

WELSH HIGHLAND RAILWAY.

PASSENGER TRAFFIC SUCCESSFULLY INAUGURATED.

EXCELLENT ARRANGEMENTS: PUNCTUAL TRAINS.

The Welsh Highland Railway, a narrow gauge railway of a gauge of 1 foot 11½ inches., constructed between Portmadoc and Dinas Junction, with stations at Beddgelert and South Snowdon (Rhyd-ddu), and halts at Pont Croesor (for Prenteg), Ynysfor (for Llanfrothen), Ynys Ferlas, Hafod-y-llyn, Nantmor (for Aberglaslyn Pass), Hafod Ruffudd, Pitt's Head, Quellyn Lake, Bettws Garmon, Waenfawr, and Tryfan, was opened for passenger traffic on Friday. The arrangements were excellent and the trains kept good time. The weather was fine and there were many passengers.

The length of the railway is 21½ miles from Portmadoc to Dinas Junction, a station three miles from Carnarvon on the Carnarvon and Afonwen branch of the London, Midland and Scottish Railway. At Portmadoc the Highland Railway connects with the Cambrian section of the G.W.R., giving connections for Pwllheli and Criccieth and Barmouth, Dolgelley and Aberystwyth. Connection has been made at Portmadoc with the famous Festiniog Railway, which connects with the Bettwsycoed and Llandudno Junction branch of the London, Midland and Scottish Railway, and also with Festiniog and Bala branch of the G.W.R.

The total authorised share capital of the Highland Railway Company is £120,000. The engineers are Sir Douglas Fox and Partners, and the contractors are Sir Robert McAlpine and Sons, to whom the contract was let at £60,000 just over twelve months ago. The length of railway from Portmadoc to South Snowdon or Rhyd-ddu, a distance of twelve miles is entirely new; but a passenger service was run at one period between South Snowdon and Dinas, a distance of 9½ miles. This service was discontinued in 1916. The contractors tackled this section first and were able to complete it by July 31st of last year when it was re-opened for passenger traffic.

Loan advances totalling £29,000 have been made to the Company by Carnarvon County Council, Portmadoc Urban Council, and Gwyrfa, Glaslyn and Deudraeth Rural Councils and a like loan advance has been made by the Government. The Company are endeavouring to obtain a further grant from the Government to enable it to complete the line from Dinas to Carnarvon, which is part of the original scheme. The Contractors have signified their willingness to undertake this additional length of railway for £25,000. So far nothing definite has been arranged.

On the new section from Portmadoc as far as Nantmor a distance of about 6½ miles, the railway is level and then for a length of about four miles it has a rising gradient of 1 in 40. Under the old Beddgelert Light Railway scheme the gradient would have been still worse when it was proposed to have it 1 in 28, but as the result of wonderful curves the gradient has been reduced to 1 in 40. The railway winds from Nantmor up to South Snowdon to a point 700 feet above sea level. Thence it falls by easy gradient to Dinas Junction which is only a few feet above sea level.

The Festiniog Railway rises to the same elevation of 700 feet at the terminus of that railway at Blaenau Festiniog.

The line between Beddgelert and South Snowdon is an ingenious device of the engineer's skill in negotiating difficult country, the winding curves adding greatly to the attractive and spectacular effect. At several points the curves form a letter "S" in fairly open expanses on mountain slopes in the most romantic part of the district between Nantmor and Pitt's Head in the very heart of Snowdonia which enables the traveller to have glorious views, not only of mountains, rivers and lakes, but up and down the valley whichever way he is sitting.

As the railway leaves Portmadoc it passes

As the railway leaves Portmadoc it passes Tanyralit, near Tremadoc, where the poet Shelley lived in 1812, and where it is believed "Queen Mab" was written. On the right of the railway stands the picturesque peak Cynicht, known as Sugar Loaf Mountain. The first view of Snowdon itself is obtained in approaching Pont Croesor, a noted station for anglers in the Glaslyn, where salmon up to 20 lbs. and yellow trout up to 4 lbs. have been caught with rod and line. When Nantmor is reached Snowdon is lost for a space as the train passes through a tunnel of 300 yards in the famous Pass of Aberglaslyn. As the train leaves the tunnel Snowdon, with the other peaks of the Snowdonian range, come into view in all their majesty, but even when Eryri is hidden as approaching Nantmor the lesser peaks which buttress it on the South West, including Moel Hebog, Arran Garn, Moel Siabod, Mynydd Mawr, and other famous peaks are in full view; and just as the train enters South Snowdon the yawning precipices guarding the famous Drwsydd Pass leading down to Nantlle come into the picture as does the noted trout lake Llyn Gadair, near the village of Rhyd-ddu. South Snowdon is a favourite haunt of mountaineers, being generally regarded as giving the easiest footpath to the summit of Snowdon.

The railway, which passes through the Vale of Madoc and the noted Nant Colwyn Valley up to South Snowdon, afterward traverses along the picturesque shores of Quellyn Lake through the villages of Bettws-Garmon and Waenfawr, the latter being the site of the well-known Carnarvonshire long-range Marconi wireless station. Tryfan is the next stop and shortly after Dinas is reached.

The first train consisting of a tank engine with two passenger coaches and a brake van left Portmadoc to scheduled time at 8-10 a.m. Great interest was taken in the inauguration and a considerable crowd assembled who gave a hearty cheer as the train steamed out.

The first passenger to book his ticket on the Highland Railway was Mr. George Brown, Portmadoc, who was going to fish the Glaslyn River at Pont Croesor, other passengers included one for Ynys Ferlas, the third stopping place, five passengers for Beddgelert the "capital" of Snowdonia, two for South Snowdon, and one for Waenfawr. At Beddgelert four passengers joined the train, two for South Snowdon and two Irish ladies from Dublin, who were proceeding to Bangor via Dinas on their way home to Ireland, and who had delayed their return from Beddgelert to travel on the new railway. Passengers who made the return journey on the first trains included our North Wales representative.

The train reached South Snowdon punctually to scheduled time, the service working perfectly smoothly.

It has been a great performance to complete the railway by June 1st, and the Directors, the railway contractors and engineers, and the General Manager of the Company, Mr. S. E. Tyrwhitt are to be heartily congratulated.

The officials on the first train included Mr. S. E. Tyrwhitt, the general manager, Mr. Robert Williams, the locomotive superintendent, and Mr. A. G. Crick, the Company's outside representative, with Mr. Ellis Lewis, Portmadoc, as guard, Mr. H. T. Jones, Portmadoc, as engine driver and Mr. R. Evans, Minffordd, as stoker. The honour of being the first guard on the new railway was bestowed on Mr. Ellis Lewis by virtue of his thirty-two years' faithful and efficient service on the sister line, the Festiniog Narrow Gauge railway. Mr. Lewis combines the duties of guard and conductor, and performed his duties with characteristic efficiency and courtesy.

The Company has been singularly fortunate in their general manager, Mr. Tyrwhitt, who has been "lent" to them by the Great Western Company. No one outside the railway has a conception of the difficulties to be overcome in successfully opening a railway. Mr. Tyrwhitt had organised everything to the last detail and left not a stone unturned to ensure smooth working and the successful inauguration which was achieved.

At Waunfawr, the Portmadoc train met the first train for Portmadoc which left Dinas at 9-50 a.m. and was due at Portmadoc at 12-13. This train carried several passengers for Portmadoc, their baskets indicating that they were bound for Portmadoc market. In this connection there can be no doubt that the railway will be of incalculable help and there is every reason for believing that the transport facilities will lead to the re-opening of numerous copper and zinc mines and slate quarries which have been closed

down in Snowdonia owing to transport difficulties.

Altogether about 30 passengers disembarked at Portmadoc when the first train from Dinas and Beddgelert way arrived at 12-15 or two minutes after scheduled time. Another crowd had assembled and gave the officials and passengers a cordial reception.

Attractive as the Festiniog Toy Railway is, the Highland Railway is still more so. It gives a sense of greater freedom to enjoy the incomparable scenery of Cambria, for the train never goes at more than about 12 to 15 miles an hour.

The route is a considerable improvement on that proposed in the old scheme. The original route would have run almost over Gelert's Grave the scene of the world-famed legend, "Llewelyn and his dog Gelert" but the new route keeps wide of that notable resort and the promoters have, in other ways done all that could reasonably be expected to preserve scenic beauty.

During the war railways of similar gauge to the Highland Railway or 60 centimetre, as it is known in French were laid for hundreds of miles all over the war theatres of France, Egypt, and the Balkans, and curiously, Lieut-Col. Mount, the Ministry of Transport inspector, who inspected the Highland Railway last week, was the originator of the narrow gauge railways in France during the war.

There is now a joint station at Portmadoc for the Highland Railway and the Festiniog Railway on a site at the back of Madoc-street West. The Festiniog Railway trains made use of the joint station for the first time on Friday morning.

The stationmaster at the joint station at Portmadoc is Mr. Henry Jones, the former stationmaster on the Festiniog Railway at Portmadoc, and Mr. Hugh Jones, formerly stationmaster of Tanybwllch is the stationmaster at Beddgelert. At South Snowdon there is a woman stationmaster, Miss Myfanwy Williams of Rhvd-ddu.