

Newsletter of the Bala & Ffestiniog Railway Heritage Trust



B&FRHT



Picture of the first steam loco in Llan Ffestiniog since 1964, a 16mm gauge K1 model.

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Welcome to our sixth newsletter
This is the first newsletter since

we gained access to and started work on Llan Ffestiniog Station. This is an exciting time for the Trust and enables the Trust to demonstrate its commitments to the project and the local communities.

The first weekend has seen progress on clearing approximately 10% of the site, progress was unfortunately delayed by equipment failure on the morning of the second day! More details will be available on this later in the newsletter.

We are of course grateful to the current owners of the land who have given us permission to carry out works on the land and who are very supportive of our future work plans and ideas for the former station site.

John Dobson of the Ffestiniog Railway could not have put it better when he said in his recent editorial that by finding the right people at the right time that seemingly impossible barriers can be overcome. In our case as can be seen from this newsletter the initial barrier of starting work on the line in advance of Network Rail reopening negotiations when COVID is under control. In this case we have had the combination of the current landowners, the volunteers who helped out, the tree surgeon who has agreed to help us and a geotechnical expert who has furnished an initial report in this newsletter.

It is baby steps but together we will make it work.

Happy reading.

Shane Barry
Interim Chairman (2019 - 2020)



Working Party Weekend

Report

On the weekend of 19th and 20th September the Trust carried out its first working party weekend on the site of the former station at Llan Ffestiniog. This work has exposed the panoramic views that can be seen below.



It is estimated that 10% of the site was cleared over the two days which is slightly less than planned due to equipment failure but further working party weekends are planned to catch up on the missed work.

The 12 month plan for the site is a series of working weekends with specific aims on each weekend in order to achieve these aims. The short term aim is to get the site into an easy maintainable state through the laying of grass that can be easily cut on a regular basis to prevent tree or weed regrowth prior to building a new station building on site.

There has been some damage to the platform faces over the years and as a part of our work on site over the next 12 months we intend to restore the platform edges to their former glory using materials recovered from elsewhere on site.

We have also been made aware that some of the original stone from the station building remains on site and in time we aim to assess it and reuse as much as we can in any building works on site.

Permission has also been granted by the current landowner to lay track panels by the old cattle docks with a view to placing a camping coach and suitable facilities there. The track panels can be installed at any time but the installation of a coach(s) will be more protracted due to the need for power, water and waste facilities to be installed for them.

There is an agreement in place with the owner to ultimately take ownership of a section of the site that will enable the trust to achieve its aims of rebuilding a station on site and this is likely to become the Trusts first significant asset in its goal to restoring services between Blaenau Ffestiniog and Trawsfynydd Lake Halt.

The longer term aim is to build a station that serves the needs of the community as well as the Trust and incorporates a cafe facility, booking office facilities, office space, a small museum and the usual toilet facilities. The intention is that the cafe would become a hub for the local community to meet up at as well as the community based bar that is being developed in the village giving multiple options for locals and visitors alike.

It is of course the long term plan that the station will be reused to serve the local community as a community hub and a railway station again.

Pictures from the weekend



The Future

Future Working Party Weekends

The first working party weekend was a very successful venture and the fruits of the clearance work can be seen in the two drone videos linked to in this post.

The plan now is to develop on that work over the next 12 months with a view to getting the site to a position where it is easy to maintain through use of grass and lawn mowers.

In order to achieve these plans the following provisional work party weekends have been set: We are publicising the dates now to enable as many members to be as free as possible for the weekends in order to maximise the work completed on each weekend.

November 21st & 22nd	Vegetation Clearance, (multiple petrol trimmers required)
December 5th & 6th	Spare Weekend
January 16th & 17th -	Chainsaws (multiple chainsaws required)
February 13th & 14th -	Digger to remove trunks
March 27th & 28th -	Rotavate Soil
April 10th & 11th	AGM weekend - Grass seed planting
May 22nd & 23rd	Spare Weekend
June 19th & 20th	Spare Weekend
August 31st & 1st Sept	Spare Weekend

The work carried out on these dates are subject to the successful completion of the work for the previous working weekend, any incomplete work can be carried to the next working party weekend and the work for that weekend pushed back to the next weekend to ensure safety.

In the event that the spare weekend dates are not used for slippage then they will be used for other works on site including installation of a trackbed and track panels at the cattle docks.

Over the next few weeks risk assessments and work plans will be generated for the individual weekends to ensure a safe working environment throughout. A separate document is in the process of being put together for the installation of track panels at the cattle docks once the initial works are completed.

Track laying

Track panels at Llan Ffestiniog

Permission has been granted by the current landowner of Llan Ffestiniog to lay track panels at the cattle docks with a view to in time having a camping coach with facilities there for use by volunteers and visitors alike. The presence of the track panels will also enable the Trust to deliver practical PTS courses for its members once they are in place.

In order to achieve this there will need to be a significant amount of manual work to catalogue and sort through the stones that remain on site, we are currently making the assumption that these stones stem from the remains of the goods shed that existed not far from that location. The intention would be to reuse these stones on site in whatever form they are suitable to be used.

4' 8 1/2" the Civil Engineer's bit

Whilst Shane and the team were working wonders in ground clearance at Llan Ffestiniog, I took myself off to explore the route, with Dale doing a sterling job as map reader and navigator. Dale knew the history of line in its working days, so told me of its history, of which I knew little: for this was my first visit to the line. The objective of the two days was to visit as many locations where the line was publicly accessible. Time constraints meant that these were all where it crossed public roads: walks along footpaths can be done another time.

The intention was to visually survey the route and assess its condition. As we couldn't walk on the p-way, and certainly not use any probing instruments that I'd like to, this could only be in general terms. But it proved valuable because:

- It gave me a picture of the route and how beautiful it is
- I can appreciate more the engineering challenges we face
- I know there are solutions for resolving these
- A report of the survey will follow, with engineering observations
- Population of the Geotechnical Risk Register can start.

The latter is an important document: created at the beginning of any construction project (actually, at the time of bidding for the work) it does what it says: records the engineering risks. It also assesses them for cost and delay, if they occur, and considers possible mitigation to prevent that: how much that will cost and the residual risk. It's a live document throughout the project. It grows with time. When I've taken this as far as I can, it will be issued to the committee, then filed where others can add to it. It will be also be available for the general membership to view, inviting their comment and suggestions.

Ultimately, it will be sent to NR, as another example of the professional approach this Trust is pursuing in its aim to restore steam traction to the line.

In due course the report of my visit/survey will be sent to the committee and then for the members to view. This might be some weeks away, but until then, I attach a few photos and comments. The survey didn't specifically investigate any structures: carrying out work on these is outside our current capabilities and may always remain so. However, the GWR Goods Shed at Maentwrog Rd was considered. I have ideas for that, but will hold them for another newsletter.

Philip G Dumelow
Civil Engineering Manager



Looking towards the buffers At Blaenau Ffestiniog, a fairly heavily vegetated retained cut. The retaining walls appear to be in good condition, despite the plant growth. The vegetation on the p-way could be removed with a couple of scrub-bashing sessions & there doesn't appear to be any free water.



Left: Just south of Blaenau. At grade / low embankment. A bit of ground clearance and we could have a 57xx running here tomorrow! If only it was that simple...

Right: ...but not here! A 20m deep cutting on the south side of the bridge which carries the A470 over the line. There are visual indications of instability in the cutting batterslopes – a job for soil nails or rock anchors?



Left: Br113, which sees the line in a shallow (~3m) cut. But there's water in the four foot: the drainage has failed. This will be high in our priorities to resolve: until the drainage is effective, it's pointless trying to remediate / stabilise the formation.

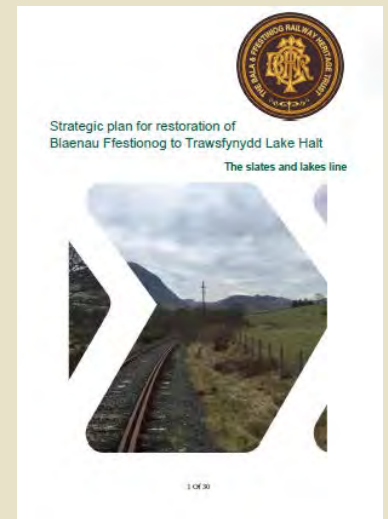
Strategic plan updates

As with any large document the Strategic Plan has undergone some updates and the updates are easier to find on our website at www.balaffest.org.uk

The sections updated to date are Phase 14 which relates to Llan Ffestiniog which is referred to in this newsletter.

We have also taken the decision to delete the requirements of Phase 16 namely the building of Manod station as sadly there is no possibility of rebuilding the station on its original site due to the presence of two houses which have been built close to the site of the station. In addition the Trust has been unable to identify any suitable alternative.

We appreciate that this is likely to disappoint some people but rest assured it is a decision that will be revisited in the future should suitable alternatives emerge,



Heritage Railway Association

The Heritage Railway Association has accepted our application and we are currently waiting for their next committee meeting to ratify the application to the HRA and enable us to gain their support for the project moving forward.

Regional Rail

In this section we are going to refer to other preserved lines in the region with a view to supporting our fellow volunteers there.

Ffestiniog Railway - The Ffestiniog has over the summer restarted limited services and these have proved to be very popular and are providing a much needed boost to the area and to the volunteers themselves. Some of our members have used these services, Spooners and the shop to help do our bit to support our neighbours.

Welsh Highland Railway - Like the Ffestiniog Railway they too have restarted limited services to support the railway and its volunteers.

Llangollen Railway - The Llangollen Railway has also restarted services which are running between Carrog and Llangollen. They are also in the final steps of finishing Corwen Station and we hope to see the services extended to there in 2021 (date subject to confirmation by Llangollen)

Anglesey Central Railway - They have been continuing to carry out works for vegetation clearance and continue in their aims to restore heritage services to the line.

AGM 2021

The date for our AGM in 2021 has been set for the weekend of 11th April to enable members to plan a weekend in the area and hopefully join us on the working party weekend at Llan Ffestiniog scheduled for the same weekend. The AGM will be held at the newly reopened The Queens Hotel in Blaenau Ffestiniog.



There is a huge amount of other activities to partake in the region including downhill mountain biking (<http://www.anturstiniog.com/>), Llechwedd Slate Caverns (<https://llechwedd.co.uk/>), Zipworld Slate Caverns (<https://www.zipworld.co.uk/location/slate-caverns>), the Ffestiniog Railway (<https://www.festrail.co.uk/>) to name some.

Make it a family affair and come and stay in the region and have a wonderful trip to remember with the family.

A full listing of AGM agenda and votes will be made available by the middle of February.

Please note family will be welcome to attend but only fully paid up members will be entitled to vote at the AGM (or by proxy vote for those unable to attend).

Members Fees

Following a vote at the last AGM the membership year was changed to a fixed annual time frame to coincide with the Trusts reporting year. This means that your membership will be up for renewal at the end of November.

Full Member :	£20.00
Family Membership (2 adults, 2 U18)	£50.00 (£10 discount over buying separately)
Junior Member (under 18):	£10.00

If any member has any concerns or experiences any difficulties with their membership fee then please do not hesitate to get in touch with the treasurer.

Gift Aid

Please remember that as a registered small charity with HMRC we are entitled to claim gift aid on donations made by tax payers. This is an extremely valuable scheme to the Trust and can result in your £20 membership fee being worth £25 to the Trust which adds up very quickly over multiple members.

The forms can be found online or you can email the treasurer who will send you a copy of the forms.

We are recruiting!

Website Translator

We have a need for an individual who can assist us with the translation of our website from English to Welsh to help ensure our website is bi-lingal and accessible to all. This is a post which would be suitable for an individual to work from home.

This is a volunteer unpaid position.

Membership Secretary

We have a need for an individual who would be interested in managing our membership system and assisting members with any queries they have with their membership, ensuring receipt of gift aid forms and recording receipt of cheques (including banking). In time the role will also involve issuing of members ID cards either through direct printing or liaising with an ID card printer to print the cards on our behalf.

This is a volunteer unpaid position.

Surveyor

We have a need for an individual who can assist us with the survey of the lands as and when we gain access to them with a view to accurately recording the land and providing relevant advise to the trust.

This is a volunteer unpaid position.

Architect

We have a need for an individual who can help the Trust to produce architectural drawings and plans for its building works moving forward with the initial works being concentrated at Llan Ffestiniog. The plans would need to be suitable for use by the local planning authorities.

This is a volunteer unpaid position.

Construction

We have a need for an individual or individuals who have experience in building conservation and construction to advise and assist on building works to be carried out within the Trusts remit.

This is a volunteer unpaid position.

Legal Adviser / Solicitor

We have a need for an individual or individuals who have a formal knowledge of and are able to advise and assist the Trust on any legal matters that the Trust needs support on.

This is a volunteer unpaid position.