

The Darjeeling Himalayan Railway Society

Activity Report for 2019

The following report on the activities of The Darjeeling Himalyan Railway Society (the Society), for the year ended 31 December 2019, 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 23rd AGM as a Society, and the 10th AGM as a company limited by guarantee.

As members reading our acclaimed Darjeeling Mail magazine will be only too keenly aware, 2019 was a very busy year for the Society. Apart from a packed, very informative magazine this past year, I urge you to read all the reports that will confirm this.

Demonstrating the regard in which we are held, and with the CCMP moving toward its finalisation, David Mead, our Engineering Director, was asked by UNESCO to facilitate a series of workshops in May at Tindharia. This also included a seminar at Darjeeling. He returned to India in September to again offer his expertise. He then, with David Charlesworth and their wives, took a party to the DHR in November when, as you will have read in the magazine, they both realised that there is still much to do.

The Society continues to strengthen its influence with our many like-minded partners, ranging from Darjeeling Tours, the charities helped by our Darjeeling Railway Community Support, the Darjeeling Ladies Inner Wheel Education Project, the good work undertaken by the Federation of Societies for Environmental Protection alongside the line, our India Support Group via President Vivek Baid, an embryonic DHR support group in Darjeeling, and many others, both groups

and individuals in the region. There are clear signs that the DHR is a fast-growing destination for a great many domestic tourists as they 'discover' their heritage. Just look at the number of Joy Trains slated to run. Further afield, both David Mead and David Charlesworth gave presentations at the annual Indian Steam Railway Society Congress in November, and we continue to develop close bonds with the rapidly expanding Rail Enthusiasts Society. In addition, quietly working on our behalf are DHRS President Adrian Shooter, our Patron in Delhi, Sir Mark Tully, the DHR Heritage Foundation, and the Windamere Hotel, where this movement began.

In the UK, as part of our mission, 'To create awareness of, interest in, and support for the DHR,' the Society descended upon the Launceston Steam Railway in August, where Adrian Shooter's Number 19 was 'on holiday', and the line was transformed into Darjeeling, with the BBC filming and then transmitting at peak viewing time. I would also like to make special mention of David Charlesworth's mammoth twenty-seven part 'Up the Line' series which was completed in our August 2019 issue of the Darjeeling Mail. An entirely enthralling series that deserves much congratulation.

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, the members, for your continued invaluable support.

In all, a very busy and significant year for the Society, with 2020 promising much. Before too long we should know the contents of the completed Comprehensive Conservation Management Plan. This will signal the next step in the story of this iconic railway.

VICE-CHAIRMAN/PUBLIC RELATIONS

Paul Whittle

Throughout the year we gave significant input to the UNESCO Comprehensive Conservation Management Team (CCMP) team as work on this vital project moved towards its final formal submission to Northeast Frontier Railway at the year-end. Relationship issues following UNESCO's mid-year criticism of the DHR's World Heritage standards were managed successfully and with all parties recognising the Society's impartiality and contribution.

We continued our support to our long-standing partner/Darjeeling NGO, the Federation of Societies for Environmental Protection (FOSEP). Their engagement with local communities in environmental programmes and trackside planting initiatives is valuable and much appreciated.

We have maintained our strong, friendly relations with the Indian Steam Railway Society and the now rapidly expanding Rail Enthusiasts Society.

During the year I gave six DHR-themed talks to a wide variety of groups and Chairman David Barrie gave fifteen talks.

EDUCATION GROUP REPORT Paul Whittle

The Society continued to sponsor the DHR Schools Awareness Programme with the stalwart support of the ladies of the Inner Wheel Club of Darjeeling. In mid-November children from Sardashwari Girls' School Darjeeling enjoyed a variety of events including a Joy Train ride. David Charlesworth and David Mead represented the Society.

MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY Janine Bird

In 2019 the Board met four times – all at The Weighbridge Public House, Alvechurch, B48 7SQ.

The Board agreed that, from 2020 onwards, the number of meetings would be reduced to three per year. This would reduce costs without reducing the Board's efficiency.

It was also agreed to increase the DHRS's insurance to include Employer's Liability. For very little extra premium this will cover all volunteers and directors who assist at shows and events.

TREASURER Fuzz Jordan

DHRS -Treasurer's Report – year to 31st December 2019

Financially, it has been another satisfactory year for the Society, with reserves up by about £4,000. Sales held up remarkably well, following a really good 2018 when David Churchill's book on the 'B' class was published. In these days of an ageing society, it is good to see subscriptions at pretty much the same level as 2018. A small profit on our events contrasts with the heavy expense of our 20th anniversary celebrations in 2018. We continue to support various lineside entities, with FOSEP and the Education Group and the work of UNESCO.

For 2020, we are hoping for another stable year, and we have sufficient reserves in hand to be able to respond rapidly to any valid requests for help we may receive.

As with previous years, we owe our grateful thanks to Derek Williamson of Goddards Accountants who has kindly overseen the production of our accounts.

EDITOR David Charlesworth

A November visit to Darjeeling and Delhi with David Mead was very limiting in what could be done so it does not compare to the achievements of the previous visit.

The Education Group school trip went well as did the very pleasant afternoon tea at The Elgin with the Inner Wheel Club. This is a very valuable part of what the Society does and I personally would like to see if it can be extended to perhaps two schools per year.

David Mead and I had the opportunity to meet Ms Mirtili Kaffe, a highly capable and qualified Greek girl working in the UNESCO India office. She had been my contact for perhaps a couple of years now and my main connection while writing and producing a children's colouring book. Mirtili's contract came to an end just before Christmas and she is now taking some time off to tour India. Unfortunately, I have heard nothing about the children's book since it was sent to print.

The Indian Steam Railway Society put David Mead and I on the list of speakers at their Delhi conference, thus making it a very long afternoon and evening. I doubt my talk entitled "The Benefit of Foresight" will be acted on but it was well received by those I spoke to.

Darjeeling Himalayan Railway Preservation Society

We invited Prabhakar Thapa to dinner at the Cinderella one evening. Prabhakar was one of the small group trying to set up the Darjeeling Himalayan Railway Preservation Society. Based in Darjeeling the idea came about because they were very aware of the tremendous amount of work the DHRS was doing, yet locally there was no support.

Unfortunately it has proved impossible to get a licence for a new group and as several founders are still employed by Indian Railways, the risk to their jobs simply became too great. A role for Prabhakar may be possible under the DHRS and this is something to be discussed. As a professional content writer for government organisations he could be a valuable local contact.

Google Arts

It was interesting to see my name coming up on the official DHR website with the title "Up the Line". Much of the content seems to have come from The Google Arts and Culture programme but it seems someone has also been reading the "Up the Line" series. The DHRS and I have been given credits so that is quite significant.

Publications

The planned book called "Up the Line" is now officially a GO so work has started.

Talks

Venues and opportunities for talks are hard to find in North Derbyshire, but two more talks have been booked for later this year.

SALES AND EXHIBITIONS Peter Barnes

Sales during 2019 totalled £9,584.26, down 43.2%. Sales of The incredible Darjeeling B Class continued but were inevitably at a lower rate than in the previous year. As you will recall, we had printed circa 1,000 copies and by the year end the bulk of them have now been sold. Gross profit (sales less cost of products and postage) was also down substantially at £4,573.11, a drop of 41.6%. 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 recent just emphasises my continued need for new items to sell. As in previous years I'm well aware that Martin and I keep meeting the same regular faces at Exhibitions and Shows.

During the year the Society Stand run by Martin (mostly) and myself (sometimes) attended some 16 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 plus various Narrow Gauge railway events: Open Days at The Beeches, and 2 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.

Most of these shows remain in our plans for 2020. Unfortunately personal commitments are making 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. Reluctantly I have decided that underlying health problems mean I will have to retire completely from the sales role and this was advertised in the February edition of Darjeeling Mail. Anyone at all interested in this, please contact our Chairman, David Barrie or myself as soon as possible.

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, myself and whoever takes over from me will 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 on the DHR and also events related to our society.

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

I also run the DHRS Facebook page, which is followed by over 1000 people in India as well as worldwide. Look for 'Darjeeling Himalayan Railway Society' or click on the Facebook logo at the top right of our website pages.

I am grateful for photographs sent to us, these are all helpful in keeping the website up to date.

Peter Barnes as Sale Officer informs me of changes of items we have for sale on the DHRS Shopping web site, new items have been added and some removed as stock is depleted.

This year I changed the layout of the sales website with a new format that was easier to view on mobile phones and tablets.

ENGINEERING David Mead

In May, at the request of UNESCO, I was asked to prepare and chair workshops on the maintenance of locomotives, carriages and track. These were held at Tindharia and included representatives from the other hill railways. The workshops were well received and there was a good interaction between the delegates. I was hopeful that they would result in a general improvement in maintenance, but as I was to find out in November, this was not the case.

Immediately following the workshops, a seminar was held in Darjeeling looking at the relationship between UNESCO and World Heritage Railways which I ended up co-chairing. Representatives from Switzerland and Austria were present, it was a very informative session.

In September, again at UNESCO's request I attended the meetings in Darjeeling aimed at concluding the Comprehensive Conservation Management Plan (CCMP). I was there in a supporting role to provide information and answer questions of a technical nature.

As part of the CCMP I edited and peer reviewed the locomotive and carriage maintenance manuals and wrote a track maintenance manual.

All this work was mostly financed by UNESCO.

In November I led a party of friends to visit India including the DHR, unfortunately this was only to show how much work there is still to do.

At the end of the trip I, along with David Charlesworth, gave a presentation expressing our views of the current state of the DHR and possible areas of improvement.

MEMBERSHIP Janine Bird

The membership dropped slightly from 648 in October 2018 to 637 in October 2019.

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 2020.

EVENTS Janine Bird

DHRS AGM, Kidderminster 27th April 2019

45 members and five guests attended.

The Beeches Light Railway

30th March 2019

12 members and friends attended.

A brilliant day with the grounds of The Beeches filled with Model T Fords.

18th May 2019

The final event at Steeple Aston was attended by 25 members and friends.

Launceston Steam Railway

15th-16th August 2019

David and Val Mead, David and Moo Barrie, Martin Collins, Thomas Conder and Hugh Rayner transformed the LSR station into Darjeeling for the visit of Adrian Shooter and his team.

MODELLING etc. David Churchill

A steady number of enquiries regarding modelling of the DHR. These often raise interesting avenues for research and hopefully have been dealt with satisfactorily.

Archives (other than photo archive)

Material which should be added to the society archive is being identified.

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.

DCRS LIAISON REPORT

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

"In 2019 DRCS had an income of £4,037 and donations to India £10,482."

"The major donation this year was for the purchase of land to enable the building of an old people's home for the in Darjeeling by Udhaar Charitable Trust. The original site proposed at Kurseong turned out not to be suitable and after looking at several sites one just outside Darjeeling on the Sikim Road has been selected. I was able to visit the site in November.

In November Rohini School was also visited and it was agreed we would finance repairs to the school in 2010."

DARJEELING TOURS LTD Fuzz Jordan

Our flagship 'Magic' tour, covering the DHR, Kalka-Shimla and Ooty, ran in March 2019 with 29 passengers, and the 2020 tour (at the time of writing) should run with the same number, although the coronavirus pandemic is causing some concern.

Our future plans include a 'Magic' tour for January 2021, and the 'Darjeeling Mail' in November 2020, which should run from Kolkata, through Bangladesh and up to Darjeeling, covering the route of the 1940's Darjeeling Mail. This is expected to run full with 30 participants. We also plan to run a tour covering the Kalka-Shimla line and the Kangra Valley Railway in March 2021.

In addition, there is also a tour to Australia in October 2020, and our annual September tours to Colorado.