



MODERN RAILWAY SOCIETY of IRELAND

The Mayo Explorer



'Small GM' Locomotives 181+176 at Connolly on 5th October 1995 on the 17.26 service to Arklow

photo: Martin Baumann

Saturday 19th May, 2007

Belfast Central – Dublin Connolly – Portarlinton – Athlone – Westport –
Claremorris - Tullamore – Dublin Connolly – Belfast Central

The Mayo Explorer Rail Tour

Welcome aboard the Modern Railway Society of Ireland's "Mayo Explorer", our day return from Belfast to Westport. Our train today is scheduled to be hauled on the Belfast - Dublin and Dublin - Belfast legs of the journey by an NIR 111-class locomotive. On the Dublin - Westport - Dublin legs of the journey we have requested one or more pairs of the smaller GM locomotives working in multiple.

The first of these "smaller" General Motors locomotives entered service on CIÉ (then the railway operator in Éire) in 1961. They were the 15 B121-class Bo-Bo 950hp locomotives and proved to be very reliable, but a major drawback was that they were built in traditional American "Switcher" style with a single cab at one end. As the driver's visibility was poor when being driven with the cab at the rear, they required to be turned at the end of each journey. As a result they were usually seen working in pairs with the cabs at the outer ends. In later years some ran singly with the MkIII push-pull sets.

These problems were overcome in the second batch, introduced in 1962/3. The 37 B141-class locomotives were built with cabs at each end. They were most distinctive looking as the engine housing was narrower than the cabs, allowing walkways down each side.

A further twelve locomotives, the B181-class, entered service in 1966. They were similar in appearance to the 141-class but with engines uprated to 1,100hp.

By the mid-1970s CIÉ needed more powerful locomotives for its mainline services. Again the order was placed with GM and in 1977 the 18-strong 071-class entered service. These locomotives were much larger than their earlier sisters, having 2,475hp engines and a Co-Co wheel arrangement, but the family resemblance is very clear.

In the late 1970s NIR was keen to develop and upgrade its "Enterprise" service. Given the success of the 071-class they decided to order two identical locomotives. They entered service in February 1981 and were numbered 111 "Great Northern" and 112 "Northern Counties" after two of the three constituent railway companies of NIR; nameplates were presented by the Railway Preservation Society of Ireland.

NIR acquired a third GM in 1984 with the arrival of 113 "Belfast & Co Down", nameplates again presented by the RPSI.

Over the years many of the older GMs have been withdrawn from service. Currently only two 121-class locomotives (124 and 134), remain in service as do around 25 of the 141- and 181-classes. All the 071- and 201-class locomotives and the three NIR 111-class locomotives remain in service.

Today's Carriages

The fleet of Mark II carriages which are forming our train today have been hired from the Railway Preservation Society of Ireland. They were introduced to service on their steam trains in 2004 as current railway safety standards mean that the Society's preserved historic carriages were no longer passed to operate on much of the Irish railway network, including the entire NIR system.

The carriages scheduled to be on our train are:

RPSI Number	Mark	Type (Class)	Seats	Doors	Original Company	Built	Previous Number
180	2a	FK (Corridor First)	42	5	BR ER	1968	13475
181	2b	FK (Corridor First)	42	4	BR WR	1969	13487
300	2b	SO (Open Standard)	62	4	NIR	1970	822, 934
301	2z	TSO (Open Standard)	64	6	BR MR	1967	5207
302	2z	TSO (Open Standard)	64	6	BR MR	1967	5135
460	2z	BSO (Brake Open Standard)	31	4	BR MR	1966	9382

Our colleagues in the Railway Preservation Society of Ireland run steam-hauled excursions throughout Ireland. Full details can be found on their website www.steamtrainsireland.com.

Route Description

Belfast Central To Dublin Connolly

Miles	Location	Description
0.0	Belfast Central	Opened in 1976 on the completion of the rebuilding of the Central Railway line which reconnected the Bangor line to the main NIR network. This is the main station in Belfast and has recently been completely refurbished including the replacement of the platform ramps and update of the passenger facilities. There are two island platforms and a redundant parcels bay. This is the location of the main Translink offices.
0.8	Botanic	This well sited station was opened when the Central line reopened in 1976.
1.2	City Hospital	This station was opened in 1986 to serve the adjacent City Hospital.
1.2	City Junction	This is the junction for the new curve which was built to give Bangor trains direct access to Great Victoria Street Station when it reopened in 1995.
1.4	Central Junction	This junction was reinstated in 1995 when Great Victoria Street Station was reopened.
2.2	Adelaide	The former goods yard is currently being used to store withdrawn 80 Class vehicles. This was the site of the GNR engine sheds.
3.1	Balmoral	Nearby is the Royal Ulster Agricultural Society's showgrounds which include the King's Hall.
3.8	Finaghy	The first of several halts that were opened in 1907 as "railmotor" halts.
4.8	Dunmurry	When the Ulster Railway opened in 1839 this was the only intermediate station between Belfast and Lisburn.
5.8	Derriaghy	This halt was also opened in 1907 as a "railmotor" halt. Closed in 1953 and re-opened in 1956!
6.7	Lambeg	This station was opened in 1877.
7.4	Hilden	The last of the 1907 "railmotor" halts and the scene of an accident in 1983 which saw the demise of 80-class power car 88.
8.5	Lisburn	The station building dates from 1878 and was sympathetically restored in 1995. From 1977 this became the junction for the GNR Antrim branch. Although the goods shed has been demolished, the signal cabin and water tower remain on the down side. There are three tracks from here to the site of the former Knockmore Junction.
9.4	Knockmore Station	This closed halt was unusual in that one platform was on the Antrim branch while the other was on the Lisburn to Portadown line.
10.0	Knockmore Junction	Until 1977 when the "third road" was opened this was the junction for the Antrim branch. Trains also diverged here for Banbridge and Newcastle until 1956 when this line was closed.
10.9	Maze	The remains of this station can still be seen just before a level crossing.
13.4	Damhead	The concrete shelter at this closed station can still be seen.
15.4	Moirá	Opened in 1841 when the Ulster Railway extended their line from Lisburn to Lurgan, the station buildings are the oldest surviving in Northern Ireland. The later signal box still exists although it has been relocated to improve sight lines at the nearby level crossing.
20.8	Lurgan	The original station buildings were in the same style as those at Lisburn but were destroyed in the 1970s.
22.1	Goodyear	This station was built to serve the nearby tyre factory. All traces were removed when the line was relaid.

26.2	Portadown	After 1848 and until 1970 the main station was on the north side of the river where the PW yard is now situated. The remains of Platform 4 still exist. At the south end of the current station the GNR lines to Clones and Londonderry diverged. Although most remains, including the concrete roundhouse, have long since disappeared the base of the Junction signal box still exists.
31.4	Tanderagee	Only the platforms and the stationmaster's house remain of this poorly sited and now closed station.
33.7	Scarva	Formerly the junction station for a branch to Banbridge, this station reopened in 1984. A 'bowler hatted man' can be seen on the Down platform at the Dublin end.
36.5	Poyntzpass	The siding behind the Down platform is one of NIR's loading points for ballast. Although it no longer controls the level crossing gates, the GNR cabin was the last to remain in operation and has been retained.
41.5	Goraghowood	Once the junction with the Armagh to Newry and Warrenpoint line and an important customs point, little now remains of the station or platforms.
44.2	Newry	Formerly called Bessbrook and Newry Mainline, this station was reopened in 1984. In the near future more suitable passenger accommodation will be provided. Just before the station is the impressive 18-arch Craigmore Viaduct. The trackbed of the Bessbrook and Newry Tramway can be seen running underneath the viaduct.
50.7	Adavoyle	The station buildings still remain despite this station being closed to passengers in 1933.
59.1	Dundalk (Clarke)	The main GNR Workshop was located just south of the station. The former Irish North Western line to Clones and Enniskillen diverged at the south end, as did the Dundalk, Newry and Greenore Railway. This line crossed the GN main line just south of the station by means of a square crossing.
66.2	Castlebellingham	Only the platforms remain of this station.
69.7	Dromin Junction	This was the junction for the Ardee branch which closed in 1975.
71.6	Dunleer	This block post was used to split the Drogheda - Dundalk section until the line was resignalled. It had the last semaphore signals between Dundalk and Dublin. The station was closed by stealth in 1984 when the last service was withdrawn.
76.1	Kellystown	Little remains of the signal box that marked the summit of the climb out of Dundalk.
80.7	Cement Branch Junction	The junction to the cement factory was removed in 1996.
81.6	Drogheda (MacBride)	After crossing the now single track (previously interlaced double tracks) Boyne Viaduct, the line reaches Drogheda, the site of Irish Rail's Railcar Maintenance Depot. This is the junction station for the branch to Oldcastle although the tracks beyond Navan (Tara Mines) have been lifted. A turntable remains but not in a form that can be used!
86.3	Laytown	Despite the best efforts of the local vandals most of the main station building still remains although much rebuilt.
87.6	Mosney	The station for the former Butlin's holiday camp is now closed while the accommodation blocks are being used for 'other purposes'. It was unusual in that the single platform was located on a loop off the main line.
87.4	Gormanston	The GNR wooden station building and signal box still exist at this station.
91.6	Balbriggan	This busy commuter station has excellent views over the local harbour and a handy footbridge for photographs!
95.4	Skerries	The loop on the Up side is passed just north of the station. Although boarded up, the signal box has been retained.
99.4	Rush and Lusk	The original GNR station buildings and signal box still exist.

102.0	Donabate	As at most of the Drogheda suburban stations the original buildings have been retained.
104.4	Malahide	This is the current northern limit of the DART. EMUs can often be found stabled in the quarry sidings just south of the station.
106.6	Portmarnock	One of the few stations where little remains of the original station buildings.
108.6	Howth Junction & Donaghmede	This junction station for the Howth branch. Recently rebuilt and provided with a station building commensurate with its status.
108.8	Kilbarrack	Basic DART station. As with all DART stations the platforms have now been upgraded to take 8-car sets.
109.6	Raheny	The former station building still exists although not in railway use.
110.4	Harmonstown	This station has been heavily rebuilt along with other DART stations to improve access for the elderly and disabled.
111.1	Killester	Basic DART station.
112.2	Clontarf Road	Built approximately half a mile south of the original station, this station is adjacent to Irish Rail's Fairview Depot where all DART vehicles are serviced. This was formerly the GNR diesel railcar shed.
113.5	Dublin Connolly (Amiens Street)	There were originally two stations at what is now Dublin Connolly. The GNR's Amiens Street station comprised the terminal platforms whereas the through platforms were the Dublin and South Eastern Railway's Amiens Street Junction station. Dublin Connolly is now the Irish Rail Intercity station for all trains to Belfast, Rosslare and Sligo. It is also the main station for the DART and commuter services to Arklow, Longford and Dundalk. The original GNR steam shed can be seen from the end of the platforms along with the carriage valeting plant. In the yard are the Central Traffic Control (CTC) buildings that now control much of the Irish Rail network.

Route Description

Dublin Connolly To Westport

Miles	Location	Description
4½	North Strand Junction	The route from North Wall Goods Yard comes in from the right.
3¼	Drumcondra	The station closed in 1907 due to stiff competition from trams but reopened in 1998 as part of the new Mullingar commuter service. It is now located nearly three quarters of a mile nearer Connolly.
	Croke Park	The GAA stadium on the left is currently hosting the 6 Nations rugby internationals whilst Lansdowne Road is being rebuilt.
2¾	Glasnevin Junction	We diverge to the right and then pass under the Sligo line.
1¾	Cabra	The cement terminal is now closed and the land sold, but space has been retained for a potential new station.
½	Phoenix Park Tunnel	On leaving the 757 yard tunnel we pass over the River Liffey.
¾ MC 0	Islandbridge Junction	We pass Heuston Platform 10 constructed on the former Down goods loop on the left. With Heuston station and the carriage valeting plant visible on the left we will probably be held at the junction before emerging onto the main exit lines from Heuston to the south.
1¾	Inchicore	Irish Rail's main workshops are on the Down side.
3¼	Cherry Orchard	Four tracking will start here extending to MP 10½. The existing station, opened in 1994, will be demolished and a new station "Parkwest" funded under an existing planning permission by a developer will open 900m further west, near the M50 motorway.
4	Clondalkin	Station closed in 1947 but re-opened in 1994. The existing station will be demolished and a new station "Fonthill Road" will open 700m to the west.
	Kishogue	New station to be built as part of four tracking.
	Adamstown	This new station was privately funded by developers. Architecturally a great improvement on the recent galvanised steel station structures, the station opened on 10 th April 2007. Built to facilitate the four tracking, two of the four platforms still await track.
6½	Lucan South	Station closed in 1947.
10	Hazelhatch & Celbridge	Another station closed in 1963 and reopened in 1994. It will be rebuilt to accommodate four tracking.
10½		Four tracking will initially end here.
18	Sallins & Naas	This station closed in 1963 but re-opened in 1994. The long-closed Tullow branch trailed in on the right.
25½	Newbridge	A new bay platform has been constructed on the Down side.
27½	Curragh Mainline	A basic halt adjacent to the well-known race course. A short branch into the race course on the Down side closed in 1977.
30	Kildare	The Up platform is, unusually, on a loop off the Up main line. The goods yard is now the major maintenance base for permanent way machinery.
32½	Cherryville Junction	The single line to Kilkenny and Waterford diverges on the Down side.
36¾	Monasterevin	Station closed in 1976, but re-opened In 2001.
41¾	Portarlinton	The main station buildings are on the Up side. Our route to Athlone diverges to the right immediately after the road overbridge. This was once a branch but is now the main line to Galway, Westport and Ballina. Plans have been approved for major works to significantly raise the existing speed restriction through the Junction here for the benefit of the mainline.
43¼	Power Station Junction	A mile long siding (closed 1965) was built on our right to carry turf to Clonsast Power Station.
46		We cross over the 3ft Bord na Móna line.

50	Geashill	Situated in the townland of Ard, this station, closed In 1963, was known locally as Ard.
57		The location of the original Tullamore station, just before Clonminch bridge. It closed in 1859 when the line was extended to Athlone. After lying derelict for years the station building was restored in 1990 and is now used by a landscape gardening company.
58	Tullamore	Opened in 1865 with just one platform - now on the loop (RHS) - the main line ran straight through and a cattle bank was on the left. The second platform was opened in 1977. CTC reached here in 1983 and the redundant signal can at the Dublin end of the Up platform now serves as a greenhouse. Immediately on leaving the station we cross the Grand Canal.
64½	Streamstown Junction	This was the junction for the Horseleap branch that ran to Streamstown on the now 'mothballed' Mullingar to Moate line. The branch was finally closed in 1965.
65	Clara	This the GS&WR Clara station; the MGWR had its own station on the Streamstown branch from 1868 - 1925.
66	Banagher Junction	The branch to Banagher diverged on the Down side. Passenger services ceased on 25 th January 1947 with goods surviving until the end of 1962.
68¼	Ballycumber	Opened in 1862 as Prospect, closed 1963.
70¾	Bellair	A Bord na Móna 3ft gauge line serving Carracuilin bog passes beneath us, this was only opened in 1990.
72¾	Clonnydonnin Loop	The loop came into use in January 1974 to break up the long Clara to Athlone section which would have become a bottleneck when Western trains were re-routed away from Mullingar to run via Portarlinton.
73	River Boor	We leave County Offaly and enter Westmeath.
73¾	Ballinahoun	This single platform station on the Up side opened in 1862 and closed in 1928. It was provided for the private use of the O'Donaghue family. There was a double arm on the platform normally locked in the off position with only certain local residents having keys! No traces remain.
80½	Athlone Station	The present station is on the site of the former GS&WR station on the east bank of the Shannon. First opened on 3 rd October 1859, closed 1925 and reopened 1985.
80¾ 77¾	Athlone East Junction	We pass from the GS&WR to the MGWR and the 'mothballed' route from Broadstone via Mullingar and Moate comes in on our night. Mileposts change here.
78	Shannon Bridge	Built by Fox Henderson and 542 feet long. Originally with double track and an opening span.
78	Athlone Midland	The original MGWR station comprised three platforms.
78¼	Athlone West Junction	The cabin stood at the junction of the Galway and Mayo lines on the Up side. The loco shed was in the vee of the two diverging lines. A 49'9" turntable was installed beside the Mayo line, but so close that it fouled the line when in use. The ETS staff for Athlone West to Kiltoom had to be withdrawn to permit the table to be used!
80¾	Hill Berries	This was a ballast pit in MGWR days and had a siding off the old Down line.

84	Kiltoom	Opened in 1879, closed in 1963. The line to here from to Athlone was singled on 14 th October 1930 and the line west to Knockcroghery on 26 th November 1930. During the Civil War the original wooden signal cabin was destroyed as well as several locomotives being badly damaged. More recently, on 16 th February 2001, 075 and 18 40ft bogie wagons on the 03:08 liner from Ballina to North Wall hit the gates around 05:15. An alleged dropping signal arm and short stopping distances contributed to the incident.
87½	Nine Mile Bridge	Known as St John's Wood, this was an annual pilgrimage destination.
88¼	Lecarrow Ballast Pit	Once host to extensive sidings on our right, and as recently as the late 1980s, it was possible to lock in a locomotive and release the section for other trains. Turnout removed on 21 st March 1989 and little now remains.
90	Knockcroghery	Has been a fringe box of the CTC since 17 th March 1985. Extensively remodelled in 2000 with loops away from the former platform face.
92¾	Ballymurry	Station closed in 1963.
	Roscommon	The cabin at the Claremorris end of the station is one of the few remaining that operates level crossing gates with a handwheel. Station buildings are on the Up platform.
101¾	Donamon	Closed in 1963 and the track is re-aligned to run between the two redundant platforms.
106	Bellacagher Gates	In August 1969, and again in June 1977, cars were hit by trains and there were four deaths. Evidence at the second inquest suggested that the low evening sun might have rendered the warning lights invisible.
107¾	Ballymoe	Station closed in 1963 and passing loop removed in May 1978.
109	Frenchlawn Gates	Scene of a fatal accident in 1903 when a train hit a PW trolley.
112¾	Castlerea	Another location where the cabin opens the crossing gates with a wheel. The hostelry in the town known as "Hell's Kitchen" has 'A' Class 055 as the centrepiece of an extensive collection of railwayana.
118¾	Ballinlough	Closed in 1963.
124¾	Ballyhaunis	The original railhead for Knock pilgrim specials before Claremorris took over this role.
128¾	Bekan	Opened in 1909 as a request stop with one platform, closed in 1963.
132¾		A Knock pilgrim special from Balbriggan with B186+B177 was derailed here on 24/9/1989 when the train struck 14 cattle on the line. Eighty six passengers were hurt, 360 yards of track destroyed, the whole 11 coach train was derailed, with five Cravens and one van ending up on their sides.
135	Claremorris	This was once a major junction as well as the destination for the Knock pilgrim specials for many years. It served the moth-balled line to Tuam and Athenry on the Dublin - Galway line, plus the "Burma Road" (closed 1975) to Collooney Junction on the Dublin - Sligo line. It was also the junction for the Ballinrobe branch (closed 1960). If campaigners have their way to re-open the "Western Rail Corridor" Claremorris could become a major junction again, once more serving trains from Athenry and Collooney Junction.
142½	Balla	The passenger station closed in 1963 but from 1964 until 1988 the signal box here controlled the power operated points at Manulla Junction.

146	Manulla Junction	Passengers for Ballina change trains here at this remote platform with no road access. Since 1988, when the station re-opened, the junction points have been controlled from the signal box located in the portacabin on the platform.
150	Castlebar	The loop was removed and station facilities rationalised in 1988. Castlebar Airport can be seen on the Up side.
155½	Islandeady	Another 1963 closure.
161	Westport	Two platforms with the main building on the Up side. From here the line continued another 1½ miles to Westport Quay. The line is now closed although some track remains in situ. Westport was also the junction for the branch to Achill. It closed in 1937. We reverse here and re-trace our route back to Belfast.

Timetable

Belfast Central		05:55
Botanic	05:58	05:59
Lisburn	06:12	06:13
Lurgan		06:30½
Portadown		06:38
Poyntzpass		06:51
Newry		07:00
Dundalk		07:18½
Drogheda	07:44	07:49
Mosney		08:00½
Balbriggan		08:04
Skerries		08:07
Malahide		08:18
Howth Junction & Donaghmede		08:25
Dublin Connolly	08:39	

Dublin Connolly		09:40
North Strand Junction		09:44
Glasnevin Junction		09:47½
Cabra Cement Terminal		09:56
Islandbridge Junction		10:09
Inchicore		10:12
Hazelhatch		10:26½
Sallins & Naas		10:35
Newbridge		10:41½
Curragh		10:43½
Kildare	10:47	10:48
Cherryville Junction		10:52
Portarlinton		11:05
Geashill		11:14
Tullamore		11:21
Clara		11:29
Clonnydonnin		11:36½
Athlone	11:45	12X00
Knockcroghery		12:18
Roscommon	12:26	12:36
Castlerea	12:55	13:04
Ballyhaunis	13:18	13:27
Claremorris	13:40	13X52
Manulla Junction		14:06
Castlebar		14:13
Westport	14:33	

Westport		14:55
Castlebar		15:08
Manulla Junction		15:14½
Claremorris	15:27	15:47
Ballyhaunis		16:00%
Castlerea	16:14	16:33
Roscommon		16:51½
Knockcroghery		16:58½
Athlone	17:15	17:17
Clonnydonnin		17:25
Clara		17:32
Tullamore	17:41	17:51
Geashill		17:59½
Portarlinton		18:09
Cherryville Junction		18:18
Kildare		18:20
Curragh		18:22½
Newbridge		18:24½
Sallins and Naas		18:31
Hazelhatch		18:38½
Inchicore		18:54
Islandbridge Junction		19:01
Cabra Cement Terminal		19:05
Glasnevin Junction		19:10
North Strand Junction		19:14
Dublin Connolly	19:20	

Note for passengers staying on the tour: please do not leave the platform at Dublin Connolly in case we can secure an earlier departure to Belfast.

Dublin Connolly		20:17
Howth Junction & Donaghmede		20:27½
Malahide		20:31
Skerries		20:38½
Balbriggan		20:41½
Mosney		20:45
Drogheda	20:51	20:53
Dundalk		21:14½
Newry	21:32	21:34
Poyntzpass		21:43
Portadown	21:54	21:55
Lurgan		22:03½
Lisburn	22:15	22:16
Botanic	22:29	22:30
Belfast Central	22:36	