

Sunday Tracks Jan 2011

Welcome to the first issue of 'Sunday Tracks', something, which I hope will be a monthly update on the activities of the Railway's Sunday Permanent Way Gang and permanent way activities on the Bluebell Railway. Who are we? We are volunteers who meet every Sunday morning at Horsted Keynes and travel the length of line dealing with issues that need attention. If after reading this you would like to join us then get in contact, via Mike Gibbard, Volunteer Recruitment Coordinator, by phone (01323 461352, before 9pm) or e-mail "mg @ michaelgibbard . demon . co . uk". Also, if you have a permanent way question then feel free to ask and we will see if we can come up with an answer.

We made a keen start on the 2nd and split up before heading to West Hoathly. Regular travellers will have noticed the thousands of concrete sleepers on the old station site. Although around a third of these are not suitable for re-use, the rest are being used on our main running line. 312 were checked,



cleaned and re-stacked ready for use on Freshfield Bank later in the month.

The rest of the gang jumped on the Wickham trolley and headed to West Hoathly by rail, loaded with tools for one of our regular maintenance tasks, jacking and packing. This involves lifting the track up to the correct level and forcing ballast under the sleepers to ensure that once lifted it stays in place (hopefully). Here we see Dave, Jon, Dave and Richard getting ready to lift the track just outside the northern tunnel portal.

A crisp start to the 9th saw us heading south to Rock Cutting and some more jacking and packing work. Dave Bowles was behind the lens with his artistic eye. Here we see Ed, Steve and David working hard with our Hilti demolition hammers forcing ballast under the sleepers.



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The operations department seem to want to run trains on a Sunday and so we nipped down to Sheffield Park to get the trolley out of the way for a service train. It's not only trains we take pictures of - while waiting to get back to the action I took this one of a robin looking through the remains of the brazier on platform 1.



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We don't always take ourselves too seriously and when we got back to Horsted to unload, Ed decided it was about time I had my first shower of the year, can't think why, a touch cold I thought.

The 15th saw the highest turnout of the year (21), perhaps because it was a slightly easier day than most and the highlight of the calendar, our annual Christmas Lunch. We held it in the Bessemer Arms so the money goes back to the railway and no one has an excuse for not finding the place. The catering department did us proud, providing a full Christmas lunch with all the trimmings, thanks to Simon Barker and his staff. Also to Tim Baker who provided something stronger than we usually drink.



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The 16th saw a change of tack and although we went south, we were sleeper changing near Monteswood Lane Bridge. The trick with this job is to ensure you don't lift the track too much and leave a hump. We do our best! Here Paul, Jon and Dave can be seen making a start, removing the ballast from around the life-expired sleepers. We also popped down to the top of Freshfield Bank to see the preparations made before the line closed for two weekends for the laying of 16 panels of new flat bottom track on the sleepers we worked on earlier in the month. The picture shows the reason for the work (but not the clay contaminating the ballast) and also the new drainage going in. After all, the track is only as good as its drainage. We do try to be a helpful lot and in the afternoon we took our colleagues from the Fencing Gang down to Lindfield Wood and dropped them off along with their materials. After helping them clear vegetation and repair some damage to the fence at Rock Cutting, we picked them up later. We didn't even get a tip, let alone the fare, we won't do that again...



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*Picking up the
fencing gang –
16 Jan 2011.*

The 23rd saw the line closed and so we had the whole line to play with. But we went south, to change more sleepers, although it was nice to be able to relax a bit and not have to worry about one of those steamy things coming round the corner. Here we see dead sleepers waiting to be picked up. It also gave us the chance to see progress on Freshfield Bank.



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The Freshfield job was progressing well. The plan was:

1. Improve the drainage;
2. Slew the existing track to the East;
3. Scrape off the old ballast and track bed, load it into wagons for removal to Horsted Keynes;
4. Lay a geotextile membrane, 'terram', fresh ballast and then level using a laser 'dozer';
5. Lay the concrete sleepers and new flat bottom rails;
6. Ballast the sleepers and then level and align the track using a tamper.



Here we see three views looking north of the old track slewed to the east with new rails waiting the arrival of the concrete sleepers.



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The 30th saw a continuation of the good weather, no trains and us heading south again for more sleeper changing. The first job was to pick up the best of the wooden sleepers displaced by the relaying, so they could be re-used elsewhere. The line had by this stage been reconnected, and was waiting ballasting and a visit from the tamper before it was ready for trains to run again.

Here we see sleeper collection (Jon Bowers), then the view from the north, the transition from bullhead rail on timber sleepers to flat bottom on concrete, the view from the south and the same robin supervising?



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We took the opportunity to rescue some of the better sleepers and took them north to replace some of the worst ones in Rock Cutting and Lindfield Wood.



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All in all, a good start to 2011. I hope you have enjoyed this insight into our activities and I look forward to some questions to answer and perhaps some of you joining us soon on a Sunday. Thanks to my colleagues for their assistance in compiling this. See you next month!

David Chappell