

The Strawberry Line Society



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Winter Newsletter – 2014

Issue 33

Can Spring be far behind?

January. Hazel male catkins came out first and the tiny red stigmas of the female flowers about 10 days later, Snowdrops, primroses and winter heliotrope are now flowering and moles and badgers seem very actively digging holes/ molehills. Some of the fallen acorns are sprouting. In my RSPB birdwatch for an hour I was very disappointed to not see one robin; the first time I had not recorded robins or sparrows; I recorded goldfinches, redwing, blackcap and lots of tits in the garden. Fortunately there are plenty of robins on the Strawberry Line and Sladers leigh field. (The field is closed at the moment due to wet conditions).

Strawberry Line Society

Formerly Cheddar Valley Railway Walk Society

Tuesday 11 March 7.30 pm Woodborough Inn, Winscombe

AGM : Talk and Presentation

'The Weston Clevedon Portishead Railway'

by Author Christopher Redwood

OPEN MEETING – ALL WELCOME

The Strawberry Line Cycle-path is an increasingly popular amenity and also forms part of National Cycle Route 26 – Clevedon to Weymouth. At this meeting, the Society and its Branches will report on developments along the established route, Yatton to Cheddar, and efforts to further extend the amenity. There will be opportunity for questions and an illustrated Talk to follow:

The Weston Clevedon Portishead Railway ran from 1897 to 1940. It was quaint, colourful and operated on a shoe-string. You can hear all about this great little railway and see archive photographs at the talk by author **Christopher Redwood**.

Contact No. 01934 843868

Michael Woods Associates this autumn did a dormouse survey for Woodborough Farm field hedges by putting up many tubes in the hedges and on the strawberry Line which forms one side of the fields. They were looking for dormice summer nests which are a small spherical easily identifiable shape. I watched three of the boxes being removed and saw one of them had a little stash of dried blackberries and seeds. (see photo overleaf) I don't know the result as this was a business survey before asking for planning permission. I doubt there were any dormice nests in the fields as not enough cover. Hopefully we will hear of the results on the Strawberry Line one day.



YACWAG (Yatton and Congresbury Wildlife Action Group) survey for Harvest Mice Nests in winter when they are unused. YACWAG have found harvest mice in several places along the Strawberry Line on the verges of the section between Yatton Station and Congresbury. Harvest mice have declined dramatically in the last 30 years and are now rare. They are on the IUCN red list and are regarded as endangered. (for the man who once asked me to explain abbreviations I don't know the meaning of IUCN ed)

Harvest mice are the smallest British rodent and the only one with a prehensile tail. They do not hibernate but spend most of the time underground in winter. Their nests woven from shredded grass to form a hollow sphere the size of a tennis ball – lashed to several stems of plants like reeds long grass and other vegetation

YACWAG manages the Yatton –Congresbury section (A.S.S.I. site of special scientific interest ed) by one annual cut in the winter which enables the harvest mice and other animals and insects to complete their life cycle. This approach also benefits the wild flowers on the Strawberry Line but keeps the worst of the bramble at bay. Some bramble is very good for insects and provides nesting sites and autumn food for birds (and humans) Faith and Tony Moulin.



Stash of dried blackberries and seeds found in nesting box at Woodborough Farm



Volunteers on SLS have been partially hibernating but Chris Ballard team removed 58 Tyres that have been on the SL in the Sandford section for as long as I can remember. They have also done more work on the Fullers Lane pond using stones and stakes to prevent the backflow of the pond water up the culvert.

Bicycle Counters have been put up by NSC. Unfortunately walkers, joggers and helpers are not recorded; what technology allows to be measured becomes the most important I suspect. So far the results have confirmed there are more cyclists at the weekend!

New website Bob Murrell S.L. East

At the last Strawberry Line Association meeting a website design expert generously offered to totally redesign the website making it more appealing and much easier to navigate. The offer was much appreciated by everyone and Richard would start work on it as soon as possible. It was generally felt that a more comprehensive Strawberry Line website used as an umbrella forum for all the path groups stretching from Clevedon to Shepton Mallet (including the connecting branches) making their own contribution should be the central post for disseminating news for the whole Strawberry Line path project. It was agreed that day to day control of the website should be handled by a small committee –

[www.thestrawberryline.org .uk](http://www.thestrawberryline.org.uk)

was the final choice after much discussion. Paul Harley had fortunately registered several domain names. It will be paid for by the Strawberry line Society as we are a registered charity and the other groups are not; it is also very difficult now for new small groups to be registered by the Charity Commissioners.

We are looking forward to letting you know by email when the new site is up and running.

Bob Murrell S.L. East

Help needed

We would welcome new members onto the committee as illness has taken some of our faithful. Lois Brenchley after 38 Years is resigning as secretary after the AGM but we are very grateful she will remain as a very valued member of the committee. So **TWO** secretaries are needed; a minute secretary and a publicity secretary. Do join us if you can. SLS needs you!

The Tunnel

At the regular Strawberry Line Management Meeting it was recorded that the lights are not working; this has been reported to NSC Street Lighting engineer. They will only be repaired if it is cost effective. (they have broken down so regularly) It was agreed that it was not essential the lights are working. Most cyclists have bright lights and the clearance in the cutting has increased the light levels in the tunnel. There are also notices either side of the tunnel asking cyclists to use their lights. Dismounting your bicycle and walking through is the safest way as it gives your eyes time to adjust. This year I have seen no icicles and surprisingly not too much water.

The Sandford Station Heritage Centre will be opening at weekends and bank holidays from 19th of April, Easter on until November. If you have not called into to see it make sure you can this season.

Axbridge Cheddar News

Lloyds bank Grants

We were listed with three other charities to be a recipient of this grant. The winner was decided by public vote by email, text or in person in Lloyds bank in Winscombe (with green tokens) We obtained over 40% of the votes and have received £3,000 from Lloyds. Many thanks to all of you who did vote and especially to Dave Beaver who heard about the competition and instigated the application and did a lot of the initial publicity. Sustrans helped by publishing it around all the south west members.

The application was targeted at the urgent need to improve drainage along the 300 metre stretch of the Strawberry Line running through the cutting up to Sharpham Road Bridge (or 5 ways Bridge as sometime known).

We had an exploratory meeting with a drainage contractor to discuss clearing vegetation out of existing ditches, avoiding several badger setts, and especially avoiding a gas pipeline alongside the track! The work will also include several drainage channels crossing below the track, and surface water repairs. However there is no point in starting the main work until Raglan Homes contractors have completed the new ramp down to the track from the old loading bay. We are expecting this to be done by April.



Raglan Homes also have a planning obligation to widen Sharpham Road Bridge. A start date for this is not yet clear, but we will be contacting them to make sure this obligation is fulfilled.

Bristol Water submitted plans for the Cheddar Two reservoir just before Christmas. These plans don't directly affect the line, but Bristol Water have agreed to provide a strip of land alongside their Lower New Road depot to create a link from the line near the bridge to what will become an access track to the new reservoir. Rupert Crosby (Sustrans Area Manager) is also in negotiation with Bristol Water about widening the narrow section between their depot and the houses along Wideatt's Road. With the roads around Cheddar heading for even more traffic, the Strawberry Line is looking all the more like a desirable option.

Dulcie Dibley and David Parkin

Woodborough Green

A new information board is being planned to be put up on the Woodborough Green Community Orchard. This triangle of land is part of the Strawberry Line Local Nature Reserve as it was bought from the Dean and Chapter of Wells in the 1860's with the land needed to build the original railway. There are one or two other parcels of land towards Yatton and Congresbury that still go with the old railway track. Chris Richards (Weston Museum) while researching for a talk on mining discovered the south west corner of the former Green boundary banks and walls. The only registered common in Winscombe now is the car park in front of the Woodborough Pub as the Parish Council had no idea of the existence of any other part of the common.

Hopefully the board (with the agreement of North Somerset) will explain some of the history of the Green and exactly what a Community Orchard is. This will be paid from a Legacy left to the society.

Fire in the tunnel

One of our members is very interested in the fire and destruction of a diesel Rail Car in the tunnel. Apparently they frequently caught fire because the fuel line broke and sprayed diesel fuel over the engine. The engines were designed by an engineer who worked for the London Bus Company and the body by Park Royal who usually made London Buses. Explains everything!

National Grid substation at Sandford

The national grid plan to have a new substation at Sandford and here the underground cables will become overground using large pylons. This will alter the Strawberry Line path which hopefully will go under Drove Way bridge and so the users of the Strawberry Line will not have to go on the Nigh Road. The disruption to the people of Sandford hardly bears thinking about!

A New Link To The Line

A lively campaign is underway to get a cycle/walkway alongside the horribly dangerous road from Axbridge Townend down to the A38 at Cross – the Coffin Lane Campaign in honour of the old track that was used to carry coffins to Compton Bishop when a slice of Axbridge was technically NOT in Axbridge Parish! At noon on Saturday March 1st coffins (not real ones) will process from Axbridge Farmers Market, through West Street and down the offending road to Cross. All supporters welcome. Here's a link for further information:

<http://www.comptonbishopparrish.org.uk/index.asp?pageid=507310>



Notice at Tintern Station – Not a sign seen at station today.

The New Year is the time to renew your membership; a form will be enclosed with the news letter. You can pay by post or to your distributor or you can renew at the AGM if you prefer.