.

This was the first phase of the electrification on the third rail of lines in Kent and was part of the extensive programme planned by the former Southern Railway and was completed as far as Gillingham (Kent) in the summer of 1939.

TWENTY-FIVE YEARS AGO - continued

This latest extension involved 78 route miles of track east of Gillingham, extensive major civil engineering works and the supply of 53 four car electric units built at Eastleigh Works for the fast trains to Ramsgate and Dover. Additionally 62 two-car units were being supplied for intermediate services, some motor luggage vans and 24 electric locomotives for freight services and certain passenger services including the "Golden Arrow" and "Night Ferry".

Another major development was the completion of the Potters Bar widening on the Eastern Region. This involved the work of driving three new twin-track tunnels, widening of existing cuttings and enlargement and modernisation of Hadley Wood Station. The net result is that there would now be not less than four tracks from Kings Cross to the south end of Welwyn Viaduct.

New rolling stock was arriving too. Ten of 38 type "2" main line mixed-traffic diesel electric locomotives were being supplied by the North British Locomotive Company for the Eastern Region. These were numbered D6100 to D6137 for use on the Great Northern Line inner and outer suburban services and local goods working the London area. They were equipped with 1,000 hp NBL/MAN engines and were of Bo-Bo Wheel arrangement.

Ten further type "2" locos were also being supplied by the English Electric Co, Ltd., also for the Eastern Region. These were numbered D5909 for use on short distance passenger train working and for the inner and outer suburban services out of Kings Cross. They were equipped with 1,100 hp Napier "Deltic" engines and were of Bo-Bo Wheel arrangement.

New multiple-unit stock was being delivered too. The first of 26 two-car sets for the Manchester-Bury service were delivered. Built by Wolverton Works to an Eastleigh design they replaced the original Lancashire and Yorkshire stock of 1916. Also newly delivered were multiple-unit diesel railcar sets from Derby Works for the suburban services between St. Pancras and Bedford. These were four-car sets powered by Rolls-Royce engines.

Regrettably passenger service withdrawals were occurring with greater monotony. In June services were withdrawn between St. Ives (Hunts) and Kettering, Rolleston Junction and Southwell (near Newark), Essendine and Stamford, Wellingborough and Higham Ferris, Rugby and Leamington Spa. Furthermore many more lines were being proposed for closure, the closest to "home" between Bedford and Northampton, also Bedford to Hitchin. Passenger service withdrawals were proposed for Bletchley to Oxford, Bletchley to Cambridge, also Dunstable to Leighton Buzzard. Finally local services north of Aylesbury and through expresses from Marylebone to Sheffield, Bradford and Manchester leaving a reduced service between Marylebone and Nottingham only calling at Aylesbury, Brackley, Woodford, Rugby, Lutterworth, Leicester, Loughborough and Nottingham. These would be the only stations to remain open for passenger traffic on the former Great Central Railway north of Aylesbury.

A report was published in mid-summer by the British Transport Commission to the Minister of Transport on its re-appraisal of the Modernisation Plan. It was hoped that as result by 1963 the Commission's gross receipts should more than cover working expenses. It was anticipated that the total number of passenger and goods stations be reduced by over 1,000 and some 1,800 route miles closed. By 1963 it was expected that 2,300 main line diesel loco's would be in service and that by 1964 the whole of the Euston-Birmingham-Crewe-Manchester/

TWENTY-FIVE YEARS AGO - continued

Liverpool electrification would be completed. This concentration of effort would mean that the East Coast Main Line electrification from Kings Cross would not start till after 1964 except for suburban services.

Other happenings include the withdrawal of the prototype "Hall" class loco 4900 "Saint Martin", itself rebuilt from a "Saint" class in 1924, being originally built in 1907. The Somerset and Dorset shed at Highbridge closed in May. Cardiff to Bournemouth trains were to be diverted in the summer via the Severn Bridge, Bath and the Somerset and Dorset line to relieve congestion in the Severn Tunnel. The last L.N.W.R. 0-6-0T, No.58850 was still in service at Middleton Top, on the Cromford and High Peak Line. The Industrial Locomotive Society acquired for preservation the 2 foot gauge locomotive "Pixie". Built in 1922 by Kerr Stuart and Co, Ltd., it had latterly been used at the Devon County Council roadstone quarry at Wilminstowe near Tavistock. Announcement was made of the formation of a "Bluebell Railway Preservation Society". Its aims were stated to be the purchase from British Railways of the section from Horstead Keynes (exclusive), still serviced by electric trains from Haywards Heath, and Sheffield Park (inclusive) for which BR required £34,000.

Progress was also being made by a preservation society to re-open the narrow gauge Welshpool and Llanfair Light Railway where terms had been agreed with BR for a 42 year lease.

A new standard gauge 0-4-0ST was supplied by Hudswell Clarke and Co, Ltd. to work on the Esholt Sewage Works sidings of Bradford Corporation. It was designed to burn recovered wool grease!!

From the end of June passenger accommodation was withdrawn from the BR ship plying between Fishguard and Waterford. The service, worked by the SS "Great Western" built in 1934, would continue for cargo and livestock only. BR continued to use horsedrawn vehicles but by the beginning of 1958 there were only 457 horsedrawn vehicles in stock compared with 26,340 in 1948. By 1959 this had dropped further to 18 horsedrawn vehicles and 66 horses still owned.

As can be seen the summer of 1959 was every eventful, with a wonderful mix of the latest stock being delivered and old pre-grouping stock still in service, just!!

CHILTERN TRAINS EXCURSIONS

<u>Sat. 30 Jun.</u>	York, Durham or Newcastle Tours to Beamish or NYMR	GW/GC
<u>Sun. 1 Jul.</u>	Chester or Llangollen Tours to Bala Lake Rly and North Wales	GW/GC
<u>Sun. 15 Jul.</u>	Norwich, Yarmouth or Bressingham Tours to North Norfolk Rly or the Broads	WCML
<u>Sat. 14 Jul.</u>	Welshpool & Llanfair Railway	GW/GC

CHILTERN TRAINS EXCURSIONS - continued

<u>Tue. 24 Jul.</u>	France-Boulogne, Bagatelle or Le Touquet	GW/GC
<u>Sun. 19 Aug.</u>	Colwyn Bay, Betws-y-Coed Tours of Snowdonia and the Ffestiniog Rly.	WCML
<u>Mon. 27 Aug.</u>	Weymouth Corfe Castle or Swanage	GW/GC
<u>Sat. 6 Oct.</u>	Blackpool Illuminations	GW/GC
<u>Sat/Sun. 6/7 Oct.</u>	Blackpool Illuminations and Lake District tour	WCML

Trains marked GW/GC operate via Beaconsfield, High Wycombe, Beaconsfield etc.
WCML via Watford, Hemel Hempstead, Leighton Buzzard, Bletchley etc.

Full details from Chiltern Trains, 13, Golden Hills, Chinnor, Oxon, OX9 4PT
Tel. Kingston Blount (0844) 52198 09.00-13.00/16.00-19.00.

LOCAL LINES

"Lots do something to create some publicity" the WR General Manager cried, as a diversion to moving offices. Well, he got more than he expected for in its metamorphosis from "Hercules" to "Sir Edward Elgar", 50-007 has become something of a local celebrity. Just in case you've been in the Falklands for the spring, the loco in question has emerged not only with a new name, in traditional seriffed brass letters, but with number plates to match, a coat of mid-chrome green paint, orange/black/orange lining and cast brass "arrows of indecision", and cast GWR crests! The yellow cab ends spoil it slightly. One of its first duties was in early March when it headed a special from Paddington through to Maidenhead en route to Paignton on behalf of Konica cameras. The train was formed of the "Venice Simplon Orient Express" set. A green loco at the head of chocolate and cream stock, Superb!

Another distinctive locomotive has been active recently. Railfreight's newest, 58.014 has spent some time at Reading for maintenance training. and crew training runs between Reading and London providing the unusual sight of a pure freight unit on passenger stock. In addition 47.901 (the class 58 test bed) has visited Reading recently. The intention is to introduce 58's onto Didcot m.g.r. trains as soon as the mining industry returns to normal.

The pit strike has led to problems in the area. With supply trains annulled, Didcot power station has been virtually closed for some weeks, Reading yard has hosted loaded hoppers "blacked" on their way to the Coal Concentration Depot at West Drayton

LOCAL LINES - continued

It appears that the WR's plans for electrification of the suburban system are back on the shelf gathering dust. The B.R.B. seems to be pushing the ECML as the next priority for the trickle of cash which occasionally appears from Stan Whitehall for such projects. The main problem is producing a financial case for investment. In recent years the WR commuter traffic has dropped into London as many switch to coaches which can take them directly into the city, where a large proportion of Thames Valley commuters work. One solution would be to operate over the Metropolitan from Paddington to Moorgate but capacity would be a problem. Do not expect the wires therefore before the late 1990's.

This means that when Marylebone closes, probably May 1986, Paddington will be the only London terminus still operating a diesel suburban service. Hence the London and South East Sector is currently examining options for a new generation of d.m.u.'s for the WR. These will NOT be developed from the 210 d.e.m.u.'s currently being tested on the WR but a new design developed from the class 150 (BREL) and 151 (Metro-Commell) units currently being built for the provincial sector.

The new timetable on May 14th brought few major changes locally. However on GW/GC Joint line locomotive haulage of the Paddington train has ceased on Saturdays. This is now a d.m.u. which runs from and to Stratford-on-Avon! Note the journey is 'up' in the morning, 'down' in the evening. If it were reversed tourists could make use of it to visit that popular town, but then BR is not for the benefit of the public! The trains are formed of West Midlands P.T.E. area units. Sunday service returns to the "Marlow Donkey" this summer for the first time since 1967. The experimental service is a result of a campaign by the Marlow Maidenhead Passengers Association and will be subsidised by Bucks and Berks County Councils and the MMPA. It will provide an hourly service between 09.35 and 19.35 from 24th June to 26th August

At Maidenhead work combines on rebuilding the Braywick Road underbridge at the east end of the station to clear a new dual carriageway road. The contractors have now completed piling and are excavating two tunnels through the embankment in which the new abutments will be built. Onto these will be erected the new decking, one track at a time. The new bridge was designed nearly 10 years ago by Chris. Wallis of Little Marlow before he left WR's C.C.E. Department.

If you should be in High Wycombe on Saturday 23rd June have your camera ready for a very Special train. Tony Parkin, one of John Diffay's Chiltern Trains couriers is getting married and he and his bride start their honeymoon on their own special train provided by WR. Its destination is an extremely close secret but it departs at 17.30 and heads for Banbury. It will be formed of the WR's General Manager's saloon, a 1926 GWR Saloon, maintained in full GWR livery. The locomotive? Nobody is saying, but what are the odds on a certain class 50? Which brings us back to the beginning of this article!

"IN SEARCH OF THE HEAD-END EMPTY FLATCAR" - John Sears

(Travel in North America, November 1974)

"TRAVEL NORTH WESTERN" suggests a hoarding by the Chicago & North Western Railway (its owned by its employees) and one of its yellow and green double-deck trains passes. On the median strip of the Kennedy Expressway a Chicago Transit Authority train passes, on the northbound lanes of the expressway the cars only pass because were southbound.

This is better, Amtrak train 3, the "Southwest Limited" is leaving track 24 of Chicago Union Station behind SDP40F's, 502 and 504, each one 198 tons, 72'-4" long, 15'-7" high, 10'-8½" wide and 3,000 hp. Behind them a baggage car, a baggage/dormitory (for the on train crew). "El Capitan" Hilevel cars - 3 coaches, a diner and a lounge - for the coach class passengers then sleepers "Indian Mesa", "Palm Top" and "Regal Stream", a dome-lounge, a diner and sleeper "Palm Arch". In all, about 10,000 tons.

"Gee, who's that guy down on the platform?" (he's even got a walkie-talkie)
"He's the Flagman".

"Flagman? Good grief Charlie Brown! What's he?"

"Well, apart from the Engineer, Fireman, Head Brakeman, Conductor, Maitre D' Chef, Waiters, a Porter for each car and Rear Brakeman, he's one of the crew. He gives the rightaway, I think".

Joliet, good old Americano, no fancy pronunciation - its Joeleeay. They do call Herbs "'erbs" though, which is just a bit silly.

I suppose were howling through Kansas around here (West of Dodge City, Mr. Earp) as we average about 83 between Garden City and Lamar - on a Sunday morning.

Inspiring architecture in the settlements, wooden houses, drab trees and dirt roads. "Relief still subdued, landscape generally untidy, very dry sandy area" to quote the journal of one traveller.

Four hours later were crossing Raton Summit (7,588 feet above sea level). Right on time from Las Vegas (New Mexico). Views of the Springer Corp's factory in Albuquerque and the Apache Railroad. "Relentless in its tracks it carried the indians away from their ancestral homelands to the federal reserves". Railways haven't been all good.

Descending Cajon on Monday morning forgetful of the inscrutable San Andreas Fault. Yes, it was a mistake building dams across it, but, well, you know! Still it is a humourous fault. Its moving Los Angeles North, and in 10 million years will take them past San Francisco as they drift angelically towards destruction down the Aleution Trench. Its the same up at San Ardo in one of the California oilfields, where herds of these donkey pumps are at work. Because they drilled so many wells the pressure fell and the oil has to be pumped up. Still it'll run out soon. Perhaps man exploits his resources so mercilessly to get his fate over as quickly as possible.

In the "Sunlight Dome" on Amtrak No.5 the eastbound "San Francisco Zephyr", the pabbish bag is made of "Recyclable and biodegradable Kraft paper".

"IN SEARCH OF THE HEAD-END EMPTY FLATCAR" - continued

Were on the original transcontinental here pioneers, climbing to the summit at Norden in the Donner Pass, 7,018 feet above sea level, with gradients such as 18 miles of 1 in 44/50. This is still THE main route west, "12.48, 3 locos, 61 cars and helper; 13.50, 4 locos, 98 cars and helper; 14.28, 4 locos, 62 cars and helper; 15.15, 4 locos and 54 cars". Rens "the biggest little city in the world". gambles its life away in North Nevada while the trains block the streets downtown for minutes on end. Really satisfying!

Next morning were on the Union Pacific thumping across Wyoming, even past Medicine Bow. Dry, dusty, brown and huge. Nearly seven hours of undulating grassland burnt out by the summer's sun. Rock Springs, Wyoming population 11,657, is 235 miles from Laramie the next train of over 10,000 people. It goes on and on. Luckily so do the westbound freights. 10.44, 2 locos and 119 cars; 11.13, 2 locos and 96 cars; 11.17, 3 locos and 129 cars; 11.40, 4 locos and 79 gondolas". More redundancies in Venezia.

Even if Denver is a mile high, the Rockies are higher and the "Action Road" attacks them head on and yet still has a 6.2 mile tunnel at 9,200 feet above sea level! (It by-passed 30 miles of 1 in 25!). The Denver and Rio Grande Western runs the "Rio Grande Zephyr" as successor to the fabled CZ, the California Zephyr", a silver lady beautiful enough to grace any Colorado River Canyon, even Gore Canyon, 5 cars. 3 of them domes, and the Grande's only 'A' unit, "Silver Sky", "Silver Banquet", "Silver Pony", "Silver Mustang", and good ole 1230, the combine. The diner serves steaks as big as all-line-timetables but far more digestable and provides a pencil with "California Zephyr" on it. There's still treasure in them hills. Flat out through the deserts west of Grand Junction were doing 80 plus under British style 3 aspect colourlights, The porter in "Silver Pony" is talkative. In CZ days a trip from base in Denver via Oakland and Chicago back to Denver took a week.

Its dark and the Mars light waves its warning back and forth, the engineer clears the crossings with 2 longs, a short, a long. Between Provo and Salt Lake City there are a lot. Music from the spheres, BHAAAMP, BHAAAMP, BHAMP, BHAAAAAAPH! Why can't B.R. use chime horns?

More first generation diesels on CP Rail train 2, the eastbound "Canadian" pull us back onto the main at Coquitlam, BC, after calling at the station. The next morning CP's experimental length of catenary bears its share of snow in the Selkirks. Cathedral Mountain is still there guarding the spirals at Yoho lifting us up to Kicking Horse Pass, and so is the "Selkirk" 2-10-4 at Calgary. Gone (temporarily) are the carriage washing plant that had cleaned us on the track into Calgary Station in 1969 and the "Stamper" from Edmonton. CP Rail still tries in the diner though - the omelettes are particularly good.

Twenty miles west of Winnipeg we cut through Meadows - an unusual name for a prairie town - fourteen miles out we overtake an eastbound freight in the loop and six miles further on its headlight still shows its there.

"IN SEARCH OF THE HEAD-END EMPTY FLATCAR" - continued

Its 11.45 on Thursday, so it must be Ontario. This is shield country, rocks old enough to have seen the Proto-Atlantic open and close, to have seen the Appalachians rise, to have seen the beginnings of Life, in short, about 2,500 million years old. Its lakes, conifers and rivers all day and little else all day and all Friday till 14.00. Thunder Bay on Lake Superior and here it is.... Leaving westbound, 106 cars of freight and the first car is an empty flat! How does it stay on round curves?

Thirty-six late off Sudbury and then a signal failure at Romford. Toronto's 200 miles away and were fifty-three late. As the weekend cottages crowd out beavers' dams and fields start to grow crops for humans, not cattle, we regain time. Parry Sound 38 late. MacTier 29 late, Medonte 24 late, Alliston 22 late, West Toronto 17 late and Toronto Union 10 late. Its 16.30 on Friday and true to form the weekend queues are long and encouraging.

Sunday morning and BA operates a relief from Manchester - discouraging.

NARROW GAUGE ON THE COSTA BLANCA - R.D. Bowen

The Costa Blanca, "the White Coast" stretches from Valencia in the north to Alicante in the south, embracing some 180 kilometres (112 miles) of Spain's Mediterranean coastline. For many centuries the Costa Blanca was part of the Kingdom of Valencia, but after the end of the war of the Spanish Succession in 1707, it became part of the Spanish Provinces of Valencia and Alicante. Until recently it was called the "Levant Coast".

Agriculturally a poor area, with little rainfall, the area has only began to develop with the onset of tourism over the past 25 years and particularly the "package" holiday maker staying at such resorts as Benidorm or at one of the many villas along the costs. For this reason the area lacked transport facilities for many years, with the nearest standard gauge lines (Spanish 5'-6" gauge) being at Alicante and Valencia. The area has been served by a number of narrow (metre - 3'-3") gauge lines, most of which have now closed, but one still operational.

The one line still open is from Alicante to Denia, a distance of 93 kilometres (58 miles), now operated by the F.E.V.E. (Ferrocarriles de Via Estrecha), the state narrow gauge railway organisation, as the Ferrocarril de Alicante a Denia. Originally a private company the Cia de los Ferrocarriles Estrategicosy Secundarios de Alicante (Strategic Railway of Alicante) with 2-6-0T locos built by Hannomag and under licence by M.T.M. Barcelona it is now operated by single unit diesel railcars with trailers. The steam locomotives were in existence, but out of use, in 1971, but have since gone. The railcars are of F.E.V.E. standard design and make the whole journey in two hours 20 minutes. There are seven trains a day between Alicante and Denia, with a further seven trains from Alicante "short-working" to Altea and two "short-working" to Benidorm. The fare for the single journey from Alicante to Denia is 365 pesetas (£1.66). The railcars are painted blue and silver but additionally there is the "Limon Express", this is a train chartered by travel agents, painted bright yellow and runs from Benidorm to Gata de Gorgos.

NARROW GAUGE ON THE COSTA BLANCA - continue

The motive power is one of a small number of 0-6-0 diesels not unlike a scaled down "08", built by Batignolles in Paris in 1959. The carriages are a lot older, some being Belgian in origin. There is no longer a freight service although a number of service wagons exist and at Villajoyosa a Matisa tamper was seen. The main works and sheds are at Alicante. The line is single with passing loops, the northern end appearing more run down than the southern, where much track relaying is taking place. Despite the lack of a freight service goods cranes and docks still exist at most main stations and at Denia there is the remains of tracks on the harbourside.

At Denia the original terminal station of the Alicante line is closed, the train bearing left, making a 90 degree turn and run onto the tracks of the next narrow gauge line up the coast, the now closed Ferrocarril de Carcagente a Denia (Carcagente-Denia Railway). The train then backs into this company's station.

The operation is a legacy of the time when the northern part of this line, ie from Gandia to Carcagente, was closed and through trains were operating between Alicante and Gandia via Denia over the link line. This method of operation occurred as late as 1971. In its heyday the Carcagente to Gandia line was 67 kilometres long (42 miles) and was the second oldest narrow gauge line in Spain, being built in 1864, adopting steam operation in 1881. It had a collection of Black Hawthorn 4-4-0ST's and Belgian 0-6-0T's which have long since gone. At one time through freights of fuel oil were worked from the Alicante line to the Cement Works at Gandia.

At Gandia a third narrow gauge line was met, the one time British owned "Alcoy and Gandia Railway and Harbour Company" which linked the two towns with a line 54 kilometres (34 miles long). This line must have closed in the late 1960's when it was working with some elderly railcars which were seen out of use at Denia in 1971, but originally it operated six Beyer Peacock 2-6-2T's of classic design with sloping cylinders. Amazingly in February 1984 one was seen externally restored on a plinth at Alcoy near the site of narrow gauge station. By all accounts this was a most attractive line as it ran through the narrow valley of the River Serpia to the town of Alcoy situated in a bowl in the mountains.

At Alcoy a fourth narrow gauge line was met, the Cia de los Ferrocarriles Economicos de Villena a Alcoy y Yecla (the Villena, Alcoy and Yecla Railway). This was a long straggling line 134 kilometres (84 miles) long which ran for six miles over Alcoy-Gandia rails and then south-west over the hills to Villena, where it crossed a "standard" gauge RENFE line and then on the Yecla, in the middle of nowhere. From Yecla an extension, the Jumilla-Cieza Railway which was worked by the V.A.Y., carried on south-west to Cieza where it met the RENFE line to Murcia, further south still.

In all, at one time a network of four metre gauge lines with a total mileage of 218 now reduced to one line of 58 miles in length. This, however, is not all because at Carcagente the network met the RENFE line to Valencia where the F.E.V.E. still has a 77 mile metre gauge electric network which is at present receiving new stock.

NARROW GAUGE ON THE COSTA BLANCA - continued

The whole area is a very pleasant one to visit and for the narrow gauge enthusiast the journey up the coast and through the mountain passes from Alicante to Denia is well worth the experience.

Regrettably there is very little written on these lines, the three main reference being nearly 25 years old. "Steam on the Sierra" by P. Allen and R. Wheeler, published by Cleaver-Hulme in 1960 covers the narrow gauge in Spain and Portugal specifically. "Railway Holiday in Spain" by D.T. Rowe, published by David and Charles in 1966 covers railways in Spain generally and "Narrow Gauge Railways in Europe" by P. Allen and P. Whitehouse, published by Ian Allan in 1959 has a section on the Spanish narrow gauge.