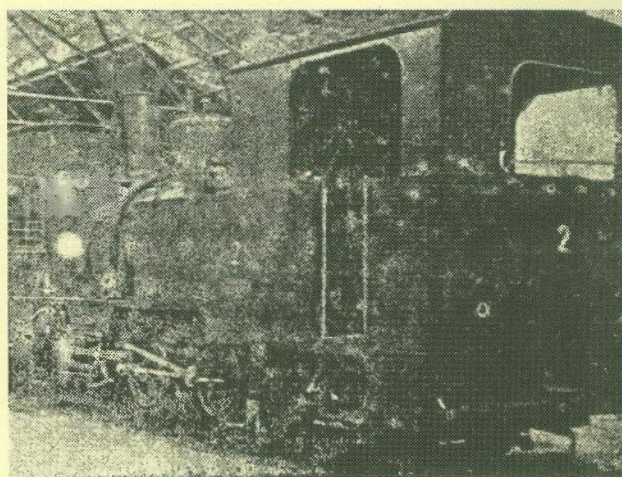


THE NARROW GAUGE



THE NARROW GAUGE RAILWAY SOCIETY

No.11 - 14 December 1954



A Charming Mountain Railway

Desmond Mee (B.R.(M), Derby)

It does us good to forsake, now and again, the familiar pattern of our own railway system and to sample the delights or otherwise of other people's railways.

Many of us like to compare foreign trains with our own and to note any improvements or gadgets which could usefully be incorporated at home. Others love the complete contrast which the incongruity of a miniature railway affords. The Chamonix-Montenvers Railway is just such a line.

Chamonix, lying at the head of a valley in the shadow of the Mont Blanc massif, is a little town well known to mountaineers and winter sports enthusiasts, and is an ideal centre for an alpine holiday. It is itself reached by a narrow-gauge electric railway from the main-line terminus at St. Gervais, 24 miles away.

Before being there long, the railwayman is inevitably drawn to the miniature train which plies between Chamonix and Montenvers, a local beauty spot 3,000 feet higher in the mountains. Access to the track is by crossing a bridge from the main part of the station. At first sight the trains look ridiculously small and untrustworthy. Looking up the 2'0"-gauge track, a steep rise meets the eye, and one cannot help wondering whether it will be too much for the toy train. However, fears are unfounded, as a rack is used to assist on the steeper sections.

The little tank engine with the tall chimney and bulbous steam dome steams impatiently in front of a four-coach train. The coaches look rather drab and uncomfortable. They have wooden seats and some of them have window frames only, without glass. Instead there is a series of roller blinds, the use for which can only be surmised.

The train sets off and almost immediately begins to climb. As the scenery comes into view over a foreground of tree-covered slopes, the journey promises to be an interesting one. A steady rate of climb is maintained for about ten minutes, when we suddenly enter a tunnel. It now becomes obvious what the blinds are for. We hurriedly pull them down and wait for the train to emerge. It is only a short tunnel, but it seems uncommonly long. As the smoke and steam begins to filter through it gets hotter and hotter. Just as we expect to suffocate, relief comes as the train breaks out into fresh mountain air. The railway works on single line for most part of its distance, but shortly after the tunnel it spreads into three or four sidings. This is the half-way point and a passing place. We wait here for about ten minutes while the engine builds up steam and takes water. Then two downward trains pass us in quick succession.

The view now takes on a panoramic quality. On the left the whole of the upper part of the Chamonix Valley is visible, with Chamonix spread-eagled in miniature behind us. In front are the Chamonix Aiguilles and Les Drus towering 12,000 feet into the clouds. On the right, more sparsely forested now, large tracts of snow come down to the lineside. After crossing a viaduct, where we appear to be suspended in mid-air, the line takes a turn to the right and soon the glacier comes into view. Within five minutes we arrive at Montenvers and the Mer de Glace - the Sea of Ice. The latter is the name given to the glacier which sweeps down into the Chamonix Valley from the heart of the French Alps.

Half-a-mile wide and five miles long, it is several hundred feet below the level of Montenvers station. A pathway leads down to the glacier and carved into the ice is a cave in which are the rooms of a house, complete with furniture, hewn out of the solid ice.

The station consists of a covered-in shed, a waiting room and a refreshment room. There is usually a guide present to explain in several languages the sights to be seen.

This quaint little mountain railway is responsible for carrying thousands of visitors every year to see one of the finest mountain views in Europe. For anyone with a railway interest it is doubly attractive.

(This article first appeared in the September issue of the B.R. (L.Midland Region) Magazine. In making acknowledgements to British Railways for permission to reproduce it, we should like to point out that, since it was written, the railway has been electrified and we hope to show you photographs of the new rolling-stock in our next issue).

Vale of Rheidol Railway

SPECIAL NOTICE : ALL MEMBERS ARE ASKED TO NOTE THAT A SERVICE WILL BE OPERATED ON THIS LINE DURING NEXT SUMMER SEASON. BRITISH RAILWAYS ARE ANXIOUS THAT TRAFFIC ON THE LINE SHOULD BE IMPROVED, AND MEMBERS ARE ASKED TO MAKE KNOWN THE EXISTENCE OF THIS LINE SHOULD THEY HEAR OF ANYONE CONTEMPLATING A HOLIDAY IN THE ABERYSTWYTH AREA.

Unconventional Models of Narrow-Gauge Rolling-Stock

D.R.Dwerryhouse, Pembroke.

Apart from being semi-freelance models of unusual prototypes, the main interest might be said to lie in the methods and details of construction. Firstly, all are built on Hornby-Dublo chassis to run on standard Dublo track, and secondly there is no metal (worth speaking of!) in their construction. The models are, in order of construction :

Glyn Valley Tramway 4-wheel semi-open observation coach
0-6-2T version of GVT 0-4-2T (Beyer Peacock)
GVT 4-wheel brake van-cum booking office
GVT small 4-wheel open observation coach
Free-lance 0-6-2ST, details similar to Talylyln Railway No. 4
Two GVT closed carriages (under construction)

All are of course built to 7mm scale. The actual gauge of the Glyn Valley Tramway being 2' 4 1/2 " makes the 'OO' track almost exactly correct. The first coach was made in medium-thin card, with panel beading made of postcard strips. All the other coaches are made out of balsa wood, in thin sheets. Every coach has a roof made out of 'laminated postcard' - two pieces cut to shape, glued together and left to set curved round a former.

The GVT-type loco was constructed with a 1/2"-square balsa strip framework, well braced, and pinned and glued. It was then 'panelled' with one or two thicknesses of postcard, the whole being very sturdy, though rather light until weighted with pieces of lead. Although this loco was built partly from scale drawings, it was necessarily enlarged to take an extra pair of driving wheels. It makes a handy little engine, though not frightfully neat in appearance; it is hoped to make a better model of the same prototype one day.

The other little engine is vaguely reminiscent of the ex-Corris Talylyln loco "Edward Thomas". Bigger and longer, but not unlike. As it is to run on the same 'tramway' as the other stock, all its wheels and motion are covered-in, which saves quite a bit of fiddly work! This engine, although very simple in details, is quite attractive in appearance. All the rolling-stock was built solely for the purpose of 'seeing if it could be done' in materials other than the traditional metal.

(Editorial Note :- these models are very well made, and demonstrate that the centre-third rail common to Hornby Dublo need not be an obstacle to narrow-gauge modelling. There may be one or two ways to disguise it e.g. by painting it black every so often to create a 'rack' impression).

Scissors and Paste Department

If any readers of this humble offering happen to see any letters or articles in the national press or weekly periodicals mentioning narrow-gauge railways, please remember the Reference Department if you don't have a scrap book of your own.

Our Thanks to all members who so promptly re-affirmed their decision to stay on and give the Society their valued support, particularly those in far-away places. Just to remind you, the new subs. are 10/- Annual (5/- if under 16 or over-seas); £3/3- Life Membership. Many of you have not told us if you are resigning or not. Subs. are now overdue if you are staying on.

This Month's Talking Point : The West Country

Some time ago, one of our isolated members, Mr. D.G.Attwood, of Hillrise, Woolhampton, Berks., asked for anyone who had an interest in West Country narrow-gauge lines to contact him. So far, no response, so the appeal goes out again in the hope that perhaps one of our newer members might be interested. Mr. Attwood is particularly anxious to know something more about certain early mineral lines in the PAR area. The magazine is the main link between isolated members, so maybe someone would drop Mr. Attwood a line; incidentally, his list of photographs may have something to interest you.

New Badge Design

One of the outcome's of this years AGM at Manchester is a new badge design, which takes the form of a head-on view of a well-known type of narrow-gauge locomotive, the letters NGRS being on a scroll below.

Members who have already purchased button badges are asked to return them to the Hon. Secretary NOW as the existing design is no longer authorised.

It will be appreciated that the object of selling the button-type badges was two-fold (a) to provide easy identification at exhibitions, and (b) to raise a bob or two towards the Preservation Fund. (See "Narrow Gauge", Christmas 1953 issue, page 5).

It is proposed to credit members with the actual cost when returning button-type badges towards the cost of a new one, if they are agreeable, it being only a matter of a few coppers and hardly worth a refund. Enquiries are being made into the cost of producing a metal badge of the new design, BUT production will only be considered if there is enough support.

When you return your old badge, please indicate your views in this respect. Even if you didn't get one, we'd still like to know if you are interested. Cost may be about 3/- depending on the demand.

Urgent! - - - _ _ _ - - - ! Yes, it's a genuine S. O. S. We need storage space urgently for the 0-6-2ST "Barber" at present in Harrogate Gas Works. Approximate dimensions : 20ft. long, 6ft. wide, 7'6" - 8' high and weighs about 15-16 tons. Can you help to save this unique locomotive from being broken up?

Combined Membership Cards and Receipts will be issued to all members who have sent in their subscriptions at the new rates, also to existing life members. We apologise for the delay, due to the fact that the new cards have the old badge design on, and we are preparing a block with the new badge design to overprint. Magazines are only being sent out this time to members who have renewed their subscriptions, by the way, and to life members. So if you hear of anyone who wants to know where his magazine has got to, ask him if he has renewed his sub.

Question: can any member remember sending three photos of the former Southwold_Railway to the Hon. Secretary? They are

- 1) Southwold Station (derelict)
- 2) Ivy-covered road-over-rail bridge (derelict)
- 3) Notice-board at end of bridge over river.

They were sent about two years ago, and have lost their means of identity.

A.G.M. Manchester Report will be circulated to members as soon as possible.

Ravenglass & Eskdale Railway tickets are urgently required by collector-friend of the Hon. Secretary.

IF any isolated member would like to take over the NGRS photographic section on a postal basis, please advise the Hon. Librarian, whose address is 14 (not 16) Hawks Nest Gardens West, Alwoodley, Leeds 17.

Cover Photographs of this issue :-

Front : Free Pass issued to T.Sampson, Esq., Auditor, T & D R, 1913. (Photo by G.R.Mahon, Dundrum, Co. Dublin. Block Loaned by the "Railway Gazette")

Front (inside) : (Left) - La Mer de Glace, from Monteners Station
(Right) - Rack-and-pinion loco, Chamonix-Monteners Railway
(2'0" gauge)

Back (inside) : Chamonix-Monteners Railway.
(three photos by D.Mee, Derby. Blocks loaned by
British Railways, London Midland Region)

ANYONE who is interested in the two locomotives which were featured on the covers of our last issue can obtain full technical details from the Hon. Librarian (don't forget the s.a.e.!)

Advertisements

INTERESTING selection of narrow-gauge railway photographs. S.a.e. for details to M.H.Billington, The Bungalow, Attleborough Nurseries, Nuneaton.

THE LIGHT RAILWAY HANDBOOK 13/6d (post 5d.) or in 2/- parts (send for list)

MINERAL RAILWAYS (new edition) 3/2d. post included

LYNTON & BARNSTAPLE RAILWAY 7/10d. post included

OAKWOOD PRESS, Tanglewood, South Godstone, Surrey.

Advertisements cost 1d. per word, minimum 18 words.

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