

THE GREAT SOUTHERN TRAIL

'committed to developing 53 miles of the old LIMERICK/TRALEE Railway as cycle/walkway'

NUACHTLITIR/NEWSLETTER - 12 - NOLLAIG/CHRISTMAS, 2004.

Beannachtaí na Nollag oraibh and go mbeidh an t-ádh libh san Ath-bhliain. The period under review in this newsletter covers from November 2003 to present. It has been a very busy time during which great advances have been made. CIE have now given licence to the GST for 5 ¼ miles of the Trail. This includes 2 ½ miles Newcastle West to Ardagh, which has been developed over the past two years with the assistance of West Limerick Resources under the National Development Plan. Entrances at the Newcastle West and Ardagh ends have been provided with the assistance of FÁS Community Employment scheme. In May 2004 Limerick County Council constructed a wheelchair access at Newcastle West to further enhance this amenity.

The official opening of this portion of the GST took place on Sunday 15th August 2004 when Mr. Tom Finn, Strategic Planning Manager Iarnród Éireann cut the tape. Over 100 people attended including several public representatives. Ms. Joan Casey of West Limerick Resources and Ms. Helen Harnett of Limerick Co. Council were also present.

Following the opening the crowd retired to Newcastle West Library (by kind permission of Ms. Aileen Dillane, Librarian) for a reception.

The Licence also covers a ¾ mile stretch at Barnagh, which is undoubtedly the location most evocative of the railway age. It includes a fine bridge over a public road, a long curving embankment and a 100-metre tunnel with approach cuttings. The entire area is a rich habitat for plants and animals (including bats and ravens).

Grant aid by the Heritage Council has enabled much access works to be undertaken along with the provision of three information boards. Access is from the N21 Lay by at Barnagh (4 miles west of-Newcastle).

The third component of the CIE licence is a 2-mile length from Templeglantine to Devon Road. This has just been extensively restored by contractor Declan Stack and is part funded by Shannon Development under the Tourism Innovation and Heritage Programme. Wheelchair access is available at Devon Road and facilitates exploration of the beautiful Tullig Wood.

The GST website www.southerntrail.net provides further information on these walks and also gives details of walks at Rathkeale and Listowel. Thanks to the adjoining landowners for their co-operation. In return we request trail users to respect the privacy and property of our neighbors.

So much energy was expended on the above developments that the usual programme of organised walks was scaled back. However, group walks between Newcastle West and Ardagh took place each Wednesday evening from Easter until September. For the winter months they continue on Sundays at 3.00 p.m.

Walks in Templeglantine took place on Monday evenings during July and August. Special visits were made to Tullig Wood/Barnagh for the Dawn Chorus on May 9th; Newcastle West to Ardagh on Saturday 5th June for International Trails Day and to Barnagh Tunnel/Glenquin Castle on 5th Sept for Heritage Sunday. The Christmas walk from Blennerville via Tralee is scheduled to round off the 2004 activities at 2.00 p.m. on Monday 27th December.

There was a huge crowd at the Devon Hotel, Templeglantine on Friday 12th March when Tony Price assisted by Liam Mooney provided a film show of historical material from the archives of the Irish Railway Record Society This included film of the last steam train between Limerick and Tralee (1972) and the last goods train from Tralee to Listowel (1977).

This was the second annual gathering of former railway families and friends and is proving to be very popular. Recognition of the Railway heritage was continued in the publication of a set of Christmas Cards depicting railway scenes from around West Limerick.

The second annual May Bank Holiday weekend away saw 22 people visit Belfast. The route of the old Bushmills Giants Causeway railway was walked in the course of a daylong tour of the North Antrim Coast; with Driver/Courier Hugh Rice enthralled everybody with his encyclopaedic knowledge. The Ulster Folk and Transport Museum at Cultra, Co. Down was also explored.

The fourth annual overseas trip involved a group of 12 persons travelling to Kastellaun in Germany from 29th June until 4th July. A new rail trail, over 30 miles in length from Daun to Wittlich was cycled as part of the programme of events. It is expected that further tours will be organised for the May '05 Bank Holiday and also for late June (D.V.).

Other events worthy of note during 2004 include: -

1. The acceptance by the Mid Western Regional Authority/Limerick County Council of the GST submission that the railway corridor between Ballingrane and Tralee be protected from development and used as a public amenity.
2. The old railway bridge at Garryduff (between Newcastle West and Barnagh) receiving a special award at the Golden Mile Awards by Limerick County Council in October '04. (This is a competition designed to find the "best" mile of country road).
3. The broadcasting on Radio 1 on July 30th '04 of a ½ hr. programme on the GST. This was narrated by Ella McSweeney and included contributions from Denis Foley (the last CIE employee on the railway) Mike MacDomhnaill, Geoff Hunt and Liam O'Mahony.

4. The application by the GST to become a participant in the Rural Social Scheme. This would allow the GST to employ maintenance workers for the developed sections of the Trail.
5. Six Committee meetings were held in 2004 with an average attendance of 14. They took place on 13th February, 2nd April, 12th August, 8th...
6. The continued generous public support at Church gate collections. A total of €3654 was collected as follows: Ardagh €286, Templeglantine €352, Monagea €294, Newcastle West €1575, Abbeyfeale €688, Ratkeale €459 these funds were augmented by profits from the Belfast and German tours. One of the consequences of the recent successful development is that more money is required to match the grants being provided by the various Agencies. The "BUY A METRE" appeal last year raised approximately €5,000.00 for which we are very grateful but which is now all gone! If you intended giving last year but never got around to it then we ask you to please consider us again. Remember any donation of €250 from a PAYE worker is worth considerably more to the GST as it will attract a tax rebate from the Revenue Authorities (contact Elsa Hallinan 061- 392619 for details) An estimated €120,000 has been spent of the rail trail since 1991 and this would not have been possible without you.
7. Sadly a number of our members have suffered bereavements in the past year. We offer sympathy to them and in particular to the family of our stalwart member, Theresa O'Dwyer who died on May 7th 2004 R.I.P. Ar dheis Dé go raibh a n-anamacha. Thank you all for your assistance during the year. We look forward to further progress in 2005, le cunamh De. Ni neart go cur le cheile!

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October (AGM), 22nd October, 19th November, Officers elected: Cathaoirleach/PRO Liam O'Mahony, Company Chairman Mike

Wright. Vice Chairman Denis McAuliffe. Rúnaí/Secretary Mike MacDomhnaill. Asst. Secretary Elsa Hallinan. Joint Treasurers Padraig O Conduin/Maire Ni Chearmada. Works Officer Tom McCoy.