



A year of challenges and complexities is drawing to a close as we enter the festive period and therefore we would like to provide you, our members, with a brief update on the state of play and our plans for 2021.

We would first like to take this opportunity to thank all who have supported our cause and worked tirelessly throughout this year to keep our Railway steaming. Whether you've volunteered, donated or supported from afar, your support and generosity has epitomised all that is great about our Railway during a year full of difficulties.

Whilst the upcoming months will undoubtedly be clouded by much of the uncertainty which has overshadowed us for large parts of 2020, we are moving forward with renewed hope that 2021 will be a brighter year for our Railway.

The festive season would usually mark a busy period for all as we welcome visitors to the Railway for Santa & Christmas week trains. Plans were in place to run a limited festive service in place of Santa trains this year. However, recent Welsh Government regulations which have significantly affected the hospitality sector and warnings of a new rise in Covid-19 cases across Wales have complicated matters. Many local hospitality businesses have closed as a result of these changes.

Therefore, with this in mind - and for the safety of all our customers, staff and supporters - we sadly decided that we would not run any trains for visitors this winter. This was a very difficult decision for us to make and not one that was taken lightly. However, we are not completely closed and have some opportunities for you to join us over the festive period.

Tearooms at Tan-y-Bwlch

Our Tearooms at Tan-y-Bwlch station will be open 10:00 – 16:00 between the 19th of December – 3rd of January, excluding Christmas Day. Hot food service will be available between 11:00 – 15:00.

Both members and the general public are welcome to visit Tearooms at Tan-y-Bwlch during this period.

Festive afternoon teas are available and will be served from 2pm each day. Advanced bookings are required at least 24hrs prior to your afternoon tea.

Members' Yuletide Specials

Despite not running our public service, we are offering two complimentary trains for members and their families on the Ffestiniog Railway. These services will run on the 28th December and the 1st January.

The train will depart Harbour Station at 11:00 and will be steam hauled and double headed. We will pause at Tan-y-Bwlch before continuing to Dduallt where the locos will top and tail to enable us to run around the deviation so we can catch a glimpse of the new south tunnel portal before returning to Tan-y-Bwlch, with a half hour stop for coffee and then back to Harbour Station. If tunnel portals aren't your thing, you are welcome to alight at Tan-y-Bwlch on the outward journey for a walk and a leisurely lunch before re-joining the train.

To join us on the train you will need to book in advance as space is strictly limited and is being sold on a compartment basis. Once you have booked a compartment, you may fill it with other people as long as they are in your family bubble. Compartments are free of charge to both Ffestiniog and Welsh Highland Society members and are sold on a 'first come first served' basis. Very limited first class is available as Carriage 152 has been added into the train. Otherwise, we are using our heritage stock so it will be chilly! Make sure you dress accordingly and bring a flask.

This is also a chance to trial a new on line ticket system. Don't worry about the cost of the ticket shown. Just be prepared to enter your membership number to get your 100% discount. Bookings will available from 11:00 on Tuesday 15th December. Member tickets for these services can be booked via the following link - <https://www.festrail.co.uk/members-yuletide-specials/>. Please book on line as our booking office is mostly closed.

If you do have problems, please email bookingoffice@ffwhr.com

Welsh Highland Winter

Regrettably, we are unable to run member trains on the Welsh Highland Railway at this moment in time, however we hope members of both societies will be able to enjoy these Porthmadog – Dduallt services. We are taking this opportunity to replace the river bridge at Plas y Nant. This has been giving concern for some time and there is always a worry it could fail mid-season. With the kind help of a private donor, we have been able to put it into this year's winter programme. However, it does mean the running line is split until late spring. Caernarfon Station is also closed until the start of next season.

Our Christmas Appeals

There are many ways that members can help us over this difficult winter. Volunteering is more difficult at the moment during the current restrictions and we urge you not to break any rules and to stay safe. However, if you live locally, there are projects going ongoing on both railways so please contact your regular leader for information. If you are unable to visit, you may wish to donate to one of our Christmas Appeals. Each society has an appeal for something that will not only provide a use in the future but will also help with job security at Boston Lodge.

FRS Linda Appeal

This project is the overhaul of LINDA - one of our ex-Penrhyn Quarry Railway 'Ladies' that is now due a major 10-year overhaul. In just two years' time this popular loco will have been with us for SIXTY years. We want to see her in action for that anniversary, rather than languishing in the back of a shed, awaiting her turn in the queue of locos passing through the Works.

There is much to be done including work on her boiler, the oldest in the fleet, chassis and saddle tank. However, it is the loco's tender that is one of the biggest areas of concern. This has been slated for replacement on many occasions and repaired many times over. Major surgery is now required. It is likely that we will be able to keep the sides and rear end, and also recycle the wheel-sets, but the rest of the structure needs to be replaced.

Over and above these major items every other part of the locomotive will require overhaul, and many hours of work are required to do this.

Paul Lewin writes: "We estimate that this overhaul will cost around £60,000 - that is one thousand pounds for every year LINDA has worked on the FR. Donations would be extremely welcome, and can be made via the FR Society as usual. I very much hope that you will be able to help us with this appeal. Now more than ever this kind of support is very important. Helping now will not only ensure we can enjoy riding behind LINDA on an important anniversary, but it will keep skilled staff working for us at a time when other income is uncertain.

You can donate to the appeal here: http://www.ffestiniograilway.org.uk/full_article/linda-appeal

WHRS Christmas Appeal

The Welsh Highland Railway Society's Christmas appeal for 2020/2021 is for a new third class saloon carriage – to follow 2046, 2047 and the Pullman Observation carriage "Gwyrfaï" which were also funded by the Society. Successful completion of this project will mean the Society's members and friends will have provided four carriages for Welsh Highland trains.

Boston Lodge was proud to out-shop the latest WHR saloon 2048 on the 8th December and are now ready for their next modern saloon build. All funded projects are especially welcome at this time as it enables us to keep staff working.

You can donate to the appeal here:

<https://www.whrsoc.org.uk/index.php/join-the-society-2/donations-and-legacies>

On Line Christmas Shopping

Don't forget, our Online Shop is the perfect place for all your Railway merchandise and gifts! We have hundreds of fantastic items available including Artwork, Books, Calendars, Clothing, DVDs and Miniature Railway Models.

Our 'A Year in the Life of the Ffestiniog & Welsh Highland Railways – 2020' DVD/Blu-ray is now available to buy from the web shop. Take a look back at the highlights from a historic year at our Railway with over 4 hours of footage!

Every penny we make from our Online Shop goes towards helping to build and maintain our world famous, much loved railways! We will be processing orders right up to 23rd December.

Looking forward

With regards to next year, we are actively reviewing plans and options for services in 2021. Whilst it is difficult to offer any further clarity at this moment in time, we hope to welcome visitors back to the Railway in Spring 2021.

As I am sure you will appreciate, the situation is very dynamic at the moment making forward planning hard. We will try and keep you informed as best we can so expect another newsletter in late February/early March.

Thanks again for all your support and we wish you all a happy and safe Christmas and hope to be able to see you all again next year!

*** IMPORTANT NOTICE** - All ongoing services and events will be subject to any further changes in Welsh Government policy in response to the Covid-19 situation.