



Swanning Around

A Look At What's Happening Around The Swanage Railway

Issue 107 – March 10th 2024

February is the month when the Swanage Railway comes to life again after the short winter shutdown for essential maintenance. This usually starts with the resumption of services for the half term week locally, boosted this year by the Community Weekend. Also in this issue, it's awards time, and another SITREP summary.

As we said last time, Swanage Railway information can be found in many places online. Just Google "Swanage Railway" to find web sites and Facebook, XtwitterX, and YouTube locations.

As part of the Business Recovery Plan, there are more events planned for this year, so make sure you go to the Swanage Railway Events page at <https://www.swanagerailway.co.uk/events> to keep up to date.

There's another event this month, the Victorian weekend, featuring another Victorian locomotive visiting us.. Check it out!





SITREP Summary - March 2024

All working volunteers & staff should have access to [Heritage Operations Processing System \(HOPS\)](#). For access and other information please contact the SR HOPS Administrator Ben Dolman:

ben.dolman@swanagerailway.co.uk

For [SR Staff access](#), and to be added to the '[Volunteer Information](#)' email group, please contact Peter Milford on peter.milford@swanagerailway.co.uk

SITREP is also posted on the [Swanage Railway Trust website](#) which provides members with information on the history of the modern Swanage Railway. Some areas require a password, which is available from membership@swanagerailway.co.uk or by calling 01929 475202, leaving your name, membership number and contact number. Please note the office is not staffed daily.

Welcome: Frank Roberts

Since September, the SR has been working on a Recovery Business Plan, and I am extremely pleased to report that the package has received a substantial boost, following approval by the Directors of the Company Board, and also the Trustees.

Both bodies recognised the considerable effort that has gone into the Plan, together with its supporting Budget, not only by those who have been work hard on it for the past five months but many others across the organisation together with a small group of external scrutineers. business.

This then is the marker in the sand which signals a new sense of vigour to underline that we are an important attraction on The Jurassic Coast. We have got off to an excellent start this season with our Community Engagement weekend organised by Claire Collins. You may recall the Commercial update a few weeks ago with dozens of special events planned in 2024.

However, I appeal to every one of you to consider how you might be able to support us at this time; be that by raising the profile of the Railway in the community where you live, purchasing a gift voucher for a friend or volunteering some of your time – there really is a wide variety of opportunities waiting to be grasped!

Open Forum

I would like to thank everyone who supported the Open Forum at the end of February, Just over 50 attended the second event. There were some good points made and a couple of particularly good suggestions which we are now taking forward.

In the chat on the side of the Forum, there was quite a lot of messaging about the drinks concession, and in particular water made available working staff. There are no plans to change this, but with environmental considerations in mind, I wonder if more staff might consider bring containers to reduce the amount of single-use plastic being used?

Future Catering - Robert Patterson

As part of the commercial transformation of our railway we have been putting all our operations under the spotlight. One area of particular concern has been catering.

When looking at the financial figures it is evident that we barely made any money from the kiosks and catering outlets around the railway – indeed from certain analysis it appears we may even have made a small deficit. No doubt you have also been aware that we had increasing trouble filling rosters during last year. For example, the kiosk at Norden was only open for about 90 days of our 260 operating days.

The options we looked at were a purely voluntary run enterprise (which would produce the biggest surplus) or outsourcing catering to a third party as part of a 3-year concession. Our appeal for a volunteer(s) to manage the catering function did not produce any takers, so we are currently pursuing the outsourcing option.

We have engaged a professional company that advertises, and sources potential concessionaires and a trade advert will be issued very shortly. This option will hopefully produce a reasonable return with an income share providing the motivation for an enhanced service and to attract much needed investment into our sites. It is unlikely that we will get a new provider in place until late spring at the earliest.

To emphasise volunteer benefits will remain UNCHANGED – more particularly free teas and coffees. (How much do these free teas currently cost the railway each year? Answer on the bottom of the page)

We will **not** be outsourcing the ‘jewels on the crown’ of our railway catering – more particularly the on-train cream teas, Purbeck Piddler etc. These will remain in house although we may well source our food and drink supplies from the new caterer.

All paid catering staff have now left the railway and in the interim the railway’s catering will remain voluntary run with help from Martin Trott’s passenger services team. Catering rosters are on HOPS. I would like to give my heartfelt thanks to all the catering volunteers who have ‘stuck with it’ despite the current uncertainties. Not a single person has resigned, which is fantastic. Thank you.

In the interim Corfe kiosk will remain closed as it is not worth getting it out of hibernation and re-stocking the vehicle for a short period of time. However, Swanage and Norden are to open as normal providing we can fill rosters. Clearly Easter will be important to us – particularly as we have an Easter Egg hunt event this year, so any help in keeping the kiosks running in the interim would be much appreciated.

So, there you have it – you now know as much as I know! Hopefully, you understand the reasons why we are taking this action and if we get it right, how we can positively turn around another aspect of our railway. And the answer is? = £7000!

Recovery Business Plan - Sale of Railway Assets

One aspect of the Plan will be a limited number of asset sales of some the former Wessex Belle coaches and a 08 shunter. In response to a suggestion, we have decided to offer to members the opportunity to bid for these items. If you are interested, please register your preliminary interest before 30 April by emailing opportunities@swanagerailway.co.uk and we will follow up with more detail. (GJ)

In response to a request for info from Swanage News (that's the local news not Swanage Railway) about the future of the railway's Wareham service, the railway released a statement which will be of interest to readers of Swanning Around.

Statement released to Swanage News on-line :

Swanage Railway Trust chairman Frank Roberts said: "I would like to thank our dedicated and professional staff and volunteers who worked so hard to put the infrastructure in place so the Swanage Railway could operate its two-year trial heritage diesel train service to the main line at Wareham in 2017 and 2023.

"My grateful thanks are also due to our valued and appreciated partners and stakeholders - local councils, Network Rail, South Western Railway - previously South West Trains - and the Government's Coastal Communities Fund - for their enduring commitment, help and assistance in enabling our two-year trial heritage train service to Wareham.

"While our trial heritage train service on the busy Network Rail main line into Wareham was operationally successful, it did not deliver commercially and any future service to Wareham would require a subsidy so it could operate. We appreciate the disappointment this may cause to people in the Isle of Purbeck.

"Operating on 90 selected days between April and September in 2017 and 2023, the 2023 trial heritage train service to Wareham was operated against the background of the Government underwriting reduced price £2 tickets for bus journeys in England.

"The Swanage Railway's important connection with the national railway network at Worgret Junction - a mile west of Wareham on the main line from London - enables excursion trains from anywhere in the country to run to Corfe Castle and Swanage; bringing several hundred passengers on each train and much needed business to the Isle of Purbeck.

"During the two-year trial, our Wareham train ticket prices reflected the additional costs of running over the national railway network into Wareham while not detrimentally affecting the fare structure of our important steam and diesel heritage train services between Norden, Corfe Castle, Harman's Cross, Herston and Swanage.

"Our popular heritage train services between Norden and Swanage carried more than 150,000 passengers in 2023 with the Swanage Railway contributing more than £15 million a year to the local economy.

"Operating, maintaining and developing a heritage railway is growing increasingly expensive and I would like to thank our passengers for their continued and valued support which helps to preserve our important railway heritage for future generations to enjoy and learn from," added Frank who lives in Swanage and has been a dedicated Swanage Railway volunteer for more than 40 years.

Also available on the Swanage News site (with some pictures!) at

https://www.swanage.news/swanage-railway-scraps-plans-for-rail-service-to-wareham/?fbclid=IwAR0pKcyvCDXBQitLvG_qir1IS58FcUg4oUOhYBU-yCd-Cm0c74DEr8OvmRo



You will recall that the railway needs around £450,000 to fend off financial trouble, and the Save Your Railway campaign is producing results. But there is still some way to go with about £120k donated so far. That's not bad for this time of year when people's spare cash is usually directed elsewhere (thanks, Santa!). So you can see, more funds needed.

We have a new video on YouTube, Episode 1 of the Save Your Railway series. You can find it here. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=noUssAdnZvQ&t=7s>



If you are able to help and donate something to the railway, however small (or large!), then go to the Swanage Railway web site at

<https://www.swanagerailway.co.uk/save-your-railway>

Any amount, however small, will be most welcome, and help the Swanage Railway to survive this critical period.

—o—

Shameless fundraising attempt over, now for some lighter news!

Earlier in the month, the efforts of some of those volunteers on the railway ensured that the Swanage Railway was recognised with several awards.

At the annual Heritage Railway Association awards event held in Brighton on Saturday 10th February, the Swanage Railway 563 team (pictured below with Awards host Francis Bourgeois) was presented with the **Steam Railway magazine Readers Award**. The award, voted for by readers of the magazine, recognised the unparalleled achievement of the restoration and return to steam of Adams T3 locomotive No. 563.

The awards evening culminated with the presentation of a new award, the **Chairman's Special Award**. This award, presented by HRA Chairman, Sir Peter Hendy, Lord Hendy of Richmond Hill, was given in recognition of exceptional achievement in heritage railways and also went to the Swanage Railway team for T3 No. 563.

Well done 563 team!



But wait! There's more!

On 8th February, at the Purbeck Business Awards ceremony at the Mowlem Theatre in Swanage, Swanage Railway Trustee/Director Liz Sellen was there to collect the Purbeck Tourism Business of the Year award from the Mayors of Swanage and Wareham.



Our major events on the railway in February were half term week followed by the Community Weekend on 17th and 18th. In spite of February's weather being **** (insert your own expletive), both events appeared to be a great success, if the visitor numbers are to be used as a marker. Cheap fares for kids ensured that many of the half term services were well filled, and cheap fares for locals and visits behind the scenes ensured that the Community Weekend was well attended.

With many of the railway's departments on show, our report is mostly a picture-fest with a few words, but we can't cover everything and everybody, just a selection.

You can't start an event without some preparation, and the Permanent Way Team could obviously not have people tramping along the track to see what they do, so a presentation was set up on the down platform at Corfe Castle, along with the Sygnets van and a Maunsell carriage for the Heritage Carriage team. Here the P'Way team sets up their display on Friday 16th February, prior to the Community Weekend. 563 handled the half term trains at the back end of half term week.



photo: Andrew P M Wright

Sygnets van and Maunsell carriage alongside platform 2 at Corfe Castle.





Vital to the railway are its volunteers, and recruiters were out in force at Swanage (above), Corfe Castle, and Norden (below).

photos: Andrew P M Wright





Class 33 diesel 33 111 was available for visits on platform 1 at Swanage , along with class 08 diesel shunter 08 436 for driving experiences in station limits.

Driver Ian McDavid is in discussion with a visitor between driving experiences.

Also available at Swanage for cab visits was Bulleid pacific 34028 *Eddystone*, here with minders Robert Craine and Aidan Strand.

both photos: Andrew P M Wright





The Herston Community Halt team, led by Trust Chairman Frank Roberts (seated left), was out there to do stuff and welcome visitors, two of which give the right signal to get the train to stop at this request station.

both photos: Andrew P M Wright



It seems this weekend's activities were well appreciated, and this lad's mother has permitted us to use these photos and she says:

"Hi! Just wanted to say what a great day we had today 😊 Our son, Oliver is obsessed with the railway. Has been from the day he could speak and would constantly ask to go to the trains. We live in Poole and try and visit regularly. He is counting down the years until he can join the signets. He's said for years that he wants to be a driver and mechanic on the railway. Anyway, today was a dream come true for him- being able to shadow the guard and have a look behind the scenes. Ian was so friendly and was great at explaining things and keeping it simple for our 6 year old. Everyone was so happy and welcoming. From the guys on Eddystone, to the man with the road railer at Corfe (son says road railer, I say digger on track 😊) everyone has been so chatty. So thank you! I hope the railway will do this annually, it was great to see it so busy!"



Oliver is seen above in the guard's compartment with guard Ian Coane, and below visiting the cab of 34028 Eddystone, which was available for visits at Swanage.

photos provided by Charlie Rogers



To get your signalling fix, you could visit the real thing at Corfe Castle or Harmans Cross signal boxes, or the demonstration box at Corfe.

Here, signalman Bill Miles has an attentive audience at Harmans Cross, while visitors are able to play with the levers in the demo box run by the museums team.

photo: Andrew P M Wright





At Corfe Castle, Billy Johnson is kept busy keeping people, especially the kids, entertained at the Permanent Way display.

and the Telecoms team had the Corfe Castle telephone exchange open for visitors.

both photos: Andrew P M Wright





photo: Andrew P M Wright

Doing a crane demonstration in the Lakeside siding at Norden probably wasn't seen by the majority of visitors, as it couldn't happen while a train was there, and the viewers had probably all cleared off on the train when the crane team was able to swing the jib!

But the presentation was all good, and

Dave Brooks was there to explain what the crane team has to do to keep these Southern Railway Diesel Electric cranes working..



Purbeck Mining Museum at Norden was open for visitors with a display on the platform with PMM volunteer Paola Hobson ready to answer questions.



A ball clay tipper wagon train being demonstrated by PMM chairman Peter Sills.



and visitors could have access to the reconstructed clay mine tunnel.



these two photos:
Andrew P M Wright



What on earth is happening to our weather? And don't say global warming, even if the news tells us that globally it has been the warmest February for a couple of hundred years! In Purbeck, we'll take a bet that it has been the wettest!

On the Saturday night of the Community Weekend, it lashed it down again, with the result that there was a river running down the trackside at Norden on the Sunday, courtesy of a blocked drain in the vicinity, not one of ours so not a lot we could do about it. Consequently the lake behind Lakeside Siding resembled a Louisiana swamp, so we were unable to do any water skiing owing to health and safety issues! 😂





Museum volunteers were on hand in Corfe Goods shed to enlighten visitors.

Plenty of people around to fill the trains at Corfe Castle. That one umbrella gives us a clue about the weather, although it doesn't look too wet. The crew of 563 hasn't got the storm sheet up yet.

both photos: Andrew P M Wright





On 26th February, Aidan Strand authentically demonstrates an old British Railways cleaner's trick of avoiding work by hiding in a firebox!

Seriously though, Aidan is supposed to be cleaning the firebox of T3 no. 563, and is having a tea break (that's what the photo caption says!). This is just the sort of job that would qualify him as 'Mucky Man of the Month', but he obviously hasn't done much as he's way too clean!

photo: Adam Travers



When public services are not running, we have the opportunity to make some money with driver experiences. While the steam experience runs with a passenger coach set, the diesel experience uses a rake of wagons. One of these is seen passing Corfe Castle on 7th March, another dull day in Purbeck!

Sorry Margate, but who would choose a holiday there when they could be in Purbeck?. We suspect Car 14 would be happier in Margate though! After spending the winter in dry storage, Car 14 is back on 9th March, and it's tipping it down again! Welcome back!

33 111 has run round and is recoupling at Norden, with driver Dan Bennett.





We've just seen Car 14 having to endure the Purbeck weather this Saturday morning, but spare a thought for the runners in the Jurassic Express Trail Run, who started from Swanage in a downpour! No public trains today as the run organisers had chartered the train to get their shorter distance runners back to Swanage from Corfe Castle. On the far right of this picture are some of the runners. Now, are they training for a run or running for a train? Probably both! U Class 31806 waits to run round its train and get these soggy runners back to Swanage.

---o---

Final note:

You may have seen some buckets for cash collection in the Community Weekend pictures, but we have to remind potential visitors that the Swanage Railway will be going CASHLESS for all PURCHASES from Monday 25th March. You can still contribute cash to any collection boxes or buckets that you see, but any purchases at the railway, whether tickets, shop, or events, etc., will be by card. Bank branches closing, and the banks making charges for counting and processing cash make going cashless a cheaper option for the railway, and in the present circumstances, every penny saved counts.

As usual, volunteers are required in all departments, so,

To use your existing skills or to learn new ones, contact us about being a Swanage Railway volunteer by either sending an email to iwanttovolunteer@swanagerailway.co.uk or by calling 01929 475212 to contact Lisa Gravett, our Volunteer Recruitment and Retention Officer.

-----ooOoo-----

If you are not a member of the Swanage Railway, don't be put off! Contact us and volunteer (or at least make an enquiry)! You know you want to! You will be most welcome!

-----ooOoo-----

Compiled and edited by John Denison

Email to swanning.around@swanagerailway.co.uk

Swanning Around also appears on line at:

<http://www.srstaff.co.uk/swanningaround> (not password protected)

Views expressed in 'Swanning Around' are those of the author(s) and are not necessarily the views of the Swanage Railway Trust or the Swanage Railway Company. No liability accepted for errors or inaccuracies.

Prepared by John Denison for the Swanage Railway Trust including content and images provided by others. All rights recognised.

(c) Copyright: Swanage Railway Trust 2024