



Ffestiniog Journey

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1. The majority of passengers travelling on the Ffestiniog Railway begin their journey at Porthmadog and we will do the same.
In this recording we hear Double Fairlie 0-4-4-OT 'David Lloyd George' departing from Harbour Station and heading out across the Cob during the morning of 4th May 1998.
2. In this recording the Single Fairlie 0-4-4T 'Taliesin' is heard starting from Harbour Station and passing from part way across the Cob with a train for Tan-y-Bwlch made up of vintage carriages on 7th May 2001.
These vintage trains operated for quite a few years, at first just to Minffordd but later through to Tan-y-Bwlch and provided an excellent and interesting alternative to riding the full length of the line. More recently they have not been included in the regular timetable and now only appear for special events.
3. Once over the Cob trains curve sharply left past Boston Lodge where the railway's workshop and running shed is situated.
In this recording ex Penrhyn Quarry Hunslet 2-4-0STT 'Blanche' is heard rounding the curve, passing Boston Lodge Halt and accelerating away on the 1 in 86 gradient through the trees toward Minffordd on 25th August 1996.
4. On 3rd May 1999 one of the smallest engines on the line which regularly sees use in passenger traffic, the England 0-4-0STT 'Prince' was employed working Vintage Shuttle trains between Porthmadog and Minffordd. Completed in 1864 this locomotive is still going strong on the line for which it was built and is reputed to be the oldest working steam locomotive in the world.
We join this train which has stopped at Boston Lodge Halt for a short on-train recording of the locomotive departing and producing some excellent sounds on the gradient heading towards Minffordd.
5. Minffordd station, being built as it is next a very busy main road, is not conducive to good sound recordings due to the sound of traffic passing by. Still, despite the noise of passing traffic Double Fairlie 0-4-4-OT 'Earl of Merioneth' makes a fine sound arriving at and departing from the station with the first train of the day to Blaenau Ffestiniog on the morning of 11th September 2003.
6. Moving a little further up the line but still close to Minffordd station it is possible to get away from the noise of road traffic and from this location we hear the other ex Penrhyn Quarry Hunslet 2-4-0STT 'Linda' departing in fine style for Blaenau Ffestiniog on 31st August 1998.
7. After Minffordd the line rises at 1 in 82 and passes Gwyndy, one of my favourite places on the railway for lineside recording. When conditions are right, as they were on 3rd May 1999, excellent recordings can be made here even if the sheep in the area do sometimes sound a little nervous!
In this recording, as bees buzz around the microphone, 'David Lloyd George' sounds to be well in control of this 10 coach train to Blaenau Ffestiniog.
8. Still at Gwyndy for this next track and, as you can hear, recording conditions were even better on 25th July 2001. The Hunslet 2-4-0STT 'Blanche' can be heard all the way from the start at Minffordd.
What a fine sound this loco makes passing on the gradient with 8 bogie coaches behind the tender.
9. After Minffordd the next station on the line is Penrhyn and just beyond the station is Penrhyn Level Crossing. There are other level crossings on the railway but most of them are ungated with warning lights to protect road users. The one at Penrhyn however, is busy enough to need gates and a level crossing keeper to work them.
In this recording, made on 27th May 2003, the Alco 2-6-2T 'Mountaineer' can be heard approaching Penrhyn with a train from Porthmadog. As the train nears the station the bell warning of an approaching train can be heard sounding in the crossing keeper's hut.
With a locomotive that makes as much noise as 'Mountaineer' the bell is somewhat superfluous. The crossing keeper would have to be deaf not to have already realised that the train was approaching and as it comes to a stand in the station he closes the gates to road traffic.
Once station duties are completed 'Mountaineer' makes a fine sound departing over the road crossing.
As the train heads for Blaenau Ffestiniog clearing the crossing the gates are reopened and the sound of road traffic resumes.
10. A little further up the line is the isolated signal box and passing loop at Rhiw Goch where, when traffic requirements demand it, up and down trains can cross each other.
In this recording made on 17th September 1997 near Rhiw Goch Farm 'Earl of Merioneth' is heard recovering from a 5 mph temporary speed restriction and passing through the loop.
11. Rhiw Goch loop isn't used very often nowadays, generally only during special events and galas but when the vintage train ran through to Tan-y-Bwlch in the main summer season it was required to be open and in use on an almost daily basis.
On the morning of 31st August 1999 the England 0-4-0STT 'Prince' was in use on the vintage train and, as this recording begins, can be heard approaching and stopping in the loop to await a down train to arrive.
The down train is the return working of the early service from Porthmadog to Blaenau Ffestiniog which is booked for diesel haulage and is soon heard approaching behind 'Vale of Ffestiniog'. This is a diesel-hydraulic locomotive built by Funkey of South Africa and rebuilt by the Ffestiniog in 1997 for use on the line.
Once the down train is clear 'Prince' with it's vintage rolling stock can depart and accelerate away through the trees and across the Cei Mawr embankment.
12. Beyond Rhiw Goch the line climbs through the forest high above the Afon Dwyryd until just before turning left to reach Tan-y-Bwlch there is a small halt which serves Plas Tan-y-Bwlch. This is the request stop, Plas Halt.
A little further on from the Halt we hear the Single Fairlie 'Taliesin' pass with a vintage train for Tan-y-Bwlch. The gradients on this section are easier and the locomotive doesn't need to make much noise with this relatively light load having passed the Halt without a stop being required.
13. My favourite place on the Ffestiniog Railway is Tan-y-Bwlch and it's surroundings. Located amongst trees and far away from any busy roads it is one of the most peaceful places that I know of on a preserved railway. Add to this peace and tranquillity the sound of hard working steam locomotives echoing around the valley and you will begin to see (or hear) why I like the place so much. Except of course when the RAF are practicing!
To a railway sound recordist the RAF are a problem in North Wales. There are very few days in the year when they are not flying practice missions in the area and I have had many potentially excellent recordings spoiled by their arrival on the scene.
The only times usually guaranteed to be RAF free are weekends, especially Bank Holiday weekends.
So, on the 26th August 2002, Bank Holiday Monday, I set out to try for a recording that would paint a picture in sound of Tan-y-Bwlch and it's



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surroundings.

This recording was made about half a mile from Plas Halt overlooking Llyn Mair and facing Tan-y-Bwlch station across the valley near a footpath across the line known on the railway as Crossing Bothy. You can find this and other locations on the map published in the Ffestiniog Railway Traveller's Guide which is sold on the trains and in the railway's shops.

The recording lasts almost 13 minutes and only some of the quiet sections while the trains recorded are standing in Tan-y-Bwlch station have been edited.

To begin we first hear an up train approaching. This is hauled by the Hunslet 2-4-0STT 'Blanche' which passes, whistling a warning for the crossing.

While 'Blanche' can still be heard continuing around the curves towards Tan-y-Bwlch a down train from Blaenau Ffestiniog can be heard in the distance whistling for Garnedd Tunnel and later rattling down the other side of the valley.

The up train hauled by 'Blanche' was running a little late. This means that the down train has to wait at the signal controlling the approach to Tan-y-Bwlch until 'Blanche' is safely in the passing loop at the station. Only then can the down train, hauled by 'Earl of Merioneth' get a clear signal and proceed. The Double Fairlie can be heard restarting and arriving in the station.

With water taken by 'Blanche' on the up train and station duties completed both trains get the right away and the up train can be heard departing working hard on the 1 in 86 gradient at the other side of the valley.

Eventually 'Blanche' can be heard reaching and passing through Garnedd Tunnel before accelerating away towards Blaenau Ffestiniog while 'Earl of Merioneth' with the down train rattles past the crossing on its way back to Porthmadog.

14. Our next recording is at Tan-y-Bwlch station made on 31st August 1998.

The Alco 2-6-2T 'Mountaineer' is heard approaching and stopping in the station with an up train. As the Alco begins to take water from the tank at the end of the station 'Earl of Merioneth' is heard arriving from Blaenau Ffestiniog.

Then with water taken, the road set and the Right Away given 'Mountaineer' departs. Initially the locomotive has a problem with slipping, often a problem here where the train has to be started on a sharp curve and, to make matters worse where the sanders can not be used as sand in the point work is something to be avoided. Patience and careful handling eventually succeed and 'Mountaineer' blasts away through the trees up towards Garnedd tunnel as 'Earl of Merioneth' leaves for Porthmadog.

15. In the woods a little way up the line from Tan-y-Bwlch station on the 11th September 1995 the Double Fairlie 'Merddin Emrys' is heard departing heading for Blaenau Ffestiniog.

The two Double Fairlies we have heard so far in these recordings were newly built by the Railway at Boston Lodge in 1979 & 1992. Unlike these 'Merddin Emrys', although considerably rebuilt in more recent years with a new superheated boiler, was originally built by the Ffestiniog Railway at Boston Lodge Works in 1879.

16. Above Tan-y-Bwlch is the first of two tunnels on the line. Although quite short, Garnedd Tunnel is very narrow and the clearance between the train and the tunnel sides is tight. For this reason trains are restricted to 10 mph when passing through.

Being part way up a very steep slope Garnedd Tunnel is inaccessible on foot so as lineside recordings are virtually impossible here we will have to join a train once again.

Our train is hauled by 'Earl of Merioneth' and is heard departing from Tan-y-Bwlch and climbing the 1 in 86 gradient beyond.

Approaching the tunnel the driver closes the regulators (being a double engine this one has two) and allows speed to fall before reopening the regulators to maintain speed on the gradient. Once the entire train is through the tunnel the regulators are opened wider and the Double Fairlie soon has the train back up to line speed. Recorded on 30th May 2002.

17. The remaining stations before Blaenau Ffestiniog are all request stops and the first two after Tan-y-Bwlch, Coed-y-Bleddiau and Campbell's Platform are both actually private Halts.

In the case of the first of these, Coed-y-Bleddiau, the railway or an arduous walk along footpaths are the only means of access to the small cottage built at the side of the line. Any sizable deliveries to this cottage must arrive by train!

In this recording 'Earl of Merioneth' is heard with a 10 coach train passing this tiny halt heading for Blaenau Ffestiniog on 28th May 2003.

18. By 1968 the Ffestiniog Railway had succeeded in restoring services as far as Dduallt but to extend beyond this point to Blaenau Ffestiniog there was a major problem.

In the 1950's the British Energy Authority, later to become the CEBG, announced the construction of a pumped storage hydro electric power station at Tanygrisiau. This meant that Moelwyn Tunnel and some of the original track bed were to be flooded in conjunction with building the lower reservoir.

The Railway's answer to this was to propose building a new line around this reservoir.

Much has been written elsewhere about the legal, practical and engineering difficulties of building what later came to be known as the 'Deviation' but in 1978 it was completed and trains were once again able to reach Tanygrisiau and rejoin the original route to Blaenau Ffestiniog.

What makes this new route unique in the British Isles is the spiral which had to be constructed at Dduallt to gain some 35 feet in height to reach the new route.

In this recording made on 1st June 2002 from the small hill in the middle of the spiral we hear 'Linda' approaching with an up train, passing under Rhoslyn Bridge, over which it will soon be passing on its way to Blaenau Ffestiniog, stopping in the station.

A few walkers leave the train to take one of the footpaths here before 'Linda' departs.

Climbing on a left hand curve the train passes behind the microphone before passing over the bridge and continuing to climb above the small tarn, Rhoslyn.

'Linda' is heard passing from left to right for the second time before heading away on the 1 in 80 gradient.

19. The most difficult engineering challenge on the Deviation must have been the construction of the new 294 yard Moelwyn Tunnel.

Despite the difficulties of cutting through the very hard rock, using modern equipment the tunnel was completed in less than a year.

The both the old and the new Moelwyn Tunnels are very wet but the new tunnel has been lined and is of much larger dimensions than the old one. An up journey through the old narrow tunnel must have been an interesting experience but there is no danger of suffocation when passing through the new!

This recording was made on 28th August 1998 a little way beyond the north end of Moelwyn Tunnel and we hear 'Earl of Merioneth' emerging and heading for Blaenau Ffestiniog on the new line built above the Tanygrisiau Reservoir.



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20. Like the other stations between Tan-y-Bwlch and Blaenau Ffestiniog, Tanygrisiau station is a request stop and although I had made a number of attempts to record a train departing from there every time I had tried the trains had not stopped. I finally succeeded on 10th September 2003 in getting the recording I wanted by the simple expedient of having someone on the train with strict instructions to get off at Tanygrisiau!
- It's a good job that there is shelter at the station as the weather on this day was very poor with a strong wind and that kind of light rain that gets you really wet in a surprisingly short time!
- The loco 'Earl of Merioneth' is heard approaching the station over the two road crossings which are protected by flashing lights and sounders. The locomotive comes to a stop almost directly in front of the microphone and the sound of the oil burner in firebox is clearly audible. All the locomotives heard on this CD are oil burners as there is too much risk from line side fires from coal burning locomotives for regular use. Once my passenger has alighted the Guard gives the right away and 'Earl of Merioneth' accelerates rapidly towards Blaenau Ffestiniog on the falling gradient at this point.
21. When originally built the Ffestiniog Railway had a continuous falling gradient from Blaenau Ffestiniog until the level track on the Cob is reached at Boston Lodge. The reason for this was so that loaded trains conveying slate from the Ffestiniog quarries could reach the Harbour at Porthmadog from where the slate was exported. The empty wagons were returned up the line using horse power. The construction of the Deviation caused this continuous falling gradient to be interrupted by a short up hill section on a gradient of 1 in 78 at Tanygrisiau.
- This rising gradient gives the opportunity of making sound recordings of down trains on this section and in this recording, made on 17th September 1997 we hear 'David Lloyd George' climbing up towards the new summit accompanied by the warning sounders on the Stwlan and Portal Road level crossings.
22. Having had the only respite it gets from the continuous gradient an up train having passed Tanygrisiau is soon back on a rising gradient. Heard on 5th July 1997 from a little way beyond the station the Alco 2-6-2T 'Mountaineer' passes and is opened up on the rising gradient towards Blaenau Ffestiniog.
23. Almost at journeys end this recording was made on 9th September 1995 adjacent to the original LNWR station at Blaenau Ffestiniog which was used by British Railways until the new BR/FR interchange was opened. Hunslet 2-4-0STT 'Linda' is heard on the final climb from Glan-y-Pwll as the train approaches the terminus at Blaenau Ffestiniog.
24. The new station in Blaenau Ffestiniog provides a most satisfactory interchange between the Ffestiniog Railway and trains on the Conway Valley line to Llandudno Junction. It opened in 1982 and during the same year the first FR passenger train since 1946 reached the terminus. In this recording made from the end of the standard gauge platform the Alco 2-6-2T 'Mountaineer' is heard approaching the terminus. The final approach to the platform end is on a short gradient of 1 in 66, the steepest on the railway. As the train comes to a stand in the platform and the Guard begins to unlock the doors, unlike the alighting passengers many of whom will have the journey back to Porthmadog to look forward to, this brings our Ffestiniog Journey to an end. I hope that you have enjoyed it.

1. 'David Lloyd George' departing from Porthmadog. 4th May 1998
2. 'Taliesin' crossing the Cob. 7th May 2001
3. 'Blanche' passing Boston Lodge. 25th August 1996
4. 'Prince' departing from Boston Lodge. 3rd May 1999
5. 'Earl of Merioneth' arriving & departing at Minffordd. 11th September 2003
6. 'Linda' departing from Minffordd. 31st August 1998
7. 'David Lloyd George' passing Gwyndy. 3rd May 1999
8. 'Blanche' passing Gwyndy. 25th July 2001
9. 'Mountaineer' at Penrhyn Crossing. 27th May 2003
10. 'Earl of Merioneth' near Rhiw Goch. 17th September 1997
11. 'Prince' crossing 'Vale of Ffestiniog' at Rhiw Goch. 31st August 1999
12. 'Taliesin' passing Plas Halt. 26th August 2002
13. Trains crossing at Tan-y-Bwlch. 'Blanche' with an up train and 'Earl of Merioneth' with a down train heard near Plas Halt. 26th August 2002
14. 'Mountaineer' crossing 'Earl of Merioneth' at Tan-y-Bwlch. 31st August 1998
15. 'Merddin Emrys' departing from Tan-y-Bwlch. 11th September 1995
16. 'Earl of Merioneth' departing from Tan-y-Bwlch to passing through Garnedd Tunnel. 30th May 2002
17. 'Earl of Merioneth' passing Coed-y-Bleddiau. 28th May 2003
18. 'Linda' arriving and departing at Dduallt. 1st June 2002
19. 'Earl of Merioneth' emerging from Moelwyn Tunnel. 28th August 1998
20. 'Earl of Merioneth' arriving and departing at Tanygrisiau. 10th September 2003
21. 'David Lloyd George' departing from Tanygrisiau with a down train. 17th September 1997
22. 'Mountaineer' passing Tanygrisiau. 5th July 1997
23. 'Linda' approaching Blaenau Ffestiniog. 9th September 1995
24. 'Mountaineer' arriving at Blaenau Ffestiniog. 27th May 2003