



## **Train enthusiast, John Hanson**

- Jon John, welcome, what is your particular interest in trains?
- John It started at an early stage. Probably in my blood I have two things: one was the Great Western Railway and the other was West Bromwich Albion.
- Jon Was there a particular train journey then or a particular train even that, that fuelled your enthusiasm for trains do you think?
- John Probably train-spotting rather than a train journey. Errmm standing on the end of Snowhill Station Birmingham, New Street Station for the other company. Errmm but a spectacular journey last year was on the South Island of New Zealand, on a tourist train, just watching the wonderful scenery. So you've got past and you've got more present.
- Jon Okay, what is your particular experience of the Severn Valley Railway because I understand there's some connection between you and that isn't there?
- John Known it since it was started. Severn Valley Railway was started by a few enthusiasts, they held a meeting in the town of Kidderminster, Worcestershire, in the public house. That railway was adjacent to where we lived last in England. We could hear it, on a Sunday morning we could sit up in bed and I would drive my wife mad with regard to which engine I could hear which is a little sad. The Severn Valley Railway though is going from such an early and small start has now got over £4.5 million turnover. That railway has got 13,000 members, 10% of those actually work as volunteers on the railway and there is a quarter million people who actually travel on it per year.
- Jon Wow, that's a hell of lot, isn't it?
- John So yes, I'm interested.
- Jon Yeah, so what is the connection then, do you think, between the Severn Valley Railway and the Gouarec Railway just down the road? This is much smaller scale of course.
- John. Oh yes but that's where it started from. So what they're doing here in Gouarec, Bon Repos, is almost that start-off. The scale with all

those numbers, I mean, in England there's over a hundred of those heritage railways, there are many other museums, narrow gauge, and here we are narrow gauge in Brittany and it's a start-off. The one thing that was readily available particularly in the early days, in England, rest of the UK, was willing volunteers, enthusiasts. Too many of us in the British community, here, are a little old with picks and shovels these days. But, um, if they can get the volunteers then maybe some magic can happen.

Jon. But what about the actual indigenous French population is there as much enthusiasm for steam trains here or for heritage railways as there is in Britain?

John. I can answer that from the modelling scene, I don't know ... heritage scene. In the modelling scene there are many modellers. There are big exhibitions that I've been to that include railways so there are railway enthusiasts in France as there are in the rest of the world.

Jon Right, you just mentioned model railways. You actually are a keen railway enthusiast in terms of your models, is that right?

John I've always wanted to create a model of the railway. I've always had this image in my mind as to what I want to do and it's only now that I've got the luxury of both time and a little bit of spare money, because it is rather expensive, to actually create a proper model. Not a toy train out of the box but I'm attempting to do a little bit more. It's taking a long time but it's coming to fruition. It's happening. I'm enthusiastic.

Jon Yeah. Okay, so you say it's not a model, a toy out of the box. You actually make the train then, do you? The moving parts. Is it run by steam or electric?

John Electric. There are steam, oh yes, now you really need engineering skills then.

Jon Sorry, I've never been on a steam train, you obviously have. A few times.

John Of course.

Jon When you were a boy they used steam?

John But yes. But the heritage railways we're talking about, yes you can still do that and you can still smell the smoke and the steam.

Jon And I understand you've just celebrated a birthday, I won't ask you which one. But can you tell us about the cake?

John A wonderful lady called Dawn created for my birthday a railway engine. It must have been, what's that, over a foot in length, to scale, in a beautiful green that is reminiscent of the Great Western Railway.

Jon Well I bet that train went quickly.  
John It went down very tastily, tender first.  
Jon John, thank you very much.  
John You're welcome.

