

Lea Bailey Light Railway

*A railway
fresh from
being
discovered*

!

27

September
2012

Newsletter No.1



You have been sent this email because your address has been given to one of the supporters of this project. The idea of the Newsletter is to keep supporters of the Lea Bailey Light Railway informed by email on a frequency of as and when there is something important to tell you. The whole project is a vast learning curve for everyone including this direct email software. If you have information for future Newsletters please send it to me at mandatrix@gmail.com or if you have friends/relations that would like to be included in future mailing lists please let me know.
Michael Ayland.

Background by Rob Needhan.

In October 2003 an article in the local paper, The Forester, reported plans by Ray and Jonathan Wright (owners of Clearwell Caves) to develop the Lea Bailey Level as a tourist attraction. However, when visited in August 2010 it appeared that work had ground to a halt some time between 2003 and 2010 as the site appeared derelict, although there were interesting remains hidden in the undergrowth. These included a corrugated iron shed with a line of (approx) 2 foot gauge track into it, the track extended towards the abandoned trackbed of the former (never opened) Mitcheldean Road and Forest of Dean Junction Railway, in the other direction the track went past the shed and turned into the old level; scattered around were various items of rolling stock including the bodies of several ex-colliery manriders plus half of a battery loco. The steel gate on the level entrance was locked but visible through a hole was a wagon on track.

When re-visited in November 2011, it was immediately apparent that some further work had taken place. Rails had been laid along the old trackbed up to the road bridge. The rails were heavy but were laid loose on the ground at roughly 2 foot 'gauge'. Otherwise, the site appeared as in 2010.

A brief history of the Level might be of interest. It is notorious as the Forest's 'gold mine'. It was apparently dug in 1906-7 by a group of investors operating under the name of the Chastan Syndicate (who also briefly owned the unsuccessful Fairplay Iron Mine) but although gold was found it was in such small quantities as to be not commercially viable. So the Syndicate apparently failed. Then after WW1 the level was dug some 580 yards to the Wigpool Iron Mine gale, but was abandoned after a few years with only 3000 tons of ore removed. (The level did not connect with the other Wigpool Iron Mine workings which were rather more successful, with some 150,000 tons of ore being mined between c1860 and WW1.) The Wigpool Iron Mine gale is now owned by the Wrights of Clearwell and access to the old iron mine workings is possible with permission for cavers through the several gated and locked entrances on Wigpool Common, but Lea Bailey Level is apparently blocked by several rockfalls part way in.

On 30 May 2012, a small group of RFDCC members visited Lea Bailey mine site to see the railway remains and found the mine door unlocked, the padlock apparently forced, and the door bent back at top. This was reported to Clearwell.

Then on 27 June a small group of RFDCC members went through the Euroclydon tunnel at Drybrook after collecting the key from Clearwell. They were intrigued by the quantity of railway equipment in the tunnel rotting and rusting away, apparently abandoned. Also there was a derelict loco (HE 4wDHF?), 2 mine dump wagons, a small flat wagon and the remains of a manrider body in the cutting at the south end of the tunnel.

Afterwards the feeling was that the equipment at Lea Bailey and in the tunnel and cutting was too good to see rot away. So I decided to see the Wrights at Clearwell to find out whether there was any mileage in proposing a volunteer-led scheme. They agreed that such a scheme was the best way forward for the railway. Since then a small group of volunteers has worked on tidying up the site at Lea Bailey. Progress has been quite fast, with numbers involved having reached a dozen. A stand was booked at the Alan Keef open day on 22nd September, their works being only 2½ miles from Lea Bailey mine.

Two days before the open day, a 20 foot long second hand shipping container was delivered to the site and positioned on a base made of old rails, which we had spent the previous two weeks preparing. Also delivered was Motor Rail loco 21282 from Clearwell where it had been stored since the collapse of the previous plan for a railway. Within minutes of arriving, it had been started. So on the open day we were able to run a train of 4 wagons behind the loco. Much more interesting than seeing one wagon manually pushed around!

We're all new to running a railway, so it was with some relief that the open day went so well. The stand at Alan Keefs was kept busy all day and many who stopped to talk to us then went on to visit our operation at Lea Bailey. We recorded 38 names in the visitors book and at one time had 6 cars on site plus another parked by the roadside. And the last visitor didn't go until 6pm, long after Alan Keef had closed.

Now it's back to the hard work of getting track in to the container and making the doors secure and as-near-vandalproof as possible (our site is rather remote from any other habitation and therefore vulnerable to scrap thieves and vandals). There is also a 90hp Lister diesel to get working with attached Brush generator to provide power, but first we must construct a weather and vandal-proof home for the diesel and generator. There are also several interesting locos in need of attention, as in store in the open at Clearwell are two 0-4-0DMFs and four 0-6-0DMFs plus a serviceable HE 4wDHF stored under cover (but as this has compressed air starting, we need a compressor before we can use it). I could go on, but I'd better not. For anyone interested, go and have a look at our website at www.leabaileylightrailway.co.uk



Simplex leaving Clearwell whilst the battery was on charge.



Arrived at Lea Bailey.....it Works!



Train, ready for the open day

Breif Timeline to the Railway (E+O.E)

Mike Ayland

1826 5th May Tramway commenced Cinderford bridge- Bullo

1837 Cinderford -Brimspill (Bullo) railway proposed.

1851 South Wales Railway Gloucester – Chepstow.
Hereford,Ross,Gloucester line approved.

1854 Broad Gauge Cinderford- Bullo

1870 Lydbrook Branch approved Cinderford-Lydbrook Jcn

1871 Mitcheldean Road to Whimsey Railway proposed.
Act passed to link FOD Branch at Whimsey with Hereford,Ross and Gloucester
Railway at Mitcheldean Road 4miles 5 chains

1872 Conversion of all GWR lines to Standard gauge.

1874 Construction commenced Engineers G.Wells Owen assisted by George
Coulter. Contractors Miller & Rogers.

1875 Work abandoned over contract dispute

1880 Taken over by GWRwork completed.

1906 Chastan Syndicate formed to exploit Gold Mine

1907-1930 Passenger service to Drybrook Halt

1917 Track lifted

1921 Lea Bailey level extended to 580 yards below Wigpool Iron mine

1939 Admiralty requisitions Hawthorn Tunnel and stores munitions

1964 Passenger traffic at Mitcheldean Road closed

1965 Freight Traffic at Mitcheldean Road closed.... track lifted.

2012 Lea Bailey Light Railway

Lea Bailey Light Railway makes the headlines

28th September issue of the Forest of Dean and Wye Valley Review ran a Front
Cover report entitled "Railroad plans to strike Gold!" giving valuable publicity to the
project.

The photo bore the delightful caption "Goldmine Express"

Mike Ayland