Steam locomotive heritage lives on the Strathspey line

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Things could have been very different for No 46512 which was retired from BR service in 1967 and sent to Woodham's scrapyard in South Wales for cutting up. Fortunately, the yard owner had other priorities which meant that this and other locomotives were placed on sidings awaiting their fate. In March 1973, the recently established Strathspey Railway Company (SRC) was looking for suitable steam locos for its Aviemore to Boat of Garten line and this one was purchased and stored initially at the Severn Valley Railway where restoration began before being taken up to Aviemore in 1982. Founding Director, Mr Eric Cooper, was particularly responsible for her acquisition and return to service in Aviemore.

After full restoration, and appropriate naming as "E V Cooper Engineer", the locomotive ran on the Strathspey line from 2000 until 2005 when boiler tube and bearing problems prompted her withdrawal. Since then she has awaited funding for a further restoration to service condition. The works cost a total of £142,800 with the Heritage Lottery Fund contributing £50,000. While much of the work was done by SRC engineers and volunteers at Aviemore shed, certain specialist contractors were needed for work on the boiler, wheels, axle boxes and springs. The SRC is also grateful for private financial contributions as well as help from some local engineering firms and Inverness College.

An important element of steam railway conservation is the passing on of traditional skills to younger people. The Strathspey Railway encourages shed visits and footplate experience sessions as part of its education programme attracting volunteers of all ages to continue Heritage Railway skills in the Highlands and conserve the assets of the railway for the public to enjoy. The sight, sound and smell of steam locomotives will continue to excite the senses of visitors to the railway for some time to come.

The Heritage Lottery Fund was represented by Mr Ross Noble, who lives in Newtonmore. Ross will be known to many as the former curator of the Highland Folk Museum at Kingussie. Since his retirement in 2003, he has been actively involved in important heritage and conservation programmes and is on the HLF Scottish Committee.

Locomotive No46512 will run on the Strathspey line from Aviemore to Broomhill for the 2011 season which starts on Saturday 16 March.

Colin McLean, Head of the Heritage Lottery Fund in Scotland, says: "HLF is pleased to see new life breathed into this locomotive and congratulates everyone that has helped make it happen. This project has not only preserved a wonderful piece of engineering but has enabled young people to learn traditional skills, ensuring they are not lost, and broadening the future opportunities open to the volunteers. Locomotive 46512 is certain to be a favourite among tourists keen to experience the heritage of the Highlands."

Doug Scott, Strathspey Railway Chairman, says: "The return of 46512 to traffic is a sensational achievement by the Strathspey Railway Company Engineering Department. The engine is ideal for our railway. It is modern, economical and easy to live with. On the Strathspey Railway it will be doing exactly the type of work for which it was built. Everyone involved with the restoration project deserves great credit for the work they have done, especially Shed Foreman Colin Vaughan whose dedication,hard work and enthusiasm has made this achievement possible. The Scottish Highlands

has another steam locomotive of national significance permanently based at Aviemore. On behalf of the Strathspey Railway Company I offer my grateful thanks to everyone who contributed financial support to the restoration. We have had wonderful support from individuals and organisations alike – including the Heritage Lottery Fund. Thanks to them all we can look forward to many years of successful operation with 46512."

Colin Vaughan, Strathspey Railway Shed Foreman, says: "The completion of the restoration and subsequent return to traffic of 46512 is not only a big boost to the Strathspey Railway's Steam Locomotive fleet, it also marks the completion of the fastest overhaul from start to finish that the Strathspey Railway's staff and volunteers have carried out to date. It has been a very thorough re-build with outstanding attention to detail. My personal thanks go out to everyone involved in all aspects of the overhaul of 46512."

Notes to editors

Using money raised through the National Lottery, the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) sustains and transforms a wide range of heritage for present and future generations to take part in, learn from and enjoy. From museums, parks and historic places to archaeology, natural environment and cultural traditions, we invest in every part of our diverse heritage. To date it has invested over £500million in Scotland's heritage.

The Strathspey Railway Company is Limited by shares and formed as a "not for profit" company. It operates heritage railway services on nearly 10 miles of the former Highland and BR line from Aviemore to Broomhill, near Dulnain Bridge and is one of the area's top visitor attractions. Its first regular passenger services to Boat of Garten were in 1978. Trains, track, stations, signalling and engineering are staffed by a combination of many volunteers supplemented by a small number of permanent and seasonal employees. Visitors enjoy a nostalgic train ride in restored carriages usually hauled by one of the Railway's steam locomotives. There are fine views of the Cairngorms and the River Spey as well the chance to see much of the diverse wildlife, in varying habitats, along the line. Many passengers also enjoy dining in the train's buffet car.

The Strathspey Railway Charitable Trust is a separate Company, limited by guarantee, from the Strathspey Railway Company. The Trust was registered with the the Scottish Charity Regulator in May 2009 to raise funds for railway heritage activities on the Strathspey Railway and, in particular, to act as the promoter, fund-raiser and constructor of the line extension to Grantown. The Charitable Company is now undertaking, subject to further consents and adequate finance, restoration of railway services to Grantown-on-Spey by extending the track a further 3 miles. The scheme enjoys broad political support. Nearly one mile of new track is already in place and a bridge has been donated by Network Rail, and delivered to Boat of Garten, for the crossing of the River Dulnain. To find out more about the Strathspey Railway Charitable Trust.

The launch of a major fundraising appeal for "Rails to Grantown" took place at Broomhill Station in March 2010. The project is estimated to cost around £5m with completion in 2014 provided all necessary funding can be raised. The Strathspey Railway has been used for filming "Monarch of the Glen", with Broomhill doubling as Glenbogle Station, and "Dr Finlay's Casebook".

Further information

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