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South Devon Railway gains ten top awards in one year!

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12 December 2016

The scenic South Devon Railway (SDR) has really hit the awards jackpot with some style in 2016 by carrying off no fewer than **nine** top tourism and leisure awards during the year, and is also a shortlisted finalist for **two** more top regional and national awards to be announced in early 2017, bringing the tally to **eleven** prestigious bouquets!

Winning such a broad range of both regional and national awards is not only an impressive achievement for the largely volunteer-run line, but also a record haul for the seven-mile, quintessential former GWR heritage steam railway running between Buckfastleigh and Totnes. The SDR's previous record haul was seven awards in 2014.

And the SDR's latest 'gong' announced this week (Thur 15 December) is a national '**Interpretation**' award from the **Heritage Railway Association (HRA)** and **Heritage Railway** magazine for the line's Totnes station. Created from a green-field site over 35 years using recovered former, mainly GWR, railway buildings and structures from around the rail network, the SDR's Totnes Riverside station now looks like it has always been there in the Devon countryside following the completion of the signal box which once controlled trains in Birmingham before coming to its new home.

With so many independent awards now won by the SDR in just one season, staff, volunteers and supporters of the heritage railway are naturally delighted by the impressive haul for the charity which is now well on the way to carrying its three millionth passenger. More follows

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The **nine** awards gained by the SDR so far during 2016, plus the **two** shortlisted finalist awards for 2016/7, are as follows:

- **Winner** of the ‘**Best Tourism or Hospitality Business**’ in the *Western Morning News* **2016 Business Awards**;
- **Gold** in the ‘**Best Visitor Attraction**’ in the 2016 *Herald Express* sponsored **English Riviera & South Devon Tourism & Hospitality Awards**;
- **Silver** in the ‘**Best Tourism Experience/Activity**’ in the 2016 *Herald Express* sponsored **English Riviera & South Devon Tourism & Hospitality Awards** for the SDR’s Dining Train;
- **Silver** for the ‘**Large Visitor Attraction of the Year**’ in the 2016 **Devon Tourism Awards**;
- **Bronze** in the ‘**Artistic, Cultural & Learning Experience**’ category for the SDR’s ‘**Drive a Train**’ in the 2016 **Devon Tourism Awards**;
- **Outstanding** in the Royal Horticultural Society’s (RHS) ‘**Britain in Bloom - It’s Your Neighbourhood**’ awards 2016;
- **Gold** in the RHS’ ‘**Business Leisure & Tourism awards**’ 2016;
- ‘**Certificate of Excellence**’ from **Trip Advisor** 2016;
- **Shortlisted finalist (Gold, Silver or Bronze award)** in the 2016/17 ‘**South West Tourism Excellence**’ awards;
- **Nominated** for ‘**Large Visitor Attraction**’ in the 2016/17 national ‘**Visit England**’ Awards.
- **Winner** of the 2016 **HRA** and **Heritage Railway magazine** ‘**Interpretation**’ award for the SDR’s Totnes station.

The HRA and Heritage Railway magazine ‘*Interpretation*’ award citation reads as follows:

“To the South Devon Railway for: the completion of a new, yet authentic GWR country station at Totnes Riverside, using genuine components from closed stations elsewhere, and thereby providing two meaningful destinations for its services, in the form of Totnes Rare Breeds Farm and the town itself.”

More follows

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Heritage Railway founding editor Robin Jones, who nominated the South Devon Railway for the national award, said: ***“Totnes Riverside station***

has been a slow burner over 25 years, but has resulted in the creation of a typical GWR country station that is not only new, but genuine, because it has used components retrieved from closed stations throughout the West Country and beyond.

“Not only does it encapsulate local transport heritage with its displays of heritage vehicles, but it does exactly what railway stations were designed to do – serve real destinations as opposed to merely giving tourists and enthusiasts a ride.

“My family are very big on animal welfare and conservation, and we consider the Totnes Rare Breeds Park, with its wonderful colony of red squirrels and other animals, the best of its kind we have visited in Britain. The standard of care given to the animals is second to none.

“The farm’s café which also serves railway passengers is the finest we have come across in the West Country, and the combined attraction easily competes with anything that the coast has to offer.

“I sincerely hope that the local powers that be look at just what has been accomplished on this site, and then do everything to help the railway extend back into Ashburton and restore the town’s wonderful Brunel-design terminus station to bring economic benefits to all, rather than think up ways to say it can’t be done.” (Contact details for Robin Jones can be found under ‘Notes’ at the end of the release)

SDR Trust PR & Business Development Manager Dick Wood, who is also the Vice Chairman of the Devon Association of Tourist Attractions (DATA), comments: **“Being in the running for a number of ‘Blue Riband’ awards this year has seen us line up against many of our local tourism industry peers, and with some terrific competition from other leading attractions around the country.**

“It’s been a lot of hard work, but the South Devon Railway is now recognised as being a Premier League attraction! More follows

“Winning the Heritage Railway Association and Heritage Railway magazine ‘Interpretation award has been the icing on the cake for us this year - It’s a prestigious and welcome bouquet, and a great achievement for a largely volunteer run organisation, so we must be doing something right!

“And, we have one more guaranteed award to come in the 2016/17 South West Tourism Excellence awards next February, and then hopefully another in the Visit England awards too in April 2017. Bring it on!”

Delighted SDR Railway Manager, Chris Williams said:

“Winning so many awards in just one year is a very creditable achievement by our whole team, especially as it’s the first time we have been shortlisted in some of these prestigious competitions.

“These awards reflect the hard work, dedication and enthusiasm of all volunteers and staff throughout 2016, many of whom do far more than is expected of them in helping to run the railway and our constituent businesses.

“It gives us heightened confidence that we are running a good visitor attraction and operate a sound business. On top of that, we have enjoyed a good season too and expect to break through the 100,000 visitor mark again in 2017 - a record year in so many ways.”

South Devon Railway Trust Chairman Barry Cogar adds:

“This latest prestigious award from the Heritage Railway Association and Heritage Railway magazine for Totnes is a fantastic achievement for the South Devon Railway.

"It's a terrific reward for all our loyal staff, dedicated volunteers and supporters, but especially all those people who made Totnes (Riverside) station into what it is today from the muddy, greenfield site I remember well from the 1980's, some of whom are sadly no longer with us, so it's a lasting monument to them too. more follows

"It has been very rewarding creating Totnes (Riverside) with its fascinating collection of buildings and artefacts gathered over many years from all over the old Great Western Railway.

"The credit goes to our volunteers and employees who all make the South Devon Railway what it is today, and it's well deserved recognition for our growing business which is at the heart of the region's economy."

Totnes Rare Breeds Farm owner Sam Adams comments: **"I'm both thrilled and delighted that the South Devon Railway has won this national award for its Totnes station, and especially so that our role as an adjacent linked animal-based attraction has been recognised and praised so highly too.**

"We get lots of repeat visitors, many from overseas, who just love what we do here with rare breed animals, such as Red Squirrels.

"Whilst we operate the Totnes Rare Breeds Farm as a commercial venture, we plough the profits back into caring for our animals and, thankfully, have a lot of volunteers to help us.

"So, this award and the comments made about us are such a fantastic reward for everyone who works here.

"Our café aims to be an idyllic restful haven, serving quality food for visitors to both us and the railway, and this award shows we are now very much on the tourism map." (Contact details for Sam can be found under 'Notes' at the end of the release)

SANTA BY STEAM

The SDR has been running its ever popular **'Santa by Steam'** trains this December which look to sell out again with spaces only left now on **Monday 19, Tuesday 20 and Wednesday 21 December** in the last week before Christmas.

More follows

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Booking is child's play by going to the SDR website www.southdevonrailway.co.uk and clicking on the 'Go Online' icon to choose which train you want and then buy tickets. Alternatively, you can call the booking office on 01364 644370 to make your booking or email us at trains@southdevonrailway.org

The SDR's Expressway model railway and gift shop is fully stocked up with Christmas presents and gift vouchers for children of all ages, and is open for business every day now until Saturday 24 December inclusive, alongside the SDR's award-winning Refreshment Rooms.

Special gift vouchers for our award-winning 'Dining Train' and 'Drive-A-Train' days are available on-line too via: www.southdevonrailway.co.uk

With ample car parking at Buckfastleigh just off the A38 Devon Expressway, the South Devon Railway is just 25 minutes from Plymouth, Exeter and Torbay and easy-to-find.

BOXING DAY & MINCE PIE TRAINS

SDR volunteers will also be busy on Christmas Day itself preparing to run special steam train services on Boxing Day and then preparing for the Mince Pie trains running from **Tuesday 27 December to Monday 2 January inclusive**.

With no on-train buffet available on Boxing Day and the SDR's Refreshment Rooms and models & gift shop closed until Tuesday 27th December, we are encouraging our visitors to bring along their **own "Christmas Dinner Leftovers Picnic"** of food and drink so that they can enjoy a festive packed lunch on the rails.

More follows

Boxing Day trains will run to a special timetable departing Buckfastleigh at **11.30am, 1.30pm and 3.30pm** and from Totnes at **12.15pm, 2.15pm and 4.15pm**.

But there will be a 15-minute stop at Staverton on the first two trains returning from Totnes, where the volunteer-run station buffet coach is expected to be open serving hot drinks, pasties, soup and mince pies.

All of the **Boxing Day and Mince Pie** special trains have plenty of seats available and **DO NOT NEED** to be pre-booked, see:

<http://www.southdevonrailway.co.uk/events/mince-pie-specials-2016>

NOTES TO NEWS/PICTURE EDITOR

- 1) For further information about the South Devon Railway, please contact Railway Manager Chris Williams (01364) 644370 or Dick Wood on mobile 07711 552947, e: rawcommsdwood@btinternet.com or dick.wood@southdevonrailway.org
- 2) Robin Jones, Editor of Heritage Railway magazine can be contacted on the following numbers: 01778 561099 and 07500 082861
- 3) Sam Adams at the Totnes Rare Breeds Farm can be contacted on 07783 5503304 or 01803 840387 or contact@totnesrarebreeds.co.uk and more details about the farm can be seen at: www.totnesrarebreeds.co.uk/
- 4) Pictures of both the South Devon Railway, Totnes Riverside station and the Totnes Rare Breeds Farm are available on request from Dick Wood or Sam Adams.

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