



History of 'Le Petit Train'

Elaine I understand, Arthur, that you know a great deal about the canals and the coming of the railway line here. Perhaps you could tell us about it...

Arthur Well, the canal was built by Napoleon in the 1800's. And all the trade went by barge, using the canal from Nantes to Brest, passing by central Brittany. Everything went by canal. But it was a very long journey, because the barges were pulled along by horses, and on top of that, there were the locks to pass, which took an age. The person who was expecting his goods would have to wait a long time. Traffic went by canal in this way until 1920-1924. In 1900, the little train appeared, and it was very bad for the canal trade, because the train also carried goods. In 1924, the building of the dam meant that traffic on the canal came to an end around here; it was all over for the boats.

Everything went by train from that point; travellers and goods. However, they made a big mistake when they built the line because it wasn't a standard gauge. The gauge for all lines throughout Europe is 1metre 44; here, the gauge was one metre. This meant that when the train arrived at Loudeac, all the goods had to be transferred from one set of wagons to another. This made the cost of transporting goods much more expensive. And not only that, it also took a long time, as everything was done manually. So, much more time, and more expensive.

At that time, the roads came into their own. Lorries appeared, and just as the train had had a negative effect on the canal, so too the road was bad for the train. While the train could only deliver to the stations, the road transport could deliver to the customer's door. So rail transport declined dramatically. With all the bother at the stations of Loudeac and Carhaix, it worked out much cheaper to transport everything by road. And that's how the train eventually disappeared. Everything after that went by road, goods by truck, people by coach. Now everything goes by road, and very little by rail. That's how things have changed since 1800.

In 1900, my father was 17 years old. At the time of the inauguration of the railway, there was a train which went between Loudeac and Carhaix, and it was free for everyone. My father got on the train, but had to get off again at the next station, because you had to go back on foot, or on horseback. There were little horse-drawn charabancs to get people home. That's how people got around in these parts.

Elaine Do you think it would be a good idea to re-open the railway line for tourism?

Jeanine I think there's an idea to do one of those from Bon Repos to Gouarec.

They started one from Mur [de Bretagne] to Caurel once; was it an Englishman? Or...

Elaine: There are often so many legalities involved, so many pieces of paper...

Mrs: Yes, too much!

Elaine: Thank you very much.

