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Ffestiniog Interactive 2002

During the Bank Holiday weekend of 4th to 6th May 2002 the Ffestiniog Railway held a unique event entitled Ffestiniog Interactive.

The idea was that participants, for a fee, could have an active part in the operation of the event by taking footplate rides, working with the guard or other operating staff, guest driving on some freight trains or even riding on the gravity slate train. The variety of trains and workings made this the most entertaining event that I have ever attended on the Ffestiniog Railway and the excellent weather throughout the weekend was an added bonus.

1. On the Saturday morning things didn't at first go to plan when signalling problems intervened. This led to the alteration or cancellation of a few trains until the problem was resolved. The rest of the weekend, aside from difficulties with the water supply at Harbour station, being trouble free. So, having gone to Tan-y-Bwlch to record the freight train hauled by 'Mountaineer' returning to Dduallt, the first train I was able to record was the 10.25 train from Porthmadog behind 'Prince' and 'Linda' on 10 coaches.
A distant whistle echoing round Llyn Mair heralds the imminent arrival of the two locos as they head around the horse shoe curve approach to Tan-y-Bwlch before stopping in the station where the return Vintage train, now rather late was waiting to cross. This train should have been hauled by 'Taliesin' on its own but, due to the aforementioned signalling problems had the addition of 'Mountaineer' which had to get down to Porthmadog from Glanypwll and 'Earl of Merioneth', which had joined at Dduallt having taken the slate wagons which formed the gravity train up there earlier in the day. With the up train safely inside the triple headed Vintage departs with whistles from all three locos but only the Double Engine doing any work. Soon 'Prince' and 'Linda' get the right away and pass through the trees heading for Blaenau Ffestiniog.
This recording, along with others on this CD has been edited somewhat as this entire sequence took almost 15 minutes.
2. The 11.35 train from Porthmadog should have had the Vintage set with 'Taliesin' as motive power but as that loco and train hadn't reached Porthmadog by the that time the 11.35 was due to depart 'Blanche' with an ordinary set of 8 coaches took over the duty. Having crossed 'Taliesin' and its two companions on the vintage set at Minffordd this is how 'Blanche', heard distantly departing from Minffordd, sounded passing Gwyndy.
3. 'Mountaineer' was booked to take the 14.55 train from Porthmadog and sounded like this leaving Harbour station and crossing the Cob.
4. After the last service train had departed 'Taliesin' worked a short train of slate wagons from Porthmadog up to Tan-y-Bwlch. This is how the Single Fairlie sounded leaving Minffordd after Earl of Merioneth had arrived with a down passenger train.
5. The first train off Porthmadog on the morning of Sunday 5th May 2002 departed at 7.50 am and, it has to be said, it looked like the crew were outnumbering the passengers although, the 'passengers' may have been crew too! 'Taliesin' was booked to work this train which was formed of the Vintage set unusually made up to 10 vehicles with 4 bogie coaches, 5 bug boxes and a van.
The departure bell rings, the Guard gives the right away and 'Taliesin' slips a little in getting its train under way but once onto the Cob accelerates on the almost level track towards Boston Lodge.
6. Due to the signalling difficulties on the previous day the freight train which was booked to run from Glanypwll in the morning didn't even start its journey.
With those problems out of the way 'Mountaineer' was able to work its booked turn. Returning from Rhiw Goch to Dduallt the Alco, with its fine whistle echoing around the hills, makes an excellent sound leaving Tan-



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- y-Bwlch with its heavy train of ballast wagons.
7. On arrival at Dduallt 'Mountaineer' was booked to perform a photographic run past on the spiral. With this completed 'Earl of Merioneth' was attached and the pair returned the freight to Minffordd. Back at Tan-y-Bwlch 'Earl of Merioneth' and 'Mountaineer' are heard arriving from Dduallt. As the freight comes to a stop in the loop the sound of 'Prince' and 'Linda' can be heard as they approach with the passenger train and come to a stand at the water column. With station duties completed the Guard gives the right away and the pair depart for Blaenau Ffestiniog. At almost the same time the freight departs heading down hill.
 8. Unlike the previous day 'Taliesin' was able to take up its booked turn on the Vintage set leaving Porthmadog at 11.35. The Single Fairlie sounds to be well in control passing Gwyndy soon after departing from Minffordd.
 9. The next train recorded about 20 minutes later at the same spot was hauled by 'Mountaineer'. This was the freight which we last heard at Tan-y-Bwlch and was now heading back from Minffordd to Rhiw Goch.
 10. The station at Minffordd is not the easiest place to try for a sound recording, especially during a Bank Holiday weekend with an event happening. On this occasion my attempt to get a recording of trains crossing here was largely unsuccessful mainly due to the quantity of road traffic passing by outside and some interesting manoeuvres going on in the small car park! Still, this short track of 'Earl of Merioneth' departing for Blaenau Ffestiniog isn't too bad so the attempt wasn't entirely a waste of time.
 11. This event gave spectators the rare opportunity of seeing two steam hauled freight trains crossing at Minffordd. Recorded not far from the station 'Mountaineer' is heard passing downhill with the freight that it had previously taken up to Rhiw Goch. Coming the other way and heading for Rhiw Goch is 'Prince' with a train of slate wagons. The England loco's approach is well timed as, with 'Mountaineer' safely inside 'Prince' gets a non-stop run through the station and passes on its way uphill.
 12. Back to a now rather breezy Tan-y-Bwlch for this recording of 'Linda' and 'Blanche' departing for Blaenau Ffestiniog. With 'Blanche' to come out of service for overhaul in the not too distant future there may not be many more opportunities to see and hear the two Ladies working together.
 13. Still at Tan-y-Bwlch the next up train is heard arriving from Porthmadog. This should have been a solo turn for 'Mountaineer' as it had been the previous day but 'Prince' had been attached as pilot. Soon after the pair stop at the water column 'Blanche' and 'Linda' are heard arriving with the down train. With water taken and the right away 'Prince' and 'Mountaineer' depart for Blaenau Ffestiniog. As the sound of the two locos fades away into the woods 'Blanche' and 'Linda' depart heading down hill.
 14. Once again 'Taliesin' had a early evening run up to Tan-y-Bwlch with a short train of slate wagons. The loco isn't being worked very hard passing Gwyndy and the wagons are making almost as much noise as the loco.
 15. About half an hour later it was turn of 'Mountaineer' with its train of ballast wagons, this time going back to Glanypwll to be ready for the following morning's excursions. The noise level from this loco was far more satisfactory from the sound recording point of view.
 16. On Monday 6th May 2002, the last day of Ffestiniog Interactive the 7.50 breakfast train with 'Taliesin' at the head of the Vintage set and with a far more satisfactory compliment of passengers than were present on the previous day departs from Porthmadog and heads out across the Cob as road traffic rushes by.
 17. 'Mountaineer', which had run down from Glanypwll with its train of ballast wagons and crossed 'Taliesin' at Tan-y-Bwlch is standing in the loop at Rhiw Goch awaiting departure time. The safety valves lift briefly just before the train gets the right away and starts out of the loop. Once clear of the points the driver opens the loco up producing some excellent sound effects blasting away through the woods and out onto the Cei Mawr embankment. Back into the woods the loco is still audible for some time before the sound finally fades away.
 18. About an hour later 'Taliesin' on the Vintage train, having crossed 'Mountaineer' heading for Dduallt at Tan-y-Bwlch is waiting to cross an up train at Rhiw Goch. 'Prince' and 'Linda' are soon heard approaching from Penrhyn and the pair pass slowly through the loop collecting the token in passing. Once clear both locos become audible again as they take the train away into the woods. As the sound of these two fades away 'Taliesin', with a few gentle exhaust beats, departs for Porthmadog.



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19. 'Linda' & 'Blanche' were paired once again for an afternoon run to Blaenau Ffestiniog. Departing from Tan-y-Bwlch adhesion sounds to be a bit of a problem in getting this well filled 10 coach train under way but, after a few bursts of machine gun fire exhaust, the two Ladies get the train on the move and up through the woods towards Garnedd Tunnel. But I do wish that young passenger had kept quiet!
20. Trains returning from Blaenau Ffestiniog have only one short uphill gradient to surmount. This is at Tanygrisiau where the line leaves it's original course to deviate around the lake and eventually reach Dduallt via the spiral. The two ladies, 'Blanche' and 'Linda' are heard approaching Tanygrisiau station where they pause briefly before tackling the remaining rising gradient to the summit close to the power station. The pair make a fine sound, almost sufficient in volume to drown out the sounders on the two ungated level crossings.
21. On the next train, heard at the same place, was 'Mountaineer'. The Alco gets a non-stop run through the station.
22. Back at Porthmadog, having done a little shunting, 'Mountaineer' takes the empty stock of it's train back over the Cob to Boston Lodge.

1. 'Prince' & 'Linda' arriving and departing from Tan-y-Bwlch. 4th May 2002
2. 'Blanche' passing Gwyndy.
3. 'Mountaineer' departing from Porthmadog.
4. 'Earl of Merioneth' arriving at Minffordd and 'Taliesin' departing with a slate train.
5. 'Taliesin' departing from Porthmadog. 5th May 2002
6. 'Mountaineer' departing from Tan-y-Bwlch on freight.
7. 'Earl of Merioneth' & 'Mountaineer' crossing 'Prince' & 'Linda' at Tan-y-Bwlch.
8. 'Taliesin' passing Gwyndy.
9. 'Mountaineer' on freight passing Gwyndy.
10. 'Earl of Merioneth' departing from Minffordd.
11. 'Mountaineer' arriving & 'Prince' passing through Minffordd, both on freight trains.
12. 'Linda' & 'Blanche' departing from Tan-y-Bwlch.
13. 'Prince' & 'Mountaineer' crossing 'Linda' & 'Blanche' at Tan-y-Bwlch.
14. 'Taliesin' on a slate train passing Gwyndy.
15. 'Mountaineer' on a goods train passing Gwyndy.
16. 'Taliesin' departing from Porthmadog. 6th May 2002
17. 'Mountaineer' departing from Rhiw Goch on freight.
18. 'Prince' & 'Linda' crossing 'Taliesin' at Rhiw Goch.
19. 'Linda' & 'Blanche' departing from Tan-y-Bwlch.
20. 'Blanche' & 'Linda' arriving at and departing from Tanygrisiau.
21. 'Mountaineer' passing Tanygrisiau.
22. 'Mountaineer' with an ECS train departing from Porthmadog.