

FACT SHEET

RAILWAYS

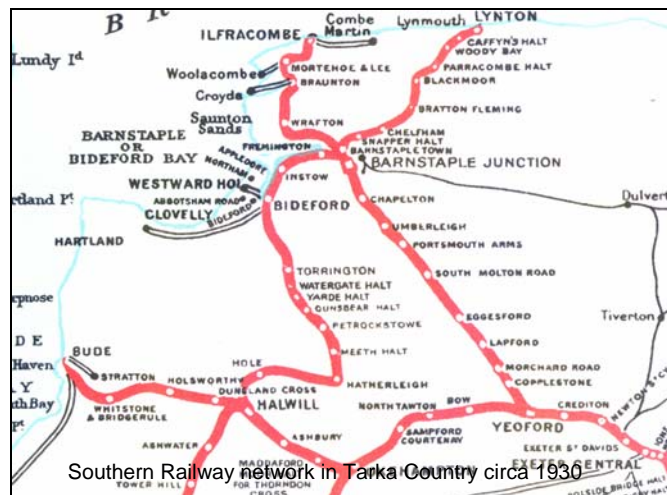
The first known railway line in north Devon was a "Standard Gauge" (4'-8.5" between rails) stretch between Fremington Quay and Barnstaple, opened in 1848. It carried freight in horse drawn vehicles and was later extended to Umberleigh but this section was not used immediately.

In 1853, the Broad Gauge (7'-0" between rails) "North Devon Railway" had reached the Eggesford area, being an extension of the Exeter-Crediton route. Track laying continued to Barnstaple, with the final section from Umberleigh being widened to correspond with it. Trains started running between Exeter and Barnstaple in 1854. As a condition of the sale of land, all trains had to stop at Eggesford, and even today they still do. This line is now called the Tarka Line, and an Adventure Pack is available from Barnstaple Station.

The next development was known as the "Bideford Extension Railway" and involved converting the Fremington section to Broad Gauge and then extending the track through Instow to Bideford, terminating at "Cross Park", where the present "Ethelwynne Browne" complex now stands.

During 1862, the entire route between Exeter and Bideford was taken over by the "London and South Western Railway" (L.S.W.R.), who progressively converted it to mixed Gauge by laying a third rail between the existing ones, thereby allowing their trains from London (Waterloo) to run straight through to Bideford. By the end of 1877, the Eggesford-Bideford section had become entirely Standard Gauge.

The existing station at Bideford came into use in 1872, when the line was extended to Torrington, "Cross Park" going over to freight traffic completely. The "Torrington Extension Railway", as it became known, involved considerable engineering work, part of it being laid over the original Rolle Canal (see Factsheet 4 The Rolle Canal).



Activity did not end at Torrington, however, and in 1881 a 3' gauge line was opened between there and Marland for the transport of clay. This was subsequently converted to

Standard Gauge in 1925 when the complete line from Torrington to Meeth, Hatherleigh and Halwill was opened by Southern Railway who, in 1923, had absorbed the L.S.W.R as part of the railway "grouping". The new line, known as the "North Devon and Cornwall Junction Light Railway", normally operated as a separate system from the Torrington-Barnstaple line, and there was a severe restriction on the size of locomotive that could operate over it.

Apart from the aforementioned lines, a line was opened from Taunton to Barnstaple in 1873 and from Barnstaple to Ilfracombe in 1874, the latter eventually acquiring "main line" status to the detriment of the Bideford and Torrington line. Other lesser lines, bordering the area, were the short-lived Bideford-Westward Ho! Appledore Light Railway, and the narrow gauge (1'-11.5") Lynton to Barnstaple system.

Right up to 1964, it was possible to get a train from principal towns in north Devon to London (Waterloo), but with much of the route remaining single track, journeys were sometimes slow.



Bideford Station during the 1960's

During World War 2, the railways in the area had to cope with heavy additional traffic due to the evacuation of children, and the vast numbers of military personnel stationed all over north Devon.

The end of the war brought a few years of heavy holiday traffic but, with ever-increasing fares and petrol for private motoring being taken off ration, railway traffic started to decline. Nationalisation took place at the beginning of 1948, with the whole area coming under the jurisdiction of the Western Region of British Railways.



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The Sixties saw wholesale rail closures. Torrington to Halwill and Barnstaple to Torrington in 1965 and Taunton to Barnstaple 1966. The Barnstaple to Ilfracombe line managed to survive until 1970 and the section between Barnstaple and Meeth (now the Tarka Trail cycle/ walkway) existed as a freight line until 1982.

Apart from passenger traffic, the lines in our area have, in their time carried:-

- Mail
- Newspapers
- Food Supplies
- Livestock
- Agricultural Supplies
- Milk
- Coal
- Petrol
- Cement
- Clay

The latter being one of the last commodities to be carried. For many years coal was actually landed by ships at Fremington Quay for rail distribution.

Dieselisation took over from steam in the mid sixties, the bulk of the passenger services becoming multiple units of varying designs up to the present day Sprinters.

Many of the structures associated with the railway survive, including the stations at Barnstaple, terminus for the Tarka Line. The Station at Bideford which has been restored by Devon County Council and the Bideford and Instow Railway Group has a collection of restored rolling stock, the Railway Carriage Visitors Centre and the reconstructed signal box which now houses the railway museum. Torrington Station is now a public house and popular with visitors to the Tarka Trail. At Instow, the signal box, complete with its working signalling equipment, is Britain's first listed signal box and is open to the public on Sundays throughout the summer. As well as isolated sidings, footbridges, impressive viaducts and two tunnels which can all be seen along the Tarka Trail.



Instow Signal Box (BIRG)



Bideford Station today

Acknowledgements:

Text prepared by the Bideford and Instow Railway Group as part of the Tarka Trail (Barnstaple to Meeth) Draft management Plan

OTHER FACT SHEETS AVAILABLE IN THE SERIES

- No 1: Tarka Country
- No 2: Cycling
- No 4: Rolle Canal
- No 5: Lime Burning
- No 6: Bideford Black
- No 7: Nature Detective
- No 8: Geology

Other publications available from the Tarka Country Tourism Association:

- The Tarka Line (exploring by Rail)
- The Tarka Trail (exploring old rail routes by cycle and foot)

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TARKA-COUNTRY