

Torbay's own funicular line celebrates its centenary

THE centenary of Torbay's Babbacombe Cliff Railway will be marked with a special event on April 1.

It was on April 1, 1926, when the Mayor of Torquay, Alderman John Taylor, cut the ribbon and, with other local VIPs, stepped on board and rode to the lower station at Oddicombe Beach.

About 400,000 people used the funicular in its first year, but the line was closed in 1934 when the tramway company switched the operation to buses. Torbay Council took over the line, but it closed again in 1941 due to wartime defence requirements.

It reopened in 1951, and in July 2009, the ownership of the 720ft double-track 5ft 8in gauge line was transferred from Torbay Council to a new Community Interest Company, which in 2019 converted to a Charitable Incorporated Organisation.

Invited guests at the centenary event will include the great grandson of John Taylor, who opened the railway back in 1926. All travel on the line on the day will be free of charge.

More events will take place during the summer, including a special exhibition being staged with Torquay Museum.

Pacer-for-a-shunter swap

THE Tanat Valley Light Railway has agreed to swap its Class 143 Pacer DMU No. 143619 with Cambrian Heritage Railways in nearby Oswestry for its Planet 0-4-0DH diesel shunter Alpha No. 3953 of 1962.

The agreement has just been signed and includes training for nominated TVLR drivers. The TVLR board has decided to dispose of all three of its Pacer sets, and so Nos. 143601 and 143616 have been bought by Heritage Traction Preservation, a private group established to maintain, safeguard and preserve railway assets and traction.

These two Pacers will stay on site at Nantmawr while the group carries out primary restoration work.

Sandstone brings in the harvest by steam

By John Titlow

SOUTH Africa's Sandstone Estates' 2ft gauge railway has recently been running genuine goods trains to bring in the harvest on its huge farm near Ficksburg, in the Eastern Free State on the border with Lesotho.

Its collection of 2ft gauge rolling stock has to be one of the largest in the world and is based on a large working farm measuring about 12 miles from end to end and six miles wide in places.

As the railway collection of wagons, freight stock and locomotives developed, so did the length of its running lines. Originally, goods stock was used for demonstration purposes, but it soon became apparent that the railway could play its part in farming activities, particularly at harvest time.

With railway lines extending across the farm, the owners realised that in many locations they had the ability to bring in the harvest at less cost and in larger bulk, saving money on expensive diesel fuel.

With long distances to the storage areas in the centre of the farm at Hoekfontein, the Grain Train was conceived. It does not run every year as conditions are not always favourable for using rail. Large loads are often moved in open

trucks in preferably dry conditions, while enclosed wagons suitable for transporting grain have opened up more possibilities.

American-built Baldwin Pacific NG10 No. 61 of 1915 was selected for the task, with two ex-South African Railways wagons originally used for transporting apples from the Langkloof area, near Port Elizabeth.

Early on January 6, No. 61 and its two freight wagons made its way to the Avondzon Farm in the capable hands of driver Thinus Dennis and fireman Bryne Vusi.

After harvesting, the two combines made several trips, filling the two wagons taking about two hours before the return journey with the

full load. Unloading into the silos was done by powerful vacuum equipment on-site.

A spokesman said: "Sandstone does not transport grain by steam every day, but we proved that we still have the capabilities to do it at any time. The Grain Train will be back on the rails soon as there is much harvesting still to do".

A short video of harvesting by rail made by Frameline featuring NG15 Number 17 with a rake of modified high-sided B wagons can be viewed at https://youtu.be/2ac_D4UEIAw

On April 2-5, Sandstone will celebrate 30 years of its Heritage Trust with a cosmos festival, and steam will be working.



Harvest time at Sandstone Estates as Baldwin Pacific NG10 No. 61 brings the grain home. SANDSTONE ESTATES

