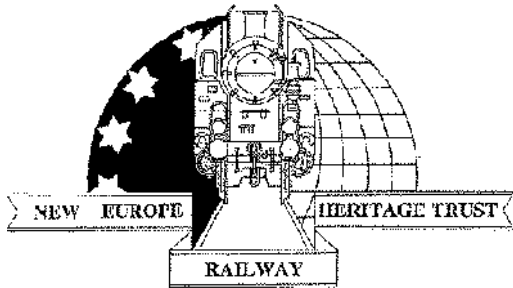


Eastern Star



Journal of the New Europe
Railway Heritage Trust,
helping railway preservation
in the New Europe

Number 56

December 2014

A Massive Restoration in Bulgaria



One of the Bulgarian State Railways' 46 Class locomotives, reputed to be Europe's largest tank engines, is shown here under restoration in the Sofia locomotive depot. This 2-12-4T should be ready for operation in 2015.

Tsanko Simeonov writes:

The development of railways is closely related to many records. Many of us want to ride on the TGV in France or Shinkansen in Japan, or to reach Gornegrat by the remarkable rack railway of the Swiss Railways. Bulgarian Railways also offer unique experiences for railway enthusiasts – rides through the picturesque narrow-gauge line Septemvri – Dobrinishte or through the

Iskar Gorge near Sofia on trains hauled by several restored steam locomotives – 609.76, 01.23, 03.12 and 05.01. The rides will be far more exciting, as completion of restoration work on one of the two preserved steam 2-12-4T locomotives, No.46.03, is scheduled for the first half of 2015. The locomotives of the class 46 are well known as the most powerful steam locomotives of BDZ and the largest tank locomotives in Europe.

How it all began

Several tourist operators showed quite a strong interest in the restoration of the locomotive 46.03. BDZ agreed to check the possibility for the restoration and sent a team of experts to pre-evaluate the technical condition of the locomotive at the Asenovo depot during the autumn of 2013. The results were satisfactory - the locomotive was almost fully equipped and with minor defects. It later appeared that it had passed a factory repair, after which it worked less than half a year! Based on this, the decision to move the locomotive to Sofia and start the restoration was taken. On 12 March 2014 locomotive No.46.03 was pulled out from Asenovo and took the long way to Sofia for restoration.



En route to Sofia

More on the history and the restoration of this locomotive will appear in our next issue. Photos are by courtesy of Railwaymodeling Bulgaria team (Tsvetan Kaludov and Yoanna Mladenova)

Lithuania

Years ago, both NERHT and Fedecrail were advising and lobbying in support of the Lithuanian narrow gauge Siaurukas line. Later, Eastern Star in June 2006 recorded how the NERHT had sponsored a Lithuanian delegation, including the Governor of

Panevezys Province, to visit UK narrow-gauge lines. Since then this enterprise has settled down, and recently built a new station at Panevezys to serve its tourist trains.

Siaurukas Gets into its Stride

A new narrow gauge railway station has been opened in Panevėžys. The original station was built at the turn of the 20th century and was used for both narrow and broad gauge trains. In Panevėžys, the narrow gauge and wide gauge railways are connected; in fact, some of the different gauge tracks are intertwined. In the 1970s, the narrow gauge station was demolished, but was rebuilt this year when the narrow gauge railway celebrated its 115th anniversary.

On the last Friday of September 2014, the rebuilt station was ceremonially opened and the first train was sent off to the sound of music. The station was rebuilt after careful analysis of iconographic material and old sketches. Panevėžys residents in their fifties and older still remember that building: the decor of carved wood under the arches, the cosy beauty of organic materials that included wood, ceramic tiles, stone, historic chandeliers, wooden rail sleepers, and platform barriers made of oak.

The infrastructure of the station is composed of a 60m long roof with enclosed waiting rooms for tourists. The two old platforms have been rebuilt, with the surface of the platforms paved with stone blocks. The length of one of the platforms was doubled to 120m. Today the historic narrow gauge railway serves trains of 12 passenger cars – such a number was unheard of even at the best times of this railway in the first half of the 20th century. The office of the Station Master was rebuilt, and another canopy was mounted over one of the station's dead-end branches where old railway rolling stock is exhibited: a rail forming machine, a wooden freight wagon, a tank wagon, and a refrigerated wagon for milk products, etc.

This is only part of the investment project funded by European structural funds. The project's aim is to adapt the Aukštaitija Narrow Gauge Railway for tourists. This is the first investment in the 76.4 km long entity: the route Panevėžys–Troškiai–Anykštai–Rubikiai, that has the status of heritage value.

Various works are being done at eight stopping places on the line. Platforms, engineering networks, and lighting systems are being renovated. A viaduct in Panevėžys was also repaired. The investment amounts to 2 million, and this is the first real step towards retaining a functioning narrow gauge railway in Lithuania.

The major works of the project were finished on the eve of the 115th anniversary of the railway, whose history dates back to 1899 when the first train entered Panevėžys station. The railway as a tourism resource started operation in 2003, after its function of a means of freight transport was discontinued. Since 2003 the number of clients has increased from 3,000 to

50,000. All are passengers and visitors to the museum and educational projects.

From the main station in Panevėžys passengers take the train on a variety of festive occasions. Additionally, some of the organized trips allow passengers to continue on bicycles to visit interesting cultural or natural objects. The train then returns the travellers back to Panevėžys station. On such trips, bikes are transported free of charge; sometimes as many as four flat wagons are needed. In the weekends of May to October, trips to the Rubikiai Lake at the eastern end of the railway are regularly offered from Anykšiai Station. It is a fun time of tasting fish soup, beer or tea, and taking boat trips. The largest proportion of these railway tours consist of itineraries on demand where people can choose their tour time, route, stations and other services. The most common theme of such travel is culinary heritage.

At the opening of the Panevėžys narrow gauge railway station the Head of the State Department of Lithuania, Raimonda Balnienė, announced that the new narrow gauge railway educational tour 'Amber Road' had been included in the global Amber Road project (www.worldamberroad.travel), and the Aukštaitija Narrow Gauge Railway is becoming a global tourist attraction. This is



particularly important because on the global tourism map, Lithuania, being part of the basin of the Baltic Sea, is associated with amber, the valuable mineral which is often referred to as Baltic or Lithuanian gold. The educational trip offered by the Aukštaitija Narrow Gauge Railway will feature a unique presentation of Baltic amber.

Text by G Kerbedis

Photo of the new station by courtesy of Zilvanis Urbutis

Meanwhile, a recent development caused some anxiety, as Tony Olsson explains:

Lithuania: the closure that wasn't

With the constant news of heritage railways (mainly narrow gauge) being closed in countries sponsored by NERHT, widespread anxiety followed when Lietuvos Geleinkelis (Lithuanian Railways) offered a narrow gauge railway for sale on Friday 28 November. Because Panevezys was mentioned, many jumped to the conclusion that the 750mm line from Panevezys to Rubikiai via Anykščiai, known as ASG or Siaurukas, was to be closed or sold. In fact what was being sold was a network of lines to the north of Panevezys which had been closed in the 60s, but hadn't been lifted as some histories suggested. I walked from Panevezys Station in 2010 along the abandoned line up to where it had been severed by the A17 E67 trunk road which allows north – south traffic to avoid the centre of Panevezys. Members who have Narrow Gauge World might remember my report and the pictures in issue 83. Some work had taken place in Panevezys to prepare the northern lines for reopening. On my walk along the track in 2010, it was obvious that some track changes had been made, such as sidings being removed.

Thanks to Žilvinas Urbutis of Baltic Railways Magazine, we now know that Lithuanian Railways considered it was not in the rail tourism business, so tried to sell the northern lines to ASG Siaurukas and its owners, but none of them were interested in buying the track, which costs about £70,000 per year just for land taxes and security services for these lines. The cost of restoring the track and running trains would add considerably to that cost.

For Lithuanian Railways to issue an email to 90 'heritage railway operators' on 28 November offering to sell the railway by tender, with bids due by 22 December, does seem rather naive. The privately-owned railway preservation movement that exists in Britain and other countries is unknown in Lithuania because of its fifty years as a Soviet Socialist Republic. The concept is not however entirely unknown in the Baltic States; the Banitis in Latvia, and the Lavassaare Museum Railway in Estonia are owned by enthusiasts, but they, and a couple of 600mm railways in Latvia, are all the heritage railways on offer. At the time of writing, the chance of attracting a buyer seems remote. A wealthy Lithuanian businessman has made an offer, but it is nowhere near the asking price, and won't cover the cost of restoration. What will happen if a very wealthy buyer or group is not found to take over the lines is open to speculation. British experience suggests the railway will be abandoned and left to rot, or, because even the abandoned lines will need substantial upkeep costs, parcels of land will probably be sold off for commercial development, housing etc. If a buyer is found, attracting enough passengers to provide sufficient income is unlikely unless Lithuania (and Latvia and Estonia) overcome their reluctance to advertise their attractions in the West. Even then there will be around 140km of track, probably too much in such a small area. In practice the new railway will have to be operated as two or three lines. There are numerous towns en route which could provide additional stopping places, leading possibly to a regular passenger service as operates on Banitis, but even that service runs only twice a day. It would be good if sufficient

passengers could be found to justify operating trains on the new lines, but I'm not optimistic.

What prompted Lithuanian Railways to offer the northern lines for sale as a tourist project on an impossibly tight tendering schedule is a mystery. Unlike British enthusiast-owned heritage railways, Siaurukas is a division of Lietuvos Geleinkelis, the state railway operator, and is also subsidised by Panevezys City and County, which owns the steam locomotive being returned to steam in the railway workshops. Perhaps the government wished to cut back on the amount of money it was spending on the project; perhaps the Siaurukas management didn't want to take on the task of bringing the northern lines back to life; perhaps the line has been sold on the quiet, and the tender offer was a legal expedient to avoid complications later?

All will no doubt be revealed in due course.

Ukraine

The Donetsk crisis

As reported in our last issue, the Donetsk Railway Museum has been living through hard times, due to the de facto assumption of local government by the pro-Russian movement. In September a Kievan newspaper published an article about the Museum's tribulations and made much of the tiny four-wheel tank locomotive b-2062, telling readers it was a unique museum piece and how its presence boosted the morale of the Museum's staff. Some days later NERHT received an unsigned e-mail appealing for help and saying that armed Russians were removing this locomotive. Then a source identified as the Ukrainian security service suggested that the Russians had stolen this locomotive.

At this point NERHT decided that a wait-and-see policy was the best. There had as yet been no explicit and reliable accounts of what was going on. Furthermore, the removal of this locomotive seemed to serve no purpose for the Ukrainian government, the Russian government or the Donetsk rebel government, and there was absolutely no evidence that any of them had been involved, which meant that there was no body to whom NERHT could usefully protest or appeal. Local Russian-speaking hotheads, perhaps incited by that newspaper article, seemed the most likely culprits.

Later, we heard from a long-time correspondent in Ukraine that the locomotive had turned up at the Russo-Ukrainian frontier on a flatbed road vehicle and that the Russian frontier authorities had blocked its entry into Russia. In December it appeared that it had been reloaded on to a railway flatcar and in early January we heard that it had been returned.



And this is b-2062. (Eastern Star of December 2005 reported how this locomotive had been sent for scrap but had been rescued in the nick of time and restored by Avdeevka depot).

Photo Alexander Ilyin

Michael Portillo in NERHT Territory

In the Great Continental Railway Journeys TV presentations of late 2014 Michael Portillo was shown savouring both Russian and Polish railways. The Polish programme included shots of the Wolstyn steam operation, with Michael Portillo having a go at firing. For help with the projected Russian episode, one of our NERHT Committee members was consulted by the production company. It was originally intended to show the Trans Siberian but, after being informed that this would take longer than the budgeted five days, the producers' interest shifted to a Moscow-St Petersburg trip, with a little extra mileage thrown in to capture Leo Tolstoy. In one sequence the Director of the Pereslavl' narrow gauge railway museum (and Eastern Star contributor!) Sergei Dorozhkov was interviewed about Russian railway history, with the support of some archival film. Additionally the programme showed the new, modernized, face of the Moscow-St Petersburg main line.

The Tesovo Railway Gains Momentum

Situated close to Novgorod, about 120km south east of St Petersburg, this project has a well-populated hinterland and thus is assured of sufficient enthusiast-volunteers to make steady progress.

The nearest station is Rogavka. The terrain is marshy, this being a peat area which in Soviet times supplied power stations serving, among others, Leningrad. The origin and main centre of the line was Tesovo-Natyl'skii, a small town. When the peat industry spread, new settlements were also named Tesovo, each with a serial number; so the Tesovo-Natyl'skii peat centre became Tesovo-1. In the 1970s the line was modernized and could boast concrete sleepers and semaphore signals. A passenger service operated between Tesovo-1 and Tesovo-2. By this time the steam locomotives were being replaced by a stock of more than 30 diesel and motor traction units.



A TU6 locomotive of the Tesovo peat enterprise

Photo:

AlexOct of Russian Wikipedia

However, in the 1990s the railway began to shrink as power stations turned to other fuels. Peat production more or less ceased but there has been a small revival recently, with 20km of line still in use for its original purpose; at its peak, the line had measured about 200km. It uses TU6 diesel locomotives and also has a pair of self-propelled electric generator units. (continued)

The enthusiasts' project, the Tesovo Narrow Gauge Railway, has been developing over the last decade and is based on Tesovo-1. Its basic aim is to preserve and present a traditional peat railway. Currently it has at its disposal about 200 metres of track, a TU4 locomotive, a PD1 railbus, and several motor-trolleys.



The PD1 railbus of the Tesovo railway museum

Photo: Mikhail Krivyy

Considerable publicity was gained earlier in 2014 by a re-enactment of the spring 1942 military operation – an attempt to break the Nazi blockade of Leningrad – which took place largely on the territory once served by this narrow-gauge railway. A good deal of vintage military equipment, manned by military enthusiasts of the region, provided a spectacle that was featured by the local television and press. Presumably the circumstance that the original operation resulted in the heroic destruction of the Soviet 2nd Shock Army, commanded by General Vlasov who subsequently defected to the Germans, and that in Soviet times this disaster received little publicity, added spice to the reenactment.

Ekaterinburg Region



This Urals region for some years now has been witnessing a surge in railway history and preservation. There is a substantial railway museum in Ekaterinburg and the tourist possibilities of the nearby narrow-gauge Alapaevsk line are still under

development. This line's historical museum, financed from the regional budget, is now open and travel agents, including VS-Tur of Ekaterinburg and Ros-Tur, are offering tours to the line. The acquisition of two couchette cars, built by the Kambarka Works, is part of this drive. (Illustration by courtesy of our correspondent Artyom).

With help from Russian Railways, Ekaterinburg activists are rescuing narrow-gauge locomotives from plinths. A Gr type locomotive has been brought from faraway Georgia. The acquisition from Germany of locomotive No 9 for the Ekaterinburg childrens' railway has already been mentioned in Eastern Star of June 2014 The picture on the next page by Evgeniy Zdovorenko shows No 9 in its new role.



Two-gauge steam tour in Ukraine, 19-24 April 2015. Wolfram Wendelin is organizing another tour. It will include broad-gauge steam trips behind L-3535 from Lviv to Likhachev and to Zhovkava (a picturesque line) and including some mileage in a railbus AS-1, as well as two steam trips behind narrow-gauge Gr-280 from Gaivoron (Haivoron). Run-pasts and photo-stops will be featured. There also will be sightseeing opportunities at Kiev and Lviv (not forgetting the Lviv trams)

The price for the full tour is €1090 (Lviv/Kiev to Lviv/Kiev). Shortened itineraries would be possible. For further information contact Wolfram Wendelin at (+43)(0)676 5025639 or wwlok@utanet.at Bookings have to be made by end-February.

NERHT is not the organizer of this tour and accepts no liability for it. However, Wolfram Wendelin's tours are well-reputed (and have been reported in past issues of Eastern Star).



No 17 of Baltic Railways Magazine is now available. Among its features are surveys of present and future prospects for the Viking intermodal service connecting the Baltics with Turkey and for the China-Antwerp link (where the 2011 trial has so far given birth only to a bi-monthly Klaipeda-Kazakhstan service). The pros and cons of Latvian railway electrification, currently under debate, are analysed. The Rail Baltica project for a standard gauge connection of Tallinn with Poland is now going ahead. There is an account of a meeting of Feldbahn enthusiasts and of the Vaingazi accident of 1971. A Lithuanian/Russian as well as the Lithuanian/English edition is available. Either can be obtained by post from J A Olsson (to whom the £6.00 cheque should be

payable) at Flat 2, 10 Oxford Grove, Ilfracombe, EX34 9HQ

Our AGM. The annual general meeting of NERHT will be at the Model Railway Club at 4 Calshot St, London N19DA (near Kings Cross) at 1400 on Saturday 9 May 2015. After the main business it is expected that Andris Biedrins and two colleagues will speak about recent developments in railway preservation in the Baltic states. Non-members are welcome at this talk. NERHT sales items will be available.

SOME HOPES FOR 2015

The railway heritage movement in many countries faced many challenges in 2014, and enthusiasts everywhere must be looking forward to better times in 2015. Here are some hopes for the New Year from some of our friends in the East.

Railway companies which may seem well-established cannot rest on their laurels, and Andris Biedrins of the Gulbene-Aluksne narrow gauge railway ("Banitis") in Latvia hopes that in the New Year his line will enjoy improved finances, including if possible EU funds, thus enabling the infrastructure to be improved.

In Lithuania Zilvinas Urbutis, one of the leaders of the campaign which saw the Panevezys – Anyksčiai narrow gauge line saved from closure a decade ago, would like to see a steam locomotive restored for regular use on the narrow gauge.

Mehis Helme of the Lavassaare narrow gauge railway museum in Estonia hopes that the Estonian railway company and the public authorities will establish an Estonian national railway museum. Similar wishes are expressed by Andrew Goltz, the Anglo-Polish preservation activist who is concerned to see a new home found for the museum collection now located at Warsaw Główny station.

Victor Gorodnyanskiy of AZIZU (the Ukrainian railway heritage association) believes that Ukraine needs a working museum railway which can provide a secure base for preserved locomotives and stock, while Wolfram Wendelin, the champion of Ukrainian narrow gauge, would like to see a TU 4 class locomotive obtained for the Korostiv museum.

Railway preservation of course requires national and international campaigns, as well as local initiatives, and Mihai Blotor of the Sibiu-Agnita narrow gauge railway in Romania sees the need for a law providing for narrow gauge lines to go to local authority control as a major priority as well as official support for moves to save remaining historic locomotives and stock. Over in Bulgaria, preservation activist Tzanko Simeonov hopes for a renaissance in pro-railway thinking in Bulgaria and throughout Europe – a sentiment which surely will be shared by all our readers! We in NERHT hope that all these wishes come true, and will do what we can to ensure that they are realised!

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The New Europe Railway Heritage Trust ('NERHT') is a voluntary organisation established to help railway preservation in the former USSR and the ex-communist countries of Central and Eastern Europe (registered in the UK as charity No 1099229).

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