

RAILWAY MEMORIES EVOKED AS THE WEST SOMERSET RAILWAY MARKS 40 YEARS OF TRAINS RUNNING BETWEEN MINEHEAD AND BISHOPS LYDEARD

Over the weekend of 8th and 9th June, the West Somerset Railway (WSR) will be holding a special 'Anniversary Event' to mark it becoming England's longest heritage railway forty years ago in 1979.

Having first reopened in 1976 initially from Minehead to Blue Anchor, the WSR's services had reached Stogumber in 1978 and, a year later, trains began to run once again over the summit of the line at Crowcombe Heathfield and down through the Quantock Hills to Bishops Lydeard, near Taunton, making the line 20 miles long.

Two generations ago the WSR held a gala event that June, and this will be repeated again in 2019 with two, and possibly three of the original locomotives from 1979 -- a pair of steam engines and a vintage diesel -- in action once again.

Up to half a dozen steam engines, two vintage diesels and a diesel railcar will be in use over the 40th anniversary weekend. There will be hourly trains over the 20-mile route through the Quantocks and along the Bristol Channel Coast, giving passengers a chance to explore the Somerset countryside as the year approaches the longest day.

And, to make the most of the daylight hours of early summer, a special double-headed steam train will run non-stop from Bishops Lydeard to Minehead and back on the evening of Saturday 8th June. This train must be pre-booked via www.west-somerset-railway.co.uk or calling 01643 704996.

The heady mixture of Great Western Railway steam engines and British Railways Western Region diesels will evoke the railway scene of the 1960's in the South West of England and there will be plenty of other things to see and do along the way.

These attractions include three railway museums that will be open at Blue Anchor, Washford and Bishops Lydeard, complete with model railways also in action at Bishops Lydeard.

There will be a chance to look behind the scenes of the WSR Association restoration workshops at Williton and see progress on the overhaul of another steam engine which was on the WSR in 1979, plus other work being carried out there by volunteer groups.

Also at Williton it will be possible to visit the Depot and Heritage Centre of the Diesel and Electric Preservation Group. And, of course there are attractions such as Cleve Abbey, Dunster with its Castle, the old harbour town of Watchet and the seaside at Minehead to enjoy too.

In conjunction with the 40th anniversary, the Quantock Brewery, whose premises are close by Bishops Lydeard station, are producing a special bottled beer which will be sold by the railway's licensed buffet cars on the trains and at the Brewery Shop and Minehead station buffet.

The West Somerset Steam Railway Trust (WSSRT) has funded a book of personal memories from people who were involved in the early days of the WSR which is being launched on the evening of Friday 7th June at Bishops Lydeard in the 'Gauge Museum', and it will then go on sale at WSR shops over the weekend.

Entitled "Tales of the West Somerset Railway" it is 130 pages in length, illustrated in colour throughout and very reasonably priced at £8.99. Further information about the book launch will be released shortly.

Normal fares will apply for the WSR's 40th anniversary event but discounted price Rover Tickets, giving the freedom of the line for the day can be purchased from www.west-somerset-railway.co.uk or by calling 01643 704996.