

The Darjeeling Himalayan Railway Society

Activity Report for 2018

The following report on the activities of The Darjeeling Himalyan Railway Society (the Society), for the year ended 31 December 2018, is provided for the information of Members.

CHAIRMAN'S REVIEW David Barrie

Once again I am pleased to present my annual report to you for the 22nd AGM as a Society, and the 9th AGM as a company limited by guarantee.

Last year I said that the stars over India were aligned for progress, citing the appointment of steam heritage champion Ashwani Lohani as Chairman Railway Board. And so it proved. But we can also now truthfully claim that last year our record of supporting the DHR has rarely been equalled. During that time I imagine that you enjoyed reading all such positive news in the Darjeeling Mail just as much as I have. The essence of this progress was encapsulated by editor David Charlesworth in his enthralling November visit report that appeared in the February magazine.

Amongst the past year's highlights, we celebrated our 20th Anniversary with a grand event at the Beeches Light Railway, courtesy of our President Adrian Shooter and his wife, Barbara. Our entire team were involved, but the fact that the day ran so seamlessly was testament to Janine, our peerless events organiser. With a bright sun shining down, for all those present it was truly a day to remember, and to reflect on just how far the DHRS story has come.

Also, with much anticipation we published the 'B' Class book, authored by David Churchill. A lifetime of research had gone into this exhaustive

and comprehensive work which will surely never be bettered. The enthusiastic response to it plus the first rate reviews were well-deserved.

Now, in the Board reports which follow, I urge you to read of the other significant events, including the progress of the CCMP, and the visits to the UK of staff from Rewari and from the DHR.

To the other UK-based initiatives, the Education Group, the Darjeeling Railway Community Support, Darjeeling Tours, and the DHR Heritage Foundation headed by Benedict Cadbury, I offer my profound thanks.

In India, the DHRS continues to be well-served by Vivek Baid, President of the DHR India Support Group, by the stalwart ladies of the Darjeeling Inner Wheel Club, by our Patron, Sir Mark Tully, and by our other partners such as the environmental group, FOSEP. Within Indian Railways, I would like to thank all those who are part of the will to make the DHR truly worthy of its World Heritage status.

Your Board met four times during the year and continues to operate both effectively and efficiently. I must also make special mention of our events organiser, Janine Bird who, as she always does, ensures the smooth running of our AGM. I also thank our reporting accountant, Derek Williamson, whose advice and counsel always prove invaluable.

The Society is blessed with a very dedicated and able Board, supported by its officers, and other DHR enthusiasts, both here and in India, who care deeply about the DHR. I also wish to thank you members for your continued invaluable support.

VICE-CHAIRMAN/PUBLIC RELATIONS

Paul Whittle

In summary then, this has indeed been a vintage year for both the DHRS and the DHR.

Much work went into planning for the highly successful 20th Anniversary event and we were particularly pleased to be joined by the former Director DHR, Mingyong Bhutia and his wife Phigu.

In June, and at very short notice, we hosted a three-man team from the Rewari Heritage Steam Loco Shed on a week of visits. This was followed in October by the first-ever working level visit from the DHR by the Director and three supervisory staff. Both visits were much appreciated and reflected enthusiastic support from the Ffestiniog/Welsh Highland Railways and from Society colleagues with planning, transport and hosting.

We continued to support our long-standing partner/Darjeeling NGO, the Federation of Societies for Environmental Protection (FOSEP). Their community environmental programmes and trackside planting initiatives are particularly worthwhile. Throughout the year we also maintained strong links with the UNESCO CCMP team as work on this vital project moves into its final stages.

We were pleased to learn of the formation of the Darjeeling Himalayan Railway Preservation Society by Darjeeling-based enthusiasts and we look forward to supporting them. We also maintain strong, friendly relations with the Indian Steam Railway Society and the steadily expanding Rail Enthusiasts Society.

During the year I gave six DHR-themed talks to a wide variety of groups and Chairman David Barrie gave twelve talks. Finally, in December, my role in the Quest TV railway documentary series 'How Trains Changed the World' introduced the Society to a much wider audience.

EDUCATION GROUP REPORT Paul Whittle

The Society continued to sponsor the DHR Schools Awareness Programme with the invaluable support of the ladies of the Inner Wheel Club of Darjeeling. In mid-November children from Turnbull Primary School, Darjeeling enjoyed a variety of events including a Joy Train ride.

TREASURER Fuzz Jordan

From a financial viewpoint, 2018 was a good year for us. Inevitably, subscriptions saw a small decline, but sales benefitted greatly from the publication of David Churchill's new book on the 'B' class locomotives, which enabled the sales profit to more than treble the 2017 figure.

We made our usual contributions to various organisations in India, including the Inner Wheel, FoSEP and looking after various Indian Railways senior staff visiting the UK. The Society also hosted the visit of four DHR staff to visit the Ffestiniog Railway in October. Although the Society paid the bills for this we were fully reimbursed by Indian Railways. David Charlesworth's visit to India in the autumn cost £2,400, and the results of this research visit were clearly illustrated in Darjeeling Mail 84.

Our other major expense was £4,300 laying on an excellent day's entertainment thanks to Adrian Shooter at the Beeches to celebrate our first twenty years. All who attended thoroughly enjoyed the day out.

At the year end, we have more than adequate reserves to carry forward which will allow your Board to be able to consider options to support much of the valuable work that is taking place both here and in India.

EDITOR David Charlesworth

My November 2018 visit to Delhi and Darjeeling proved to be very crammed and tightly timetabled trip. The February Darjeeling Mail carried a comprehensive personal report of my "official" visit to Delhi, Siliguri and Darjeeling and combined the Chairman's page, News from the Line and the DRCS reports. My main task on the DHR was research for Up the Line and a lot of this was done successfully.

Google Arts

The Google Arts and Culture programme has been a major success. As mentioned in earlier reports, the workload was huge but the benefits are going to make it worthwhile.

Bound magazines for UNESCO

A full set of bound magazines were sent to UNESCO India in Delhi and they were very warmly received. These were kindly donated by Enid Lang, the widow of Eddie who died last year. UNESCO India is now being kept up to date with Darjeeling Mail and binders when needed.

Publications

"Up the Line" is going to be the next book; it is going to be a large, costly but "essential" piece work. I certainly still see publications as one of the prime services of the Society.

Although not a Society publication as costs will be paid by UNESCO India, I have been asked to produce a Children's Story Book on Baby Sivok. My first response was to ask why Baby Sivok as it wasn't, as is claimed, the oldest DHR locomotive or even a true DHR one. However, I quickly realised that Baby Sivok's history would make the perfect children's book, and the chance to tell its true story. I have suggested it should be a colouring book as printing would be considerably cheaper in black only. Work is well under way on this.

Talks

I have done a few talks on the DHR and the DHRS with average audiences of 25 to 35 and with several more booked.

SALES AND EXHIBITIONS Peter Barnes

Sales during 2018 totalled £16,872.53. After some years of declining sales it is good to report a massive 73.1% increase in this past year. This is of course thanks to the expected and successful launch of The incredible Darjeeling B Class to which other directors have referred. We had printed circa 1,000 copies and by the year-end over half had been sold. Gross profit (sales less cost of products and postage) was also up at £7,830.72, a slightly smaller increase of 59.9% which reflects that quite a few copies of the B Class book were sold to the book trade. Other books that have done well include the long-standing Great Indian Railway Atlas, now in its third edition, Darjeeling's Wonderful Railway, Back on Track, and The Story of 19B, all of which feature on our sales stand. That most of these are new, emphasises my continued need for new items to sell. As in previous years I'm well aware that I keep meeting the same regular faces at exhibitions and shows.

During the year the Society stand again visited a number of exhibitions including Narrow Gauge North, Alexandra Palace, the 16mm Society Garden Railway Show, the East Anglian Garden Railway Show, ExpoNG at Swanley and the Warley exhibition at the NEC. The stand also visited various narrow gauge railway events: Open Days at The Beeches, and two Open Days at Statfold Barn. We hope to be at Statfold again this year and once more I emphasise that anyone fascinated with narrow gauge steam engines who hasn't been there should book a ticket for an Open Day without delay. See the events column in the Darjeeling Mail for details.

Several of these shows remain in our plans for 2019. Unfortunately, personal commitments are making it now impossible for me to attend exhibitions on Sundays, plus a problem with increasing night blindness is making it impossible for me to travel

back from shows after dark. To ease matters, Martin Collins now holds exhibition stock and is undertaking an increasing number of shows on the Society's behalf.

Finally, the Society's grateful thanks are due to those members, who have helped at exhibitions and made them such a success. Assistance is always very welcome and Martin and I look forward to meeting more of the Society's members at future exhibitions.

WEBMASTER Michael Melbourne

During this last year I have continued to update the web site with news and changes about the DHR. I have rearranged the order in which pages appear on the navigation bar, with the more important ones to the top. There is a page now listing our Company documents.

There is not much news directly from the DHR; most reports are via members visiting the DHR and are first published in the Darjeeling Mail.

There also is our Facebook page, look for Darjeeling Himalayan Railway Society. I am grateful for photographs sent to us, which are all helpful in keeping the website up to date.

Peter Barnes as Sales Officer informs me of changes of items we sell on the DHRS Shopping web site: new items have been added and some removed as stock is depleted. The major new addition was 'The incredible Darjeeling B Class' book which has sold well.

ENGINEERING David Mead

The visit of the Senior Section Engineers and Director DHR was a great success and appreciated by all those involved. Unfortunately, I was only able to attend the Beeches due to only having been out of hospital a week following a major operation. Thank you to those that provided support in North Wales.

It is planned that I will be able to follow up progress during a visit in May 2019, at the request of UNESCO. I will be interested to see how the maintenance regime has improved since my last visit in 2015. There will also be the supply of new spare parts from the outside contractor to inspect and to discuss ways of improving locomotive reliability.

The maintenance manuals for locomotives, carriage and track are being reviewed, again at the request of UNESCO.

MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY Janine Bird

The membership dropped slightly from 656 in October 2017 to 648 in October 2018.

DTL clients were offered a year of free membership

The Sales Director offered a discounted subscription, from May to November, to people who bought from the Society's Sales Stand.

Both initiatives are being repeated in 2019.

Once again Members have been extremely generous with their donations. The Society is immensely grateful and the Board wishes to thank everyone.

EVENTS Janine Bird

DHRS AGM, Kidderminster 28th April 2018

53 members and four guests attended.

DHRS 20th Anniversary visit to The Beeches Light Railway 1st July 2018

170 members and friends attended the event.

A special mention of thanks to the Indian Hill Railway group for bringing their superb layout.

MODELLING etc. David Churchill

The B class book was finally published on July 1st. It seems to have been well received and thanks are due to all who helped. Work has started towards a publication covering the carriages and wagons.

During the year a good number of enquiries have been received, mostly from modellers, on a wide variety of topics. Hopefully, all have been dealt with satisfactorily. Many have raised interesting areas for further research.

Although the Darjeeling Railway Community Support and Darjeeling Tours Ltd. are separate legal entities apart from the Society, reports of their activities are given below as it is considered these are of interest to Members.

DRCS LIAISON REPORT

David Mead, in his capacity as Director responsible for Darjeeling Railway Community Support (DRCS) liaison, reports:

"In 2018 DRCS had an income of £4,034 and donations to India £4,419."

"We continue to equip Rohini School, finally setting up the computer centre. This follows an agreement between FOSEP and SMPC, the charity arm of the Society's India Support Group, to work together and allow DRCS to send money to India again.

The home for the homeless that was proposed to be built in Darjeeling had to be put on hold due to problems with the proposed site and contractor. Hayden Hall were able to retain the funds we sent towards this project and Radha Karky is working with a new group to build the home in Kurseong."

DARJEELING TOURS LTD Fuzz Jordan

DTL ran four tours to India in 2018, three of which visited the DHR, one for an extended visit sponsored by 'Steam Railway' magazine which was memorable for having six charter trains, four of which featured derailments! Other lines covered by these tours included the Kalka-Shimla, the Kangra Valley, and Ooty. The final India tour covered as many of the lesser-known surviving narrow gauge lines where the trains still perform a genuine transport function rather than being "tourist" lines. In addition, we also ran tours to Colorado and Australia, the latter being masterminded by our good friend (and member) Bob Cochrane.

Our regular 'Magic' tour has operated successfully in early 2019 and will run again in 2020. The eagerly anticipated "Darjeeling Mail" tour, featuring the 1940's rail route from Kolkata to Siliguri, will run in November 2020 and (at the time of writing) is nearly half-full!