

Churnet Valley Railway turns 25

August 24, 2021



Today (Tuesday, August 24) marks the 25th anniversary of the Churnet Valley Railway. Staffordshire's key heritage visitor attraction will be marking this milestone with two dining trains. The Ipstones Express will be running with a Breakfast Train in the morning and Cream Tea Train in the afternoon. Throughout the Bank Holiday weekend a special celebration is planned to get the party started. There will be tipples and tunes during the 3-day Rail Ale Trail. For those interested in the history of the railway, volunteers will be on the station and train to answer any questions.

Early 90s

In 1992, a newly formed Company applied to the Department of Transport for a Light Railway Order that would give it statutory powers to operate the Line. In 1995 agreement was reached with British Rail for the purchase of that line by the Company, subject to raising the necessary funding. In 1995, the Company also launched a major share issue in order to finance the purchase of the remaining section of the Churnet Valley line. The share issue was well supported, especially by the local community, and succeeded in raising over £120,000.

The First Passenger Train

As a result, the Company was able to purchase the entire seven miles of track bed and associated works from Leekbrook to Oakmoor and make a substantial down payment towards the purchase of the existing trackwork and sidings. The first passenger train to be operated by the Company ran on the 24th August 1996 over the one mile section of line between Cheddleton and Leekbrook.

Early in 1998 the Company launched its second major share issue, the purpose of which was to raise the balance of the purchase price owing to British Rail and to finance the extension of the passenger train operation southwards from Cheddleton to the secluded hamlet of Consall Forge. This second issue was also successful and raised in excess of £160,000. As a result, the Company was able to launch a passenger service between Leekbrook, Cheddleton & Consall commencing on Saturday 11th July 1998.

After the successful opening of the line south from Cheddleton to Consall Forge, the Company then launched its third major share issue, with the aim of opening the line south of Consall to the former Froghall station site. The plan was to redevelop the area for public use, and to enable the public to begin their journey through the Churnet Valley at Froghall as well as at Cheddleton. This share issue was very successful and raised the sum of £185,000.

A completely new station building and platform was built, which incorporated all of the appropriate facilities that the Company required. The design of the station building is in keeping with the Company's policy of representing a typical British railway scene of the 1950/60's.

Gregory Wilson, Managing Director paid thanks to the volunteers. He said: "We've reached this milestone due to the dedication and passion of our volunteers. We have almost 100 active volunteers and some have been with us since the beginning. Devoting a quarter of a century to anything requires commitment. Our volunteers come rain or shine and they are the main reason we are here today."

Volunteer Jon Kerr started at the railway in 2010 and is a fireman and also works in the commercial department. He said: "Volunteering brings a sense of family to like-minded individuals who genuinely want a local attraction grow. The track itself has grown from a 1/2-mile operation to the 10 miles it is today. We've got exciting plans for the extension to market town of Leek too, so here's to the next 25 year."

Visit www.churnetvalleyrailway.co.uk for more details.

Photo credit: Churnet Valley Railway