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“The Ffestiniog Railway – a sentimental journey”

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My first visit to the Ffestiniog Railway was nearly 50 years ago, and for me, it has always had something special. To that end, I embarked on the construction of Don Youngs 3 ½” gauge ‘Mountaineer’ and even managed to get it to a rolling chassis stage until life events put paid to that.



Fast forward to the discovery of the Bygones Event, held annually by the railway to showcase some of the less well used rolling stock and locomotives, demonstration passenger trains and goods trains from the early days of the railway, both as a private company, and an early preservation, and it seemed too good an event to miss. Nowadays with advent of YouTube, and the fantastic monthly Moving Pictures vlog produced by the railway, it is possible to get a good look at what is on offer, and having convinced Sylvia it would be a nice little break (North Wales in October, what could possibly go wrong!) we booked our hotel to cover the full three days of the event.

We elected to spend our first day (Friday) photographing as many trains as possible between Porthmadog and Tan y Bwlch, as that was where most activity was taking place. To aid this, the railway produced a very useful and detailed working timetable of each day's workings, which enabled us to have a basic plan. The train working is fairly intense for a single line with limited passing places, and the variety of the locos and rolling stock allows some pretty spectacular photo opportunities.



For me, the highlight was going to be the world's only gravity operated freight train consisting of a number of loaded, empty, or both slate wagons, steamed hauled to the lines summit, just above the Ddualt spiral, where, once cut loose from the loco, only manually applied handbrakes on the wagons are used to control the trains descent to The Cob near

Porthmadog, This is how the line was initially operated from its inception in 1836, using horses to haul the empty wagons up to Blaenau Ffestiniog, which were replaced by steam locomotives from around 1850.

With our hotel situated directly opposite the station in Porthmadog, it was possible to tuck into a full English breakfast and view the action in readiness for the first departure of the day at 07:40 hauled by the replica Lynton & Barnstaple 2-6-2T 'Lyd' built by the Ffestiniog railway in 2010 hauling a rake of coaches to represent the 1920's.



Another world one off is the replica inspection car built for the Spooner family, which again uses gravity as motive power, but also has the added feature of a sail to enable it to traverse the cob if it ran out of gravity oomph. This was seen under sail early on Friday.

The gravity train in action at Tan y Bwlch.

Fairley, James Spooner, built by the Ffestiniog Railway in 2023 runs round its train at Tan y Bwlch.

We spent Friday at various locations including Tan y Bwlch, Minffordd, Penryn deudreath, and Porthmadog: Hugh Napier (Hunslet 1904) on a freight at Penryn crossing.



The Fairlie Merddin Emrys (Ffestiniog Railway 1899) at left,

Tasmanian K1 Garratt (Beyer Peacock 1909) in middle, and Hugh Napier on right

David Lloyd George (Ffestiniog Railway 1992) and the Victorian set at Minffordd night photo shoot.

Saturday was spent riding the line and the trains on offer, starting with Lyd and the 1920's set to Blaenau Ffestiniog, with a short shuttle trip to Tan y Griseau.



Second trip was in the Victorian set, and initially in carriage No10, but to say the ride was rough would be an understatement, so we opted for a more conventional bogie coach on the return trip. Included in this set was the superb replica 'Curly Roof Van' built in 2004 to the original Brown Marshall design of 1873. An absolute masterpiece in both workmanship, and also the paintwork.

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On the Sunday we drove over to the National Slate Museum at Llanberis which has an impressive array of vintage machine tools in the slate quarry workshops, and a rebuilt incline plane for moving slate wagons up and down the quarry slopes.

Finally, as the clouds thickened, and the light was fading we captured the elusive 1899 Hunslet, Britomart on a freight at Minffordd, which rounded off the weekend nicely.

Overall, the weekend was a superb demonstration of the less visible locos etc on the railway, well organised and a credit to all the volunteers and staff of the railway who made it happen.

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