

JUNE 1979 NEWS-SHEET

RARING TO GO: The big news is that our 4-4-0 express loco No.171 "Slieve Gullion" is ready for action on the Portrush Flyer. The engine has successfully completed three test runs aimed at running in the new bronze axleboxes - an empty carriages trip to Antrim on May 21, hauling the empty stock of the two-day tour to Lisburn on May 24, and finally operating the Steam Gala special from Belfast York Road to Whitehead on June 2. To add the finishing touch, 171 is being given a re-paint in her famous Great Northern blue livery before the first Flyer on Saturday July 21.

TAKING FLIGHT: Bookings are coming in steadily for the Portrush Flyer with a number of inquiries from parties. So the word from our Portrush Flyer officer is - don't leave it too long before getting your booking in. We're very grateful to Mullans Bookshop who have agreed as last year to act as our booking agents in Donegall Place in downtown Belfast. If you want another brochure to give to friends, please send a stamped addressed envelope to the Portrush Flyer officer.

VIP VISITOR: Our centenarian 0-6-0 No.186, back in Whitehead for the first time since 1974, got the 1979 season of Sunday afternoon steam train rides at Whitehead off to an excellent start on June 17. A fine crowd augured well for the rest of the season, during which 186 and 0-6-0ST No.3 "R.H. Smyth" will share duties. Enclosed with this circular is your very own Steam Train Rides car sticker. Please make sure you display it in a prominent position - your car windscreen or a local shop window. More of the stickers are available from Alan Love. Also in the circular you'll find a "Volunteers Wanted" leaflet; please read it and make a point of helping out one Sunday - it's the best of crack.

LIONSIZE SUCCESS: Thanks are due to all those who helped make the June 2 Steam Gala at Whitehead such a success. Everything went very smoothly - particularly on the loco operations front where three engines (3, 171, & 186) were in use. The special from York Road - the first through passenger train to enter the site for about 25 years - was an outstanding success, with 280 passengers for 250 seats! In all, about 3,000 people attended the event which took place in glorious sunshine. It's also worth remembering that the venture helped raise funds for various charities under the auspices of our joint organisers, Carrickfergus Lions Club.

DOING THE CONTINENTAL: We hope to have a slide show of steam in South Africa, Poland, Turkey and the Continent in the tarry at Whitehead at around 21.00 on the night of Saturday July 21 (the first Flyer). A group from Steam Safaris in England is coming over to travel on the Flyer and they've promised to bring a selection of slides with them. All welcome, but please remember that the tarry will never rival St Jude's Hall for size.

STEAM SCHEME: Negotiations over the proposed Carrickfergus Steam Train Rides extension have been opened with Carrickfergus Borough Council, the Department of Commerce, and the Northern Ireland Tourist Board. The plan now is to inaugurate the venture next summer, as 1980 marks the 800th anniversary of the founding of Carrickfergus (which makes the town a mere eight times older than 184!). We await results.

COLOURFUL FIRST: The next issue of Five Foot Three, featuring for the first time ever a colour cover, is now expected to appear within the next four weeks. It's a high quality production specially produced to mark the appearance of the film "The First Great Train Robbery". Meanwhile the 1979 Steam

Brochure, a slightly more modest publication, is now available at 20p a time. It gives a thorough run-down on Society activities and is well illustrated with a wide selection of pictures from Society photographer Charles Friel.

BARBED COMMENT: To keep out unwanted intruders at Whitehead, phase two of the barbed wire programme has started. This involves stringing coils of the stuff along the foot of the inside of the fence. Work proceeds on Saturdays - why not come down and lend a hand?

SOMETHING TO "CROAGH" ABOUT: Some 180 enthusiasts - half of them visitors from Britain - were on board the RPSI "Croagh Patrick" railtour at the end of May. All in all it was 370 miles of steam haulage involving our two veteran class J15 0-6-0s, Nos. 184 and 186. It was film star 184's first ever railtour and she proved a big hit with the tour participants. With memorable runpasts and very efficient CIÉ operation, the tour provided three days of fairly leisurely steam-hauled travel. It was the first steam train to visit both Westport and Ballina since the early 1960s. And just to prove the railtour went down a treat we had some of the passengers making a special point of thanking Denis Grimshaw for all his work - and four letters of appreciation to date!

KILLARNEY, HERE WE COME: To enable more long-term planning, a provisional date and destination for the 1980 two-day tour have already been fixed by the RPSI Council. It's to be on the weekend of May 17/18 and we will be travelling from Dublin via Mallow, Killarney and the South Kerry line to Tralee - covering a most scenic part of the country. At this stage the plan is to use 171 and 186 for the tour - so keep the date free. Part of the reason for looking so far ahead is that the major Rainhill celebrations on the Liverpool-Manchester line are scheduled for the Spring Bank Holiday weekend 1980 (May 24/25/26). It is reckoned that many of the foreign enthusiasts coming to Britain for the big event will be taking a longer holiday and will want to include the Irish railtour. Already we've had a query from an Australian railway society which wants to bring a party over to Ireland to take part in our tour around that period, so that they can compare our 5' 3" with their own version down under.

CASHING IN: The RPSI has always banked with the Northern and as a mark of the Society's standing, the Bank recently agreed to sponsor the external decoration of our new sales van to the tune of £250. Part of the deal was that the van now bears a special advert which proclaims: "The Northern Bank - where you come first". The latest improvement to the van is the installation of a stereo tape system which booms out steam train noises to great effect. All we need now is to get the ice cream compartment into operation....

MODEL FOLK: The Society was pleased to be able to accept an invitation to be represented at the opening ceremony of the extension to the miniature railway at the Ulster Folk Museum, Cultra, which has been built by our colleagues in the Model Engineers Society. The Model Engineers can easily beat us on one score - they've got no fewer than 40 steam engines, not to mention a couple of diesels powered by both motor mower and motor bike engines. The June 9 opening was performed by NIR chairman Sir Myles Humphries and the RPSI was represented by chairman Bob Edwards and operations officer Denis Grimshaw and their wives. The line is in operation every Saturday afternoon during the summer and is well worth a visit.

RAISING THE ROOF: There are high hopes that work on the roof of the new shed at Whitehead could get under way within the next two months. Final arrangements are being made between Carrickfergus Borough Council and the

structural engineers for the roof, on which the Society qualifies for a 50pc grant from the Department of Commerce (Tourism Branch).

SEE YOU ... IN SEPTEMBER: Full details of our September railtour programme will be distributed with the magazine. Here's a reminder of what is planned:

Saturday September 1 - 186 will be hauling a centenary year special to Londonderry on what is a very rare visit by a J15 class to the outer reaches of the NCC.

Saturday September 22 - An exciting new venture in the Dublin area. On Thursday September 20 186 will haul the railtour train from Whitehead to Dublin and then on Saturday the 22nd 186 and 184 will each be hauling three-coach trains on a steam shuttle service between Dublin and Bray - a highly scenic stretch of line.

Final details have still to be worked out but those are the outline plans at this stage; keep the dates free!

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