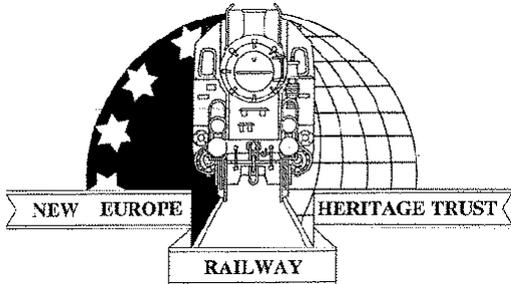


Eastern Star



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

Number 62

June 2016

NERHT Annual General Meeting

Once again, NERHT enjoyed the hospitality of the Model Railway Club for its annual general meeting on May 14. Stephen Wiggs presented the annual report (see next page).



AZIZU, the Ukrainian preservation organization, is a group with which NERHT has long been associated. This picture shows one of its 2015 excursions.

Photo Ivor Harding

The New Europe Railway Heritage Trust was established as an informal committee over twenty years ago to help railway preservation in our area of benefit, that is, the former Soviet Union and the ex-Communist countries of Eastern and Central Europe, the region which is sometimes called the New Europe. In the past twelve months we have been as busy as ever in pursuing this objective in the changed conditions facing us two decades later.

Our area of benefit of course is vast and far more diverse than some people realise, so it is good that a request last year from Wattrain (the World Association of Tourist Trams and Trains) for statistical and other information on railway preservation in the New Europe caused us to seek information from our contacts, and to review the overall position. The responses we received from our friends in the East show that they still face many challenges, yet these difficulties should not blind us to the more positive aspects. Tourist railways are now operating or are being established in a majority of the ex-Communist states; while some are comparable to those in the West, others have no exact equivalents; for example, children's (or pioneer) railways which have developed as tourist attractions. Railway tourism on the main lines using heritage trains continues to develop. Problems as always include shortage of money, while some organisations have few members, which can lead to them becoming inactive. As in Western Europe internal disputes can be a problem. Against all this, our friends lack nothing in terms of dedication and enthusiasm!

In the past year, as in previous years, we have welcomed guests from the New Europe to the United Kingdom on study tours – at our 2015 Annual General Meeting we enjoyed a presentation by our friends from the Latvian narrow gauge railway company (*Banitis*) which is one of our oldest partner organisations. This year we are privileged to have delegates from the Covasna-Comandau Forestry Railway in Transylvania. As well as attending the Wattrain congress in Japan, in 2015 delegates from NERHT took part in conferences in Hungary and Romania, and last June we made a memorable visit to Western Ukraine - where several railway heritage projects are in operation or proposed in this spectacularly beautiful area – and were privileged to join representatives of AZIZU (the Ukrainian railway heritage association) and the Carpathian Tramway Forum in making the case for railway preservation to senior officials of the Lviv Railway, the region of Ukrainian state railways.

Other lobbying included making representations to the Romanian authorities following damage to the historic narrow gauge depot of the Sibiu-Agnita Railway, which of course is helped by our partners the British-based support group SAR UK. Our lobbying moves are usually made in conjunction with Fedecrail, with which we continue to co-operate; as in previous years we were pleased to give financial support for young volunteers – this time from Ukraine - who attended the Fedecrail youth camp, held last year in Hungary.

At times we in NERHT have setbacks. Ever since our foundation we have spent time and effort on things which take years to show results, or which get nowhere: for example, moves to develop links with politicians who are voted out of office, while efforts to obtain European funds can lead to disappointment after much hard work has been done. There are still organisations which seem to prefer to act alone, and do not want outside links, and while ultimately we must respect their decision to do what they think is right, we always aim to make the case for international co-operation.

As a small trust NERHT operates with a minimum of formality, yet the Committee meets regularly, officers carry out their tasks, and our quarterly journal *Eastern Star* is seen by a

growing number of people who often express appreciation for this source of original news. At long last we have started improving our internet site (where the growing number of country flags and foreign-language pages are evidence of the new contacts which we are developing). In addition to our main activities, we provide help to others in various ways, using our network of connections; we answer queries from those seeking information and carrying out research on the railway heritage of the New Europe and have recently secured Russian and Romanian translations of the (British) All-Party Parliamentary Group report on heritage rail!



A scene on the Banitis line in Latvia, another of NERHT's interests.

Photo John Westwood

As always, we must remember that our work would not be possible without those who assist us in all sorts of ways, including railway companies and museums in Great Britain and elsewhere which have welcomed our guests, other helpers of all kinds and, above all, NERHT members who take an active part or donate funds. On behalf of the Committee I should like to thank all of you for your support.

Stephen Wiggs Chairman

NERHT COMMITTEE

At the annual general meeting on 14 May the following were re-elected to serve for the coming twelve months: Graham Farr, Mike Hudson, John Jones, Robert Raynor (Treasurer), Richard Tapper, John Westwood and Stephen Wiggs (Chairman). Jonathan Sutton the then Secretary did not seek re-election to the committee as a result of health problems; we are most grateful to him for his service to date and we wish him all the very best.

ROMANIA

Train Club of Romania. NERHT has maintained its contacts with the TCR preservation organisation and its president Octavian Udriste. It was good to hear that TCR is now properly registered. NERHT intends to help TCR apply for membership of Fedecrail and supports the establishment of a Romanian national railway museum. (A site at the old Filaret Station is envisaged, although not yet confirmed). NERHT also intends to support TCR's lobbying to preserve the Varna – Moldovita Railway.

The Covasna line 4-6-0T. Readers may recall a question raised in our issue No 60, concerning the Krauss 4-6-0 tank locomotive No 763-247 currently surviving on the Covasna – Comandau forestry railway in Romania. The problem was to resolve the rumour that it had once worked from Panyvezys (site of the present-day Siaurukas narrow-gauge tourist railway) in Lithuania. Tony Olsson enlisted the help of well-known experts in several countries and it now does appear that this locomotive was built as a 4-6-0 tender locomotive but was conscripted by the German military railways for service in Lithuania, then sent to the Transylvanian front, and finally ended up at Covasna as a tank locomotive. The chain of research, with much more detail, will no doubt be published elsewhere.

SAR maintains its momentum

Three letters from Mihai Botor detail progress on the Sibiu – Agnita Railway. In March he wrote that the motorized draisine had been a bit of a pain, with the engine refusing to start. After many days and several spare parts (including a second carburettor) Dani finally convinced it to start, not without some help from a high school teacher who owned a Trabant.

There had already been more requests for tourist rides than in previous years, requests that were satisfied with the use of the velo-draisine, which had been running flawlessly. On one Saturday alone it made six round-trips with a group of Belgian girls and another large group of young school children.

Five linden trees had been planted at Cornatel station as part of a grant received last year from the Romanian branch of DB Schenker. More and more milestones were regaining their looks between Cornatel and Hosman; so far, just over one kilometre of them had been painted.

The semi-marathon and cross-country were going to be run again, in late May in Sibiu, where for the fourth year in a row a project has been submitted to spend the 7,000 lei it was hoped to raise. This time it would be for the restoration of the station building interior at Cornatel and functional repairs of the water tower which could then be used as a water reserve for the steam locomotive.

Ioana and Diana were dealing with their own project. They had teamed up with a group of eight children from a local technical school and together have submitted a project to demonstrate how a Stirling engine works by building a scale replica of a steam locomotive. The project has been approved for funding by Youthbank (the local funding scheme for high school children) and will be given 2000 lei. The project will also include a visit to the Railway Museum in Bucharest to see a functional example of the Stirling engine principle. Four of the children live on the Hartibaciu valley and they want to present the outcome of the project in schools across the valley once it's done. They have also become active volunteers on the railway at Cornatel.

There had also been a visit to Georg Hocevar's works. Apart from visiting the workshop, learning a lot about wagons and locomotives and riding a private steam train to Brad and back there was also a look to the future. Georg kindly agreed to lend a small tipper at no

charge which will make it easier to transport ballast where needed on the line. He also showed a diesel locomotive which he thought best suited our needs, a former industrial standard-gauge diesel of Austrian origin: 100hp 2-cylinder 4-stroke engine, 9 tonnes, mechanical braking. It could be regauged and cabin redesigned and put back into use within two months at 15,000 Euros.



In his second letter of late-April Mihai developed the story of continued progress. In the matter of carriage repair, mineral wool had been added to the side panels (*see left*), and windows and door handles had been fitted to the exterior doors, although one door needed to be taken back for welding adjustments. Flexible white plastic panels were being tried for the ceiling. The ceiling had been wired and lamp locations decided. Meanwhile, the Cornatel sidings and the first kilometre of track towards Hosman had been sprayed with herbicide. Elsewhere the sheep were useful in keeping the grass down. The weighbridge at Cornatel had been raised so that it was now possible to pass over it safely. Fifteen more rotten sleepers had been replaced on the curve after the second metal bridge and the 3km of straight track up to the bridge near Hosman were to

be dealt with next. Painting the milestones continued. The two men employed last year to replace sleepers were demanding a 40 per cent wage increase; this was unaffordable so others were being sought in Cornatel.

The county council requested a ride for a group of Swiss local government people and it went well, the new chairman of the County Council expressing his hope for more future cooperation. The Railway had been offered free use of the Council Tower, a tourist site, to organise a photo exhibition for two weeks in late May.

The Hartibaciu local action group, which hopes to obtain EU funds, had now included restoration of SAR lines among its interests.

A BBC producer had arranged to visit the Railway in May with the aim of filming it for the Great Continental Railway Journeys series. Georg Hocevar would bring a train to Cornatel for the occasion.

But in his third letter of early June Mihai reports that because the mid-May BBC filming had been cancelled, advantage was taken of the available train to hold an unplanned public steam weekend. He continues: '...Just one announcement placed on our Facebook page three days in advance raised a swarm of people over the weekend at Cornatel. We were

overwhelmed by the numbers.' They coped with the demand but with little margin. On 28 May the semi-marathon, relay, cross and children's races were duly run in Sibiu for the SAR. There were 72 runners and 111 supporters this year and so far 9600 lei has been raised, which will go towards interior restoration of the station building and repairs to the tank inside the water tower at Cornatel.

Mihai continues: 'The steam event in May (*pictured below*) raised plenty of publicity and we are now bombarded with requests for rides with our draisines. Last Saturday I gave a speech about the SAR to some 50 members of the UK Association for Industrial Archaeology and immediately after a tour with the Trabant draisine to a group of building restorers from the Ludlow area. I lost count of all the other groups we had since May. The high school children whom I spoke about in the previous email finished their model of a steam engine. It works flawlessly and now they are building a second version.'

Local elections resulted in the mayors of Agnita and Nocrich remaining the same, while there was a change at Rosia (Cornatel). The new chair of the County Council is a lady from the liberal party, who included the SAR in her campaign – not unlike four years ago, and one can hope that she will keep her promises. Another steam weekend was scheduled for end-June. An NGO was to sponsor events in Sibiu connected with the international day of the traditional Romanian costume, which will be celebrated on the little train. An online booking service was to be provided.

Work is going on with the track issues identified during the May events, and notably sleeper replacement and gauge widening on the Donkey curve, as well as ballast tamping to raise the inner side of the Dogkennel curve.

The second metal bridge between Cornatel and Hosman has been named the David Jones Bridge, in honour of David Jones, a major long-term SAR supporter, who died in late May.



BALTIC STATES

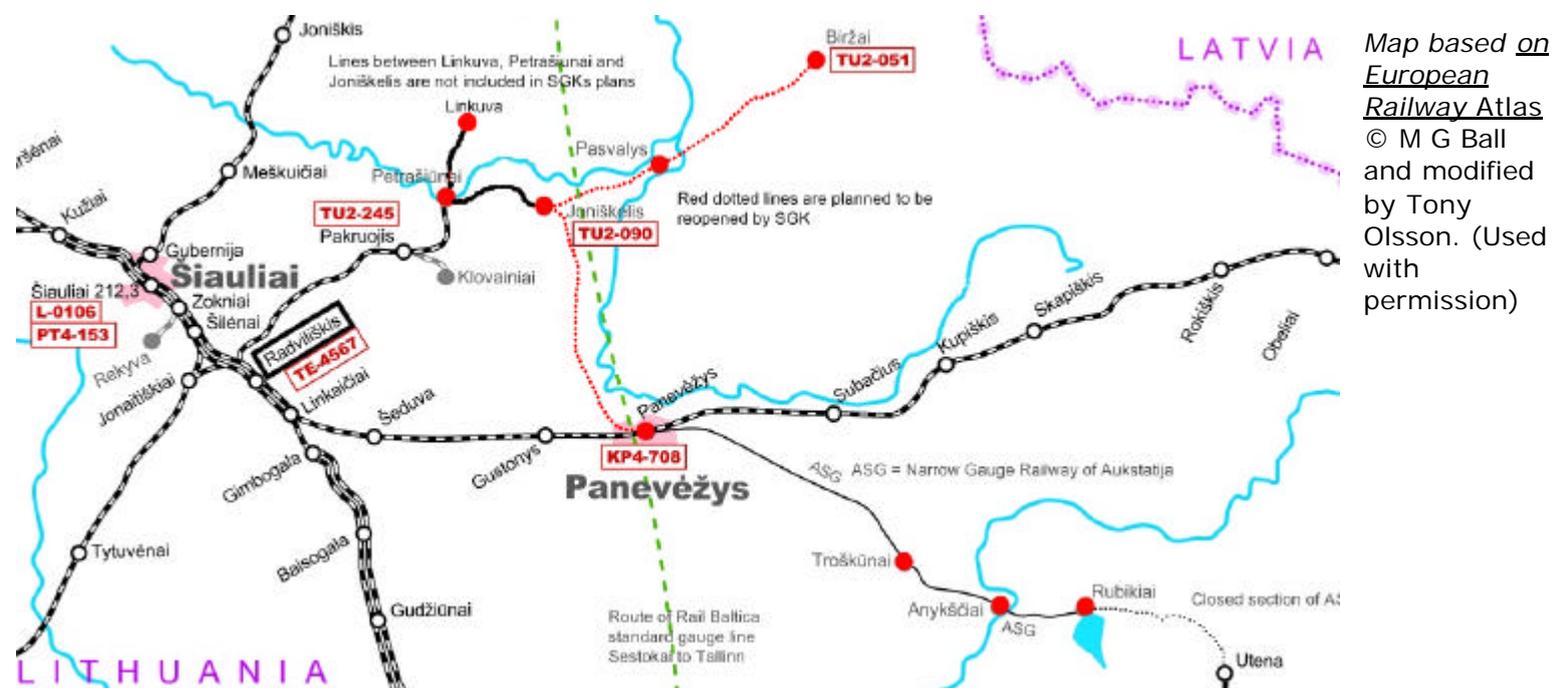
Baltic Railways Magazine. Tony Olsson writes that Zilvinas Urbutis has taken on a new journalist to help in the production of *Baltic Railways Magazine*. Marijus Antonovis works in the Vilnius University Institute of International Relations and Political Science as a political analyst. He is responsible for the website, Facebook in Lithuanian and English languages, and new issues of the magazine.

It is unlikely that the English/Lithuanian version will be resurrected as sales in the UK were insufficient to cover the cost of production, but the regular Lithuanian and Russian version continues (and a German special edition was produced for a trade fair in 2015). But after more than a year of hints, it seems an online English version may be imminent. He, Tony Olsson, was recently entrusted with editing an email announcement of the introduction of a digital version for iOS. A version for Android systems is in preparation.

The BRM app is totally free of charge (though the announcement indicates that there will be premium content for which payment is required). and comes with the ability to switch between English, Russian, German and any of the Baltic languages. The application can be used off-line, although it is necessary to have an Internet connection for downloading publications and viewing attachments. In addition to typical BRM content, the app will provide a showcase for the growing number of publications about the railways of the Baltic States.

A NEW LITHUANIAN PRESERVATION SCHEME

It seems that the 750 mm gauge railway – over 100 km in length – extending from the city of Panevezys to the historic town of Biržai has been purchased, with the aim of running tourist trains and creating a technical museum. This line was originally the northern part of the extensive narrow gauge network based on Panevezys which originally ran as far as Glubokoye or Hlybokaye (formerly Berezvech) in what is now Belarus, parts of which were 600m gauge until 1938. The existing tourist railway from Panevezys to Anyksciai known as Siaurukas also formed part of this system. Track and infrastructure of the Panevezys to Biržai section was first offered for sale by Lietuvos Gelezinkelis, the Lithuanian State Railways, in November 2014, and has been sold for the nominal sum of 60 Euros although no doubt large amounts will be required to restore the railway which was closed completely on 1 July 1996. The purchaser is apparently SGK, a non-profit company.



Lithuanian railcars book. A companion volume to *The Steam Locomotives of Lithuanian Railways 1919-1940* is nearing completion and is expected to be published this year. The book covers all rail vehicles powered by internal combustion engines in addition to railcars. Tony Olsson, who has been checking the translations, says it is a fascinating book, particularly as it illustrates an aspect of Lithuanian railway history that disappeared when the Soviet Union occupied the Baltic States in 1941.

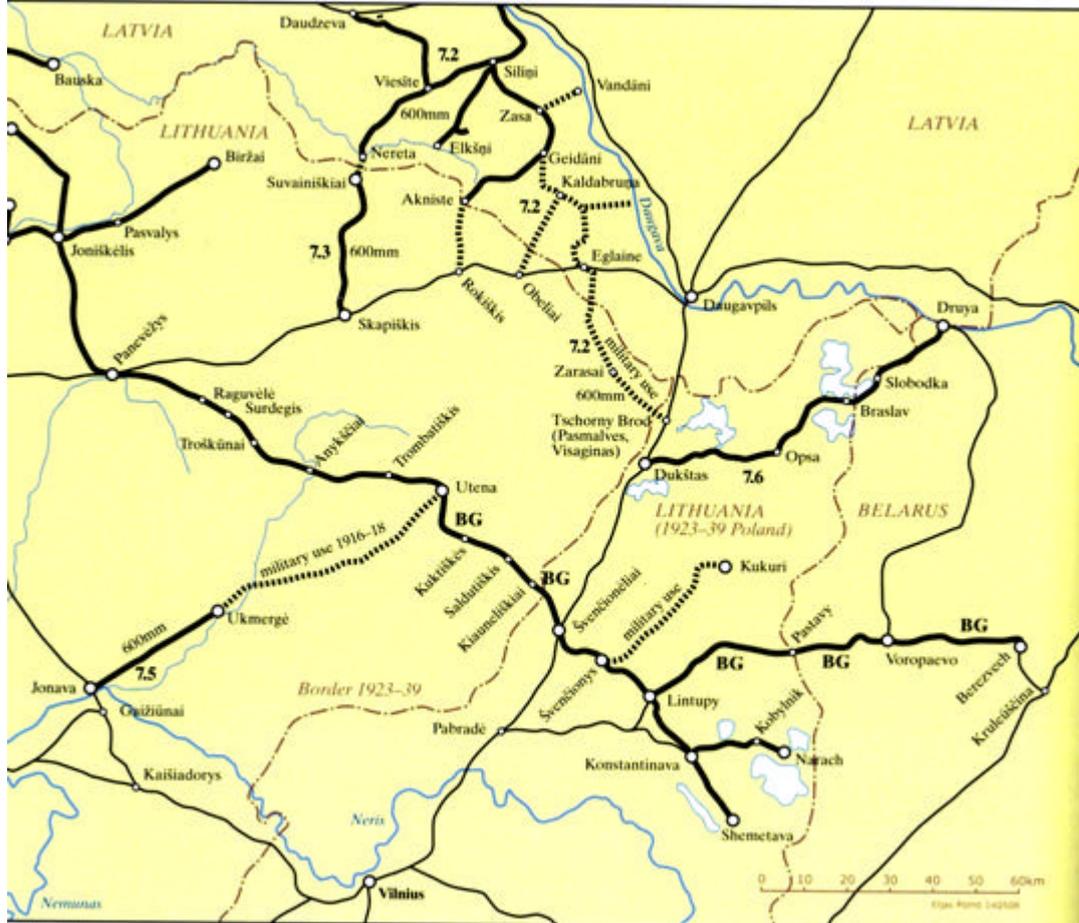
Baltic Place Names: *Beresvetch*

Tony Olsson writes: In 2013 I analysed two of the tables in the July 1913 edition of *Bradshaw's Continental [Railways] Guide*, the one used by Michael Portillo on his journeys through Europe. An article in issue 86 of *Narrow Gauge World* alerted me to the fact that tables 313A and 317 cover the Baltic States which at that time, a year before the start of WW1, were part of Imperial Russia.

Consequently the station names are not the ones that appear on modern maps. Because of my interest in Lithuania, and the Siaurukas narrow gauge railway in particular, I spent many days reconciling the names in the tables with their present-day names.

The results of my labours were written up into an article published in *Eastern Star 50* under the title *Travelling back to the past in the Baltics*. A different version of the article was sent to Michael Portillo with a request he do a programme on Siaurukas, the narrow gauge railway Panevėžys – Anykščiai – Rubikiai which in earlier days extended on to Beresvetch in what is now Belarus but in Bradshaw's day was in Russia.

A few names had stumped me, including Beresvetch. Having just analysed table 313 for a well-known television series, I revisited my earlier work, and managed to fill in most of the gaps. Beresvetch still eluded me as it was not on any of my historical maps. As usual I consulted Google and was astonished to discover that the only reference was my article in *Eastern Star*



Then I remembered *Narrow gauge common carrier railways of the former Soviet Union* by Paul Engelbert, published by Stenvalls ISBN 978-91-7266-188-2, which I bought last year, an invaluable resource for those interested in ex-Soviet narrow gauge railways. And there it was – Beresvetch – not just by name, but on a map! Comparing it with other maps suggested it is now called Glubokoye. Another look at Google revealed another two versions of Beresvetch / Berezvetch / Berezwezc,

and there was an alternative name for Glubokoye: Hlybokaye.

So I got there in the end – it's just a shame we can no longer do the whole journey by narrow gauge train. (*Map by Eljas Pöhlö reproduced with permission*)

Book Review

RIGAS SABIEDRISKAIS TRANSPORTS (RIGA PUBLIC TRANSPORT FROM MID 19th CENTURY TO THE PRESENT) By Andris Biedrins and Edvins Liepins. Published by Industrial Heritage Trust of Latvia and Riga City Council. Latvian text only. Hard covers, 26cm x 22cm. 375 pages. Several hundred illustrations in black and white and colour including tables, maps, plans and technical drawings.

Our attention has just been drawn to this work which was published in 2015. The joint authors Andris Biedrins, a director of the Latvian narrow gauge railway ('Banitis') and Edvins Liepins, former director of the famous Riga motor museum, have played a leading role in conserving Latvia's transport heritage, and have now turned their attention to the history of public transport in the capital city in all its forms, including horse and electric trams, trolleybuses, buses and river boats. The modern photographs show that Riga today is something of a paradise for transport enthusiasts; those heading for the narrow gauge lines at Gulbene and Ventspils or catching mainline trains should spend a day or two in this attractive and historic city and explore the extensive tram network (taking the heritage tram when running), ride trolley buses and visit the railway and motor museums. We hope that an English edition of this book will be produced soon.

Anyone requiring a copy should contact Richard Tapper (details below).

RUSSIA

AM-1 Railcar Restoration

As mentioned in our September 2015 issue, there is an on-going project in Russia to restore one of the once-widespread AM-1 narrow-gauge railcars. The project relies on volunteers from *Poezd naprokat* (poezdnaprokat.ru) and *Zapovednyie Zheleznynie Dorogi* (rusbestrailways.ru), which is a crowd-sourcing body devoted to the preservation of historical railway sites and equipment. The restoration site is the Museum of Industrial Culture in Moscow. Luckily, many of the parts used in this vehicle, including the mechanical parts and interior accommodation, were standardised with other Soviet products. Thus the wheelsets have been found at a turf enterprise in the Kirov region. The expense of bringing these and other items to Moscow is why the organisation is seeking to raise 100.000 roubles (much of which, apparently, has already been subscribed). The surviving original part of the railcar (AM-1-093), its body, had already been brought to Moscow.

BULGARIA

Sofia Tram Museum. Tzanko Simeonov informs us that the 'Green Trams are Searching for Their Home' project proposed by the Public Transport and Infrastructure Association with support from Association 365 and the Czech Culture Centre in Sofia is to receive about €6000 of aid from the Sofia municipality's Europe Programme. Although this is less than the budget (€9000 had been hoped for) this is a huge step forward towards transforming the first tram depot into a cultural centre and tram museum. The duration of the project is six months, from May till end-October.

A Note of Thanks

In May NERHT sponsored a visit to the UK of three representatives of the Covasna – Comandau Railway, and we have just received this letter of thanks:

Thanks to the generous invitation of the NERHT, in the period of 9-15 May 2016, our small group of three people could make the wonderful two way time travel in the future and past of railway history. On one hand we travelled back in time to have a glimpse on the era of steam engines and on the other hand we have been projected to the future of narrow gauge railway operation in Transylvania.

Due to our wonderful hosts Stephen Wiggs and Graham Farr, it became obvious that besides the hardware of railway, there is an immense need of the right human resource. This is why experiencing the ability and attitude of people towards the matter was just as important for us, as seeing the rolling stock and having a ride. Through these encounters one could conclude the need of planning ahead in an economically sustainable way.

It was a real pleasure to experience the "trinity of 600s" (Welsh Highland Railway, Ffestiniog Railway, and Welsh Highland Heritage Railway), the Boston Lodge Works being the cherry on top of the "steaming Welsh rail pie". The NERHT conference that we attended in London was a true surprise in sense of the knowledge about Transylvanian narrow gauge railways among the members. The supporting atmosphere motivated us for taking new action for the revival of the Kovászna-Komandó (Covasna-Comandau) railway.

The trip's last objective was the Bluebell Railway, a very good example of enthusiasm and marketing. The Retro Day was alone a good example for enhancing attractiveness. Besides that, the many special programs (Steam & Cream, Rail Ale, Kids for a Quid) are also exemplary of how to section the market to boost visitor numbers.

Thank you for the opportunity given by the NERHT and hopefully we'll be able to return the favor by "showing off" with the results of our own activity.

CHANGES AT FEDECRAIL

At the annual general meeting of Fedecrail held at Dornbirn in Austria in April Livius Kooy finished his term of office as Secretary, the job which he has held for over twenty years. In this time Livius has been a good friend to railway preservationists in the ex-Communist countries and to NERHT, and has represented Fedecrail on several missions to the East, including joint expeditions with our trust. We wish Livius a happy partial retirement, and are delighted that he will continue to act as one of Fedecrail's links with NERHT, and will still be involved with the ex-Communist countries. Livius's successor as Secretary is Kees Wijn Nobel, also from the Netherlands, and we in NERHT look forward to working with him.

* * * * *

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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