

steam train visits county



These four passengers made the journey in style, taking a picnic basket and champagne. From left, Anne Harding, Barbara Morrison, Alison Bartlett and Joan Whittingham, all Dornoch. Pictures: Louise Mackay



The Cathedrals Explorer brought back memories for Helmsdale resident George Adams (88) who worked on the railways as a young man. He started in 1943 with the London Midland and Scottish Railway as a 'cleaner', polishing steam engines until they shone and was later promoted to the post of fireman, stoking the engine. George made the trip to Dunrobin with Helmsdale Lunch Club.

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All aboard as Cathedrals Explorer stops in Sutherland

By Caroline McMorran
reporter@northern-times.co.uk

THE Cathedrals Explorer steamed into Sutherland on Monday to a warm reception.

Onlookers thronged the platforms at Lairg, Rogart, Golspie, Dunrobin and Brora, to catch a glimpse of the train.

The arrival of the coal-fired engine pulling seven carriages, operated by commercial company Steam Dreams, was significant in two ways. Although other steam trains have visited the county in previous years, this was the first to have travelled from London King's Cross so far north since the war. Appropriately, the engine which pulled it out of Victoria was called the *Duchess of Sutherland*.

And it was also the first opportunity local people have been given to take a ride on a steam train in Sutherland.

The Cathedrals Explorer had spare seats after stopping at Tain to off-load passengers who went on a day trip to the west.

Some 65 north residents pre-booked a seat and travelled from Tain to the end destination at Dunrobin

Station, although it had to steam up to Brora in order to turn round.

Some had been treated to their seats by family and friends, while others just fancied a trip on the train.

Passengers boarded with picnic baskets and bottles of champagne and other refreshments were served during the journey including scones with cream and strawberries.

There was a particularly festive atmosphere at the Dunrobin platform with the museum there opened for the day by Daniel Brittain Catlin who looks after the station on behalf of Sutherland Estates.

Among those waiting for the train were members of Helmsdale Lunch Club.

The train heralded its arrival with a great burst of steam and drew to a clanking halt, disgorging passengers before heading for a quick turnabout at Brora.

Its stoker and driver waved to the waiting crowd.

Joan Whittingham, who boarded at Tain said: "It was a wonderful journey."

Mr Brittain Catlin said it had been a great day and thanked local people for their interest.



Daniel Brittain Catlin, who looks after Dunrobin Station, poses beside the platform sign.

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Health board cuts water bills by a third in three years

NHS Highland has cut its annual water bill by £400,000 in just three years after working with Business Stream, a supplier of non-domestic water and waste water services.

The figure equates to a third of what the health board was previously spending per year on its water services, a total of £1.2 million.

Costs were cut significantly through the installation of automated meter readers (AMRs) across its sites, which helped the board monitor water use and isolate anomalies in the system. This allowed NHS Highland to implement efficiencies, align billing with consumption and detect faults in its pipe network.

A full plan of the health board's underground network was also put together, a process referred to as network mapping, helping it to understand the estate, plan for any extensions and manage risk.

Gordon MacDonald, energy and sustainability manager at NHS Highland, said: "Having meters installed across our estate meant our bills more accurately reflected what we were consuming and we were in a position to identify where savings could be made."

"We're saving public money that would be better spent on clinical activities and other NHS services."

Debbie Malcolm, public sector account manager at Business Stream, said the installation of free AMRs played an important part in helping NHS Highland cut its bills. Of equal importance was the network mapping exercise.

She added that Business Stream hoped to save the health board a further £200,000 on its annual bill, essentially halving its spend on water.

Debbie said: "We've been working with NHS Highland for just over three years and it's fair to say we have come a long way together. But there's still a lot more to be done."

"Eventually we want to help NHS Highland cut its water bill in half, taking the total savings per year up to £600,000."

"That will help the organisation focus more resources on providing its services to the people of the Highlands."

The company has also invested in helping public bodies access savings from water efficiency measures.

This includes an innovative "gainshare" financial model, whereby Business Stream provides up-front capital expenditure for water efficiency investment and shares in the subsequent savings.

This scheme has been used with Glasgow City Council and has helped the local authority save £1.4 million so far.