

Technology advances but core mission is unchanged

THE job of a lifeboat service is, at its core, a very straightforward one, and this has always been the case. We exist to help people at sea.

While saving lives is an extraordinary thing to do, our approach is simple. We will do our best to offer rescue to everyone who needs it.

Throughout the 196 years that Ilfracombe has had a lifeboat, this approach has not changed. We have always existed to do what we can to save lives.

While our aim and approach have remained steady and simple, the role has brought with it increasing complexities for two primary reasons. The first is that we want to reach individuals in distress as quickly as possible. The second is that we want to keep our lifeboat crew as safe as possible, as well as the casualties we rescue and all other people we come into contact with.

This need for speed and safety has driven enormous developments in the lifeboats and other equipment that we use.

The Shannon all-weather lifeboat we have today is virtually unrecog-

The latest news and views from the team at Ilfracombe's RNLI station



The Shannon all-weather lifeboat that Ilfracombe RNLI has today is virtually unrecognisable from the first wooden boats which we used as the town's lifeboats until around a hundred years ago

nisable from the first wooden boats which we used as Ilfracombe's lifeboats until around a hundred years ago. These were powered by sail and oar - not the jet propulsion which drives the Shannon forward at 25 knots. The modern lifeboat can take on board 79 casualties, keeping them all safe and dry. The crew are kept (mostly) warm and dry in a cabin and no longer left exposed to the elements.

High tech navigational systems mean that compass and maps are only on board in case back-up is needed, and our lights and radar mean that we can find casualties on even the most dark and stormy nights.

All this high-tech equipment means that our volunteers now face

continual training, with some choosing to specialise as mechanics, navigators or other key roles.

But all the training and equipment has not changed our basic aim - to reach and rescue people in trouble as quickly and as effectively as possible.

What has really changed in very recent years is the way in which people find themselves in the water. We still have fishing boats, cargo ships and passenger ships, the boats have changed but their roles have not. But we now have individuals in the water by myriad different means.

Now, our shoreline shows a very different picture. The last century brought surfing, leisure swimming and canoeing to the world. The

Covid lockdowns, however, seem to have brought a new appreciation for getting onto and into the water. Wild swimming is booming as is kayaking, canoeing, sailing, windsurfing and floating around on inflatable flamingos. Paddle boarding has reached such a level of popularity that most of our call-outs this year have been to people who have set out from the beach on paddle boards. Inflatable boards with inflatable sails are also appearing on our coast.

These new ways of people enjoying the water have brought people great joy but have also brought some serious challenges. We have big tides, unpredictable weather and rocky shores which can all cause major problems for people on boards,

small boats and flamingos regardless of who they are, how fit they are or how much prior experience they have. As the sea doesn't ask questions about who it takes down, we don't either. We do our best to rescue everyone who needs us.

It is the simplicity of this approach and this aim, saving lives at sea, that is at the core of the success of the lifeboat service here in North Devon. If you need us, we will get there as fast as we can, using the best equipment and utilising on the best training that we have access to.

Should you ever be in difficulties on the coast or in the sea, or you witness someone else who looks like they might be in difficulties, please dial 999 and ask for the Coastguard.

Join towns' railway milestone celebrations

THIS year marks anniversaries of the railway first reaching two North Devon towns.

Ilfracombe is celebrating its 150th anniversary on July 20 in the Ilfracombe Landmark Pavilion.

Thanks to the efforts of Combe Rail, there will be model railway layouts, trade stands and displays by other local heritage railway groups. Ilfracombe Museum will be opening a new display of its extensive railway collection, on the same day. The day will conclude at 7pm with an illustrated talk in the museum by Combe Rail chair John Burch.

The railway may no longer reach the coastal town of Ilfracombe but there are regular buses that can take you there from Barnstaple or why not walk/cycle on the old track bed that was remade into the Tarka Trail. On the trail, you will see new railway heritage installations as you approach Slade.

Barnstaple Junction was the name of what was the town's busiest station. Nowadays you call it "Barnstaple station" and it is being used now more than at any point in its history, mainly because it is now the only railway station that has buses that connect to the towns that lost their railways in North Devon and Torridge. The North Devon line runs from Exeter and terminates at Barnstaple and is so well used that the

Tim Steer



The vice-chair of the Tarka Rail Association on milestone events

users are filling the carriages and that brings capacity challenges as the Devon and Cornwall Rail Partnership figures show that the North Devon line is closing in on a million users per annum! These staggering figures show that the North Devon line is here to stay and will one day be upgraded, with the need for a further extension to serve Bideford.

Barnstaple Town Council (in conjunction with partners), is celebrating the 170th anniversary of Barnstaple railway station and has a lot planned from August 1 to 5. The town will have its first-ever rail trail!

Firstly, start at the station that is still drawing in hundreds of thousands of users per year and boasts two consecutive South West in Bloom awards (2022-2023), plus was shortlisted for a national Community Rail silver award in 2024.

The Stationmasters cafe is accessible from the ticket office, car park and platform 1. The cafe is a delight and has won awards plus has a wonderful garden by the platform. While

looking around the station, take some time to view the award-winning displays of sustainable planting that is maintained on a weekly basis by volunteers from Tarka Rail Association and Barnstaple in Bloom.

For the next stop, go and visit the Barnstaple museum railway room that has an original Barnstaple West County class nameplate and local history information.

One town area that is pedestrianised is the Strand. Along here you

will be surprised to find a new Barnstaple Town sign near the location of the original Quay Station. This new bespoke sign by Idam signs was made in partnership with North Devon Council and is the first 'Way finding' sign to improve the town this year. There is a plan to have various activities and information boards by the sign.

The Guildhall will be alive with historical displays and have amazing railway exhibitions.

Finally, visit the Pannier Market and discover stalls from various railway organisations and personal railway model displays.

The market will also feature children's crafts and a possible screening of *The Railway Children*. This 170th anniversary is a historical moment and you should find something for all kids and big kids.

Oh, and one more thing, at each location you visit, make sure you get your railway trail stamp!