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PRESS RELEASE

Santa season breaks all records

The volunteers and staff of the Embsay & Bolton Abbey Steam Railway are celebrating after their 2022 Santa season has broken all previous records and been the most successful to date.

Our Santa trains operated on a total of fifteen days – including eight consecutive days on the run up to Christmas Eve – and, together, generated more revenue and attracted more customers than ever before. Santa revenues alone totalled over £470,000.

“We are absolutely delighted,” said Trust Chairman Rob Shaw, “but none of this success could have been achieved without the phenomenal contribution made by our fantastic team of volunteers and staff. They have worked tirelessly, even on occasions when the weather did its very best to conspire against us, and have really done us and themselves proud.”

The E&BASR has, for some years now, offered a range of options to prospective Santa customers to suit a wide range of tastes and budgets, including ‘the Classic’, First Class and various dining options too, a formula which has proved extremely successful.

On the majority of Santa operating days, two separate trains were run – both formed of six coaches – one of which was the beautifully restored and turned out ‘Dales Dining’ set. Four locomotives were in action over the Santa period – the popular 16-inch Hunslet 0-6-0ST *Beatrice*, ‘Austerity’ 0-6-0ST *Cumbria*, the visiting Bagnall 0-6-0ST No 401 (*Vulcan*), supported by Class 37 diesel No 37294 following completion of repairs.

The Christmas Day dining train, which offered a superb five-course festive meal with all the trimmings, was another resounding success, selling out weeks in advance.

Embsay & Bolton Abbey Steam Railway
Bolton Abbey Station, Bolton Abbey, Skipton BD23 6AF
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Train services on the line have now ceased for a few weeks to allow for a period of essential maintenance, including the total renewal of a quarter of a mile of track between Embsay and Holywell Halt, work on which is already ahead of schedule. Train services are set to resume in early March.

“2023 will no doubt be another challenging year for the Railway”, comments the Trust’s newly-appointed Press Officer, Richard Jones, “but after a highly successful 2022 we are looking forward to the coming year with optimism and continue to build on the excellent progress we have made over recent years.”

Ends

Contact:

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A photograph of one of our Santa Specials is enclosed with this press release. If you would like to receive an ‘exclusive’ image for publication please contact Richard Jones.

NOTES & BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The **Embsay & Bolton Abbey Steam Railway** (or ‘Yorkshire Dales Railway’ as it was formerly known) is a heritage railway that runs over part of the line that used to run from Skipton and Ilkley. The railway between the two towns was built by the Midland Railway Company and opened in 1888. The line connected with other routes at both Skipton and Ilkley and, as well as local traffic, it was also used as key alternative and diversionary route to relieve congestion on the busy Aire Valley line. The line was originally built with double track, with intermediate stations at Embsay, Bolton Abbey and Addingham. There was one branch, a single-track line from Embsay Junction, half a mile to the west of Embsay station, to Grassington, with an intermediate station at Rylstone.

In 1923 the Midland Railway became part of the London, Midland & Scottish Railway (*‘LMS’*), and twenty-five years later, in 1948, the line was run by British Railways upon nationalisation of the country’s railway network. Like several other railways in Wharfedale, the line became a victim of the ‘Beeching axe’ and – despite vigorous local opposition – the section between Embsay and Ilkley was closed in 1965. The lines from Skipton to Embsay and just short of Grassington were retained for stone traffic from local quarries – the former was subsequently closed, but the latter – running as far as Swinden Quarry – remains open and is used regularly.

In October 1968, a group of people met in Skipton Town Hall to explore the possibility of reopening part of the line, which resulted in the formation of the ‘Embsay and Grassington Railway Preservation Society’, with the aim of using Embsay as an operating base for running steam trains to Grassington. This was thwarted as the Grassington line was retained for stone traffic, so attention was focused on the line between Embsay and Bolton Abbey, with the title ‘Yorkshire Dales Railway Society’ adopted. British Railways allowed the Society to occupy the Embsay on a lease arrangement, with the first steam locomotive arriving in 1970. The line was opened in stages – initially in 1979, then to Skibeden (1982), Holywell (1987) – where a new Halt was built – Stoneacre Loop (1991), and finally to Bolton Abbey (1997), given the line we know today, almost five miles long. By the mid-1990s, the railway had purchased most of the trackbed from just short of Embsay Junction to Bolton Abbey, together with the station sites at both Embsay and Bolton Abbey. At Stoneacre, a Signal Box has been built at the Loop, allowing two trains to run on the line at busy times. Since then, a wide and interesting collection of locomotives and rolling stock have been amassed.

Responsibility for the operation and maintenance of the line is the responsibility of the Yorkshire Dales Railway Museum Trust (Holdings) Limited, a registered charity, museum and company. It has a Trading Company arm that is responsible for the shops and cafes. The Trust is governed by a Board of Directors, who set the policy and strategic direction, and has a small number of employees (full time and part time) in key positions, supplemented by occasional seasonal staff when required, although the railway is largely run by volunteers, who make an immensely valuable contribution towards our success. The Trust has a membership of around 800.

Timetabled passenger trains operate regularly throughout the year, and daily during the peak summer months. In addition, we offer a variety of other services, including our extremely popular ‘Dales Dining’ trains, special events, evening special trains and ‘Experience Days’.

Further information about the railway, and its services and activities, can be found on our website – www.ebar.org.uk.

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