

The Darjeeling Himalayan Railway Society

Activity Report for 2021

The following report on the activities of The Darjeeling Himalayan Railway Society (the Society), for the year ended 31 December 2021, is provided for the information of Members.

CHAIRMAN'S REVIEW David Barrie

2021, much of which was under Covid restrictions, was yet another challenging year and this was reflected in the number of activities, events and shows in which the DHRS was able to participate. Your Board held three virtual meetings via Zoom. A sign of a "new normal" materialising was that the society's AGM was able to be held at Kidderminster Railway Museum with the usual catering, socialising and entertainment. Although constrained by the pandemic, the DHRS has still managed to achieve a number of objectives. In the UK we are forging a close link with Statfold Barn, and now have a permanent presence at this fast-developing narrow gauge centre. In India we continue to support the good works of the environmental group FOSEP, helping with the planned DHR-themed 'Gulma Junction' visitor centre near Sukna, and our own charitable and educational work.

Please do read the various reports and I am sure you will be gratified to note the achievements made under difficult conditions. I heartily thank each of the Directors and Officers for all that they have accomplished. As you may be aware, our previous sales director, Peter Barnes, has retired, with Peter Jordan adding that role to his responsibilities, so we really would welcome fresh offers of helping to run the society. You care about the DHR, and possibly you might consider playing a part in ensuring our

continued support. No job is onerous, and is usually both fun and rewarding, without taking up too much time. One much-needed role would be to develop our sales, both here in the UK and in India. Please speak with one of us, or contact me for a non-committal chat. I thank our members for continuing to support the DHRS during these difficult times and look forward, with optimism, to 2022.

VICE CHAIRMAN/PUBLIC RELATIONS Paul Whittle

Despite the continuing Covid pandemic, we continued to maintain and enhance sound relations with our expanding network of friends and partners in India, including Indian Railways, the Indian Steam Railway Society, the Rail Enthusiasts Society and private individuals. Much publicity was gained by the Society's input to the Indian rail e-magazine 'Rail Canvaz' in a special edition featuring the DHR

Grant support continued to our long-standing partner/ Darjeeling NGO, the Federation of Societies for Environmental Protection (FOSEP). This was used to support local communities most badly affected by the months of Covid lockdown.

In August the Indian Government announced plans to 'monetise' its railway assets including the narrow gauge hill lines. We await developments and aim to take advantage of any viable opportunities that may arise.

New and potentially valuable publicity opportunities include our developing links with the impressive Staffold Barn Railway and a planned DHR-themed visitor centre on a tea estate near Sukna.

EDUCATION GROUP REPORT Paul Whittle

The annual DHR Schools Awareness Programme took place in mid-November, with the customary invaluable help of the ladies of the Inner Wheel Club of Darjeeling. Twenty five male students from the Darjeeling Government High School completed a DHR-themed drawing competition with the prizes being presented at Darjeeling Station, before a Joy Train ride to Ghum. Each participant was presented with a copy of the Society's 'Darjeeling's Wonderful Railway' guide book.

SECRETARY REPORT Janine Bird

In 2021 the Board met three times all via Zoom.

The meetings were held in February, June and October.

The 2021 AGM took place on Saturday 9th October at the Kidderminster Railway Museum.

39 members, including Directors and Officers, attended.

11 guests attended.

There were 30 proxy votes and 4 apologies.

The 2022 AGM was booked for Saturday 28th May and the relevant insert will be included in the Feb 2022 DM.

TREASURER REPORT Fuzz Jordan

The year 2021 closed with the Society in a sound financial position. Most income and expenditure are directly comparable with 2020 except that we agreed to provide Statfold with a display of wall boards showing why (in a worldwide sense) narrow-gauge railways are necessary, but of course with specific reference to the DHR. There may be opportunities within Indian Railways current move towards offering private company participation, which would undoubtedly cost money, maybe significant sums, and it therefore seems sensible for the Society to keep finance available for this eventuality, if needed.

SALES AND EXHIBITIONS Fuzz Jordan

Retail sales have gone well in 2021, and ended at about the same level as 2021 after a lot of hard work. 2020 had the benefit of two new profitable lines that we did not have in 2021, but we are hoping to bring you several new items in 2022! Because of COVID, our only event was the DHRS AGM, but we hope to have more opportunities in 2022, especially at Statfold

on 11 and 12 July. Sales is a really good way of helping the DHRS develop, and the current small team would really welcome some help, so if life is getting a bit boring, please give us a call and we may be able to add a bit of fun to your life!

EDITOR David Charlesworth

Production of the Darjeeling Mail throughout 2021 has been tough and taken considerably longer than usual – and it has always been bad enough. However, though abused by some and taken for granted by others, information and communications technology is incredible. Were it not for email and being able to call friends in Siliguri, Kurseong, Darjeeling and even Gangtok with WhatsApp (the favoured method in India) throughout this unbelievable period news, would have been hard to get.

Articles for the magazine are quite different. It is impossible to get answers if you do not have the questions and the first task is to dream-up a feature or some way to connect what bits of information you do have. Words and pictures in a magazine have to have a *raison d'être* otherwise it becomes nothing more than a newsletter and the Darjeeling Mail has to be much more than that.

Special thanks to Paul Whittle for his ceaseless contact and monitoring, without Paul we would have no news at all and David Churchill for his constant research which feeds us with the historical material. Long-standing Members such as Warren Miller in Australia who is always comes up with something unusual and Keith Strickland for his book reviews and Sushil Dikshit and Prabhakar Thappa in Kurseong and Salbari.

An important development during last summer was to complete the DHR/DHRS display panels and the chance to get over to Statfold Barn to deliver the mounted prints willed to us by John Clemmens. Without the help of Graham Lee and James Gorton at Statfold, the Board would have struggled to store any of the material. The UK negatives and prints from John's collection were left to Kidderminster Museum and although grateful for the negatives, which are being scanned, the huge piles of prints are a problem to them.

We are all planning eventually establish a permanent DHR display at Statfold and the wall panels, though an expense to the Society, gives us a permanent promotion. As I have already said in the magazine, Statfold is already becoming the premier site for all things narrow-gauge and to have a presence there is hugely beneficial to all of us. The recruitment of new and younger members is vital now.

WEBMASTER Mick Melbourne

During this last year I have continued to update the DHRS web site with news and changes on the DHR and also events related to our society.

With the continued lockdown due to Covid 19 limiting the traffic on the line, there has been very little news coming from the DHR apart from the usual landslips. Most reports have been from members living along the DHR or from reports in Indian Newspapers.

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. The 'locals' have also now produced their own similar Facebook web sites.

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

Peter Jordan 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 have continued to update the sales website with the monthly software updates, to keep track of trading rules by the many nations using the software.

Digital pdf downloads have been disappointing with very few sales for the 'DHR Timetable' collection and no requests for individual pdf copies of back issues of the Darjeeling Mail, Peter Jordan has done a few downloads for members requiring a lot of back issues. Maybe people still prefer a paper copy to a digital one. At the moment when a copy is ordered, the customer gets a link to the download that is available for 3 days, hence the need to use a PC type computer as a tablet/iPad does not have the storage facility to view the issues at their leisure at a later date.

ENGINEERING David Mead

There has been little activity in connection with engineering this year. We are still awaiting the issue of the Maintenance Manuals by UNESCO or any evidence of improved maintenance to track, locos or carriages. This a repeat of last year, and I do not see any change happening in the year ahead.

MEMBERSHIP Janine Bird

The membership dropped slightly from 613 in October 2020 to 599 in October 2021.

EVENTS Janine Bird

Because of COVID-19 restrictions it was not possible to hold any events in 2021. Any events in 2022 will depend on what COVID-19 restrictions are in place but there are provisional plans for visits to The Beeches

and Statfold Barn.

MODELLING etc. David Churchill

Work is continuing toward the book on the DHR coaches and wagons, to be similar in size and style to the B Class book. Considerable progress has been made but COVID restrictions have severely restricted access to many libraries and archives for almost all the year. A target date for a complete draft is now Summer 2022.

During the year a good number of enquiries have been received, mostly from modellers. Hopefully, all have been dealt with satisfactorily. Some queries can be answered quickly whilst others require research effort but are nevertheless very helpful in highlighting items not previously noticed. There have been some useful contacts in the general area of 'family & local history'.

The Indian press is monitored for items relevant to the DHR and other Indian narrow gauge lines. Material is used for an Indian Narrow Gauge News page in the Mail and will be added to the archive.

Although Darjeeling Railway Community Support (DRCS) and Darjeeling Tours Ltd are separate legal entities from the DHRS their Activity Reports are included because they are always of interest to members.

DRCS LIAISON REPORT

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

"DRCS has continued to support Rohini school and the Udaar Trust during 2021 "

"The donations this year provided the funds for the maintenance of Rohini School and its repair following the land slip in the Autumn. We are continuing to fund raise for a school/community hall. The land purchase for the home for the homeless has finally been completed and the land registered in the name of the Udaar Trust. We continue to work with the trust on this project."

DRCS are grateful for all the support we receive from members of DHRS. This has enabled the Charity to send £75,610 to the Darjeeling District of India since our formation in 2006.

DARJEELING TOURS LTD Fuzz Jordan

COVID has caused a hiatus, but we are hoping that the infections peak is over, and tours will be able to resume in the autumn. With the absence of tours for the last two years, advertising has had to be suspended for a period, but, COVID permitting, advertising will resume in the summer, and tours in the autumn. In the meantime, the next year's tour programme is set out at www.darjeelingtours.co.uk