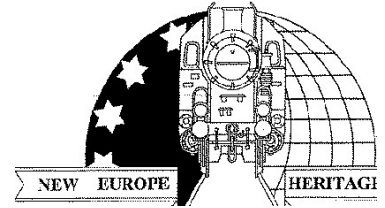


Eastern Star



Journal of the New Europe Railway Heritage Trust,
helping railway preservation in the New Europe



Zagreb's Garden Railway on a Busy Day

(Photo by courtesy of HRKLJUZ. More details of this innovation will be in our next issue)

New Links With Russia

We were delighted to welcome Alexey Vulfov, Chairman of VOLZhD, the All-Russia Society of Railway Enthusiasts, who made a short visit to Yorkshire in August. Our thanks go especially to all those on the North Yorkshire Moors Railway and the Keighley and Worth Valley Railway who went out of their way to welcome Alexey. Plans are being made for a delegation from VOLZhD to visit Britain next year and we in NERHT hope to co-operate with this organization in future. In the meantime you may like to read the following article by Alexey on the Bologoye – Ostashkov line, which is being developed for heritage trains with support from VOLZhD.

A Russian Broad Gauge Steam-Age Restoration

(Bologoye is at the mid-point of the Moscow-St Petersburg main line, and the line from there to Velikiye Luki runs in a south-westerly direction, with Ostashkov situated 112km from Bologoye. This light-traffic line is the scene of Alexey's narrative with photos provided by himself and by Olga Borstch)

The project of preserving the railway line between Bologoye and Velikiye Luki with a branch to Torzhok as a second choice appeared a long time ago, immediately after I happened to encounter this line for the first time. My first trip in winter 1984 led me as it were to a haven of Russian nature and the bygone railway. I was surprised and delighted with the state of preservation and the beauty of the early twentieth century railway facilities. It is all the more surprising (a real miracle) that all this was preserved during the Great Patriotic War when this line was heavily bombed and shelled.

The line's structures are distinguished by a special architectural style created by the architects Stanislav Volovsky and Vladimir Myshak. This style reflected both the "Russian modern" style of the early twentieth century, especially noticeable in the appearance of Class 4 wooden railway stations, and elements of pseudo-gothic, as the line from Russia went to Sedlets in the kingdom of Poland and the architects took this into account in designing the buildings of the larger stations.. In common parlance, the line is called "Bologoe-Polotskaya". Several documentary films appeared with titles such as *Bologoye-Polotskaya*, *Zapovednaya Doroga*, and *Iz Bologoye v Ostashkov*. There were many articles in the press. The branch from the station Soblago to Torzhok gradually developed in the period 1910-1928.

The line was built only for strategic purposes at the insistence and with the financial participation of France - an ally of Russia at the beginning of the Twentieth Century - against Germany in accordance with the Military Convention of 1891, without setting any economic objectives. It passed through the underdeveloped edge of the Upper Volga, in impassable forests (which were one of the reasons that the front line stopped here in 1941), among the beautiful lakes of this region, which people call "Blue Russia". The only towns on the 300km line between Bologoye and Velikiy Luki are the ancient cities of Ostashkov and Toropets, which are of great importance in Russian history, and still preserve the old-time look with their monasteries and temples. Ostashkov is located on the beautiful large Lake Seliger, and is today one of the most famous tourist places in Russia. In the old days it was famous for fishing and the high culture of life. Toropets is known for the beauty of its ancient landscape, the nursery of bears and the museum of the great Russian composer Modest Mussorgsky located nearby. The surrounding

natural landscape is beautiful; a trip through it turns into an immersion in the world of wildlife. I was fascinated by it at first sight and always marvelled how the line of the railway organically fits into this region. There is no doubt that this is one of the most picturesque railway lines in the European part of Russia, if not the most picturesque. There were many unique old railroad curiosities on it, because no one had ever planned to modernize the line due to its low economic significance. This was one of the last steam-powered lines in the Soviet Union; steam locomotives served here until the end of the 1970s. After the Great Patriotic War, captured German locomotives of class 52 and Soviet Su and L locomotives worked on the line. 52 type steam locomotives operated here with trains until 1969.



Su 250-74 brings the train into Kuzhenkino

Due to the ongoing modernization of all sections of the railway, which began with the creation of Russian Railways in 2004, it became necessary to take under state protection the preserved objects of the line as historical and cultural monuments. Of course, this should have started much earlier, which would have prevented losses, but "better late than never," as the Russian proverb says. With the support of the Department of Culture of Tver Region, and with the participation of the Russian Society of Railway Enthusiasts (VOLZhD), it was possible to take over the protection of the Kuzhenkino, Batalino and Ostashkov stations along with all the old buildings. Following this, on the basis of the positive experience of creating in Moscow the unique "Moscow Steam Depot" museum complex, the idea arose of creating a similar museum on the line.

Locomotives have become a national treasure today in Russia. They are constantly used on holidays and on tourist trips (for example, the "Golden Eagle" retro-tour of the south of Russia has been recently carried out on a huge scale). The preservation and operation of steam locomotives, which Russian Railways conducts at a very high level, has helped the implementation of the retro-train organization process in Russia. The repair of locomotives is handled by the company "Railway Retro-Service", and the operation is managed by Russian Railways. VOLZhD acts as a consultant and supporter of the project, in close contact with Russian Railways. These structures have ensured the preservation of operating steam locomotives in Russia and, thus, a whole area of the country's history. Today, there are more than 100 operating locomotives in Russia, and the process of restoring unique series, such as the L series tank-engine of the late 19th Century or the famous P36 passenger locomotives removed from pedestals, continues to replenish the national collection. It is very important that this is fully supported by the leadership of Russian Railways at all levels, including President Oleg Belozеров, and with the provision of financing for the process.

One of the acts of the head of the Directorate of Railways of Russian Railways, Oleg Valinsky, in 2016, in the field of preserving and operating steam locomotives, was the organization of steam locomotive traffic on the Bologoye-Ostashkov line of the Bologoye-Velikie Luki line, recognised as having great potential for tourism. He issued an appropriate order for mandatory implementation of this. By order of one of the managers of Russian Railways, Valentin Gapanovitch (who was the man who did so much in Russia to preserve railway historical rarities) the line was officially declared a protected zone of Russian Railways at the request of VOLZhD. The work of steam locomotives on it seemed completely natural, since the line has retained a lot of the old look to this day.

I would like anyone to have the opportunity to ride this retro-line (on tourist retro-trips the prices are quite high and not available to everyone). There was an idea of operating a locomotive with a commuter train here, where, by a regular commuter ticket, anyone could ride on a train with a steam locomotive. This line with its small traffic and only one passenger train per day was very suitable for this. In addition, this line in its landscape is literally created for a locomotive. For the transfer to steam traction (in the Twenty-First Century!), the train No. 6691 Bologoye-Ostashkov was identified, which is usually hauled by a diesel locomotive on ordinary days.

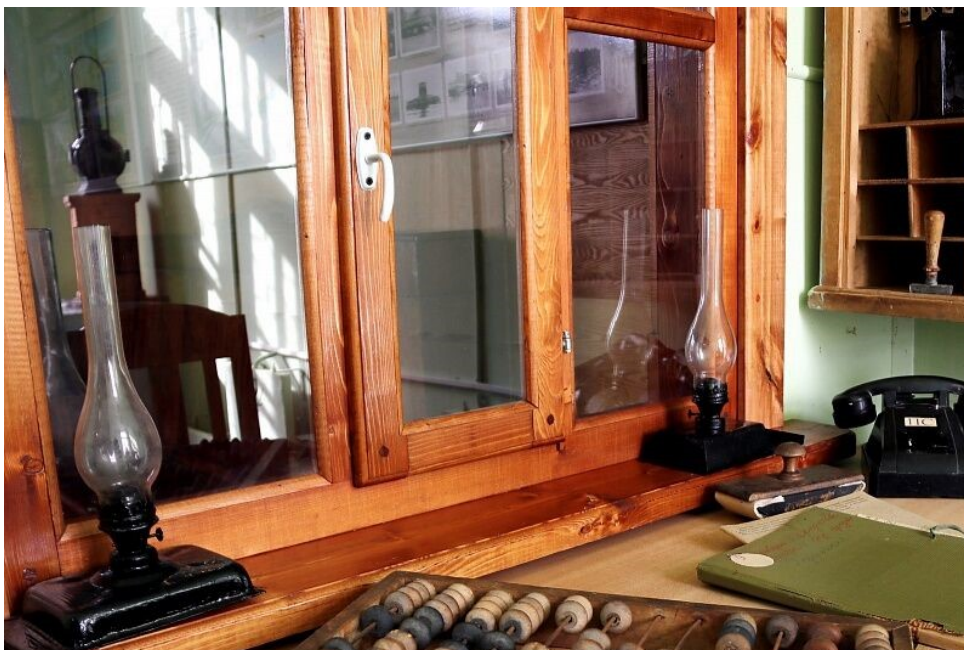
The management of the October Railway in St. Petersburg supported this idea. The appointment of an experienced railroad worker and a stalwart of the Tver region, deputy line chief engineer Viktor Ivanov, was a happy event. He was very interested in the project and fully supported the idea of VOLZhD, which was not only to start a train with a locomotive here, but also to create a certain historical complex, which would create a museum of architectural objects of the line, which coincides with the project of a retro-train; the two themes would organically complement each other.

Kuzhenkino has been chosen as the place to create a museum complex. The reason for the choice was that the main objects of the station were preserved in the best condition - the railway station and the water tower (the decorative tower of the station building was preserved, the superstructure was mainly preserved on the water tower). It almost did not require additional funds for the restoration, so the costs could be regarded as normal expenses for the operation of the facilities. Kuzhenkino became a kind of "capital" of the Bologoye-Polotsk line. In addition, the Petersburg-Moscow highway is within a mile of the station.



A close-up of the restored station building at Kuzhenkino.

Under the leadership of Viktor Ivanov, experts from the October Railway and the Moscow-Tver suburban company, with the participation and advice of VOLZhD, carried out unprecedented, unique, work on launching a suburban train with a steam locomotive and creating a museum in Kuzhenkino. And the work was carried out without any special additional costs. To do this in a year and a half is amazing. At Bologoye station, access to the depot workshop was restored, and at Ostashkov station the tracks of the turning triangle were restored to turn the engine, a place was chosen for fire-cleaning and blowing the boiler, and for coaling. At Bologoye I, Bologoye II, Kuzhenkino and Ostashkov stations the water columns and water collection points for watering locomotives were restored, and a water column in Kuzhenkino was brought from



another, mainline station and connected to it with water. The launch of the hydrocolumn in Kuzhenkino made it possible to make the whole project possible at all, since there is enough water to reach Ostashkov (112km kilometres from Bologoye)

The booking office at Kuzhenkino

For the use of locomotives hauling a commuter train, schedules of their movement on the section Bologoye - Ostashkov were developed. The passenger cars of the suburban train, to give them a historical look were, by special permission of Russian Railways, painted in green, and "Bologoye-Ostashkov" route boards were made. A special emblem of the Bologoye-Polotsk line was approved and placed on the cars.



The water tower at Kuzhenkino

Two locomotives of the L series were transferred to the Bologoye operational locomotive depot. During the warm period, the passenger locomotive of the Su series, which is optimal for such work, will be used to haul the retro train in this section. Locomotive brigades were formed to work on steam locomotives and they were trained for the qualification to control a steam locomotive on the basis of a school of drivers in the city of Kursk (there are only two such schools in Russia). Train running-in for the Bologoye-Ostashkov section was also carried out to measure the consumption of water and fuel, and the hourly rate of payment for the use of a steam locomotive was approved. On the Bologoye-Ostashkov line, the regular operation of a steam locomotive was also started on auxiliary work on those days when the suburban retro train does not run.

A huge amount of work was carried out at Kuzhenkino station. The building of the station was repaired here with the restoration of some historical elements, the booking office and the luggage compartment were reconstructed (the station interior was re-planned, but the outside remained approximately 80% authentic). Restoration of the kerosene cellar and redecoration of the water tower were carried out. On the passenger platform were re-created historical fencing and lights. An old station attendant console was also kept. A manual fire pump of the 1920s and baggage scales from the mid-twentieth century were brought here from the Batalino station, and old wooden benches with the words "Ministry of Railways" were brought from Nevel Station. VOLZhD provided consultancy and historical documentation.

Also, visitors' paths were laid here, plants were planted along the apron, museum signs were made and installed, two concrete pillars on the platform were replaced with wooden ones, and an exposition was created in the station building. Coloured information sheets were hung in the waiting room of the station, decorative inscriptions were made. There are also photos by the driver of Bologoye depot Alexei Alekseev, who was born in Ostashkov and who is in love with this line.

On the morning of September 29, 2018, after many meetings and completions, the grand opening of the "Old Kuzhenkino Station" complex took place, and the first in

modern Russia trip of a steam commuter train was made for everyone. The uniqueness of this retro-complex is particularly relevant due to the fact that it was created not on a narrow, but on the broad gauge. Until spring, the train with the locomotive will run every Saturday, and starting in May it is expected that it will run on Thursdays, Saturdays and Sundays. The train schedule is based on the arrival in Bologoye of passengers from Moscow and St. Petersburg by «Sapsan» and «Lastotchka» trains. The ticket price is equal to the usual suburban fare for this route. The train cars are well-loaded, including some foreign railway enthusiasts, for example passengers of the «Golden Eagle» train. At Kuzhenkino station, it was necessary to open a special guide post because of the large number of people wanting to visit the museum. The total cost of operating a locomotive turned out to be less than the cost of operating a diesel locomotive with a similar train along a similar route.

The project has already received the nickname "Russian Wolsztyn" in the circles of foreign railway lovers. This turned out to be a truly popular project both by design, and in embodiment, and by demand, created by the people for the people. It is especially important in the tourist region of the Upper Volga in the vicinity of the famous Lake Seliger. The project was appreciated by children and students. It remains to hope that it will be durable.

Alexey Vulfov (*Chairman of the Russian Society of Railway Enthusiasts, author and one of the organizers of the project*).

The Ruskeal Express

According to the newspaper *Gudok* (20 October), since June the October Railway has been running a daily steam train from Sortavala, at the northern tip of Lake Ladoga, to the Ruskeal Mountain Park. The latter has been attracting tourists since it was organised a decade ago and comprises among other things a now-flooded canyon which was once a marble quarry. In fact the marble of several St Petersburg cathedrals and palaces was obtained here. The deep water attracts divers who from time to time come upon rails and wagons of the narrow-gauge railway that served the workings.

The new steam train, connecting the Park with steamers and with rail services from St Petersburg, has already increased the number of visitors by at least 15% and, equally important, has encouraged visitors, no longer deterred by difficulties of access, to come in the autumn months.

The train consists of an L class locomotive and six cars, including a restaurant car fitted out in the old-style green curtaining, and plenty of velvet and tassels (but nevertheless offering USB ports and charging sockets – the trip takes about an hour).

SLOVAKIA

The Orava Forest Railway

James Waite writes:

These are the notes and photos from the visit Margaret and I went to north-western Slovakia for a weekend in May to visit the Orava Forest Railway - a line of which I had never heard until a chance mention in an exchange of emails with a Czech enthusiast

friend in April. It turned out that they only steam their loco a few times each year, in order to avoid wearing it out and this was one its occasional operating days. Their tourist coaches aren't very photogenic. I asked if they would be willing to pose the loco with a timber wagon parked in their sidings and they responded by hauling it out and

taking it with the loco midway up the line for my benefit after the public services had finished (see picture) - all free of charge and they wouldn't even accept a tip. Really kind people.



The main section was built during WW1 but was of

limited use as it didn't connect with a main line railway. In 1926 it was extended west over the Beskyd pass or saddle at an altitude of 935 metres to join up with the Kysuce Forestry Railway which did have a mainline connection. The extension climbed steeply up to Beskyd summit and then dropped down the western side by a series of Z reversals. The combined railway was about 61kms long and ran until closure in 1971, when the Czechoslovak government declared the section on both sides of Beskyd summit to be a listed monument. The western side reopened a few years later as the Vychylovka Museum Railway with two Hungarian-built locos from the old railway (Slovakia was in the Hungarian part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire until WW1) and is quite well known but the eastern side, the Orava railway, wasn't restored until 2008.

The summit separates two administrative regions and the two sections are run by their respective museum authorities. The Vychylovka section isn't well-managed and has been without a working steam loco during the past three or four years. The eastern section, based at Tanecnik, is much more go-ahead and had this loco (*right*) refurbished a few years ago. It's CKD D76-90 class No 1441/1928 and worked on the old railway for many years until the closure - and also worked the last train. It's called "Gontkulak" after the mountain which overlooks Tanecnik and for many years before 1971 had the name prominently painted on its side but now it's back in its original nameless state. Several of these locos were built in the late 1920's and 1930's to supplement the old Hungarian locos on the Slovak forest lines. Just as we arrived on Saturday afternoon the crew were polishing the loco ready for Sunday's runs. There were white sheets keeping the motion clean. This is clearly a well-pampered machine! The decorations



on the front of the loco were part of the region's traditional May celebrations, the central part of which is the construction of huge maypoles by stripping off all the branches and also the bark from tall conifer trees, leaving just the top two branches which are then decorated with ribbons. These were plentiful in the villages we passed through, often with several of them just a few metres apart, and small decorations of branches and ribbons were everywhere. The event was the railway's May celebration. There's another celebration in the district on 1st June when the poles are taken down.



There are two Hungarian locos in store at Vychylovka engine shed, a green 0-8-0T (MAV 4281/1916) and a black 0-6-0T (MAV 2282/1909, No U34 901) with what looked to me like a disproportionately short wheelbase (see left). There is also a rusty Krauss Munich 0-6-0T (15791/1939) from the old line which has never been restored. Maybe some of these locos will be back in action one day.

Certainly a weekend with a difference, made all the more memorable by an amazingly good small family-run hotel just along the road from Tanecnik station with brilliant food and local wine, amid interesting flora and fauna.

LITHUANIA

A Visit to the Siauruko Narrow Gauge Railway in Lithuania

Nick Fletcher writes:

In September Stephen Wiggs and myself attended the celebration of the 120th anniversary of the opening of the ASG line (also known as 'Siaurukas'). This is a 750mm gauge line running roughly from south-east to north-west through central Lithuania.

The western terminus of the line is at Panevėžys, where the interchange with the main line is located and also the quite extensive main engineering works of the line. The line then leads south and east through a number of small intermediate stations to Anykščiai, which is the centre for the line. Here there is a delightful original station with a number of newer buildings, one of which now houses a motor vehicle museum and another is a new educational hall for the railway. Both of these new buildings were officially opened during the celebrations. The line then continues further east for a short distance to its current easterly terminus at Rubikiai, which is a lakeside resort. The total length of the line is around 68km. The line is the only remaining section of what was once a network of over 800km of narrow gauge railways in Lithuania, most of which was 750 mm and largely built over that part of Lithuania which fell within the Russian Empire. NEHRT helped to ensure the line's survival in 2001, when Stephen together with David Morgan made a mid-winter visit to talk to the involved officials and others.

There has been some useful investment in the line and related infrastructure and there seems to be a lot of support for it amongst the local community. Many local politicians and the Mayor of Anykščiai were present during the celebrations. The remaining

challenges include ownership (although a tourist line, it is still the responsibility of the Transport Ministry, for which it is only a marginal care). It is also a bit long for a tourist line with two mutually dependent centres (Panevėžys the logistical and engineering hub, and Anykščiai, the line's cultural heart) more or less at opposite ends of the line. The line passes through attractive countryside and Anykščiai is a designated tourist resort (in particular for winter sports) but it is somewhat remote from major population centres (Vilnius is 120km distant). Importantly the line currently relies entirely on paid workers, without help from volunteers. The line is currently reliant on Soviet era Tu diesels (mainly TU2s). It does have one steam locomotive, but its restoration has been curtailed by shortages of money and know-how.

The ASG team were extremely hospitable and we are extremely grateful for their help, in particular the line's general manager, Mindaugas, and his wife Jolanda. Mindaugas has been invited by NERHT to visit a number of UK heritage rail centres in search of useful know-how. The line certainly continues to warrant NERHT's support.

POLAND



As a senator, Robert Gaweł worked long and hard for new railway legislation to ease the financial and bureaucratic burdens on heritage railways in Poland, some of which has already been passed into law. He is also campaigning for the establishment of a proper Polish National Railway Museum. He has consulted with NERHT about the possibility of setting up a Polish parliamentary special-interest group for heritage rail on the lines of the UK's All Party Rail Heritage Group. On Thursday 15 August, he visited the Didcot Steam Centre and was very enthusiastic about all he saw. He was particularly impressed by the work going on in the boiler shop, the carriage works and the archive department. This photo by Frank Dumbleton shows him and Mr Przemysław Frackowiak at Didcot.

AGM. The NERHT annual general meeting will be on Saturday 16 May and, after it, there will be a talk by a representative of the Line 102 Polish/Ukrainian project.

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The New Europe Railway Heritage Trust ('NERHT') is a voluntary organisation established to help railway preservation in the former USSR and the ex-communist countries of Central and Eastern Europe (registered in the UK as charity No 1099229).

Chairman: Stephen Wiggs sandgw@hotmail.com tel. +44(0) 2085053186
Secretary: Livius Kooy l.j.kooy@planet.nl
Treasurer: Robert Raynor, 2A Avenue Road, Forest Gate, London E7 0LD

Editor, *Eastern Star*: John Westwood, 9 Whitefriars Meadow, Sandwich, Kent CT13 9AS

jnwestwood@tiscali.co.uk