



21 February 2023

PRESS RELEASE

Great progress made over the winter

Despite trains not running for two months, the volunteers and staff of the Embsay & Bolton Abbey Steam Railway have made tremendous progress on several fronts in readiness for the start of the new operating season.

The biggest task successfully undertaken was the complete relay of a quarter of a mile of track, using new rail and sleepers, at Skibeden, between Embsay and Holywell Halt, which was undertaken by a relatively small, but dedicated, 'in-house' team in just eight weeks.

Work has also been progressing well on laying and burying cable between the Railway's two operational signal boxes at Embsay and Stoneacre to enable Electric Key Token working to be introduced for the first time. The necessary signalling regulations have been written, and our Signalmen are currently in the process of being trained on the new system, which will bring considerably enhanced flexibility to future train operations.

Meanwhile, work is nearing completion of a further extension to our carriage shelter at Embsay, which will enable us to store a further four carriages undercover and away from the worst of the Yorkshire weather.

In the workshop, work on the carriages has involved ensuring our carriage fleet is checked, serviced and all ready for the start of the season, whilst work continues on completing the extensive overhaul of former Mark 1 'BG' No 81517 (YDR No 15), which has been converted into a further catering vehicle for our highly successful Dales Dining operation, and the comprehensive restoration of a genuine Midland Railway bogie carriage No 3300 to, as far as possible, 'as-built' condition. Work on the Great Eastern Railway No 8 Prince of Wales six-wheel saloon is also progressing well.

Embsay & Bolton Abbey Steam Railway
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The Railway expects to start the season with three serviceable steam locomotives – *Cumbria*, *Beatrice* and No 401 (*Vulcan*) – whilst Class 37 No 37294 has recently returned to service after engine repairs and sundry other work.

“We have made terrific progress during the past two months,” said Trust Press Officer, Richard Jones, “but none of this work over the winter could have been achieved without the tremendous contribution made by our volunteers and staff, who have all pulled together to ensure success. It has been a great whole team effort.”

Passenger trains start running for the 2023 season on Sunday 5 March. “We are very much looking forward to the new season,” comments Richard Jones, “and further building on the great progress we have made over recent years.”

Ends

Contact:

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A photograph of the track relay at Skibeden 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 site at 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), giving 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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