

Sunday Tracks Feb 2011

Welcome to the second issue of *Sunday Tracks*, 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 become a volunteer or join us on a Sunday then get in contact, via Mike Gibbard, the Railway's Volunteer Recruitment Coordinator, by phone (01323 461352, before 9pm) or e-mail "mg @ michaelgibbard . demon . co . uk". If you are interested in volunteering and being out in the countryside then see this from Jon Bowers,

<http://www.bluebell-railway.co.uk/bluebell/personal/jon-bowers/pway/volunteer.htm>

If you have a permanent way question then feel free to ask and we will see if we can come up with an answer. If you find that I'm talking about areas of the railway, which you are not familiar with then either come and join us or perhaps have a look at this –

http://www.bluebell-railway.co.uk/bluebell/map_grad.html

February 6th was an overcast day and saw us heading south to Freshfield Bank to see what the finished track looked like and doing a bit of ballast tidying.

It looked good and a ride over it confirmed that. It's very smooth.



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All that remained was to redistribute some ballast and tidy up the ends of the sleepers. With the Wickham safely parked out of shot, we moved the ballast up the hill to fill in the areas where it was thinly distributed. Here we see Richard, Dave and John hard at work.



The conclusion of this work represents the first steps in relaying Freshfield Bank. My guess is that we will be back here soon for more track re-laying.

After lunch we headed up to Horsted House Farm for another of our routine maintenance tasks, fishplate greasing. More on this in future reports.

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The 13th was our first wet session of the year. Our nine miles of track is walked every Saturday morning to ensure that everything is in order. This inspection highlighted a couple of issues, namely catch pits blocked with leaves, and sleepers in need of replacement.

Catch pits are, as the name suggests, pits to collect debris and are where drainage pipes meet to enable direction changes and to give rodding access. Good drainage is very important to the long term stability of the track, and so with the Wickham loaded, north we went to just past Horsted House crossing.

Here we see Paul and Mark Hailes busy clearing a pit. Paul, with over 25 years' service as a volunteer is one of the unsung heroes of the railway in both permanent way and carriage and wagon. Dirty jobs – the messier the better - are his speciality and he has more energy than a hyperactive 10 year old! His brother, Mark, while not quite as hyperactive is also a very useful member of the gang, best known for his ability to carry a sleeper under each arm (not concrete ones I hasten to add).



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So having totally failed to dent their energy levels we continued up to Ingwersen's Curve to change two life-expired sleepers.



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If you are a regular traveller you will know that it is not unknown to see deer about the railway. They make their own paths to cross the track and this is one of them on the east side of the curve, which looks like it sees a lot of use.



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Kingscote Station will soon no longer be the line's northern terminus but one of the intermediate stations, and plans are being made to turn it into a demonstration goods yard. With this in mind, a tidy-up is going on and one of those 'could you just' jobs came along when we were asked to move some unwanted permanent way items back to Horsted Keynes stores.

On our second trip we had time for tea with the chairman. Here we see Jon, David, Mark, Rich, Paul, Dave and Roy. You might just be able to make out part of a biscuit in Roy's hand, forensic tests are continuing but no signs of orange on the biscuit's packet could be found! Thanks to David Shannon for the picture.



While a level of dampness is acceptable, the rain decided that it would conform to the forecast and it promptly got a lot worse, so we tidied up the Wickham and sorted some fishplate bolts for future use. So, an interesting day, from the bottom of a catch pit to tea with the chairman. Can't be bad!

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The 20th was cold and damp and we headed back to Horsted House Farm to pick up where we left off with the fishplate-greasing job.

Here we see Jon using a petrol-powered impact wrench, a heavy but essential tool for us, to loosen fishplate bolts.



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Between trains we nipped up to Kingscote to continue with the tidying. On the way back we paused at the old West Hoathly station site. The ballast mountain has been a landmark for some time, but it's more of an anthill now. I guess people might have thought it would last us for a long time, sadly not.



This picture from Martin Lawrence, taken on 27th January, explains where the mountain went: loaded onto a train hauled by the C class for use on the re-laying of Freshfield Bank.



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The 27th started cloudy but brightened up, and we headed up to between Vaux End and Black Hut to tackle some of the worst dipped joints. These needed jacking and packing. Keeping our generators on board the Wickham to ease the task of moving locations we see a close-up of proceedings. Here we see Jon with the cant stick (in effect a long spirit level) and Julian about to operate the track jack, raising the track as directed by Jon.



Later in the day Dave Bowles, our lookout, took this, looking back towards Vaux End.



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Permanent Way Lesson

Why is it called permanent way?

As far as I can establish it's called permanent way because it is permanent. In the very early days of railways, the track was not always laid in a permanent fashion, hence the distinction. The modern definition is: the track, complete with ancillary installations such as rails, sleepers, ballast, formation and track drains, as well as lineside fencing and lineside signs.

Safety?

The priority of any transport system is the safety of the people using it and the staff looking after it. The Bluebell Railway is no different in that respect: safety is still paramount. To perform our job we need to be out on the track and since we are working on a Sunday when trains are running we employ techniques to ensure everybody is kept safe. Single line railways have evolved a system whereby a train needs a 'token', issued by a signalman, to travel over the line. You can see the token being 'exchanged' by the train crews and signalman when trains arrive at and depart from our stations. Although the trains (hopefully) follow a timetable we don't, so if we need to travel along the line we obtain the 'token' and retain it while we are working. Since there can only be one token issued at a time we ensure our safety and everybody else's by stopping any other trains from running.

If we are out for the day then we use a system of 'lookouts'. The 'lookout' gives everybody sufficient warning of an approaching train so that we and our tools are in a place of safety in good time. The final safety check is the locomotive crew, who when they have us in sight, sound the whistle, which we all acknowledge. So when you see us waving at you as you pass by in a warm and dry train please bear in mind that you have stopped us working...

I hope you have enjoyed this insight into our activities and I look forward to some questions to answer and hopefully some of you joining us soon on a Sunday. Thanks to my colleagues for their assistance in compiling this.

David Chappell

PS I gather the tip was in the 2:30 at Lingfield, a bit late now!

If you have any questions then please email it to Richard Salmon, our webmaster, at [rasalmon @ btinternet . com](mailto:rasalmon@btinternet.com) who will pass the question on.