

Railwatch

AN INDEPENDENT VOICE FOR RAIL USERS

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Mending the gap

A 30-year dream became reality on 8 September when a 125-mph Virgin Voyager travelled from the national network on to the steam railway at Swanage.

It was a major step towards the Swanage Railway's aim of providing a daily rail service from the beautiful area which includes Corfe Castle to the main line at Wareham.

"This is about as significant as it can get," said Swanage Railway chairman Bill Trite. "Although we don't yet have regular services between Wareham and Swanage, this train really is the start."

The diesel electric Virgin Voyager was named Dorset Voyager by veteran Swanage Railway campaigner Moira Cross of

Swanage and veteran steam train driver Stan Symes of Bournemouth.

Moira was one of the Swanage Railway's earliest pioneers - trying to prevent the branch line closure in 1969 - while Stan is an ex-BR steam train driver and fireman who worked trains down to Swanage from the 1940s through to 1972.

"This is our own small example of the triumph of determination and success in spite of the odds," said Mr Trite. "We are grateful to Balfour Beatty and Chris Green of Virgin for their help."

British Rail closed the line in 1972 and lifted the seven miles of track between Swanage, Corfe Castle and Furzebrook. Now the

Swanage Railway runs steam trains over the six miles between Swanage and Norden. Half a mile of disused line between Furzebrook and the end of the Swanage Railway at Motala had to be cleared of undergrowth and have rotten sleepers replaced.

Dennis Lovett of Virgin Trains said: "We are honoured to be involved."

Further work to the half-mile of line between Furzebrook and Motala will be necessary before passenger trains can make regular runs between Wareham and Swanage.

More details:

<http://www.swanagerailway.co.uk/>