



# Full steam ahead: The South Devon Railway

Level  
**B2**  
Intermediate

***Sixty years ago Britain had railway lines running all over the country to small towns and villages. As the motor car became more popular, however, the railways began to close as fewer and fewer people used the trains. Many railway lines closed forever; but a few were bought by people who thought that they might be able to run their own trains. The oldest private line in the Westcountry - the South Devon Railway - celebrates its 40th year this month.***

The line from Ashburton to Totnes was always a very pretty line, running

through the River Dart valley. But it was never very popular: none of the towns on the line had many people to use the trains. The last passenger train left Ashburton in 1958 on its way to Totnes, and the last delivery train ran in 1962.

At the same time British Railways were replacing their old steam trains with faster, more efficient diesel and electric trains. A group of businessmen thought that they could buy some of the old steam engines and run them on the disused railway line as a 'heritage' railway. Without being paid to do it, they began to repair the railway track and stations on the line, and found

trains and carriages.

In 1969 the Dart Valley Railway company finally managed to buy the line from Buckfastleigh to Totnes. On 5th April 1969 the first heritage train left Buckfastleigh for Totnes. The line was re-opened by Dr Richard Beeching - a man famous in Britain for starting the closure of nearly a third of the country's railways.

It wasn't easy for the Dart Valley Railway: after the initial excitement it was difficult to attract visitors. In 1991 the company decided to end its use of the Buckfastleigh-Totnes line and concentrate on the trains from Paignton

*The Stationmaster (left), Signalmen (right) and the engine drivers on the locomotives (below) are all volunteers.*



South Devon Railway/Tim Grevatt



South Devon Railway/Tim Grevatt



South Devon Railway/Tim Grevatt

to Kingswear. The volunteers stepped in to save the line again: this time they had to lease the track and trains from the Dart Valley Railway until they could buy their own trains and, eventually, buy the track back.

The eighteen years since 1991 have seen remarkable change: the South Devon Railway, as the line is now known, has transformed the line into a popular attraction. The line runs almost all year round with a mix of steam and diesel trains, and about 100,000 passengers travel on the line each year.

Those visitors find a railway line which is like stepping back in time. The stations at Buckfastleigh and Staverton have been carefully restored to the way they looked when owned by the famous Great Western Railway, complete with antique luggage and goods wagons, open fires in the waiting rooms and historic advertising signs. The station »

## Doctor Beeching

Dr Richard Beeching, who opened the Dart Valley Railway in 1969, was the chairman of British Rail in the early 1960s. He realised that much of Britain's rail network was losing money and proposed the closure of over 30% of Britain's railways. The loss of trains devastated towns and villages but he probably saved Britain's rail network from total collapse. Now that our roads are crowded with cars, people wonder if the lines which he closed might have been useful again.

## Where do you buy a train?

In the 1960s British Rail sent thousands of steam trains to be cut up for scrap metal. A scrap yard in Wales received over 200 trains, but found that cutting up rails and wagons was easier than cutting up locomotives. Enthusiasts started to visit the yard to buy trains for restoration. When the last steam engine was sold in 1990, only three had been cut up by the yard since 1969 and 213 sold for preservation.



Floyd Nello

*Cider barrels at Staverton Station recall the days of freight traffic on the line*



South Devon Railway/Tim Grevatt

« at Totnes, by contrast, is not original: The original station at Totnes is still used by main-line trains, so a new station has been built just outside the town using buildings from other stations which had been closed.

Several steam locomotives have been restored to perfect condition by the railway, and pull carriages refurbished and repainted in the style of years gone by. The railway is proud to own a carriage from Queen Victoria's royal train, and two of the Great Western Railway's Ocean Saloon carriages, with wood panelling, table lamps and comfortable armchairs.

The railway runs right beside the River Dart and through beautiful woods and fields, and the trains run slowly enough for you to enjoy the view. At Buckfastleigh there is a small museum with items from the railway's history, including the last surviving broad-gauge locomotive from the GWR. There are also engine

## Engineering

As well as running tourist trains, the South Devon Railway also runs a successful engineering workshop. They repair and restore their own trains, and also carry out work for other companies. They do a roaring trade in the metal 'tyres' for trains, for example, and spare parts for locomotives and carriages.

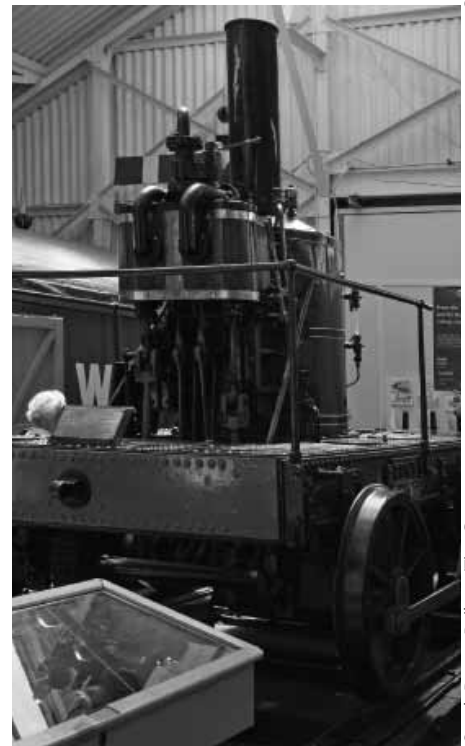


South Devon Railway/Tim Grevatt

workshops, a model railway, a café and gift shop. Staverton offers walks through the countryside to the nearby village with its traditional pub and church. At Totnes there is an award-winning farm attraction with rare breeds of animals right next to the station, and the historic town of Totnes is a short walk away.

The South Devon Railway won the award for Heritage Railway of the Year in 2007: why not find out for yourself why it deserved to win that prestigious award? The South Devon Railway is a great day out where you can discover a beautiful part of Devon and experience rail travel as it used to be.

Between 5th and 13th April the railway is running a special timetable to celebrate the 40th Anniversary, with more trains than usual. Over the weekend of 11th April up to eight steam locomotives will be in use. It will be a great opportunity to see the South Devon Railway at its best. **TG**



South Devon Railway/Tim Grevatt

*The last surviving broad gauge locomotive in the SDR museum at Buckfastleigh.*



South Devon Railway/Tim Grevatt

## Services on the South Devon Railway

The South Devon Railway runs trains every day until 31st October. A return ticket for Adults between Totnes Littlehempston and Buckfastleigh is £9.90; on most days this allows you to travel all day on the railway.

Between 5th and 9th April a day rover costs £15; on 11th, 12th & 13th April a day rover will be £17.

**For more information, see [www.southdevonrailway.co.uk](http://www.southdevonrailway.co.uk).**

## Getting to the South Devon Railway

It is easiest to start your journey at Totnes Littlehempston station: take First bus X80 or X81 from Paignton bus station to Totnes mainline railway station (£4.60 return).

From there it is a short walk (500 yards/450 metres) to the South Devon Railway station, past the National Rail booking office and over a footbridge across the river Dart to Totnes Littlehempston.