

# Transylvanian triumph with return of steam to Sibiu line



The efforts against considerable odds of a small group of dedicated Romanian enthusiasts, supported by regular working parties from the UK, came to fruition on 26th/27th September with the return of steam to the Sibiu-Agnita Railway, reports *Alasdair Stewart*.

British ambassador to Romania, Paul Brummell, spoke at a reception and traditional Transylvanian 'brunch' in support of the 'return of the train' celebratory event near to the central Romanian city of Sibiu to highlight the potential for tourism and economic benefit that could be offered by a re-opened narrow gauge railway.

David Morgan, President of pan-

European umbrella railway heritage organisation Fedecrail addressed the reception attended by dignitaries, including mayors and councillors representing a consortium of communes and settlements along the route of the railway.

The weekend saw a steam train running from Cornatel to the next station near the village of Hosman for the first time in more than 20 years. Organised by the Friends of the Mocanita, more than 1,000 passengers were carried over the two days of the gala event. Trains ran at approximately hourly intervals and were often full to the extent that many passengers had to stand on the 7km round trip.

A group of volunteers from the UK group SARUK – Sibiu Agnita Railway UK Supporters Association – travelled out to Romania in the days preceding the event, to complete and consolidate essential track maintenance work that local volunteers had been working on throughout the year and to follow up from an earlier trip from Britain in June.

Last minute preparations included designing and translating a souvenir guide, painting and preparing a place for a photo

exhibition under a water tower as well as general tidying up of the site to make it presentable for the general public.

New timbers were secured to the top of the walls of an inspection pit and the rails re-laid on top of them – the new wood being delivered on the Thursday afternoon before the event made for a fairly tight deadline for completion.

Borrowed-in 0-8-0 MAV locomotive CFI 764 – 243 and a single bogie carriage operated all the passenger turns and in the process almost all of the old sleepers that have been changed for new during the last few months were burnt for fuel.

## 'Pioneer' condition track

Chris Phillimore of Track Systems UK took on the multi-faceted role of controller and 'guard' on most of the trips down the line after having given the running line a check. At the moment its condition could be described as very much akin to some of the 1950s pioneering preservation movements in the UK rather than present standards – everything is done according to 'first principles' – including drawing water from a well beside the station for the loco.

Despite a couple of close calls during the weekend, including a moment reminiscent of the *Titfield Thunderbolt* movie that nearly saw the fire have to be raked out of the grate just before the VIP train was due to depart, the event has certainly raised the profile of the restoration project and the bold ambitions of the volunteers and Friends of the Mocanita in Transylvania to the authorities. Planning for next year has already begun in earnest and there will be opportunities available for volunteers from the UK to lend their much needed expertise and support to the scheme too.

The UK support group SARUK welcomes new members – To join send a cheque for £15 to membership secretary Frank Cooper, Maple Lodge, Chapel Lane, Sibsey, Boston, PE22 0SN.

Latest news of project activities can be found online by entering SARUK in the search box of Facebook.

*Photos: Radu Tompa/SARUK*

