

WEARDALE RAILWAY

NEWSLETTER No 66 - 21 OCTOBER 2012

POLAR EXPRESS SPECIAL ISSUE

LEAMSIDE LINE PURCHASE

SIX LOCOS ON THE LINE IN ONE DAY



- **POLAR EXPRESS : AN UPDATE FROM BARS PRESIDENT ED ELLIS :** “I am really grateful for the strong public support for Weardale Railway’s Polar Express, as evidenced by the advance sale of over 10,000 tickets by October 14. Many of the December operating dates now have two 500-seat trains sold out, and sales are increasing every day. It’s clear that the Weardale Railway will host more people between November 15 and the end of 2012 than ever before in such a short period of time. We hope this transformational event will benefit Stanhope and the entire Dale, and will provide good exposure for the Railway and its staff and volunteers, so that people will choose to come back and ride with us in the spring, summer and fall, not just at Christmas. The staff and volunteers, plus the larger community, still have the large challenge of handling and delighting the Polar Express attendees. This is our time to shine, and show everyone what a fine railway we have, in a beautiful part of England. How many people will we have? I am betting that the 10,000 tickets sold to date will be less than half of the total sales, and that we will need to add runs on some days. Thanks to all our stakeholders for making this possible.”
- **STOP PRESS :** Since sending the above earlier this week , Ed has updated the news as follows : “13,500+ Polar Express passengers for Weardale as of today, October 21, we are now adding trips to accommodate the demand.”
- **BUSY DAY ON THE WEARDALE RAILWAY :** Saturday October 20th will be remembered for some time by Trust Chairman David Scott. It was his first day volunteering as Controller since the new metal staffs and associated new procedures had been introduced (see Newsletter 61). Not only did he have to contend with the new system – it was a day when he had six operational locomotives /units to deal with and on one occasion had to use all three metal ‘tickets’ which the new system provides. The six were : Wilbert, the Bubble car, an outgoing coal train Class 66, the WR Class 33 and on the Charter a Class 47 and the K4 Steam engine. This is probably the busiest the Railway has been for many decades. At the end of 12 hours David reckoned he had taken or made over 100 phone calls.



The Polar Express is on offer at 19 railways, or maybe its railroads, in the USA – three of them are operated by Weardale Railway majority owner Iowa Pacific. Here are two photos from previous years.

- STAFFING THE POLAR EXPRESS** :As well as the usual operational staff (see separate item) the Polar operation requires upwards of 40 staff per train. For those who missed it here is the information From the Agency notice : “The UK’s brand new official Polar Express attractions have a number of exciting seasonal job opportunities available at two UK locations. These are ideal positions for those that truly do believe in the magic of Christmas. Inspired by the hit Warner Bros. film *The Polar Express* and book by Chris Van Allsburg, the officially licensed train rides are coming to the UK for the first time from 16th November to 30th December 2012. The Weardale Railway is looking for enthusiastic individuals who are happy to perform, entertain and who like working with people. Jobs on offer include cast members such as Santa Claus’, elves, singing chefs and of course train conductors. Production jobs such as car park attendants, station attendants, cleaners, ticket office advisors and gift shop assistants are also available. Set to the sounds of the motion picture soundtrack, pyjama-clad passengers will relive the magic of the story and see their favourite characters come to life as they are whisked away aboard The Polar Express on a magical round trip to the North Pole. During the journey, the Conductor will punch tickets and Chefs will serve hot chocolate, just like in the film. Passengers will also enjoy a sing song and a special reading of the Van Allsburg classic. At the North Pole, Santa will board the train to greet the children and will be giving a special sleigh bell to all those who believe. **For job vacancies in Weardale please contact Chantelle Jones at Baltic Recruitment Services on 01325 731061**



Eleven coaches and two locomotives stand in Stanhope station on October 20th on the Railway Touring Company charter from Preston. At the head of the train for the return journey is K4 ‘The Great Marquess’ Photo : Keith Moorcroft.



Having sent Thomas the Tank Engine to US railroads – now it's the turn of the Polar Express to come to the UK and bring scenes like these to the Weardale and Dartmoor Railways – the coaches however will be Mk2 stock.

- POLAR EXPRESS : PUBLICITY CAMPAIGN :** We mentioned in an earlier Newsletter that a firm had been appointed to handle the publicity on both the Weardale and Dartmoor operations. The firm was Cube Creative, here are some excerpts from their account of the campaign from their website : “The Cube PR team took to Skype to present their ideas to the Chicago, Illinois based railroad company in charge of the festive train rides in the UK and many locations in the USA, inspired by the hit book and film telling the Christmas story of a railway journey to the North Pole. A pitch dressed in their favourite pair of pyjamas was the winning formula for Cube PR when they landed a contract worth £100,000 to promote the official Polar Express™ rides in the UK. they beat off competition from four national agencies to win the prestigious contract – to the delight of the rapidly expanding team. Cube PR, which is part of full service agency Cube Creative Group, is managing all elements of the PR and media buying campaign to promote the rides when they arrive in the UK for the first time. Debra Goodman, Special Events Director for the Iowa Pacific Group of companies said: “As we are based in America and have to put a lot of trust in the people handling the campaign on our behalf, it’s important to have an honest relationship with the agency we are working with. We immediately loved the down to earth approach demonstrated by the Cube PR team, and were impressed by the creativity they showed in the ideas put forward at the pitch.” Cube’s PR Director Alison Short said “To have won such a huge national PR account is a massive coup for Cube PR and we’re very excited about the possibilities such an opportunity presents us with. We’re sure it’s going to be a fun and fulfilling campaign to be involved with. It’s a good job my kids love this film as its going to be a permanent fixture in my life.”



The Cube Creative team in their pyjamas ready to make their pitch for the Polar publicity contract. See news item.



Heading west into the setting sun, Wilbert hauls the train back to Stanhope. Photo : Peter Baker.

- POLAR EXPRESS AT THE DARTMOOR RAILWAY :** Alistair Gregory reports : Stephen Goodwin has moved in to the Okehampton office as the Polar Express Operations Manager, and is spearheading the work on the ground to make sure that the carriages and all of the other construction and specialist tasks stay on schedule. We are also excited to welcome on board Tiffany Arthurs, our new Event Coordinator for Dartmoor. She has hit the ground running and already made a significant impact on the project.” See elsewhere in this Newsletter photos of the newly prepared coaches in the station at Okehampton.

- COACHES BEING PREPARED FOR POLAR EXPRESS :** The trains for the Polar Express will be composed of eleven Mk2 coaches and a generator carriage. Alistair Gregory who is overseeing the preparations sent us the following :- “ We have made fantastic progress since the last update, with the coaches out of storage that arrived at Dartmoor two weeks ago now steam cleaned outside, repainted, cleaned inside and work arising identified. In the next few weeks they will all go through a programme of wiring modifications to allow them to be supplied off the generator car rather than the unreliable Motor Alternator arrangement, always considered the weak link in Mark 2 air conditioned stock. They will also have their interiors deep cleaned by a specialist cleaning contractor and damaged windows and defective doors continue to be tackled admirably by Rampart Ltd. The generator car, known as ‘Rocket’ because of the large on board power generating capability, has been checked over by local engineer and DRSA supporter David Trant and after a few tweaks to the fuel pump and voltage regulator it is once again running clean and quiet and exporting power. Once again both Steve Goodwin and I are extremely grateful for the fantastic work of the Dartmoor Railway Supporters Association Carriage and Wagon Team, and especially Dave Clegg and John Coxon for their coordination of volunteers, guidance and support. Not only have we had some great turnouts of volunteers who are great painters and hard workers, but they are also becoming closet experts in Mark 2 carriage restoration – a skill invaluable to us. Meanwhile at the Rampart Ltd main works at Barrow Hill, carriages for the Weardale Polar Express continue to be repaired, restored and repainted. The first coach is due to arrive at Wolsingham on Monday 22 October.”



On the Dartmoor Railway, volunteers are painting the Virgin liveried Mk2 coaches Southern Green at Okehampton Station on the former Southern Railway route to Plymouth. On the right can be seen the generator car referred to in the news item . Both Photos : Alistair Gregory.

- POLAR EXPRESS : MORE BACKGROUND NEWS :** I am indebted to Jo Brown and the WR Company team at Stanhope (Dean Boyes, Bill Warriner and Graham Isom) for the following information. Design work is taking place on the 2013 Weardale Railway brochure/timetable so that it can be ready to hand out to passengers on the Polar Express trains. The main publicity campaign will focus on Radio, TV and family magazines plus posters, banners and leaflets for local marketing – the internet campaign will continue throughout. Each train will have c160 First class seats (4 coaches) and 340 second class seats (7 coaches). A local contractor has been engaged to provide coach decorations and station lighting plus the lighting at the North Pole. The North Pole design is a closely guarded secret and it is being constructed by a professional set builder. There will be a Polar Express shop at Stanhope to sell the branded merchandise and the Trust is planning to have the station shop open every operating day. There will be additional catering facilities at Stanhope. Car parking arrangements and signage etc. have been agreed – more information on this when everything is finalised. Staffing will include car parking marshalling and attendants as well as station stewards,
- FACEBOOK SITE FOR WR POLAR EXPRESS :** <https://www.facebook.com/pages/The-Polar-Express-attraction-UK/145666798907533>



At a secret location in the depths of Weardale, elves (aka ‘The Sunday Gang’) have been spending several weekends clearing the site of what will be the North Pole terminus of the Polar Express. The worksite is guarded by Mike Wood’s dog ‘Monty’ in regulation safety gear. These photos were taken by John Lewins. Also note the excellent turnout of young volunteers.

- POLAR EXPRESS : HOW TO BOOK, ETC :** For those who may not have kept the earlier notifications and are considering booking, here are the details :- The Polar Express train ride schedules include 5.00pm and 7.30pm departures between November 16 and December 30. Advanced booking is required and tickets are on sale now. Prices start from £20 per adult and £15 per child (ages 2 – 12). A limited number of First Class tickets are also available and are £35 per adult and £25 per child (ages 2 – 12), or £5 for children under the age of 2. Along with upgraded seating, all First Class passengers will receive their own Polar Express ceramic souvenir cocoa mug. For tickets and event information, call **08000 23 23 83** or visit <http://www.UKPolarExpressRide.com> The current days of operation are on the WRCIC website, but as Ed Ellis mentioned in his update extra trains are now planned. At the moment trains run every day except Tuesday (and Christmas and Boxing Day) with, at the moment, only one train on Thursdays. As a tip the phone office (it is in Alamosa , Colorado) is usually manned between 11am and throughout the day until 3am the following morning. **STOP PRESS :** The online booking section of the website now gives you an idea of which trains are completely sold out and when the extra trains are running.



The ‘Bubble’ Car was out on the line again on October 5th. Seen on the left in the bay platform at Bishop Auckland West being passed by Class 66 (66418) hauling a loaded coal train on the connecting line. On the right E 55012 rests in the platform at Stanhope on the same day. Both photos : Peter Baker.

- ‘WILBERT’ OWNERS VISIT WEARDALE :** Peter Adams and Rob, co owners of the leased ‘austerity’ tank engine ‘Wilbert’ which is being used as a replacement for No 40 this summer, visited the railway in early October. Jo Brown reports :- “. They arranged to call in and see how Wilbert was getting on and to ride our track. They were met by Trevor Horner who travelled with them from Bishop Auckland to Stanhope where I then met them. They were particularly interested to hear about the Polar Express and were very impressed by the beautiful countryside and the ride they had just experienced. After a look around the station and a photo opportunity, I dropped them at the Black Bull at Frosterley for a well-earned bite to eat and a pint of real ale.” Next weekend will be the last operational duty (October 27,28) before the loco goes to its next location.



Wilbert was in action on the weekend of 13th October when its owners from the Forest of Dean Railway paid a call. see news item, Peter Adams, stands on the left. On the right Wilbert in action this last weekend at Witton Crossing. Photo left : Trevor Horner and right Peter Baker.

- WEARDALE RAILWAY OWNER PURCHASES LEAMSIDE TRACK** : As mentioned in the last Newsletter, Network Rail were about to start removing the rail from the disused line from Ferryhill to Pelaw. Trevor Horner was quick off the mark and sends us this report :- Through personal contacts working within NR I managed to track down the Project Manager in charge of the contract for recovering the track. This led to an approach to NR's National Delivery Service (NDS) department to enquire about purchasing rail from the site. I targeted getting Bull Head rail, as this was our most urgent need, and I calculated that NR would be unlikely to go to the trouble of recovering this product. After a meeting with NR's site managers it was confirmed that BH rail was to be scrapped and that, unfortunately, this had already commenced working south from Fencehouses. I quickly negotiated for the cutting up of the rail to stop and a quick calculation of what remained throughout the branch was done. This led to a request for Weardale Railway to purchase up to 3 miles worth of rail – some 500+ rails in total. Following some brief negotiations on details of what NR could offer; an all-in price for rail and any arising BH components, including delivery, was arrived at. I put this to Ed Ellis and very quickly had an instruction to get what we could and he would support it. The first materials have already been delivered to Wolsingham, comprising a skip load of BH keys and Pandrol fastenings; the latter being considered for a loop extension for Dartmoor. I expect the first rails to be arriving in 4 – 6 weeks as the uplift progresses to the next BH track between Sherburn and Whitwell. My thanks go to NDS managers Tim Brady and Marion Reddy, Project Manager Chris McDaid and Site Manager Neil Hemingway for all the effort and support they have provided to make this happen.



The two locomotives on the October 20th Charter. West Coast Railways Class 37 : 37706 at the west end and K4 61994 at the east end prior to its return to York. Photos : Keith Moorcroft.

- POLAR EXPRESS ON THE NET** : As mentioned elsewhere ticket sales have exceeded expectations for this stage of the operation. After the local press launch in July, publicity has been mainly via the internet. Traffic on the Company website is up tenfold with links from other sources being increasingly utilised. The main 'traditional' media launch starts on the 22nd October in

London and on the following day in the North East. There is a Twitter site : <https://twitter.com/PolarExpressUK> which is becoming increasingly active. Some sites are offering the chance of winning tickets, for example : <http://babyworld.co.uk/2012/10/win-exclusive-family-ticket-to-the-polar-express/> and information and links to the official ticket booking site have appeared on numerous websites such as : <http://forums.moneysavingexpert.com/showthread.php?t=4212687> “This Christmas the Weardale Railway plays host to the Polar Express - a recreation of the popular film. I am beyond excited having just booked tickets for me and my little one. It's the first time they have had this outside America” Also on : <http://www.netmums.com/coffeehouse/netmums-chat-clubs-795/seasonal-chat-arts-crafts-99/828147-were-going-polar-express.html> where there is a long thread of comments, here's one : “So glad you posted this, my son is obsessed with trains and loves the film - I have just called my mum to tell her about this as her partner is also a massive train enthusiast and they are booking it to take my son and my niece who will be 5 and 4 just before New Year! My sister and I just watched the video on the website and cried, I know that sounds so weird, we must be very emotional today (more so than normal!) Thank you so much!” There are many more links to the event demonstrating how critical the internet has become in promoting events such as Polar Express.



Not Weardale but great photos from Youth Team member Chris Simpson who has been getting his photographs into National publications regularly. On the left K4 No 61994 is seen clinging to the cliff top at Huntcliff bound for Boulby and on the right 37706 passing the NRM Locomotion Shildon, whilst A4 60009 Union of South Africa works shuttles?



REMINDER :The Weardale Railway Trust AGM is to be held at 10.30am on Saturday 17th November. It will be in the Stanhope Methodist Church Schoolroom, which is in the High Street (not Front Street). Parking is Available. Don't forget your membership card.