

‘Bullhead is still Best’ for Buckfastleigh!

March 8, 2021



British Steel’s ongoing support for UK heritage railways has continued with a sizeable delivery of brand new, 95 pound/ metre, or 47.07 kg / metre, bullhead rail to the [South Devon Railway](#) (SDR) which was rolled at British Steel Scunthorpe.

The 22 lengths of 60-foot rails were delivered bang-on-time to the SDR’s order at the start of February as part of a five-figure contract to renew heritage era track on the line, which is the oldest heritage railway in the West Country.

South Devon Railway Trust Finance Director Chris A. Williams said: “The South Devon Railway Trust is a registered charity and so we aim to educate people about the history and development of our lovely railway and older rail systems through the preservation, operation and exhibition of railway vehicles and equipment.

“It’s therefore essential for us to maintain our own track in a way that is sympathetic and sensitive to its history. British Steel’s bullhead rail allows us to maintain our authenticity in key places as it’s very similar to the double-headed rail produced from the 1830s.

“I’m very pleased to report that British Steel delivered a first class product to us in record time. From the

point of ordering to taking delivery, British Steel have provided an exemplary service in supplying the South Devon Railway with a significant quantity of prototypical bullhead rail to enable our regular winter track replacement and renewal programme to be completed on time.

“It was also very reassuring to know British Steel could supply and arrange a timed delivery to coincide perfectly with our own logistics, so avoiding any double handling of the rails from road transport to our rail vehicles upon delivery. We also use flat-bottom rail in some places now, but bullhead is still best for us on most of the route.”

First opened in 1872, the SDR line was mainly used for transporting coal, wool, cider and agricultural goods, and serving the local population. It closed to passengers in 1958 and then finally to freight in 1962. The line was re-opened as a tourist line in 1969 – then known as the Dart Valley Railway – and runs for seven miles through glorious countryside between Buckfastleigh and Totnes.

Chris added: “In 1991, the line was taken over by the South Devon Railway Trust, when it was renamed the South Devon Railway, and we celebrated our 50th anniversary of its re-opening as a steam-operated heritage railway recently in 2019.

“Over the last 50 years, our track has become quite worn in places, so the new rails will be used to replace ageing, worn or life-expired bullhead rail whilst maintaining the historical accuracy and ambience of the line. Some of the older, less worn rails will be cascaded for re-use elsewhere on the line, so the new rails will effectively improve our track in two locations, making it a double bonus.”

British Steel Rail Account Manager Darren Cole said: “Customer satisfaction is fundamental to what we do – I’m delighted we’ve been able to help South Devon Railway find the right solution and stay true to their roots with our bullhead rail. Our country has a long history in innovative rail and locomotive developments, so I’m very proud we’re able to support this industry’s ongoing journey.”

South Devon Railway train services are currently suspended due to ongoing COVID-19 restrictions, but visitors can plan their future journeys via the SDR’s website www.southdevonrailway.co.uk.

Photo credit: South Devon Railway