

# Getting things ready to roll again on the South Devon Railway

April 7, 2021



After being closed for over a year as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, the scenic [South Devon Railway](#) (SDR) is getting ready for a Spring re-opening of the seven-mile heritage line running from Buckfastleigh to Totnes.

The last SDR steam trains ran virtually empty on Tuesday 17 March 2020 after visitors deserted Devon just ahead of the first lockdown the following weekend. This dramatic change came straight after a very popular weekend SDR steam gala event featuring former branch favourite loco No. 4555 as the star visitor. What a contrast it's been since then!

It's now the longest period that the quintessential former GWR branch line has been closed in its 52-year history after re-opening as a tourist railway in 1969 following closure by British Railways in 1962.

The SDR says it will re-open to visitors in phases starting with the large Buckfastleigh site first on Monday 12 April when national CV-19 restrictions are set to ease significantly for attractions.

The site 'Open Days' will follow a similar format to those successfully staged last summer and autumn.

Opening up the site was very popular with SDR visitors last year, and includes the gardens, workshop viewing, riverside picnic area, children's playground, Lee Moor Tramway museum, north signal box, and the gift & model shop will be open too.

Many of the SDR's steam and diesel locomotives and historic coaches will be on display and, on selected days, both the miniature railway and the garden railway will be in operation too.

The SDR site will be open all of the week commencing 12th April for the half-term holiday, then on every Tuesday, Thursday, Saturday and Sunday until 16th May. Entrance is free, but the SDR does ask for a donation at the gate. There is plenty of free car parking at Buckfastleigh station too.

And, the really good news is that SDR trains are set to start steaming down the picturesque valley of the River Dart once more from Monday 17 May, with the fantastic sight, sound and smell of them now being almost as much a natural part of the landscape as the trees, green fields, cattle and Devon's rolling hills.

Not surprisingly, SDR staff can't wait to welcome visitors back to the railway. A timetable of four steam trains per day will be in operation, leaving Buckfastleigh at 10.30, 12.10, 2.15 and 4.00, and arriving back about one and quarter hours later

The SDR is putting in a range of measures to ensure that customers can travel on trains in confidence and safely. This includes reduced capacity on trains, all tickets booked in advance, socially distanced passenger flow systems, hand sanitisation stations and enhanced cleaning regimes. Unless visitors are exempt on health grounds, the SDR is asking everyone to wear face coverings on its stations and trains.

Train tickets will be available from Monday 12th April on the SDR website [www.southdevonrailway.co.uk](http://www.southdevonrailway.co.uk) and booking website. As further restrictions on social distancing and household mixing are hopefully reduced, the SDR hopes to be able increase the number of trains it runs, so watch this space.

Despite the enforced closure of the last 12 months, the SDR has still managed to carry out considerable, necessary planned maintenance and improvement works all along the line, but using socially distanced workers. These jobs have ranged from preparing stations and signal boxes; clearing undergrowth and track repairs, to signalling, coach and loco repairs, plus endless cleaning and painting so that everything is ready for re-opening again.

And SDR staff and volunteers will also be undergoing refresher and competence training in almost all railway duties, plus a host of behind-the-scenes work has been done to get the operation ready to run, including a focus on detailed risk assessments and enhanced hygiene regimes.

*Photo credit: Adrian Harris*