

An inconvenient truth

Report and pictures

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"We are going to have to change the way we live our lives."

Thus said Al Gore in his 100-minute documentary film *An Inconvenient Truth*, an expose of imminent global warming and climate change.

"Extreme weather will buckle railway lines, flood routes and cause points to fail," according to a British government study.

"While there is much to learn, the temperatures that may result from unabated climate change will take the world outside the range of human experience," said the recent Stern Report on the economics of climate change.

Over-zealous scare-mongering? Or an inconvenient truth?

In the world of UK transport it is an inconvenient truth for us in Railfuture that even modern diesels, and the generators that power electric trains, all put carbon dioxide – the principal cause of global warming – and other toxins into the atmosphere.

The fact that they are more efficient, in terms of passenger-km or tonne-km than car, truck and aircraft engines should give us cause for hope, but how much of the 90% of UK's road-based passenger and goods traffic can be transferred to public transport and rail freight remains to be seen.

The car-indoctrinated mind has cast its spell. So much is set in concrete, steel and tarmac, and in the mindset of the British population.

One pro-rail commentator has concluded that too many people and too many goods are being moved around too far, too often and too fast.

Greening the narrow gauge?

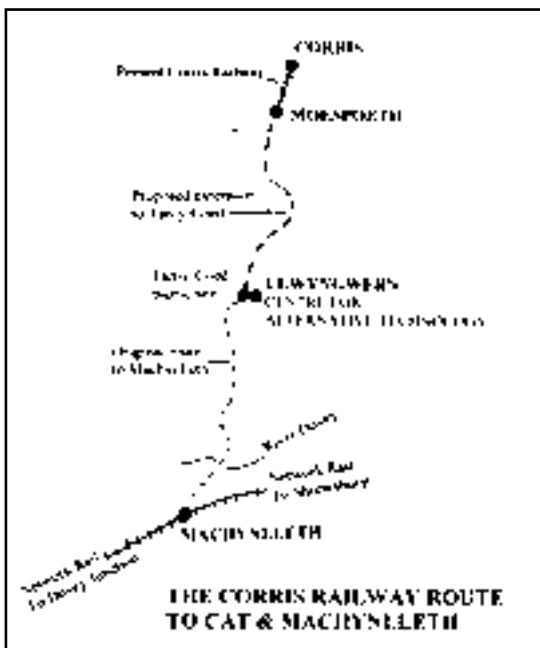
Coming down to earth, if we are effectively to combat global warming we are going to have to change the way we live our lives, and in the world of heritage railways, shouldn't we be changing the way we think about the development and use of preserved railways, including narrow gauge ones?

It is with these thoughts in mind that I briefly recall a day return rail-and-foot journey I made recently to Mid Wales.

I left the train at Machynlleth on the Shrewsbury-Dovey Junction line and walked north along the A487 road.

Once across the Dovey Valley the path follows the quiet back lanes, about two Welsh miles, a good hour's walk, to CAT – the Centre for Alternative Technology.

Within its hill-top world (reached by a water-gravity balanced cliff railway) of sustainable living, wind turbines and solar panels, CAT's transport section contains a tiny



WAY AHEAD: Map showing the preserved line, the Centre for Alternative Technology and Network Rail's Cambrian line at Machynlleth

mock-up rail platform, an approved bus, and a disgraced car.

CAT is a must for Railfuture supporters who care about the environment.

Continuing on the back road, I eventually reached the village of Corris, the station and railway museum. As usual on these heritage railway visits, the museum, café and shop staff, and the train operating people were full of enthusiasm. The 2' 3" narrow gauge railway rattles along the backs of gardens and alongside the roadway towards Machynlleth, as far as Maespoeth. The 1.5 mile round trip, including time at Maespoeth takes about 50 minutes. Slow, yes. But it is still sobering, regulated, steel wheels on steel rails.

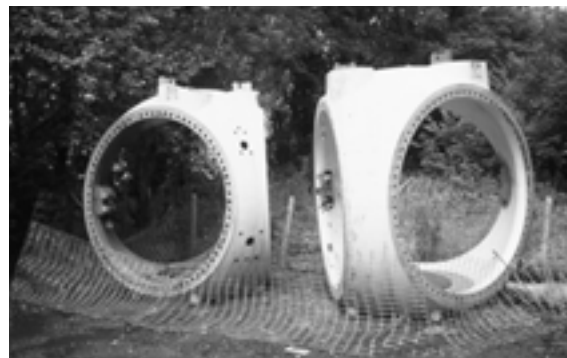
Once running all the way to Machynlleth Station, the Corris Railway has a fascinating history. In its last days as a freight-only line it was briefly owned by, then in 1948 finally closed by British Railways. The present restored railway reopened in 1985.

In 1994 planning permission was obtained to extend the present Corris Railway a further two miles south beyond Maespoeth to a point close to CAT, and well on its way back to Machynlleth.

Back to global warming, and a picture begins to come into focus. Suppose the Corris Railway was extended beyond its wildest dreams, back to Machynlleth station, to connect with the national network.

With a modest diversion from its original route it could pass CAT's front gate.

Bringing the right people together we could have a new narrow gauge railway thinking, enthusiastic railway volunteers working within the



ALTERNATIVE: Wind turbine rotor hubs at CAT



CORRIS STATION: Does it have more potential?



MACHYNLLETH STATION: Change for alternative technology

world of sustainable energy and an achievable, re-thought travel life style.

A place perhaps for the Parry People Mover running on non-polluting, sustainably generated CAT electrical energy, working alongside a thriving Corris heritage railway?

This would be so much more than just a fun ride. Global cooling doesn't depend on every fire being extinguished – only the ones that don't run on rails!

A crazy notion plucked out of the blue? With global warming issues rapidly taking a front seat, locally, nationally and internationally, with a properly thought-through and presented case, funding for a CAT-Corris "showcase" development could be just a little more thinkable and achievable today than it would have been yesterday.

Will somebody see fit to start the ball rolling from CAT to Machynl-

leth? Either way, CAT and the Corris Railway are well worth visiting right now, and will be just the places to offer a supply of the new Railfuture leaflet "Remember Yesterday's Railways? What About Tomorrow?"

Corris: The present restored Corris Railway and its museum have restricted opening days and times so check before setting out at www.corris.co.uk or phone 01654 761303.

Travel: For information on bus services via Machynlleth rail station, CAT & Corris, phone Traveline on 0870 6082608, or www.traveline.org.uk or Bws Gwnedd on 01286 679535 or www.gwnedd.gov.uk/bwsgwnedd

CAT: www.cat.org.uk The centre is open all year round. Phone 01654 705950. Entry charges: Car travellers £6. Show your Machynlleth rail ticket and tired feet for half-price entry.