

Shrewsbury
Aberystwyth
Rail
Passengers'
Association



Newsletter No. 42

March 2008



A change from the Cambrian lines. Your Editor has just returned from a railway holiday in Switzerland, and this the metre-gauge train from Chur to Arosa.

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Chairman's Message

First of all a big thank you to all SARPA members who have renewed their membership for 2008 (and the new ones to!). The messages of support that often accompany cheques are most welcome, and it seems the committee's efforts by both current and past members are appreciated by passengers at least! I've always said we're not here to win a popularity contest, and if we ruffle a few corporate feathers and upset a few people along the way that's OK as it's the end result that counts – representing the interest of passengers and campaigning for better services.

Ivor Morris stepped down as Treasurer at our AGM last October. He was Treasurer when I became Chairman in February 1999 and for a couple of years prior to that. His contribution to SARPA and rail users in Mid Wales has been great and I can't thank him enough for all the hard work and support over the years. A special mention too for Angus Eickhoff and his efforts with our website – it's been noticed all round the world and favourably received as recent comments in the ACORP magazine show.

Wales is to have a transport strategy published this spring. The WAG Minister responsible for transport Deputy First Minister and leader of Plaid Cymru - Ieuan Wyn Jones has been heard making the right noises about encouraging more use of public transport, improved and integrated services. However we rail users have long memories about promises: remember John Prescott and the ten year plan? "I will have failed if in ten years time..." - that's right John you did fail. Rhetoric is cheap, a lesson for all politicians whatever their colour, it's results that count – you can't flannel forever and Prescott's legacy is his failed boast.

I'm told the stakeholders in the TraCC area (mainly County, Town and Community Councillors) are all squabbling like cats in a sack as to what should be spent in the TraCC area's Transport Plan. All putting forward their parochial road schemes failing to see beyond the end of their own car bonnets. Investing in the Shrewsbury to Aberystwyth line is actually a strategic measure in this context as it covers a large part of the TraCC area including its largest two towns, and will bring benefits to all three local authority areas and improve links to where Mid Wales economy is tied to – the West Midlands. Frighteningly simple: an hourly service on our line is the best strategic deal on the cards for Mid Wales transport and ironically one of the cheapest options also. A real strategy has to take into account the wider picture, not narrow sectional interests.

Reforming the fares system across Wales would be a good start in addition to a few genuine expresses between North and South Wales for WAG to make. ATW is not a commercial operation in the true sense as it's heavily dependent on public subsidy of £140 million a year which is roughly 60% of its income. Taxpayers' money has to be seen to be value for money. Paying a private sector company that sort of money and then finding that taxpayers then pay wildly fluctuating rates to travel per mile depending on where they live and what line their on is simply not on. There is no commercial justification as ATW would not make a penny profit if it were not for their subsidy. The fares structure in Wales certainly does not fit a "one Wales" agenda as my analysis shows on page 8, passengers on the same train can pay anything from 9p per mile to 45p per mile: its crazy. There should be a flat rate of cost per mile travelled applicable to all Welsh rail services.

Gareth Marston
Newtown, January 2008.

News in brief

Shrewsbury

No work has started on the planned improvements mentioned in previous Newsletters. The new London Midland livery can be observed on ex Central Trains units following the franchise swap over.

Direct trains to London Marylebone have been confirmed as starting this spring. Operated by Deutsche Bahn-owned Wrexham, Shropshire and Marylebone Railways, connectivity to our line is poor.

Monday to Friday

Departures from Shrewsbury at:

06.25 08.10 11.53 15.53 18.53

Arrivals from Marylebone at:

10.08 13.41 16.38 19.41 23.15

However there's hope that the December 2008 timetable shake up will allow some re jiggling.

Newtown

The clearing of a temporary speed restriction in the Forden area has seen on time departures from Welshpool appear as much as 4 minutes early at Newtown.

Work has started on the Mid Wales Housing Association office and social housing in the upper goods yard including the demolition of some 1950's British Railways concrete buildings.

Machynlleth

ATW - Several months after the official launch of the new depot work has continued mainly in the ground under the old 1863 engine shed where material has been removed for decontamination. Some nearby residents have made a fuss about the increased noise levels overnight since the level of activity on site has been boosted. At least one has put up a for sale sign. The Old Magistrate's building at the bottom of the station drive is on the market with Sanderson's Estate Agent for £275,000.00.

Network Rail have constructed a new depot in the throat of the old lower goods yard and by raising the level of the ground alongside the UP side of the track toward Talerddig. The 1950's goods shed in the main yard has been demolished and the house at the end of the DOWN platform bought and turned into office accommodation.

Aberystwyth

The official release of the master plan for the town has seen the crazy scheme to relocate the station reincarnated in another form. Gone is the multi storey car park. However with no public money available quite where the money will be found to concrete over half of Aberystwyth into retail units is to be found remains uncertain.

Work has started on the construction of the new Assembly building rail users can see all, but screens have been built on the road side of the complex.

Driver Training

With some spare units depending on maintenance regimes, trainee drivers have been observed taking turns with empty units from Machynlleth depot: runs to Aberystwyth and Welshpool have been observed. The word around the town is that there are now more drivers than work available – does this mean ATW have the resources to implement the hourly service?

Floods

Flooding in mid to late January brought a breakdown in communication on several occasions with many passengers being given conflicting advice or non at all. Despite the consensus locally being that a spare road coach should ideally be kept on standby at Newtown to cover eventualities when bus replacements are running, local staff were overruled by control in Cardiff and chaos ensued with all the road transport at Shrewsbury and all the passengers at Machynlleth on at least one occasion. The poor customer service skills of the bus drivers were also noted, with an information vacuum in operation passengers at Welshpool in particular suffered badly.

ATW fleet news

All Arriva's fleet of 24 Class 158's are now sequentially numbered between 158817 & 158842. NFRIP data in Modern Railways magazine showed that reliability improved to 5,467 miles between failures for 2007/2008 Period 7's moving annual average compared to 4,930 for the same period the previous year. Better then - pat on the back time? With 322,993 unit miles per period the MAA of 5,467 equates to 59 unit failures causing delays per 4 week period or 2 per day. On the Cambrian – Pwllheli, Aberystwyth, Shrewsbury, Birmingham mileage is roughly 100,000 per period which gives 18 failures on average.

ATW's Senior Management insist the punctuality problems on our line are nothing to do with Arriva – but with 18 unit failures every 28 days and any knock on consequences from them, the official stats pull the rug from their feet. ATW were happy to accept the award for the most improved fleet (their Canton based Pacers) using the NFRIP data. Still South West Trains get nearly 11,000 miles between casualties on their Class 158 fleet.

New Cycle Parking Facilities for Cambrian Railway Stations

Arriva Trains Wales, the Cambrian Railways Partnership, Ceredigion County Council and TraCC, the Mid Wales Transport Consortium, have teamed up to provide and install new cycle parking facilities at the railway stations in Aberystwyth, Borth, Dovey Junction and Caersws.

‘THE CAMBRIAN’ STEAM TRAIN MACHYLLNETH – PORTHMADOG / PWLLHELI SUMMER 2008 SEASON

Dates of Operation

Monday 28th July - Friday 29th August inclusive to Porthmadog
and on a Wednesday and Friday through to Pwllheli

Timetable

Outward / Morning Journey

Machynlleth	10:05
Dovey Junction	10:12
Tywyn	10:33
Barmouth	11:02
Harlech	11:23
Minffordd	11:42
Porthmadog (Arr.)	11:49
Porthmadog <i>Wed & Fri only</i> (Dep.)	12:19
Pwllheli	12:40

Return / Afternoon Journey

Pwllheli <i>Wed & Fri only</i>	14:15
Porthmadog (Arr.)	14:45
Porthmadog (Dep.)	14:55
Minffordd	15:00
Harlech	15:23
Barmouth	15:50
Tywyn	16:22
Dovey Junction	16:53
Machynlleth	17:00

	To Porthmadog	Mon-Fri		To Pwllheli	Wed and Fri
	RETURN	SINGLE		RETURN	SINGLE
From	Machynlleth		From	Machynlleth	
Adult	£28.00	£20.50	Adult	£33.00	£23.50
Child	£16.00	£12.00	Child	£21.00	£15.00
From	Tywyn		From	Tywyn	
Adult	£22.00	£17.00	Adult	£27.00	£20.00
Child	£13.00	£10.00	Child	£18.00	£13.00
From	Barmouth		From	Barmouth	
Adult	£20.00	£15.00	Adult	£25.00	£18.00
Child	£11.00	£8.00	Child	£16.00	£11.00
			Porthmadog To Pwllheli	only	
			Adult	£7.50	£5.00
			Child	£5.00	£3.00

(Groups: A 10% discount is available to groups of 10 or over, travelling together)

On Train Services

Hot & cold drinks and cold snacks are available from the Buffet.

Bookings

Advance bookings can be made, by telephone, on **01524 737751/737753**, during normal office hours. Credit cards accepted

Other Information

Principal steam locomotives for the 2008 season: will be the Standard Black 4 76079

'The Cambrian' is operated by: West Coast Railway Company Ltd Jesson Way, Carnforth, Lancashire, LA5 9UR Tel: 01524 737751/737753 Fax: 01524 735518
E-Mail: cambrian@wrc.co.uk Website: www.steamtrain.info

2007 Steam on the Cambrian

Last year the steam trains had a slow start. The initial decision to run was not made until a few weeks before, and hence publicity did not appear until July. However, as the season went on the loadings improved. As before, No.76079, the "Pocket Rocket", ran impeccably, and was easily the master of the standard six coach set.

The trains will run again this year, with a slightly altered timetable, route and period (see page 5).

On the day of the Editor's trip, the engine was not, on the outward journey, carrying the Cambrian Coast Express headboard, but an "in-house" chalked board reading "Uncle Chuff Chuff's Woo Woo Special". Something to do with a birthday?

The View from Milepost 62 with Brigadier John Faviell

The New Year saw the rail network under the media spotlight - not a sexy crash but the staggering degree of incompetence displayed by Network Rail (still using contractors) and its overrun possession on the West Coast Main line near Rugby, and the tale of the rich man only fare increases across the network. Rail travel at its worst and guess where the media's finger pointed? Firmly at the door of the politicians and civil servants - who went into hiding. Power: without the acceptance of responsibility. There appears to have been a shift over the last few months: no longer will the media and public opinion accept that Ministers can pretend that the railways are in private hands and the blame be shifted. This has followed on from a YouGov poll in November that showed given the choice of more roads and investment in public transport, twice the number of people preferred investment in public transport to more roads. January found us being told what we all knew, that the current Government has presided over a 10-15% increase in road traffic levels which were widely deemed unacceptable and unsustainable when they came to power over a decade ago. Add to this 84-Tonne lorries. No one in their right minds wants these, and most will happily see freight go back on rail to get rid of HGV's on the road. Yet Government seems to want these so called "Gigaliners" on our roads.

There's an unwritten acceptance of taxes to pay for services that individuals cannot provide, such as defence, education and health - add to this a working public transport system. People want this provided, in congestion-locked and £1.00 a litre petrol Britain. Everyone sees the value of quality public transport provision as a solution. Government is badly out of touch with reality and public opinion - the unwritten contract with the taxpayer has been broken. The need to invest in public transport will not go away because you put up fares and cross your fingers that a slow down in the economy will dampen demand.

As the National media pointed out it now costs the dysfunctional railway £10bn a year to transport 1.1bn passengers where it cost British Rail just £3.5bn to move 750 million. Instead of trying to address this fundamental problem of structural waste, Government's answer is to get passengers to pay a higher percentage of the £10bn. Weasel words about record numbers travelling and investment ring hollow to passengers who know the day in day out reality on the trains. If those extra Billions had actually been used to invest in the rail network over the last decade.....

The 4.8% fare increase across ATW is to provide for improved services we are told. What improved services we ask? WAG paid for the extra carriages in July 2006; WAG and Network Rail are paying for the reinstated passing loops; ATW are known to be cold about the hourly service unless somebody else pays. The depot at Machynlleth? Well ATW have not invested in it out of their own kindness, rather it will pay for itself over the life of the franchise as units don't have to make a 300 mile roundtrip to Cardiff every time something more serious than a light bulb failing happens. Are ATW secretly planning a refurbishment of the Class 158's? A constant criticism - well they've been spotted with a begging bowl round the Assembly trying to get WAG to pay. In the meantime we have another 10 months at least of the unworkable timetable with only 6 out of 10 trains running on time. We really should, have the fares slashed out here!

We had our own mini meltdown on Thursday 27th December as our threadbare resources were exposed as ATW's control shuffled the pack to cope with signalling delays at Wolverhampton. Despite the new depot at Machynlleth, Thursday 10th January saw multiple unit failures throwing the service into confusion. And what's being done about the flooding in the Welshpool area and the Black bridge by Machynlleth - disrupt-

tion for nearly a whole week in mid January? Pay more for more of the unacceptable same is the message that Government is forcing on us instead of discharging its responsibilities. Yet £25 Billion could be found at a drop of a hat to prop up a load of incompetent bankers at Northern Rock. Is government only concerned with the well being of those at the top of the money tree or the people of Britain and its future generations? Brown really should be called Black.

Farcical Fares

By Gareth Marston

Fares are now a very hot topic and we have provided some analysis of the huge inconsistencies from the farcical fares system.

Like many other people I have to drive whilst on business, and get travelling expenses at 40p per mile – if I drive to Aberystwyth for example from Newtown that's an 88 mile trip so I could claim £35.20 plus any parking costs from my employer. If I get on the train and use my Cambrian Railcard I've been paying £6.25 prior to the recent fare increases (£6.60 now). There's no comparison as to which is the better deal! The 40p is a Treasury calculated rate which is not only supposed to reimburse the cost of fuel used but is for the cost of running and purchasing a vehicle, based on an average sized car that travels 10,000 miles per year. However most people do not think of travelling as costing 40p per mile by car as they argue that they would have purchased the vehicle anyway and with that comes maintenance costs. The price of buying vehicles and maintaining them has come down considerably and is a smaller percentage of average wages than in years gone by. So the individual cost of any journey is widely perceived as fuel and parking. Using my Aberystwyth example my vehicle would probably use 9-10 litres of petrol, and with petrol roughly a pound per litre a cost of around £10.00 in fuel would be a fair guess.

This is where the increasingly high prices of some rail fares are making rail uncompetitive. More so if you travel in a group. We went to the sales in Chester just after Christmas, myself partner and youngest child by car. We used the park and ride. Two big factors made us use the motor car: one was travelling time as you have to go via Shrewsbury and change – it's nearly 2 hrs by rail plus the station is some way from the city centre. The drive and transfer to bus was about an hour and twenty minutes. Secondly cost: even with our family railcard it would have been £25.80 for a return from Newtown to Chester! The fuel for a 106 mile trip plus 2 bus tickets saved us about £10.00. If we'd gone to Aberystwyth which is only 18 miles less by road we would have paid £14.55! Consistent? Fair?

Here's some walk on fares from Newtown to various destinations. Only Singles, Opens or Standard Day Return fares are available if you walk on without pre booking.

First of all once we get over the shock of the Open Return to London some patterns emerge. Singles are poor value for money full stop. Why is that you can travel twice as far for a little bit more on returns? Generally speaking the further you travel the more per mile you have to pay! However there's some real absurdities going on. No Open Returns are available to Shrewsbury or Birmingham which means buying two singles if you stay in those places overnight or longer. Then there's no Standard Day Return to Chester, Cardiff or Manchester yet you can buy SDR's to Leeds and London which are further away! Then there's the Beeching effect - Cardiff is closer to Newtown by road than Manchester yet look at the difference in rail fares!

By now the reader is thinking how do we get round this nonsense? Well SARPA will lobby away at the politicians as ever. My local MP boarded as I got off the train on way home from work tonight - I doubt he paid £170.00 and probably booked ahead to go from his constituency to London. Not all of us have the opportunity to book ahead nor is it fair. I commute 3 or 4 days a week by train and use a station with an Independent travel agent so have the means to enquire with a helpful ticket seller, plus I have a moderately good idea of what to look for. I'm lucky and can do this, most can't.

So let's not play the book ahead railway game and try and win on the day by using some cunning.

Shrewsbury and **Aberystwyth** are easy to sort out for day returns anyway as all residents living west of Shrewsbury can purchase a local rail user card for £5.00 per annum which gives a third off local journeys. **Aberystwyth** becomes £6.60 and **Shrewsbury** £3.70. Two of these are cheaper than two singles if you come back a different day from **Shrewsbury**, and pay £7.40 versus £9.80. Aberystwyth day return £13.20 vs. £15.40 open return. Of course if you're lucky enough to have a Senior or Young Person's railcard you can get a third off travelling beyond Shrewsbury. For the rest of us there's the old trick of rebooking instead. Whilst Cheap Day Returns no longer exist on our line they do elsewhere. However these are generally available after 0930 weekdays and all day at the weekends, which means if you travel on the 0840 from Newtown by the time you get to Shrewsbury you can use them. Earlier travel on the 0624 means having to book Standard Day Return's on weekdays. The examples beneath all assume that a Cambrian Railcard is used for the Newtown to Shrewsbury legs.

Chester is relatively easy to sort out: book to Shrewsbury using your Cambrian railcard and then the SDR is £9.10 and the CDR is £7.70 from Shrewsbury to Chester. £11.40 (£7.70 CDR plus £3.70 Cambrian Railcard SDR) is lot more palatable than £19.10 for a day out, and cheaper than buying a single if your only going one way. Though if you're staying overnight the £19.10 is what you should go for.

Manchester: the CDR from Shrewsbury is £17.10 and the SDR £19.20. £20.80 for a day out compared to £27.10 and cheaper than the single. Again the £27.10 overnight is the best option.

Birmingham: the SDR from Shrewsbury is £12.60, the CDR £10.40, so £14.10 is on compared to £18.50 for the day. Staying overnight? A Saver fare of £12.80 is available from Shrewsbury plus two Singles to/from Newtown on your Cambrian railcard will give £19.20. Two singles would be £26.60.

Leeds: go via Manchester and you can save nearly £13.00 on a day trip. SDR from Shrewsbury to Manchester at £19.20 then a £14.20 CDR from Manchester to Leeds, total cost £37.10. Overnight trip? The Saver from Shrewsbury to Leeds is £44.50 and valid via Birmingham. Add two Singles on your Cambrian railcard and £51.10 can be achieved versus £56.80.

London: on the 0624 buy an SDR from Newtown to Shrewsbury, then an SDR from Shrewsbury to Birmingham. Walk over to Moor Street station and buy a Chiltern Railways CDR to London Marylebone for £29.50. You'll still be in London before 1100 for a total of £45.80 versus £50.80. Go on the 0840 from Newtown and you can use a CDR between Shrewsbury and Birmingham bringing the cost down to £43.60, and still have the afternoon in London. Short circuiting the fare system if you're staying overnight without pre booking is harder. Two sets of £43.60 still beat the Open return though!

Cardiff is a route whose fares have been stitched up but some leeway is still possible. Travelling on the 0624 book a Cambrian railcard SDR to Shrewsbury, then a SDR from Shrewsbury to Hereford at £15.90 and an SDR from Hereford to Cardiff at £18.60. Total cost £38.20 versus £44.20. If you go on the 0840 there's a CDR from Shrewsbury to Hereford at £14.40 available but still only an SDR from Hereford cheapest total now £36.70.

The above are only suggested ways round. Play around (these all came from the NRES website) you'll find a combination of re booking points on longer journeys and may even beat the examples above. We wouldn't want to flag up the best short cuts in print in case they're blocked, would we?

As any analysis shows of the fare system there's no consistency to be found anywhere. The cost of buying fuel for a car is roughly the same anywhere in the UK give a or take a few small percentage points. Therefore the cost of travel per mile is roughly the same whatever journey is taken. A starting point for a fair fare system would be consistency across the UK and across all TOC's.

Still if you work the system not only can you save yourself money but you also undermine the policy of making users pay an ever higher percentage of the rail budget and all those re-bookings show as multiple journey in LENNON demonstrating soaring demand and putting more pressure on to invest!

Want to Join SARPA?

The membership year runs from January to December. The membership fee is currently (for membership up to 31 December 2008) £6.00 per annum for individuals and for organisations. Please make any cheques payable to SARPA. Donations are of course welcome.

- SARPA will lobby for better rail services.
- Act as a watchdog to safeguard the lines future.
- Meet in public once a month.
- All members will receive our quarterly Newsletter free of charge.
- Members with access to e-mail, can be included in our electronic network if they so desire.

The majority of our expenditure goes towards the cost of publishing and distributing our newsletters. We subscribe to the Shrewsbury Rail Users Federation and occasionally pay for room hire. Any surplus is held as an emergency fund for the future. None of the officers gain financially in any way from SARPA.

Please send cheques to: **SARPA Membership c/o Gareth Marston, 64 Churchill Drive, Barnfields, Newtown, Powys SY16 2LH.**

Make sure to include full name, address and telephone number and also e-mail address if you wish to become part of our electronic network.

A glimpse from the past

Two articles from *The Railway Observer* No. 400, Vol. XXXII, June 1962

Tomorrow's Railways

By Dr. R. Beeching

Chairman, British Transport Commission.

There are important facts about British Railways which even the most nostalgic of us must accept. The rail system, conceived and developed when the only alternative or complementary form of transport was the horse-drawn vehicle on poor roads, was designed for a balance between road and rail which is no longer appropriate to an age which has developed efficient motor road vehicles, operating on good road surfaces, and freely available for various forms of private and public transport. This must colour our thinking about the future shape of the railway system and about the forms of service which the railways should seek to provide.

I have no need to remind such an expert body of enthusiasts as members of the Railway Correspondence and Travel Society of the traffic surveys now being made, but I do invite your help in making the need for them properly understood. There is no doubt that pruning of little-used services is essential. This will enable us to make better use of the railways' most valuable asset - the trainload movement of dense flows of passenger and freight traffics at speed over long distances. Far too much money is being lost on uneconomic stopping services for which railways are no longer the right answer, and by the use of rail movement for too much of the collection and delivery of small freight consignments. The main system must be cleared for a greater volume of profitable, long-distance, bulk traffic.

Some of these changes may well be unpalatable, not least to those who have a special affection for railways like the readers of *The Railway Observer*, which this month reaches such a notable milestone. But the railways cannot survive by sentiment alone, and the enthusiasts who have derived pleasure and pride from past achievements will surely acknowledge the wisdom of shaping the railways to do those things, and only those things, which they can do better than other means of transport.

Brecon and the Mid-Wales line, Easter 1962

By R.E. Barby and G.E. Jones

Over the Easter weekend observation of passenger traffic on the branches serving Brecon found trains lightly loaded, many passengers being camera laden enthusiasts taking the opportunity of a trip over the lines before it is too late.

On Easter Monday, 23rd April, several early morning trains on the Mid-Wales line did not run. The first through train from Moat Lane to Brecon, which the writers joined at Builth Road, was the 9-55 a.m. consisting of two coaches hauled by 46515 (89D). The early morning 5-45 a.m. from Moat Lane which is something of a mail train was actually the first train of the day as far as Builth Wells, through passengers changing there, but on this date the connecting train was not running. The 5-45 a.m. had been worked by 46505 (89D) which was noted at Builth Wells preparing to work stock. to Builth Road for the 12-30 p.m. to Brecon.

The 1-20 p.m. Brecon to Moat Lane (the return, workipg of the 9-55 a.m. from Moat Lane) makes good conceptions at Three Cocks from Hereford and is shown at Brecon as having connections to Crewe and the North, passengers travelling via the Central Wales Line from Builth Road (High Level). On Easter Monday about six people

boarded this train at Three Cocks J junction behind 46515 and no passengers were picked up or set down until Builth Wells was reached. At Builth Road (Low Level) connections are made with the 12-20 p.m. Swansea (Victoria) to Shrewsbury, unfortunately on this occasion this train arrived at the High Level station some thirty minutes late behind 48732 (87F), several people alighted and changed trains.

Normally the 1-20 p.m. crosses the 2-50 p.m. from Moat Lane at Pantydwr but due to the delay at Builth Road it was crossed at Rhayader behind 46508 (89D); this train is the return working of the 12-45 p.m. from Builth.

At Llanidloes, due to there being no freight workings and the curtailment of early morning passenger trains, two of the three engines allocated here were on the small two road shed; these were 46504/22 both 89D. Apart from turns over the Mid-Wales line, Llanidloes has one long-distance turn, the 6-15 a.m. to Whitchurch, returning to Llanidloes with the 6-50 p.m. from Whitchurch. On Easter Monday this train was worked by 46401 (89D).

At Moat Lane the down "Cambrian Coast Express," hauled by 7800 (89D), and the 2-30 Aberystwyth to Oswestry had been held to make connections. 46515 retired to Moat Lane shed to be prepared for the 3-2 p.m. to Llanidloes returning light engine to Moat Lane. The Moat Lane freight engine 46518 (89D) was dead on the shed.

Freight over the Mid-Wales lines consists mainly of farm produce, basic slag, and the like, and comprises one daily working over the whole length, leaving Moat Lane at 8-55 a.m. and reaching Brecon at 6-45 p.m. The opposite working leaves Brecon at 9-0 a.m. and arrives Moat Lane at 4-40 p.m. There are also two shorter workings from Brecon to Builth Road.

On Easter Monday no fewer than twentyfive people joined the 5-27 p.m. from Moat Lane to Builth Wells which makes good connections from the Oswestry direction. The train was headed by 46519 (89D) and at Llanidloes the majority of the passengers alighted and left the writers in almost full possession of the train. Retention of the Moat Lane to Llanidloes section might seem to be possible. The 5-27 p.m. terminates at Builth Wells, and due to the level crossing there, 46519 caused quite a congestion of road traffic when running round the train to work back to Builth Road with the 7-40 p.m. It returns to Builth Wells with the 7-55 p.m. and then retires to Builth Road shed adjacent to the High Level station. The former shed at Builth Wells for so long inhabited by 5801 now houses two gangers permanent way trolleys.

On the former Midland Line to Hereford traffic is very thin, the first train Easter Monday was the 9-50 a.m. from Brecon, a three-coach train headed by 46509 (89D), returning from Hereford at 12-42 p.m. making connections at Three Cocks for both Brecon and Moat Lane. All Hereford line trains are handled from the Brecon end with the exception of the 9-35 a.m. pick-up goods from Hereford (Moorfields) to Three Cocks which is diagrammed to Hereford's Standard Cl.2 2-6-0, 78004. The I.C.I. tank traffic which formerly went via this route behind two Hereford panniers now runs via the Brecon to Newport line to Fleur-de-lis, thence over the connection to the Neath to Pontypool line and thus to Hereford via Pontypool Road.

A normal service was provided on Tuesday, 24th April, and the writers boarded the 9-2 a.m. from Hereford consisting of three coaches and 46508 (89D). Permanent way work was in progress near Eardisley (the proposed terminus of the line to be retained under present closure proposals) and a speed restriction of 15 m.p.h. was in force over the bridge spanning the River Wye at Whitney, a flagman is also provided here. At Talgarth 46519 (89D) was passed with the pick-up goods from Brecon. Brecon was reached in good time at 10-44 a.m. Owing to the peculiar service provided over the Neath line, this was not visited and attention was turned to the lines of the former Brecon and

Merthyr Railway. The first train over this line was the 8-3 a.m. from Newport which was formed of two coaches behind 0-6-0PT 3747 (86A). 3747 worked the 12-10 p.m. return to Newport with few people aboard. At Tallylyn 46515 was crossed with the 9-55 a.m. from Moat Lane and at the next station, Talybont-on-Usk 2243 (86A) was passed with the morning freight to Brecon. Down trains (Brecon to Newport) take water at Pentir Rhiw, to enable them to tackle the 1-in-38 climb to Torpantau summit. Up trains take water at Torpantau after the climb to this place from the other side. On 24th April 3691 (86A) was passed here with the 11-15 a.m. ex-Newport. This is the return working of the 7-35 a.m. from Brecon, one of the two Brecon turns over this line, the other being the 2-5 p.m. from Brecon returning from Newport at 6-55 p.m.

At Pant, 0-6-2T 5645 (86G) was seen with the daily I.C.I. tank train from Dowlais and at Ogilvie Village Halt one of the few railcar turns was passed, the 1-38 p.m. Bargoed to Fochriw which returns with the 2-25 p.m. to Bargoed. At Pengam connections are made for New Tredegar and Newport is reached nearly three hours after leaving Brecon.

Associated with the Newport to Brecon is the 2 1/4 mile branch from Pengam to New Tredegar now facing complete closure. All workings over this line (which runs parallel to, but on the opposite side of the valley to, the Rhymney line) are worked by Ebbw Junction 0-6-0PT's with two or three coach trains. The mainstay of this branch are colliers and school children, and several workmen's trains are run from Machen. On Easter Monday all services on the branch were cancelled but a full service was restored on 24th April. The 2-10 p.m. from Pengam was worked by 3661 (86A); no passengers used the advertised stations but workmen were picked up at two unadvertised colliery halts.

At New Tredegar 3661 ran round its train to work the 2-43 p.m. train to Machen. Two brake vans were attached in the rear to be used by 3661 when it took up a freight diagram at Machen later in the day. The writers were the sole occupants of this train as far as Pengam where they alighted to await the 2-5 p.m. from Brecon. This arrived some fifteen minutes late with 2218 (86A) and three coaches. Passenger traffic on the lower end of the line is somewhat greater than at the northern end.

Power for most of the Brecon lines is supplied by Brecon shed which is officially in the Cardiff Valleys District and coded 88K. Despite this, no allocation has been made or 88K plates used and the depot relies on Oswestry (89D) and Ebbw Junction (Newport) (86A) to supply engines for the workings. L.M.S. Cl.2 2-6-0.s are used for the Hereford and Mid-Wales lines, a G.W.R. 0-6-0PT works over the Neath line, while the Newport line and local shunts are worked by Collett 0-6-0s and four 0-6-0 PT'S. On 22nd April the shed contained 2218/40/7, 3691, 3706/14 (all H6A) and 465071 911012113 (all 89D). Nominally two Brecon engines are stationed at Builth Road but these are also supplied by Oswestry, on 22nd April they were 46508/19 (both 89D).

A further public meeting to discuss the proposed closures of these lines to Brecon was due to take place at Brecon Town Hall on 15th May 1962. It is understood that the local 'bus company covering Mid-Wales section is also seeking to reduce its services so that Mid-Wales may face a future without public transport of any kind should the proposed closures be allowed to take place.



Busy Aberystwyth: on Wednesday 30th January the head of the loop is occupied by track tamper 73105; the 0921 is arriving from Birmingham, and the 0840 arrival is stalled in the loop before returning to Machynlleth after the 0927 departure.



From the Cambrian News

The line continues to feature regularly in the paper - both in the news sections, and in the letters page.

A recurring theme is the concern of Llandre and Bow Street residents with the siting of the new radio masts for the ERTMS scheme:

6th December

"Network Rail admitted this week it had no detailed information about the spread of radiation from trackside communication masts planned for Bow Street, Llanbadarn Fawr and Llandre.

A drawing provided by the utility claimed to show the masts' microwave signals would be broadcast in a sausage-shaped band along the line, so that the spill-over of radiation would be 'significantly lower' than from mobile-phone base-stations."

Network Rail had held a second meeting with Llandre residents in the previous week, following pressure from Ceredigion MP Mark Williams.

Carol Morris wrote in the same issue detailing the behaviour of drunken young men on the 1928 from Shrewsbury to Aberystwyth on the previous Saturday, who swore, shouted and took turns to stagger to the toilet to smoke. She noted that the conductor "wisely stayed hidden, only scuttling through the carriages when we pulled into Aberystwyth".

13th December

Tudor Wynn-Williams, a physicist living in Dolybont, was reported as suggesting that "repeated statements by Network Rail that they would use technology which minimised the spread of radiation either side of the line were false;

The width of signal beams could be halved simply by selecting a different kind of antenna from the same German company's catalogue at little extra cost."

He did however state that microwave radiation levels from the trackside base-stations proposed by Network Rail would be lower than the UK limit for public exposure at all housing along the line.

Network Rail spokesman Ben Herbert said that they are looking very seriously at what Mr Wynn-Williams has said, but that these are not mobile-phone antennas.

10th January

Geoffrey Walker detailed a journey at the end of December. The West Coast being closed, the helpful ticket staff at Aberystwyth suggested he should change at Birmingham into the Reading-Paddington service, changing stations to do so. A 15 minute time was rather tight, but as the ATW train was on time it was possible. His return journey was also on time. He also praised the trolley staff between Aberystwyth and Shrewsbury for their work in providing refreshments, and keeping the carriages clean and free from litter.

Fifty Years Ago.....

We are all used to having, even making, complaints regarding the current Cambrian lines service, often making the comparison with how it used to be. Recently I found myself idly browsing through the Western Region, British Railways, Passenger Timetable for the period 16th September 1957 to 8th June 1958 - that is exactly fifty years ago - and found the comparisons with today's service very instructive, even at times quite startling. Yes, I know we have lost a great deal during those fifty years - many connecting lines and stations have closed - but there is much about the service level itself that compares very badly with today's timetable.

Fastest service to -	From Aberystwyth	From Machynlleth	From Newtown
Shrewsbury	3hr 22mn	2hr 21mn	1hr 13mn
Birmingham Snow Hill	4hr 20mn	3hr 19mn	2hr 11mn
London Paddington	6hr 45mn	5hr 44mn	4hr 36mn
Manchester London Road	5hr 40mn	4hr 39mn	3hr 36mn
Slowest service to*			
Shrewsbury	3hr 38mn	2hr 45mn	1hr 38mn
Birmingham Snow Hill	5hr 21mn	4hr 28mn	3hr 23mn
London Paddington	7hr 45mn	7hr 40mn	6hr 35mn
Manchester London Road	6hr 35mn	7hr 12mn	6hr 07mn

* Ignoring a highly convoluted overnight connecting service.

First of all, if we look at departures from Aberystwyth, Machynlleth and Newtown to four popular destinations - Shrewsbury, Birmingham, London and Manchester - in the table below, we see quite a contrast! Not unexpectedly the fastest services were all by, or connecting with, the *Cambrian Coast Express*, which in those days conveyed a full Restaurant Car all the way from Aberystwyth to Paddington. In addition to this train there were only three other trains running between Aberystwyth and Shrewsbury, but not beyond. There were two additional services available with a change of trains at Welshpool, the mainline still being to Oswestry and Whitchurch. The earliest arrival into Shrewsbury from Machynlleth and Newtown, but not Aberystwyth being 0908 - not much of a commuter service in those days! From Aberystwyth an arrival into Shrewsbury was not possible before 1318 and the final departure, to anywhere, from Aberystwyth was an incredibly early 1800.

I haven't mentioned Cardiff in this round-up as the journey via Shrewsbury was very long-winded - as far as Aberystwyth was concerned it was much better to travel via Carmarthen, despite the two-and-a-half hours needed to traverse the Aberystwyth to Carmarthen line with its numerous stations and halts - how much different that route could be as a "modern" railway!

Having examined the "up" service, things were not much better in the "down" direction. As with the "up" services the *Cambrian Coast Express* and its connections formed the fastest service and the only through service from beyond Shrewsbury. There were four additional trains running through from Shrewsbury to Aberystwyth, plus one very early morning connection at Welshpool. Newtown enjoyed a further connecting

Fastest service from	To Newtown	To Machynlleth	To Aberystwyth
Manchester London Road	(4hr 07mn)	(4hr 52mn)	(5hr 40mn)
London Paddington	4hr 22mn	5hr 07mn	5hr 55mn
Birmingham Snow Hill	2hr 15mn	3hr 00mn	3hr 48mn
Shrewsbury	1hr 09mn	1hr 54mn	2hr 38mn
Slowest service from*			
Manchester London Road	(5hr 19mn)	(6hr 23mn)	(7hr 30mn)
London Paddington	(5hr 50mn)	(6hr 50mn)	(7hr 36mn)
Birmingham Snow Hill	(3hr 40mn)	(4hr 38mn)	5hr 38mn
Shrewsbury	1hr 39mn	2hr 43mn	3hr 45mn

* Again ignores overnight connections.

service on Saturday evenings, and on Mondays to Fridays a connection from London (Euston) via Crewe and Whitchurch arrived in the mid evening.

As far as the Coast Line I've concentrated on the link between Aberystwyth and the main coast towns - Barmouth, Porthmadog (Portmadoc in those days) and Pwllheli. The present arrangement with changes and long waits at Machynlleth is inconvenient, but received opinion is that it was once better. Admittedly in 1957/8 waits at Dovey Junction were much shorter, but overall the journey times do not differ that greatly. Travelling north from Aberystwyth to Pwllheli in 1957/8 there were three trains requiring only a change at Dovey Junction with an additional pair requiring an extra change; one at Barmouth, the other at Porthmadog; plus one further service termination at Porthmadog. Fastest time from Aberystwyth to Pwllheli: 3hr 15mn, and the slowest: 4hr. Today we have eight services with one connection at Machynlleth, completing the journey in around 3hr 30mn. The picture is not dissimilar in the southern direction from Pwllheli. In 1957/8 there were only two services requiring just the one change at the junction, together with three more requiring an additional change at Barmouth. Fastest journey time from Pwllheli to Aberystwyth: 3hr 05mn (but very early in the morning) and the slowest 4hr 26mn. Again, today we enjoy eight "up" services the full length of the line with the usual journey time of 3hr 40mn. On service level alone this compares favourably with 1957/8, whilst journey times overall are not dissimilar.

I haven't even counted the minimal Sunday service of 1957/8 into this survey as it was of precious little use to anyone - a very early down morning service (newspapers) and early evening return (mail).

Today's services may not be all we would wish, but it is clear from the small number of examples set out above that, in terms of numbers of trains, through trains (although the lack of a through London service must always be regretted) and overall journey time, we have come a long way from the railway of 1957/8.

Robert J. Knight

Websites

Our website <http://sarpa.info> **Webmaster Angus Eichoff**

Website host is object4.net

Other sites of interest:

Arriva Trains Wales

www.arrivatrainswales.co.uk/

National Rail Enquiries

www.nationalrail.co.uk/

Train and Bus Information Midlands

www.centro.org.uk/wwwroot/HomePage.asp

LondonMidland

www.londonmidland.com/index.html

Virgin Trains

www.virgintrains.co.uk/default.aspx

Chiltern Railways

www.chilternrailways.co.uk/

Network Rail

www.networkrail.co.uk/

Railfuture/Railway Development Society

www.railfuture.org.uk/

Cambrian Rail Partnership

www.thecambrianline.co.uk/

The Association of Community Rail Partnerships (Acorp)

www.acorp.uk.com

Website of the new Wrexham to London company

www.wrexhamandshropshire.co.uk/index.html

North Wales Coast Railway

<http://www.nwrail.org.uk/>

SARPA Meeting dates and venues 2008

April	5 th	Saturday	1145	Aberystwyth	RAFA Club
May	6 th	Tuesday	1900	Newtown	Bell Inn
June	7 th	Saturday	1200	Borth	Victoria Inn
July	5 th	Saturday	1200	Tywyn	Talylyn Railway
August	2 nd	Saturday	Summer trip please join 0633 ex Birmingham New St & 0905 ex Machynlleth for mystery trip on Cambrian Coast.		
September	2 nd	Tuesday	1915	Welshpool	Pinewood Tavern
October	4 th	Saturday	1115	Machynlleth	Tabernacle
				Annual General Meeting	
November	4 th	Tuesday	1900	Newtown	Bell Hotel
December	6 th	Saturday	1145	Aberystwyth	RAFA Club

Useful addresses

Arriva Trains Wales:

St Mary's House, 47 Penarth Road, Cardiff CF10 5DJ. Tel 0845 6061 660
Email: customer.services@arrivatrainswales.co.uk

Network Rail:

Community Relations, Railtrack House, Euston Square, London NW1 2EE

Newtown Station Travel

The Railway Station, Old Kerry Road, Newtown, Powys SY16 1BP. Tel. 01686 621966
E-mail info@newtownstation.co.uk

The Association of Train Operating Companies:

ATOC, 3rd Floor, 40 Bernard Street, London WC1N 1BY

Wrexham and Shropshire: Great Central House, Marylebone Station, Melcombe Place, London NW1 1JJ. Tel. 0845 260 5233

London Midland

London Midland, PO Box 4323, Birmingham B2 4JB. Tel. 0121 6342040

Association of Community Rail Partnerships

Rail & River Centre, Canal Side, Civic Hall, Slaithwaite, Huddersfield HD7 5AB

Virgin Trains

Virgin Trains, Customer Relations, PO Box 713, Birmingham, B5 4HH. Tel. 0870 789 1234

Traveline Cymru for all public transport information

www.traveline-cymru.org.uk Tel.0870-6082608

Alison Teague, Rail Franchise Manager

Rail and New Roads Division, Transport Wales, Welsh Assembly Government, Cathays Park, Cardiff, CF10 3NQ. Direct Line (029) 2082 6561

For Train Times and Fares Call:

08457 48 49 50 (24hrs)
0845 60 40 500 (Welsh Language Service)
0845 60 50 600 (Textphone)

For ticket reservations please call: 0870 9000 773

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