



Editorial & Chairman’s notes –

May was not a particularly good month for the Club. Firstly we heard of the sad passing of Allan Trotter, Vice Chairman and newsletter editor. Although we not able to be present in person at Allan’s committal, I believe many of us joined the service via a webcast. The eulogies were fulsome about Allan and although I knew Allan well, there were many aspects of his life that I was unaware. I must thank Tony for representing the Club and me personally at the funeral. Our thought are with Ruth at this time. Secondly, Peter, our Lake District member, was admitted to hospital for emergency surgery. Fortunately after several major operations he is now at home recuperating but it will be some some before he is fully recovered. Our good wishes, Peter, for a speedy recovery.

Rather than duplicate effort, I thought it better to combine the Editors and Chairman’s notes for this month. As you will realise, if the newsletter was to continue as a valuable conduit of news and comment to Club members, we would need a new editor following the sad passing away of Allan. Fortunately we had a willing volunteer put his name forward and so I am pleased to say that from the July newsletter you new editor will be Andrew Chrysler. Please give Andrew your support and inundate him with articles etc over the coming months. Andrew joined the club at or about the time of our last autumn show but with Christmas, new Year and then the coronavirus emergency intervening we have had had scant opportunity to see him in person although we have seen him on zoom.

Although we have not been able to meet in person for over two months now, I hope that the zoom video conference meetings that we have been holding on a Friday evening have in some ways made up for that. It was nice to see our “out of town” members. I think we have now conducted five meeting like this with at least ten of our members joining on each occasion (see below for a screen shot of the on 8th May). We even managed to conduct the AGM on-line. We have also conducted a couple of 5-10 minutes talks by members in lieu of our formal “talks” evening. The latest one was an interesting selection of photographs by Tony who was on a circular tour – Southport – Chelford – Southport with the underlying theme being sand – I may expand on this topic with an article for the next newsletter.



Over the last few weeks at least a couple of members have been popping into the clubrooms to check on security, water the plants and evn tidy up the garden and cut some wood ready for next year. Thank you Tony and Barry for this effort.

It is hoped that in the not to distant future we will be able to open up the clubrooms again for personal visits. It may not be a formal meeting with many of us in attendance but perhaps just two or three people at a time on an appointment basis and with appropriate social distancing. We wait and see. Perhaps at this time I might remind anyone who does visit the clubrooms, they should wash their hands both on entering the building and leaving it.

Ian Shulver

Secretary’s report:

We live in interesting times. First of all, let me assure you that I won’t be mentioning Barnard Castle, or for that matter Specsavers, but I do think that we are getting to the stage where we need to begin thinking about a staged re-opening of the club as the lockdown is eased legally, with social distancing of course. Any of us could be harbouring this bug without knowing and the person who catches it might be in the 0.6% who die from it. But is does seem clear that “fresh air” is something that the virus does not like.

On Wednesday I paid a visit to the Model Engineers (SMEC) at Victoria Park and after doing my share of gardening, I was able to run a couple of my steam locos, suitably socially distanced. Of course SMEC is substantially an outdoor activity so the clubroom and kitchen is currently out of bounds to members but the running tracks are coming back into use, although the main passenger carrying one is currently out of use due to the reconstruction of the steaming up area.

So I'm thinking that with the fine weather we might be considering meeting on site again in small numbers and concentrating on our garden or Eastbank Lane stationmaster's vegetable patch as it was in 1848! Derek Pratt has taken charge of this project and is currently thinking about the design of the railway which will be G gauge.

Why G gauge, ie 45 mm? Well G gauge has a huge range of ready to run available for it, mostly track powered electric, whilst it is possible also to run selected steam locos from the Roundhouse and Accucraft ranges. But the key is the ready availability of ready to run items, although it has to be admitted that the large range manufactured by LGB, Piko, Bachman Accucraft and Aristocraft is substantially of continental or north American prototypes. With a little ingenuity, UK-looking models can be developed and there is a thriving secondhand market to provide suitable subjects for conversion. In particular, the Thomas range can be turned into quite passable UK models once you have removed those eyes - and there are kits available to help you to do this.

I note from elsewhere in the newsletter that the Big Model and Hobby Show has been cancelled. Obviously it would have been questionable under Covid Regulations, but the failure of the company that markets the Theatre/Floral Hall complex made the decision final. We have not yet made the decision over whether we can run our show this November, but in fact although the Hall has been reserved, only tentative bookings of layouts has been made. It is difficult to see how shows like ours, or even the bigger shows could function with 2 metre social distancing!

Jim Ford

Forthcoming events

The programme for the next few months has obviously been curtailed. However, we will be conducting a regular Friday evening zoom conference starting at 8.00pm. It is hoped that during these conference sessions somebody will give a short discourse of any subject they may like to talk about. These would be expected to take 5-10 minutes and could include photographs or a powerpoint presentation (zoom has the facility for this). The log-in details for these meetings will be sent out a few days in advance.

Please see the note below about the Big Model Show which has now been cancelled for this year:

The BIG Model and Hobby Show
8th August 2020 in Southport
To our Exhibitors, Traders and Demonstrators.

26th May 2020

Dear All,

Over the past week or so discussions have been going on as to whether or not the BIG Show could continue this year, if Shows re-commenced then social distancing would be a big problem.

However, we were overtaken by events when it was announced that the Southport Theatre and Convention Centre, which was held on lease by Bliss Space (Southport) Ltd., from Sefton Council had gone into liquidation and the Convention Centre was unlikely to open again soon.

So, the show will now be held on 7th August 2021 at a new local venue to be announced. One or two traders have paid for trade space so please let me know if a refund is required or if you are happy to hold this over for the 2021 show. It is such a pity as the show last year was a great success and we had been building up an interesting show for this year, please look at our website

www.modelandhobbyshow.com

If you have any questions or observations I would be pleased to hear from you.

Kind regards,
Peter Wood
Peter Wood and the team.

News(?) from members:-

An unusual 32mm gauge "locomotive": R2D2 descends at 57a – Frank Parkinson

This little fellow started his existence in Tesco as a Christmas stocking filler containing liquid soap and flannel. I had a cunning plan for his future though. I set about making him ready for an alternative means of movement, acquiring an I P Engineering 4 wheel drive budget chassis mounted into a hole cut into his base, he never felt a thing. It also occurred to me that as his domed head has a number of coloured points these could be illuminated from within. I set out my plans before Mike Lowe of Pendle Valley Workshop who, after proclaiming you're mad, proffered me a mixture of red LEDs and other coloured lights together with a flash unit and blue lamp for use in his Tardis police call box. I, painlessly, drilled out holes in the dome to mount the red white and blue (patriotic eh) lamps, connected up battery pack and flash unit and eagerly (yes quite mad) switched on.



Here's where the cunning plan started to fall apart. I could get the flashing blue light and nothing else, or by swapping the wiring around as suggested in the instructions could get flashing red lights only.

My electronics expertise is limited, perhaps when these strange times are behind us someone out there could help me untangle this confusion? Meanwhile R2 is sat in his box with his lights out.

A question on the former Southport and Cheshire Lines Extension Railway from Ian Graham:

My wife, Joy, has a query for the next newsletter. The question is, is there a gradient on the coast road - previously Cheshire Lines railway. It really appears that there is a slight upward gradient from Southport to Birkdale and downwards when you travel back. Is this an optical illusion from the sand dunes? Phil goggled this for her, but he got two opposing views on the internet. As it all must be at "sea level" - what do members think? Is Hillside called by that name because it is slightly higher than the area around. We come from Essex/ Surrey where we have real hills and miss them (Been here now in Southport for 40 years come this Autumn).

Answer:

We have at the SMRS, a number of friends who can help us out on various matters. One of them is **Keith Hick**, the well known local lecturer on railway subjects, artist, golf and art historian - and co-ordinator of the Southport railway authors group. Keith is not only an expert on the Cheshire Lines railway but is also by profession a civil engineer and actually worked on the conversion of the trackbed into a road in the 1960s. His answer follows:-

Many thanks for your note and interesting query, which I'm delighted to help out as always and offer the following abstracted from my archives:

- Referring to my copies of the original Southport & Cheshire Lines Extension Railway (S&CLER) hand drawn coloured washed track drawings from Lord Street Station (today's Morrisons Supermarket) through to Woodvale station (today's traffic light junction of the Coastal Road and Formby Bypass), the first Gradient Post (GP) shown on the drawings appears immediately to the North of Birkdale Palace station. Weld Road bridge. This indicates LEVEL towards Ainsdale Beach (originally Seaside) station and 1 in 198 falling gradient towards Lord Street station. Approx 200 yards further North, a second GP shows 1 in 198 rising back towards Weld Road bridge and LEVEL towards Lord Street station. The next GP appears immediately to the South of Oxford Road bridge/Birkdale Palace station and shows LEVEL northwards Lord Street and 1 in 198 rising towards Ainsdale Beach station (ie: through the sand dunes of today's Coastal Road). Again, a second GP appears 200 yards southwards showing 1 in 198 falling back towards Oxford Road bridge GP and LEVEL towards Ainsdale Beach. Essentially, the trackbed from Birkdale Palace and Ainsdale Beach station was LEVEL. From Ainsdale Beach station the next GP shows a 1 in 198 rising towards Woodvale station.
- Putting all this tech info to one side, the railway ran on level ground from Birkdale Palace to Ainsdale, through the sand dunes and alongside Royal Birkdale Golf Club. The latter was founded in 1889 on land now forming Bedford Park in Birkdale, moving to the present location on what was known as Birkdale Hills, where a new course was laid out in 1897. The land rose eastwards from the railway towards Waterloo Road, later becoming known as Hillside. A new bridge was built over the LMS Liverpool-Southport electrified railway between the wars, crested by the then new Hillside station.
- Back to the S&CLER. From Ainsdale Beach station, the railway then ran on a slight rising gradient to cross the Southport-Liverpool railway (today's Coastal Road bridge over the railway), then ran on an embankment towards Woodvale station. Following purchase of the entire S&CLER railway trackbed by Southport Corporation from British Railways in the 1950s, plans were drawn up to convert the railway into a road - the first of its kind in the UK - and I have the original paper by Borough Engineer, Norman Tovey, which he submitted to the Institution of Civil Engineers in the late 1960s. During the mid to late 1960s I worked in the Southport Borough Engineer's office in Southport Town Hall as a Junior Engineer, involved in the design of both the Coastal Road and the replacement bridge over the Liverpool-Southport railway - I still have one of my design drawings in my archive for the Coastal Road and replacement precast concrete bridge deck. The replacement bridge deck necessitated a slight increase in the gradient from Ainsdale Beach towards this new bridge. Today, once you have crossed the electric railway, the gradient rapidly falls to grade (ground level), and runs towards the traffic light junction with the Formby Bypass. During the removal by Rainfords of the sand embankment between the new bridge deck and Woodvale station, Rainfords erroneously removed the entire embankment, instead of leaving a gradual gradient slope from the bridge to ground level - Rainfords then had to return sand to make good their mistake!

As always, it is far easier referring to photographs and diagrams than attempting to describe information in a literal sense.

Thank you, Keith!

Features:

Where's Ian

Continuing the tradition started by Allan, at least for the present, there is a “Where’s Ian”. Looking at the wheelbase of the tram, it would be disastrous if more than one weighty person entered at the same end!



From Playcraft to Scale – Barry Miltenburg

During the recent clear-out at SMRS HQ, I purchased a set of Playcraft Trackside Indicators (set PR.682) with a view to using them on my proposed layout.

I have to say that the plastic mouldings are very heavy and more in line with their intended use on a trainset rather than a scale model. However, I feel that brutal use of a file and a bit of cleaning up could get me something serviceable.

Whilst at it, I took the opportunity to research the use of the signs on offer and am happy to share my findings.

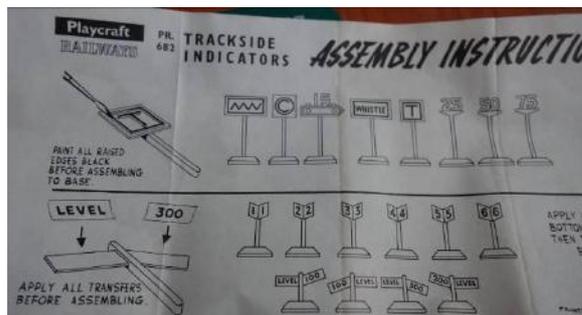
Here is the instruction sheet showing the various signs included in the set. They are, in case you need to know, from top left, “Water Troughs”, “Commencement of Temporary Speed Restriction”, “Temporary Speed Restriction”, “Whistle”, “Termination of Temporary Speed Restriction” and various speed limit signs that would be permanent.

Below the line are the gradient posts and furlong markers between mileposts.

The instructions suggest (at the top left) that the “T” sign is painted with a black T on a white background but the accepted norm was actually the reverse of this. The “C” was painted black on a white background. There were examples of the reverse of this norm for both but they were rare.

The Speed Restriction sign was, when initially introduced on GWR and LMS lines, green with white lights but in 1949 (presumably with the arrival of BR), they were re-painted yellow as this was the accepted colour for warning signs. No doubt some far flung corners of the network still used green at first.

From the 1960’s, gas lights replaced oil on the board as this gave a brighter light. From the mid 1960’s (later than my layout), a single light was tried in place of the dual light version. Also,



from about 1965, two speeds were often shown – one above the board showing the speed limit for trains containing 4-wheeled vehicles and one below the board for trains without 4-wheeled stock.

Hope that is useful.

eBay – love it or loathe it – Barry Miltenburg

I am a big fan of eBay but it is not hard to find people who loathe it or fear it – some never having used it. My eBay account has been used 700 times to buy and sell all sorts of things and I have only ever had 1 issue. My experience has taught me a few things which I am happy to share.

Set up an eBay account – whilst you can trade with some sellers as a guest, it is much easier to set up an eBay account. You pick a trading name (usually a *nom de plume*) and set up a debit or credit card from which to pay. Buyers never see your card details as the payments are handled by **World Pay** which is a recognised transaction handler. Once you have an account, you can log into your account from your laptop, phone or other device. Your account shows up to other people as your *nom de plume* and a postcode.

Buy what you know – I make it a habit of fully researching anything I buy because you only get to see the pictures and whatever description the seller posts. The vast majority of sellers (particularly in the railway modelling world) are modellers themselves and are honest about second-hand items where there is damage, a scratch or whatever. It is easy to spot the sellers who are not modellers by the description and I tend to avoid these unless I am absolutely sure about the integrity of the item. If they don't know what they are selling, you **can** get a bargain. There is an option to contact sellers and ask questions and I will **always** do this if there is something that is not clear. Where manufacturers have produced modern versions of older releases, check that you are buying the version you want!

Ways to buy – there are 3 ways to buy on eBay. **Auction** is the most common. Sellers quote an opening bid price (often 99p for smaller items) and it's a free-for-all until the auction ends at the date and time stated. The highest bidder at that point is obliged to buy it. If you don't, the seller will report you and eBay will look darkly on your account. **Buy Now** – this is where the seller quotes a fixed price and you buy at that price. Hattons, Rails of Sheffield, TrakShak all have an eBay presence and often sell things this way. Some auctions have "Reserve" prices (which you cannot see) and will also quote a Buy Now price if you want to skip the auction. **Best Offer** – is exactly that. A seller will post an opening price of, say £30, and then add "**or Best Offer**". This is typically accepted if its within 5% of the auction price.

Bid to your maximum – I have a limit beyond which I am not prepared to go for most things I buy. When I make a bid, I tend to put this figure in as my opening bid. If you are the first bidder, eBay will match the asking price and if you are subsequently outbid, increase the amount automatically to 50p above the highest bid. When it reaches your maximum, you just stay outbid. There are people who will hover over auctions that are about to end and try to outbid you in the last 5 seconds and some will use (legal) spy software to identify your maximum bid level – eBay does not reveal this nor does it reveal the names of the bidders during an auction. I take the view that if these people are *that* desperate for an item, they are welcome to it!!

Pay safe – I have used an old bank account and debit card for my eBay account and I have a World Pay account for income from eBay sales. In this way, I can protect myself from any unscrupulous dealings but I have to say, in the 10 years or so that I have been using eBay, I have only ever had 1 item not delivered and needing a refund. The **eBay Resolution Centre** is quick to jump in if asked if you have any issues with a trader.

Deliver, collect, click – there are 3 ways to get your goods once you have completed your purchase. **Post** is the easiest but most traders charge post and packing. If you are selling the Royal Mail Parcel website gives all the costs for sizes and weights. **Collection only** is for big stuff – this is where the postcode come in. Be wary of buying something and then finding that it needs to be collected from Taunton if you are in Southport!! **Click and Collect** is a relatively new thing – you get your parcel sent to Argos or any other collection point listed on the eBay page. You get a barcode sent to your phone/laptop and simply go to the collection point when they advise you of delivery.

Tips –

- Looking at eBay regularly is a good idea, especially if you are searching for something specific.
- Access it on your phone if you see a "bargain" at an exhibition or show to check that it really is a bargain – I have found that show bargains are rarely that but I use eBay to check anyway.
- You can save your favourite traders. The boys at Ouston Mill trade as KitLady
- I **NEVER** buy from anyone with less than 100 reviews – this is the number that appears alongside someone's trading name. I might take a view if it's a £2 item and their feedback is 100% but it would have to be something I need badly.
- Always look at the reviews if buying something larger (an engine or anything over £30) to make sure that they have a good reputation.
- Change the **Filter** to "Ending Soonest" when searching – especially midweek evenings. Good sellers will have auctions ending Fridays and weekends but you do get some ending late night midweek and these are the ones that can slip under the radar.

- Set the filter to “Lowest price + p&p” to see the items in price order. Bear in mind that whilst you might find a wagon for £10, later in the listing you might find 2 for £15 so don’t just buy the cheapest
- Adding items to your “**Watch List**” is a good way of keeping up with a number of auctions that interest you
- **Always** give feedback as this informs the eBay community and helps us all whenever we buy. If everyone gave feedback, we can avoid rogue traders. Most traders give feedback on you as a buyer and this can be useful if you ever sell anything – its good to have a good reputation.

I am happy to chat through anything on WhatsApp or via email

How to model loads for model railway wagons – Ian Shulver

This was originally published in our March 2019 newsletter and was based on a BRM digital article. With the current restrictions in place on socialising, why not use the enforced time you have to liven up the trains you run. Yes there were trains consisting largely of empty wagons (y hose returning to the coal mine or quarry, but there were as many, and more with full wagons of coal, mineral ore, and much more exciting loads. It is appreciated that it is not particularly desirable for some people to permanently fix a load into a wagon, the instruction below show how it is perfectly feasible to have a removable load and so not destroy the otherwise pristine nature of the model.

Coal might have been the lifeblood of the railway's freight services, but it wasn't the only commodity carried. Until 1962, the railways were designated 'Common Carriers' which meant they weren't allowed to turn down any load offered, no matter how awkward, at a nationally agreed rate.

Everything from food to building materials to racing pigeons was moved by rail. Much of this was stacked in box vans and so from a modeler's point of view, invisible. However, there were still plenty of open wagons and they needed to be kept full if they were to make money for the company.



Picking suitable loads for a model railway isn't as easy as you might think. All those lovely colourful private owner wagons would normally be full of coal, so putting anything else in them can require a little 'modeler's license'. In other words, we've stretched the truth a bit to make our layout a bit more interesting but a little lateral thinking can provide suitable ideas.

Open wagons with loads give any model railway a sense of purpose. We're not just running trains around; we're operating a real service -just like the real thing. A few example are given below.

Pipes

For OO gauge models, drinking straws are perfect for the job. Start by cutting them to length. Then cut a thin slice, around 3mm long for the collar at one end. Slide this over the end of the straw, fixing with superglue.



The pipes are glued with all-purpose adhesive to a piece of card cut to fit the inside of your wagon. If the gaps in the collars are placed at the bottom, no one will ever know they are there. Spray the load with red oxide coloured car primer. Hold the can several centimeters further away from the model than the instructions tell you. This way the paint is slightly dry when it hits the pipes giving a slightly rough look to replicate clay.



To protect the pipes in transit, straw would be packed around them. We've used beige electrostatic grass pushed into place but any fibrous material will work fine such as wool cut into short lengths.



A plank load

Planks start life as wooden coffee stirrers. Cut to around 5cm long and then sand the ends square. Then, using a sharp knife and steel rule, split in half along their length to give planks 2-3mm wide, just over a scale 6 inches.



Build up around 3 layers of planks using PVA glue to hold them together. We find it easiest to work with the pieces in the wagon but remove the load before the glue is fully dry to make sure it's not fixed permanently.



It's important that the ends of the planks don't stick out any further than the buffer faces. If this happens, on the real railway, a low empty wagon would be coupled up to stop the load hitting the next vehicle in the train. You could do this, but it makes marshalling the wagons trickier.



A tarpaulin-covered load.

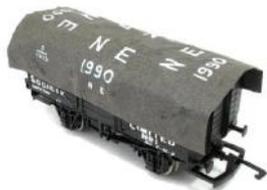
To keep the British weather at bay, most open wagons travelled with a tarpaulin cover. Sadly, the only way to replicate this is to stick the sheet in place. As you can't tell what is in there, running the same wagon both to and from a destination doesn't look wrong – there could be something different under there for the return trip. OO scale tarpaulins are 86mm by 60mm. Plain grey paper works well or you can download versions to print yourself from some suppliers.



To give the load a little shape, some foam is glued in the wagon. This isn't essential as some loads were lower than the sides, leaving the tarpaulin to dip in the middle, but supporting the paper isn't a bad idea or it's easy to poke your finger through it!



- Arrange the sheet so it's centred on the wagon and glue to the sides with all-purpose adhesive or thick superglue. Leave to dry before the next step.



The ends are folded around much like wrapping a parcel and glued in place. On the real wagon, ropes would be used to tie everything down and you can use black thread to represent these if you like, although on a layout you don't really miss them.



Remember, tarpaulins also had to be returned in empty wagons, so a folded up one in the bottom of an open wagon would not look out of place.

How to model wagon loads for mining areas

In steam days, goods trains were the lifeblood of the railway system with miles of wagons rolled around the country hauled by various locomotives such as On a model layout, we can do the same, but our wagons really need to be full. After all, transporting empties around represents lost money and

30/05/2020



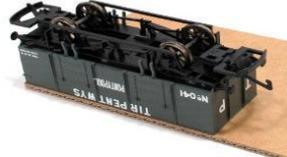
companies didn't do this if they could help it! Moulded plastic loads are available but these normally look exactly what they are, plastic and it's not difficult to do a much better DIY job, and often an awful lot cheaper too.

It is not necessary to glue anything into the wagons, so they won't be damaged and in fact, removable loads are the best idea as they allow you to run full trains to the destination, empty them, and have an excuse to run the train back in the other direction.

To start with we are looking at suitable loads for mining areas. Coal is an obvious choice, but coke, stone, ballast and ore all kept the railway in employment. Modelling each is basically the same, just use a different material. Be aware though, the density of coal is greater than coke but less than stone or ore. All wagons have a maximum 'tare' (the weight they are permitted to carry) and should not be overloaded. Therefore you see a greater volume of coke than stone in a wagon, but this would still represent the same weight.

In mining areas coal and empty wagons are in abundance, but also items such as wooden pit-props. These were vital to the industry and millions were shipped from wood-yard to coal pit. This is another cheap modelling project, a pounds worth of cocktail sticks will load at least two wagons. Mind you, doing this is time consuming, but ultimately satisfying.

Filling up your wagons adds a real sense of purpose to a model railway. A few evenings work can transform a model and provide a reason that the trains are running, yet you only need knife to cut some cardboard and a bit of glue and coal.

<p>A simple to use kit from Geoscenics containing some high quality corrugated cardboard and a bag of load material, in this case coal. But of course you do not need to go to that expense – just find your own card, coal, or other mineral - broken up with a hammer and sieved to an appropriate size.</p>		<p>Work starts by cutting a piece of card so it just fits into the wagon. This needs to be a good fit, but not tight.</p>	
<p>More card is used to make up supports. For a coal load, the top should be around 2-3mm below the top edge of the wagon.</p>		<p>Once built, the load should be easy to remove by pushing one end. If it's too tight at this stage, trim some more card away.</p>	
<p>A quick coat of black paint is followed by a sprinkle of load material held in place with diluted PVA glue (50/50 water/PVA). Note the little mounds showing where coal is poured into the wagon from above.</p>		<p>Using some old cereal packet, we've made a similar load for limestone ballast. This is heavier than coal so wagons weren't loaded so full, about 5-7 mm from the top is perfect.</p>	
<p>If you have some foam or dense sponge to hand, try cutting it to fit the wagon and then trimming the top into a mound shape with a pair of curved nail scissors. As the foam is springy, it can be slightly bigger than the inside of the wagon.</p>		<p>We're using real coal here and crushing it with pliers. You can use a hammer but it's very messy. Coal sold for model engineers is best as it's nice and soft – try on-line auctions or exhibitions. We bought a lifetime supply for under ten pounds!</p> <p><i>Note that there is no indication of glue used to stick the coal to the foam – I have used spay glue. PVA is not ideal since it dries very hard. Copydex might be an alternative. IS</i></p>	

<p>Coke is very light so the loads are much higher than those for coal. Wagons were often fitted with extension boards to allow the full capacity to be used.</p>		<p>Removing the load is easy if you take a length of wire (a straightened paper-clip will work) and bend a hook at the end of it. This is poked into the foam and the load pulled out.</p>	
<p>Very specific instructions were laid down for transporting pit-props. We cut ours from cocktail sticks, each 28mm long, and fixed onto a cereal packet floor with PVA. Time-consuming but looks great once painted dark brown.</p>		<p>You'll see from this simple guide just how easy it is to create a variety of wagon loads, all of which are suitable for mining areas. We love how these loads are easily removed and transferrable to other wagons. Plus, they are really cheap to model. Try them for yourself! You can see from the pictures just how effective they are.</p>	

10 years ago: 2010 Sleeper trip; The Outer Hebrides. – Derek Pratt

The departure was comfortably routine, with all five reporting for kit inspection at Southport station, with barely a Hawaiian shirt in sight. We were spoilt for choice, with two Pacers vying for our custom. At Wigan we made our usual bee-line for the Station Cafe, for either first or second breakfast, depending on getting-up time. The station-change was slowed somewhat by the presence of a large contingent of railway police and Virgin staff, complete with dog handlers. Wondering if this was a guard of honour or a security tip-off, we tip-toed past the serried ranks of officialdom, showed more tickets than was strictly necessary at the barrier, and climbed aboard the London train.

Euston arrived on time, allowing us the luxury of several hours in the metropolis. Not of course to be frittered away in frivolous shopping or pointless sightseeing. In theory a more-or-less complete circumnavigation of middle London suburbia was possible via the London Overground. First stop was Highbury and Islington via the Victoria line, then the LO itself to Dalston Kingsland and Ditto Junction. More Overground, this time due south to Crystal Palace and Beckenham, the north-eastern extremity of Tramlink. From there we traversed the length of the line, carefully avoiding Croydon, ending up at Wimbledon. After dinner at an Italian restaurant, the final stage was another novelty, a First Capital Connect train aiming for Luton but going the pretty route through central London, across the Thames at Blackfriars to St Pancras International, within walking distance of Euston.

In the lounge car appropriate refreshments were sought, and eventually obtained as we sped northward. Next morning the sun was up early, illuminating fine highland scenery as we headed into Fort William. The Jacobite was ready and waiting, with kilted piper in full flow. The Black Five in charge behaved impeccably and we reached Mallaig on time.



Lunch was taken on the hoof, to allow time to explore and to identify the B&B for later use. The steam train took us back to Fort William, and the service train then returned us to Mallaig. That evening we had a more than passable meal in the Marine Hotel, to the surprise of at least one of our landladies, who darkly hinted at a 'reputation'. A stroll around the harbour revealed some interesting wildlife, not only a seal in the water but an otter out of it, taking fish left on the deck of a fishing boat by an obliging crew member.



Next morning we assembled for the ferry to Skye. The crossing was noted only for the presence of a bright red Morgan in pole position on the car deck, adding a touch of class to an otherwise ordinary collection of vehicles. The bus took us to Portree, where the afternoon was free for freelance adventures in the steadily-improving weather.

By general agreement this would take the form of a boat trip to view the local aquatic wildlife. The boat looked a touch smaller than the brochure suggested, and the safety drill a little on the brief side, whilst covering all the main points, including the all-important one that the water was cold and not to be entered if at all possible. The skipper was clearly a man of knowledge and experience, and soon had us alongside a stretch of cliff on which perched an impressive-looking sea eagle. Attempts to entice it to fly by tossing fish in its direction resulted in complete indifference by the eagle and a noisy fight by two herring gulls, who knew a free lunch when they saw it.

We then navigated south-eastwards into the Sound of Raasay on the strength of rumours of dolphins, and were eventually rewarded with a number of splashes in the distance that were clearly mammalian in origin. As we and two other boats approached schools of perhaps a dozen or so circled round us, timing their appearance to just miss the clicks of numerous camera shutters. Much photography of blank sea was achieved.

Back on dry land there was time to watch the world go by in the town square before the bus came to take us to Uig, driven by a lady with a strong sense of mission. The weather started to mist over a little, giving added drama to both landscape and seascape, but fortunately not having any significant effect on wave heights. A pleasant two-hour cruise later North Uist grew on the bow horizon and we were manoeuvred alongside the modest jetty by a captain clearly well familiar with putting either left or right hand down a bit, as the situation demanded.

As the evening was well advanced the priority was to find the accommodation reserved for us. One seemed to be more self-catering than B&B, particularly at breakfast time, whilst the other was formerly the local courthouse, complete with walled garden for the better containment of the local miscreants. Just across the road a new-looking hotel beckoned, the Tigh Dearg, which hosted an impressive collection of the national liquor. On the return journey we diverted a little to try our hand at low-light camera work across the local jetty, it being almost dusk at almost midnight.

Next morning we set off to explore, guided by local information that a pleasant walk could be obtained beyond the Tigh Dearg in a circular fashion. Highlights included a circular stone igloo, far too new in appearance to be an ancient dwelling-house, that later research was determined to be a camera obscura. So obscure in fact that we never twigged it at the time. Also on the itinerary was Spanish House, a somewhat run-down mansion built 200 years ago for the local sheriff. We circled back to the hotel for a welcome coffee, and wandered back down to the harbour, via the local museum and shop, to wait for the bus to the airport on the neighbouring island of Benbecula.



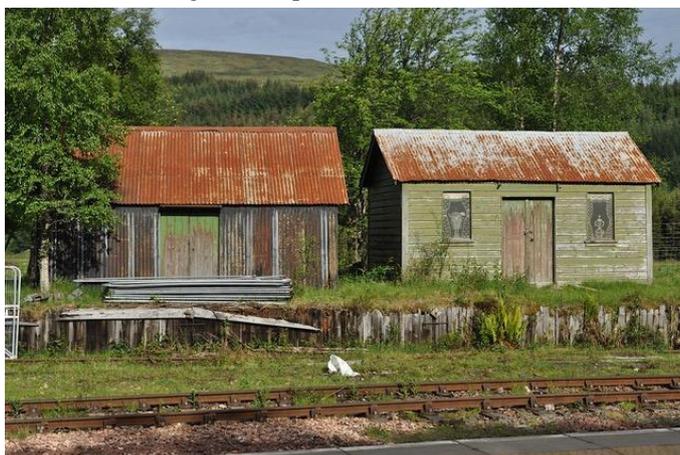
Altogether nine or ten passengers squeezed into the De Havilland Twin Otter for the short trip south to Barra. The flight was remarkable not only for the scenery but also for the beach landing, which was accomplished with the aplomb of a pilot who has done it many times before and who regards bumping over multiple worm-casts merely as an environmentally-friendly way of maximising runway grip.

The bus to Castlebay was piloted by a driver whose customer service battle honours were clearly born of natural island breeding rather than of an anonymous training course delivered in the back room of some

soul-less Glaswegian urban hotel. Not only did we manage to underpay the fare, but we were cheerfully delivered right to the door of our chosen B&Bs, involving a diversion off the bus route and one a tight three-point turn.

Castlebay turned out to be an attractive well-appointed small town on a scenic island. After a quick spruce-up we set out looking for sustenance. We went up-market in the Castlebay hotel, which claimed to be the best dining experience in town. Almost certainly the most expensive, but on balance judged to be good value. As the evening drew to a close, and the light even began to dim a little, a shadowy shape approached the jetty. This was the ferry from Oban, at the end of its seven-hour journey.

Next morning was unscripted, allowing us to choose how to explore the attractions of Castlebay. We elected to visit Kisimul castle, the home of the chief of the MacNeil clan. This had a moat of some considerable proportions, namely the whole of the bay, the bay of the castle in fact.



Whilst waiting for the boat to take us across, various buildings were identified that had starring roles, or at least significant bit parts, in the making of Whisky Galore in 1949. The castle itself was interesting rather than excessively fascinating, but we still managed to stay longer than the first available return journey. Lunch was taken on the patio of a small cafe overlooking the bay, consuming sandwiches which the vendor correctly described as 'not your average Tesco'. The bus took us back on the beach runway where we soaked up the sun, finished off lunch and waited for splashdown of the Glasgow plane. We flew south-east over such exotic isles as Coll, Tiree and Mull, and quite possibly Muck and Eigg as well. A bus took us to Paisley station where we entrained for our final destination, Largs.

The B&B proprietrix was welcoming and Rumanian, and encouraged us to make full use of the facilities, including our second resident's lounge of the trip. However we had more important matters to attend to, namely to find a suitable venue for eating, drinking and watching England's stumbling performance through World Cup qualifying. The first two requirements were easily met, the third was somewhat frustrating. The final day saw us back at the station aiming for a seven-minute connection at Glasgow Central for the train to Preston. We made it without undue alarm and we had an uneventful trip back home, the final leg courtesy of the Stagecoach.

The End – until next month. Please send your contributions to Andrew Chrysler (apc253@gmail.com)