



Downpatrick & County Down Railway Society

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PRESS RELEASE

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Three Point Turn at Downpatrick & Co. Down Railway!

Last Saturday evening, as the sun set over the distant Mourne, the Downpatrick & County Down Railway's (DCDR) locomotive No. 3 became the first steam engine to be turned on the Downpatrick Loop Triangle for more than half a century.

The Downpatrick Loop was a feature of the railway network in County Down for over half a century, but was consigned to history when the Belfast and County Down Railway network south of the Belfast-Bangor line was closed in 1950.

Now, with the reinstatement of all three legs of the railway triangle, this long-lost unique feature of Downpatrick's landscape has returned.

Railway Chairman, Michael Collins, says that this is a landmark in the railway's development.

"The completion of the triangle makes the DCDR unique amongst all the heritage railways of the UK and Ireland – no other preserved line possesses one!"

He continues, "Another aspect is that completion of this track means that the railway is fully restored along all the old BCDR trackbed in our ownership."

Mr Collins says that once the extension of the South Line from the triangle to Ballydugan is built (the trackbed is not currently in DCDR ownership), this will allow for an interesting train operation.

"What we could do is run trains from Ballydugan to Inch Abbey via the triangle stopping at the Loop Platform, using the steam train and vintage coaches," he says. "People could then change onto another train at the platform - perhaps a heritage diesel or a steam autococh - to take them back to Downpatrick."

"We've informally suggested this to our visitors, and they find this an interesting idea, something that could really increase their enjoyment of the train journey".

Mr Collins adds, "Essentially, it could see, in miniature, a resurrection of the way the original railway used to run."

He also says that the completion of the triangle has more tangible benefits in the short term.

"Since we have no turntable at Downpatrick, we have been unable to turn rolling stock. It was decided to turn the steam engine because, until now, when she has been entering the station at Downpatrick from Inch Abbey she has been running bunker first – so all you could see was the back end of the steam engine coming towards you."

He explains, "By turning her, it will allow her to arrive boiler first, which will look more impressive as this is often the first view of the train our passengers have. It will also give our visitors better photographic opportunities."

While it is not anticipated that the triangle will be in regular passenger use until the completion of the Ballydugan extension, it will be available to travel on for hired charters later in the year.

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