

On Safari -

or how to spend a holiday

with historical intent

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MORE than ever, these days, one reads of appeals to serious modellers and railway lovers to "go out into the bush" and record with camera or note book and sketches the fast dwindling railway relics still left with us. I suppose each one of us has his own particular interest—tracking down rolling stock, buildings or signals etc., which is all to the good in presenting a balanced historical record and I like to think that our efforts today will be invaluable in 50 years' time, especially to serious modellers of that era.

These treks into the bush (and bush is the operative word in describing some of the places I've visited) can conveniently form the basis of a delightful holiday, thus combining business with pleasure, and having done this myself over the last few years (and made many mistakes) it may be possible to offer a few tips towards better results and enjoyment.

Transport, of course, is essential and at least three alternatives are available. Having tried them all, I hesitate to recommend any particular one, but the following summaries may help the reader to decide which one suits him best.

Railrover Ticket

For £10 I was allowed to travel for one week over the (then) Western Region lines, covering the rough triangle, Shrewsbury, Paddington and Penzance. I found this gave one a glorious feeling of freedom—just saunter up to any station and catch any train, but it was impossible to cover all the main and branch lines in one week and involved a fair amount of footslogging. Furthermore, if I spotted an interesting vehicle or oddment in a station siding, particularly from an express, it was often found to be most inconvenient and time consuming getting back to it for closer inspection. For this jaunt I took just a rucksack containing simple toilet requisites, pyjamas, pacamac, camera and tripod, timetable, notebook and 6ft rule and didn't appear to rough it in the slightest. The rucksack is ideal—when placed on one's back, it can be forgotten—leaving both hands free for sketching and if one keeps strictly to carrying only the items named, there is no weight problem.

By prominently displaying my gilt GWR coat of arms badge, I invariably found suitable B & B accommodation at the right price by enquiry from the local railway staff, though it is advisable to start looking round no later than 18.30. The evening can then be spent planning the next day's timetable—quite an interesting and delicate exercise in deciding what "connections" are a good risk and what will incorporate the maximum number of branch lines in a single day. A word of warning here—the railway timetable must be supplemented with the small booklet published periodically and available free from the main stations called "Alterations to Passenger Services" otherwise your whole day's schedule can be ruined. One other point I continually overlooked was allowing time for meals. Whether due to an excess of zeal or my Caledonian ancestry, I don't know, but I frequently found myself dashing for a train connection, realising too late I had nothing to eat and at the end of the day I had a dry tongue and a very empty stomach.

Summing up, I would say that this railrover ticket represents very good value for money (you must try it whilst some branch lines and main lines are still operational), but the mobility is not flexible enough if you are tracking down old relics of any kind for the purpose of measuring and photographing. The total cost was around £25 per week.

Railrover plus Motor Car

The £10 Railrover Ticket supplemented by the motor car offers the maximum flexibility in reaching inaccessible stations or sidings—particularly those with only a couple of train services a day. For example, I would leave the car at Carmarthen and do a "scouting" trip by train, out to say Swansea. Fishguard or Milford Haven, noting carefully the site of any interesting relics (rolling stock in my case) then visit these sites later by car, armed with camera and 6ft rule. On these trips, the car is virtually one's home for the week and is a valuable haven if the weather is bad. I sleep in it, of

course, and with a sleeping bag and a few Dunlopillo cushions, it will compete with most of the hotels for comfort (I should add that it is a station wagon!) Thus no time is lost in searching for digs (not to mention saving about thirty shillings a night) and one can work in the sidings or station yard until dusk and then go to bed as convenient. If possible, it is best to park the car at least 50 yards from the track, preferably in a hollow or behind a clump of trees to reduce the train noises which usually prevail throughout the night, though, of course, one must be able to see the train from the car—it's a lovely experience to lie in bed and be able to pull back the curtains and see what is passing at any hour of the night or early morning. Also, of course, sleeping in the car avails an early start if required—you can (or could!) catch the 6.10 out of Carmarthen for Aberystwyth, or the 7.20 out of Exeter up the Exe valley, without having to cajole the hotel proprietor to get up at dawn and skip your breakfast into the bargain!

Further flexibility is available if required by "sleeping out" an odd night, for instance if a long train journey is planned, say Bristol to Penzance, the car can be left in Bristol overnight and you can stay the night in digs at Penzance, returning next day, fitting in a few Devon branches on the way. Of course, this joint train/car method means considerably less train mileage for your £10, but I think it is still good value for money and if the aim is to find as many relics as possible in a given time (before they all go) it is undoubtedly the best.

Motor Car (no Railrover Ticket)

This is basically very similar to the one just described, but less ambitious and thus less expensive. One would say, motor to Aberystwyth and find a nice camping site for the car (one I use is near the track and the river—gorgeous scenery with the countryside all to yourself) then book cheap day returns on the railway to perhaps Pwllheli or down to Carmarthen, again searching for vehicles en route. After a couple of days, I would then motor to new headquarters, say Worcester or Shrewsbury and repeat the process there. This is a more leisurely trip altogether and doesn't justify the £10 Railrover Ticket, as selected cheap day trips over a week amount to much less than this. It is almost certainly the cheapest way, assuming that one already has a car suitable for sleeping in.

General points

When I find a suitable subject of especial interest—mainly GWR passenger and freight stock in my particular case—I usually go through the following routine and it is hoped that these few tips may help other members to avoid the mistakes of my earlier efforts, for it is maddening to get back home from a 200 mile journey and find that some major point has been overlooked.

Always ask permission to "work" on the vehicle from the nearest railway official—one just cannot work properly if continually worrying about being caught climbing all over the vehicle.

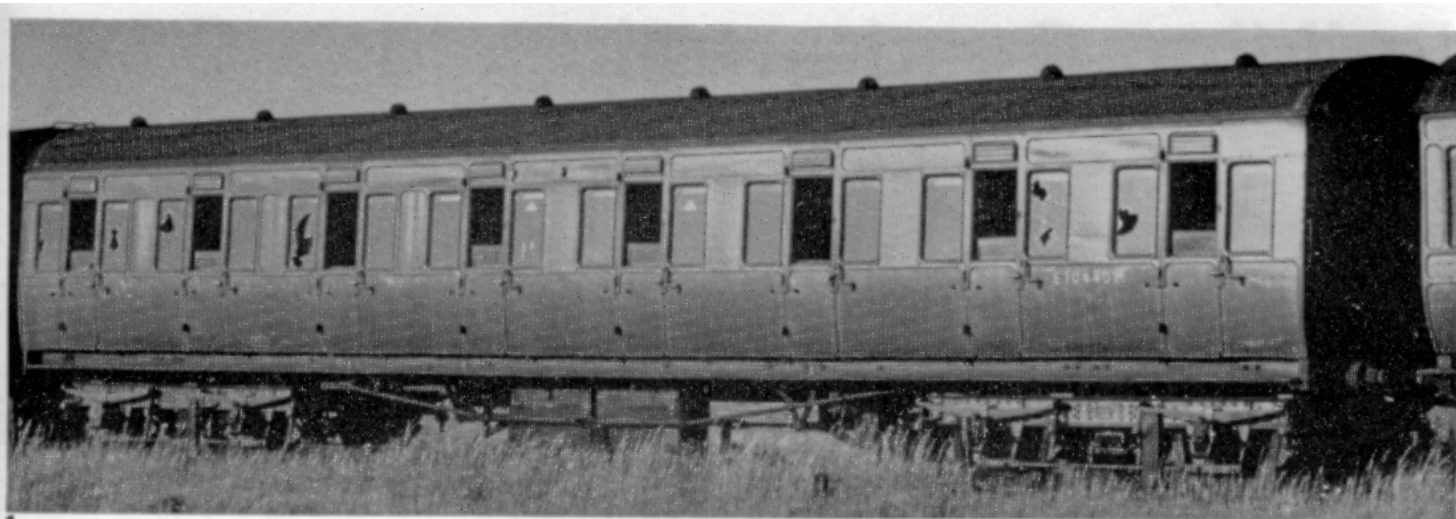
Measure the main body dimensions, door sizes and positions, and other vital dimensions, such as queen post centres, vac cylinder diameter, and "V"-Hanger position—anything, in fact, likely to prove difficult to "scale down" from memory some months later when the model is being built. After a time, of course, one finds that many features are standardised and these can be ignored on subsequent vehicles, once these "standards" are established—thus saving a lot of time.

Always photograph both sides and both ends, if possible—coach sides are frequently dissimilar and ends nearly always so.

Photograph from a dead square position if possible, so that some attempt at "scaling dimensions" from the photograph is possible, if any measurement is overlooked.

Photograph the vehicle also from an angle, so that the approximate dimensions of any projections can be gauged from the photograph.

Take several shots of the undergear from various angles—sufficient to be able to build up a fairly complete picture of the chassis,



including braking system, gas tanks or battery boxes etc. As these are often in semi-darkness, I use a tripod for the necessary long exposures—in fact, I try to use a tripod on any photograph, as it appears to give a sharper edge to the finished product.

A “close up” photo is advisable of any particular feature of the vehicle which looks rather complicated and likely to prove difficult to model, such as a corridor connection. After missing so many chances in the past, I now work on the principle “if in doubt, take a photograph;” after all, 35mm film is cheap and, after spending possibly 3 days and 60s finding a relic, there’s no sense in economising on film.

Make a note of any information painted on the vehicle—particularly the number. Although it may have been re-numbered in the domestic series, the original number can be traced and from it the Diagram No., Lot No. and building date etc. If the number has been obliterated by ravages of time, it can often be established by opening one or more of the doors and inspecting the inner edge of the door near the top, where the original vehicle number

is frequently stamped with a metal punch. (Some paint scraping may be necessary on occasions). On the solebar is nearly always painted the vehicle’s overall and wheelbase dimensions (for checking one’s efforts with the 6ft rule) and for added interest, sometimes one can find the maker’s nameplate still in position.

If possible, always carry a drink and a few bars of chocolate for emergency use. Two summers ago I found in Pyle station sidings a 4 wheel (ex 6 wheel) Broad Gauge convertible type 1 centre van composite and had to work on it non-stop through a broiling sun for over six hours without any sustenance whatsoever and it was no joke. (One can’t risk such a vehicle moving off unexpectedly whilst enjoying tea and biscuits.)

Well, it is hoped that these notes might encourage some readers to get out on safari in the coming months whilst the opportunity is still with us. In these changing times, we shall be lucky if there are any lines left other than main trunks in a few years’ time and even if you fail to find any relics, at least you can say “I was there” and earn some memories and enjoy yourself in the process.

1 An example of what can be found. An ex-LNWR non-corridor first coach in a dis-used carriage siding awaiting scrapping. Photograph by A. Howard Thomas

2 The result of Safari’s. An enlargement of the author’s well known 4mm scale GWR Siphon G. Note all the smallest details have been faithfully reproduced, but unfortunately the roof is lost in the white background.

