

ROMNEY HYTHE & DYMCHURCH RAILWAY

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LAUREL AND HARDY CELEBRATE THE ROMNEY HYTHE AND DYMCHURCH RAILWAY'S TWENTY FIRST BIRTHDAY

There are possibly some Britons who are still unaware that their country boasts the world's smallest public railway - The Romney, Hythe and Dymchurch. As guests to its twenty-first birthday party to-day the R.H. & D.R. welcomes Laurel and Hardy, the famous Hollywood couple who are currently appearing at the London Palladium. Thus the R.H. & D.R. can add yet another distinction to the many it has already gained - carriage of one of the world's largest men on the world's smallest public railway, and in the line's latest novelty, the world's smallest Observation Car.

To-day sees the completion of the last stage in the little railway's recovery from the ravages in war. Like its elder brothers, the main line railways, the R.H. & D.R. contributed nobly to the war effort, becoming a vital factor in the construction of Pluto, the cross-channel pipeline. Military occupations and the constant bombardment, however, left their marks on the railway, and it was only the herculean efforts of the railway's loyal staff in rehabilitation that permitted the reopening of the section from Hythe to New Romney on March 1st, 1946. Now the final section from Romney to Dungeness is again ready for use, with the result that services can be resumed over the entire length of the 13 mile main line from Hythe to Dungeness. In its first post-war summer season last year more than 300,000 passengers were carried by the R.H. & D.R.

On August 5th, 1926, our present King, then Duke of York, drove the first train across the impressive 56 ft. single-span girder bridge which spans one of the many marshland dikes $\frac{1}{2}$ miles east of New Romney, the occasion being commemorated in its name - the Duke of York's Bridge. Although the R.H. & D.R. has not grown in stature with advancing years, its progressive development has far outstepped the apparent limits of 15 in. gauge, which postulates a track no wider than eight columns of a daily newspaper. Until to-day you may have been unaware of the degree of travelling comfort achieved despite the restrictions of size, in the smooth-riding Pullman-Plus saloons, with their electrically-lit, cushioned compartments. Even the new Pullman Observation Car you have seen does not mark the limit of the railway's ingenuity in small-scale design, for the almost fantastic innovation of a miniature buffet car is proposed for introduction in the future. The summer schedules will cut existing times, and will make half-a-mile-a-minute speeds commonplace, speeds which may not on paper appear impressive, but which are in the realm of 100 m.p.h. when translated to the scale of fullsize railways.

This twenty-first birthday year will also be marked by the addition of a new locomotive to the railway's 'stud', a powerful 2-8-2 or 'Mikado' type. This will increase the R.H. & D.R.'s steam engine stock to ten. Each engine weighs, with tender, roughly 8 tons, each deals regularly with trains holding upwards of 100 passengers, and is capable of handling 100-ton freight trains.

Happily, it is not to be nationalised !

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THE WORLD'S SMALLEST PUBLIC RAILWAY