
West Somerset Railway

Introduction

Just like the Swanage Railway, the WSR served a popular holiday resort but was a victim of the rail network cutbacks in the 1960s.

Thanks to the efforts of volunteers and the support of the community it has been brought back to life, and once again provides a valuable transport link for that area of West Somerset, whilst also representing a significant tourist attraction in its own right.

This collection of images was compiled from two separate visits in August 2009 and 2011. My usual captioned slides are augmented with additional railway shots, and coastal views of the area.

Tony Bartlett, Hungerford Camera Club

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On holiday in West Somerset, and hugely impressed by the whole WSR operation. Helpful staff, immaculate stations, interesting stock and very regular trains generally well on time. Stopped off at Williton Station on the way to our hotel, just in time to catch 'heavy freight' 2-8-0 no 3850 departing with a train for Bishop's Lydeard. Evidently the sun is shining in spite of a discouraging forecast before we set off. Thu 20Aug 14:56 f5 1/1000 82mm


Minehead Harbour at dusk


MINEHEAD


G W R


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CIGARETTE


88
88
S D J R
4P
50



One of the diesel turns on the West Somerset Railway is being operated by a Class 35 'Hymek' D7017, seen here departing from the end of the line at Minehead. These locos were nicknamed after the hydraulic transmission selected for this mid-range design by the Western Region of BR when replacing steam traction in the 1960s. 50 years later on they may well have been called 'Maybachs' after their German diesel engine - the Maybach brand is now associated with high-end automotive products - or more likely 'baby Maybachs' in deference to the twin-engined Westerns and Warships. Fri 19Aug 17:37 f5.6 1/400 iso400 120mm


3850
86
E





Birthday treat for this year was a full day spent on a round trip on the WSR, stopping off at three stations along the way. The day started from the nearest station at Washford where 9351 arrives facing forwards - tender-first running is a consideration to be taken into account when planning shots. The adjacent segregated tracks are part of the Somerset & Dorset Rly museum co-located at Washford.

Fri 21Aug 10:41 f4 1/400 63mm


PORTLAND
BLUE
CIRCLE
CEMENT
BEWARE OF THE TRAINS



First stopping off point was the far end of the line - a busy scene at Bishop's Lydeard as passengers come and go, and the loco prepares to run round its train for the return journey. An advantage of taking the view from well back (in addition to improving the composition) is that those pesky railway photographers become less intrusive! At least, one viewer has been trained to stand clear of the line of sight! Fri 21Aug 11:56 f4 1/640 123mm



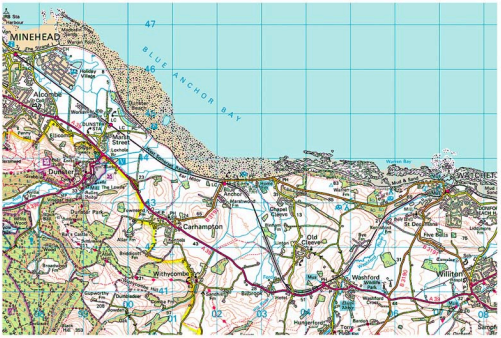
At short notice we heard that 60163 Tornado would be operating on the WSR, but not during my planned visit to the railway. So it was not a complete surprise to find the loco in light steam on the depot at Bishops Lydeard on reaching the other end of the line. The best shot was to be had from the platform end - not even lineside pass holders were allowed into the depot itself - but this hardly qualifies as a classic shot! Interesting enough though is the view of GWR 2-6-2T 5553, complete with headboard on the bunker end, getting ready to work the 'Quantock Belle' lunchtime dining special. Sun 21Aug 12:20 f4.8 1/640 iso450 63mm



Standards of presentation have clearly been maintained since my previous visit to the WSR judging by the immaculate scene on the platform at Williton station. In fact there have been further developments with the appearance of a 'new' footbridge which has yet to have its ornate wooden roofing fitted over the steel formers already in place. West Country Pacific 34046 Braunton must be a relatively recent arrival on the railway - it makes an impressive sight as it brings in a passing train heading for Bishops Lydeard, although the use of such large locos on a rural branch line was not typical in steam days. Sun 21Aug 13:14 f9 1/640 iso320 72mm


34046
2
WILLITON





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3850 is one of the GWR's 2-8-0 'heavy freight' locomotives, seen heading inland briefly on leaving Watchet station. The line has to circumvent the coastal obstacle of Cleeve Hill as it makes its way onwards to Minehead, opting to follow the route of the old mineral railway from the Brendon Hills along the Washford River valley then over a summit cutting just beyond Washford village. True to its origins, 3850 provides quite the most uncomfortable ride for its passengers, with each piston stroke being felt in the small of the back - in stark contrast to the effortless and smooth delivery of the WC Pacific. Sun 21Aug 13:24 f7.1 1/640 iso320 72mm


Watchet Harbour



Big engines abound on the West Somerset railway - to wit another 2-8-0 tender engine, of a class specially designed to work trains over the heavily graded Somerset & Dorset route through the Mendip hills. No. 88 looks very elegant in its subdued blue livery as its stops at Dunster station for the final leg of our round trip. It's a minor inconvenience in travelling on preserved railways that you don't easily get the best photo-opportunities when you are largely confined to station areas. I've come to the platform end for the best light but have had to make do with a rather tight view of the train in the space available. Sun 21Aug 17:32 f5.6 1/640 iso250 78mm


View from Dunster Castle



Back at Minehead, 5553 is adding the stock of the 'Quantock Belle' to the front of the final departure of the day. Coupling up is being supervised by railway staff in hi-vis vests while passengers wait to board - each to their own section of the train. So the train now loads to 11 coaches - beyond the scope of the 2-6-2 tank engine over the line summits - so I suspect that some additional motive power was provided, perhaps the incoming S&D 2-8-0 loco running round for the return working. This feels like an impromptu arrangement, perhaps caused by some operational delay during the high-season schedule. Sun 21Aug 17:49 f5 1/640 iso250 48mm


W21174
3650



'Heavy freight' 3850 brings the last arrival of the day over the level crossing and into Minehead station, passing Class 25 D7523 stabled opposite the signal box. In this view the railway can be seen traveling almost dead-straight for 3 miles, past Dunster station before performing a foreshortened zigzag - to the left to Blue Anchor (out of shot) then back in front of Old Cleeve church and curving left again through the summit cutting near Washford. The thick smoke is nothing to do with the railway (for once) - a double-decker bus is burning fiercely after a road accident on the A39 the other side of Dunster. Sun 21Aug 18:37 f6.3 1/640 iso250 135mm