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Cover photograph

A CrossCountry Voyager heads north along the sea wall at Dawlish on 30th September 2016. It is approaching the repaired section which was washed away at Sea Lawn Terrace on the night of 4th/5th February 2014.

CHAIRMAN'S INTRODUCTION

The need for railway diversionary routes across our area of the South-West continues as ever. In Railwatch (158 December 2018) we reported on the closure to CrossCountry Voyager trains and at times to all trains, of the line through Dawlish when high tides coincided with storm conditions. This was on the 7th, 8th and 9th of November last year. Restrictions on CrossCountry trains through Dawlish continued through 2018, known dates being the afternoon of 22nd and 23rd November and early morning and evening on 12th December 2018. This year on the afternoon of 18th and 31st January and on the morning of 8th February.

Meanwhile from 17th February to March 8th the main line through Devon has become reliant on single track. On the southern margin of Dartmoor the twin bore Marley tunnel, just to the east of South Brent, has had one line closed for maintenance work. The resulting single line section is almost 8 miles long between the Totnes East Crossovers near Ashburton Junction and the Aish crossovers located about $\frac{3}{4}$ miles west of South Brent. Line capacity and so trains services have been reduced for the period. The Exeter to Plymouth via Okehampton line has never been needed so often.

Similarly the need for more double track on the diversionary Honiton route for London Paddington trains. Whiteball Tunnel has been having more concrete applied to its interior, resulting in complete closure of the Exeter to Taunton line from 18th February to 8th March. Diversionary route capacity is limited to one train every 2 hours eachway, as our advice on new passing loops at Whimble and near Crewkerne remains unheeded.

On a positive note the Government has announced funding for a short stretch of sea wall strengthening at Dawlish. This scheme should not conflict with our suggestion for a new 2 mile tunnel diverging within Kennaway Tunnel and emerging at Teignmouth station (branch newsletter December 2016). This would avoid the need to protect the line through the tunneled section from Kennaway Tunnel to Parsons Tunnel and rebuild 1.2 miles of sea wall across the beach towards Teignmouth station. Based on the Dawlish cost the new sea wall here could be at least £320 million.

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Dawlish Sea Wall Funding

On 15th February the Transport Secretary announced that there would be £80 million of funding to rebuild the sea wall at Dawlish. This involves the ¼ mile section between Dawlish station and Kennaway Tunnel (Boat Cove to Breakwater). It would raise the wall by 2.5 m and with a wave return design. The walkway will be about 1 m wider taking it to 4 m and pedestrians will have the protection of a wall on the seaward side.



This picture taken on 13th May 2013 shows a morning down CrossCountry Voyager train heading away from Dawlish towards Kennaway Tunnel. The section of sea wall to be widened is in the middle of the picture running from the pier, passed the kiosk and to Boat Cove in the middle distance. Marine Parade runs parallel to the railway and is here seen on the right.

The Teignbridge District Council planning reference is 19/00237/NPA with a location at Marine Parade. Dawlish Town Council at a meeting on 21st February 2019 made suggestions on the planning application including the following –

- A lower overall increase in height of 1.4 m rather than 2.5 m,

- A 1.1 m high railings rather than a parapet wall to avoid concerns in Marine Parade of loss of light and noise reflecting back to them,
- Visibility out to sea for wheelchair users,
- Rock profile finish to match the current sea wall.

Level crossing Collision near Calstock

On 13th December 2018 a DPD parcel delivery van collided with a train between Gunnislake and Calstock line on the Okeltor open level crossing. No-one was seriously injured in the collision, which is thought to have involved the 15:45 from Gunnislake. Trains were reported as cancelled over the entire route to Plymouth and with a minibus replacement service.

The Plymouth to Bere Alston and Calstock section of the route is difficult to reach by road, so it is disappointing that a service could not have continued to run on the remainder of the route. Disruption for other passengers would have been far less, as it is little more than 1½ miles by road from Calstock to Gunnislake.

Presumably no staff or replacement train was available and the train involved in the collision would still have had the key to operate the junction at Bere Alston.

Previous incidents at Okeltor were on 26th June 1997, then a collision with a van on 8th December 2005 and with a car the following January.



On 26th April 2018 the 14:54 Plymouth to Gunnislake descends the 1 in 40 gradient from Bere Alston to Calstock. By train it is a distance of just under 1¾ miles, but by road about 8½ miles.

The Heathfield and Bovey Branch - 60 Years of Closure

The Heathfield Branch from Newton Abbot is the remaining part of the Bovey and Moretonhampstead line opened in 1866. It closed to passengers 60 years ago from Monday 2nd March 1959 (last passenger trains on Saturday 28th February). The branch line, at least at its southern end, follows the rule that the earlier a railway is built the more likely it is to survive. This has been true of freight which continued at Moretonhampstead until 1964, Bovey until 1970 and until recently between Heathfield and Newton Abbot (oil, ball clay and timber). Occasional special passenger services have also been run over the years on the remaining track, the known ones being –

- 6th June 1960 and 11th June 1962 to Moretonhampstead and organised by the South Devon Railway Society,
- 5th July 1970 4 return workings from Newton Abbot to the end of the line, then at Bovey and organised by British Railways,
- 31st May 1987 Plymouth Railway Circle Dartmoor Boundaryman charter,
- 4th August 1988 Newton Abbot to Heathfield by Cornwall Railway Society,
- 20th April 1974 Newton Abbot to Heathfield organised by the Railway Correspondence and Travel Society,
- 27th November 2011, Class 142 Farewell, thought to have been organised jointly by Driver Jon Morton of the *Devon Diesel Society* and his employer, *First Great Western*,
- 21st December 2014 a service of 7 trains run by First Great Western, and organised by Rebekah Hartley,
- 10th October 2015 organised by Rebekah Hartley and her employer First. Tickets sold by the Branch Line Society.

Moretonhampstead with only a parish population of 1,703 at the 2011 census is unlikely to be able to support a revived rail service and justify restoring 8½ miles of track from Heathfield. An hourly service operated by a 2-car diesel multiple unit would provide more than enough seats to move the entire population each day. Bovey is different though and a future reopening from Newton Abbot would be supported by us. Our March 2000 Rail Strategy said,

'Railway routes to Bovey Tracey (1991 population 4,823 inclusive of Heathfield and Coldeast) and Chudleigh (3,227) from Newton abbot have been disrupted by road developments. However, Heathfield station lies adjacent to the A38 and is still linked by the little used freight line to Newton Abbot about 4 miles away. Heathfield has the potential to be developed as a rail park and ride station for Newton Abbot, Torbay and to a lesser extent Exeter. A park and ride point could also be used by express buses to Exeter. The Bovey Tracey line continues north as the disused Heathfield oil terminal siding and terminates less than 1½ miles from the town centre. Regrettably the Bovey Tracey bypass has taken over the railway although it might be possible to run a railway alongside. An alternative at least in the interim would be to build a station on the south side of the town at the Pottery Roundabout. Only ½ mile of track would need to be restored so strengthening the case for reopening to Bovey Tracey in the medium term. This short section of trackbed is recommended for route preservation.....'

Now 19 years since first suggesting a restored railway service to Bovey, the population of the town inclusive of Heathfield has grown to an estimated 7,544 in 2017 (Ward population in 2011 was 7,721).

At the moment the Stagecoach 39 bus provides a half hourly service from Bovey into Newton Abbot and originating once an hour from Exeter. It serves the shopping area of Newton Abbot well from the town's Sherborne Road stops.

However, the bus does not go to the railway station at Newton Abbot and even if it did the journey time would be double that of the train. With an intermediate station at Kingsteignton Bridge the industrial estate area of Kingsteignton would be within a walking distance of ¼ to ½ mile from this suggested station. The walk from the bus stops at Sherborne Road is a further half mile distant. The railway would clearly serve some different markets.



Ashburton Road links the site of the former Brimley Halt to Bovey town centre. The 39 bus runs every 30 minutes to Newton Abbot, but not the station. Photo 9th February 2019.

Even with a 40 mph line speed the journey time from

a new station at the Pottery Roundabout would only be 12½ minutes. This is assuming the automatic operation of the level crossing at Teignbridge and dwell times of 1 minute per station at Heathfield and a new station at Kingsteignton Bridge, near Newton Abbot.

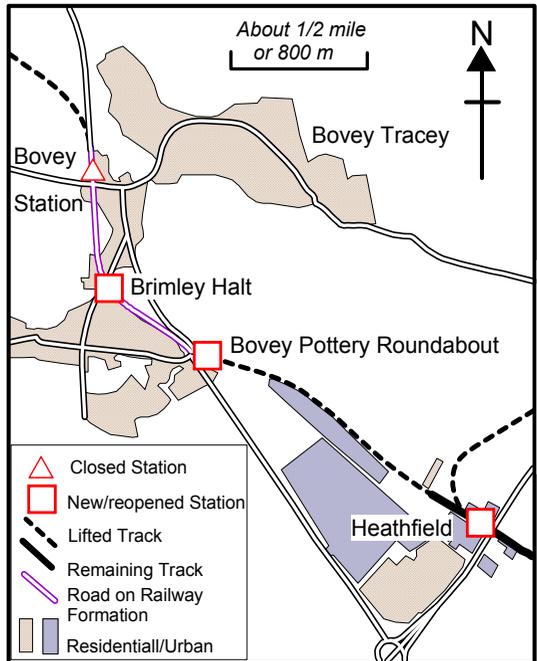
A possible further half mile extension alongside the Bovey bypass road would add a further 2 minutes journey time and take the trains to the site of the old Brimley Halt. There would be no car parking here, but good for access on foot. Half the town would be within half a mile and much of the remainder within 1 mile.

Whether or not a revived railway would be viable or not at the present time is not clear. At the very least the remaining track and trackbed should be protected to allow this to happen at some point.

A plan for a Parry People Mover service between Newton Abbot and Heathfield came to nothing due to the state of the track. Recently much publicity has



View SE from Ashburton Road, Bovey Tracey along the A382/ former railway. The green strip is wide enough to restore track to a new Brimley Halt on the left.



Sketch map of the railway at Bovey. Curving ENE from Heathfield is the lifted Teign Valley line. From Bovey Station heading NW was to Lustleigh and Moretonhampstead.

focused on a revival group now with a web site at <http://www.heathraillink.co.uk>. Their stated aims are to provide a commuter service and to 'have a timetable to cover the needs of as many people as possible'. Regrettably no attempt has been made to contact Railfuture and no response has been made to our email. We await reopening developments with interest, but consider inclusion of Bovey as essential.

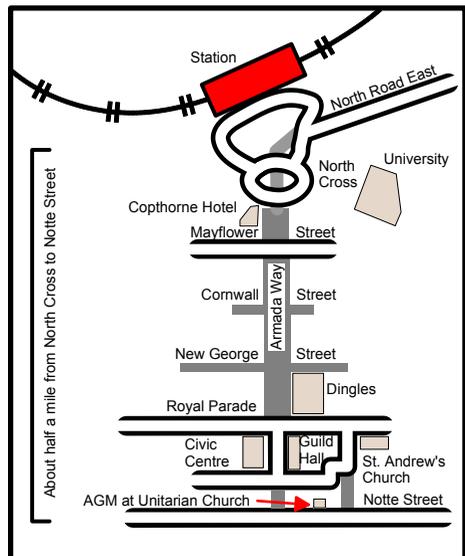


End of the line for now? This special train has just reached the buffer stop to the north of the closed Heathfield station. Picture with permission of the Exeter & Teign Valley Railway, Christow.

Next Meeting – AGM Saturday 16th March 2019

Our AGM will be at the Unitarian Church, Notte Street, Plymouth, PL1 2AQ. From 13:30 to 16:15.

The venue is in the centre of Plymouth near the Guildhall and Civic Centre. From the railway station, walk towards the North Cross roundabout and through the pedestrian subways to Armada Way. Then straight down past Dingles on your left, and after crossing Royal Parade go by the former Civic Centre. Miss the next road which is Princess Street, and turn left into Notte Street to find the Unitarian church.



Missed Opportunity – The Aller Chord

The £110 million South Devon Link Road, bypassing Kingskerswell between Newton Abbot and Torbay, opened over 3 years ago on the 15th December 2015. It consists of about 1 mile of modified and widened road running south from the Penn Inn roundabout at Newton Abbot, plus 2¼ miles of dual carriageway on new alignment. This new road should not have been of concern, as it simply bridges the Torbay line on a tunnel like structure. It is really the slip roads, new service roads and roundabouts which are the main problem. They have added a further 1¼ miles of new road and where we have long advocated a direct chord between the Torbay and Plymouth lines.

It could still be built as outlined in the photos, but would be far more expensive than the formerly simple connecting line across open fields.



The Torbay Branch viewed south towards Kingskerswell from the Aller Road bridge near the Barn Owl Inn. An Aller Chord would branch westward (to the right) from the double track on a radius of about 240 metres



The chord on straight track could pass under the bypass road bridge in the background and on the left (south) side. It would be necessary to cut and divert the two roads leading left off the road sign. Continuing at 240 m radius the Plymouth line could be rejoined in about a ¼ mile (360 m) and to the south of the Old Kingskerswell Road bridge (railway location 215 m 46 c).

The late John Hartley in his role with the Campaign to Protect Rural England, but also Railfuture member did oppose the road on the grounds of protecting the Aller Chord. Devon County Council's response to the July 2009 public inquiry (Proof of Evidence on behalf of the Campaign to Protect Rural England I (DCC/REB/8) (Obj 53): OBJ/CPRE(53)/P/1) was disappointing. They wrote –

7.2 This section of railway is unlikely to be required for the following reasons:

7.3 There is currently little traffic travelling between Plymouth and Torbay. Traffic survey data recently collected in Totnes shows that during the AM and PM peak hours, approximately 150 vehicles per hour travel from Plymouth to Torbay (and vice-versa). During the off-peak periods, the flow is less than 100 vehicles per hour.

7.4 It is currently possible to travel from Torbay to Plymouth by rail, which would involve a change at Newton Abbot.

7.5 The journey from Torquay to Plymouth could be provided without changing at Newton Abbot. This would involve the train changing direction at Newton Abbot, which does currently occur at some other stations.

There are no winners. Without great expense rail passengers have lost the opportunity for a direct Torbay to Plymouth train service avoiding Newton Abbot and saving around 7 minutes. In addition buses from the Kingskerswell direction have a more complex journey northbound, the layout is confusing for motorists and the countryside spoilt. The simplistic public inquiry response from Devon County Council ignores that reversing trains at Newton Abbot uses up line capacity and may necessitate new platforms. This includes existing empty stock movements for Great Western and CrossCountry trains between Paignton and Plymouth Laira depot.

Also lost is the opportunity for grade separating the Aller divergence of lines. The bypass overbridge/tunnel occupies the point where the up Torbay line could have risen at 1 in 100 to go over the Plymouth line and so increase line capacity and train service reliability.

The Aller Chord is now a long term aspiration, but Railfuture will continue to press for a direct Plymouth to Torbay rail service albeit via Newton Abbot. The combined conurbations have a population of almost 400,000 people.

Draft Dartmoor Local Plan

On 20th February 2019 we submitted comments on the **Regulation 18 Draft Dartmoor Local Plan**. These were late in, but we received the assurance, 'We will.....consider them alongside the rest as part of the consultation.' This is what we said: -

ASHBURTON

Land should be protected for restoration of the Ashburton to Buckfastleigh line. The public transport benefits should take into account that:-

- 1) Bus services to Buckfastleigh and Ashburton are infrequent on Sundays and adequate improvements would require much Local Authority subsidy. An enhanced Totnes to Buckfastleigh heritage service, with an extension to Ashburton, would offer a service to the community supported by tourists using and visiting the railway.
- 2) Completion of the line to Ashburton opens up the potential for a future weekday commuter service from Ashburton to Plymouth via Totnes.

EXETER TO PLYMOUTH VIA OKEHAMPTON REOPENING

Railfuture supports this rail reopening as a vital back up route for the main line via Dawlish and Totnes. Land should be protected from adverse developments that might increase the cost and complexity of reopening. This should include the protection of existing bridges and major infrastructure. Also access to any potential rail halts/stations between Okehampton and Tavistock. (rail halts might only have foot and disabled access,). Suggested locations are:

- 1) Lydford (original site or new site off School Road),
- 2) Brentor (on north side of Station Road and on parallel Great western line formation to avoid the old station in residential occupation) and
- 3) Mary Tavy on the south side of Station Road at approx. SX499787 and using the former Great Western line formation for footpath access.

SOUTH BRENT

This closed station lies within the village and within the Dartmoor National Park. Reopening of this station should be supported together with sufficient land for local rail user car parking.

Friends of Ashburton Station/Ashburton RUG

Our affiliated member made a detailed submission on the draft local plan and which we have supported. This included –

With regard to the statement about Buckfastleigh - Ashburton in the Regulation 18 Local Plan, it would be most helpful if the statement at 4.3.1 be amended to:

"There has been a recent desire to explore whether the Buckfastleigh to Totnes heritage line could be extended to its original Ashburton terminus. It is recognised that such a link could result in considerable public benefits, not least for the potential to deliver car-free footfall into the National Park and due to the likely uplift to Ashburton's economy. It is also recognised that such a link might provide for high quality walking and cycling networks and supporting facilities. The option for this exists through the identification of land at Chuley Road for redevelopment."

It is understood that South Brent station, the Buckfastleigh – Ashburton link and the reinstatement of the North Dartmoor route are not yet fully committed, but given the need for car-free transport, lack of any rail facilities within the National Park and the explicit requirements of the NPPF, we would strongly advocate a Sustainable Transport Policy along the lines of:

Policy 4.X: The Council will support proposals for rail reinstatement and other sustainable transport proposals within the Park. Development proposals that would threaten such proposals will be resisted. Specifically proposals for development that might prejudice sustainable, car-free transport options at the proposed sites of South Brent and North Cornwall parkway stations and between Okehampton – Tavistock and Buckfastleigh – Ashburton will not be supported.

The A38 at Buckfastleigh



1) On Saturday 3rd June 2017, a special train awaits departure towards Totnes. The small headboard says 'Experience this' and has two 'L' plates.

In the background the long line of trees are growing on the embankment of the A38 trunk road. This cuts the original line to Ashburton, just beyond the signal box, and deflects the last section of line to the right.



2) The A38 viewed towards Plymouth from the Buckfast/A384 interchange. The 4 mile Ashburton to Buckfastleigh section of the dual carriageway opened in 1974 and cost £7.4 million.

The railway, had it been retained, would have passed under the road at an oblique angle where the slip roads start/end.



3) View north towards Ashburton from the Buckfast A38/A384 interchange. The lost railway alignment is first on the left (west side) between the slip road and Ashburton bound carriageway near the lorry. The former railway alignment is then beneath the road as it transfers to the right (east side) at the start of the exit slip road, Further on towards Ashburton it is back on the west side.

About 1½ miles of the road used the railway trackbed.

Focus on Talaton

Railfuture's suggested new passing loop at Whimble, on the Waterloo to Exeter line, was described in the November 2017 newsletter. Our proposed east junction would be just 1 mile east of Whimble station and at the end of a length of straight track ending at the road overbridge number 496.

East of here further doubling is perhaps best avoided for the moment. This is to avoid track sections where lateral realignment, both laterally and possibly vertically, has taken place. The route between Whimble and Feniton has a series of sharp curves that swing it away from the Escot Estate. Curiously the A30 dual carriageway was able to go straight through the estate.

As the single track starts to curve sharply (radii about 800 m or 40 chains) it swings from one side of the double track width formation to the other so as to ease the curve radii (Photo 1). In addition over the 2¾ miles eastward to Feniton there are 7 overbridges which would need clearance checks, as singled track can get



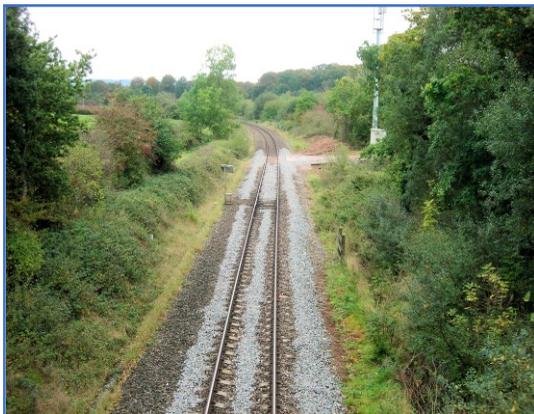
1) *The 12:20 Waterloo to Exeter St. Davids on 15th October 2018 recedes into the distance as it rounds the sharp curve at Talaton. All the way from Honiton to Pinhoe it was the down line that was retained, but here the track is swinging on to the up formation to ease the curve (on the right).*



2) *Bridge 499 between Talaton & Whimble shows how the arch design may restrict clearances for double track restoration.*

raised over time with ballasting (Photo 2). In contrast west of Bridge 496 there is only one overbridge in the 4¾ miles westward to Whimble, Cranbrook and Broadclyst. This makes it an ideal length of line to redouble.

Talaton is about half a mile away and has never had a station. With a population of only around 590 (2012 estimated) the village is rather too small for a station and there is insufficient line capacity to consider one until the route is substantially double track. It would only make sense as part of an additional service from Exeter and stopping at a second Cranbrook station and running on to a restored Ottery St. Mary station on the closed Sidmouth line from Feniton.



3) The short straight track between the sharp curves at Talaton is the only location for a station to serve Talaton should it ever be required. View towards Feniton. This photo and photo 1 from bridge 496 at 161 miles and 8 chains from Waterloo.

The only possible location is the approximate 3 coach length of straight track on the east side of bridge 496 (Photo 3).

Fortunately Talaton is only about 1¾ miles from Feniton station and a little over 2¼ miles from Whimble. The only problem is that parking is limited at both stations and the country roads have no pavements and are unlit for night time walking. The 5 times daily 382 bus to Ottery St. Mary and Sidmouth allows some bus/rail connections via Feniton or Whimble. Unfortunately what would be an excellent connection at Feniton with the 17:46 from Exeter St. Davids is lost, as the last bus back to Talaton is request only from Ottery St. Mary. Just when its too dark to walk during winter months there is no bus. Integrated transport is not yet here. As with many stations there is still much to do in improving access.

Picture Gallery



1) The closed Bovey Station on 9th February 2019 and viewed northward towards Lustleigh & Moretonhampstead. The photo is from close to the former southernmost ramp of the down platform. The road is the A382 single carriageway 7.3 m wide Bovey bypass completed in 1987. Total length of 1.6 miles and at a cost of £3.65 million. The station building canopy was sent to Staverton. The station building now houses the Bovey Heritage Centre which is open from April to October, but not Sundays.



2) The single track Tiverton to Exeter Exe Valley line closed to passengers from 7th October 1963, but it is still evident in many places. This bridge is located immediately south of Thorverton station (right hand side) at 16 miles and 56 chains from the former Morebath Junction. Freight from Thorverton Mill continued to cross the bridge until 1964 and so kept the track in situ to Exeter. The point or turnout for the two station platforms was located on this bridge. The road underneath has also been closed to traffic for a few years due to a land slip. Photo 16th July 2018.



3) The disused Lynton and Barnstaple narrow gauge line between Blackmoor Gate and Wistlandpound. Trains may well return here. Photo 16th July 2018.