

The Cumbrian Engines

By Eliot Andersen

Christmas Special 2004

Dear friends,

I would like to take this chance to wish you all a merry Christmas and a happy new year! Christmas has arrived so soon this year, and due to a lot of urging from the engines, I have decided to write a full length book about an event that recently happened in the region. I hope you all have a nice time, and I shall speak to you again in Volume Six!

The Author

Dramatis Personae

Alexander – BR Class 47 Co-Co diesel-electric locomotive, operated by Virgin Trains

Arthur – BR Class 25 Bo-Bo diesel-electric locomotive, owned by Cumbrian Engines Enterprises

Calder Hall Power Station – BR Class 31 A1A-A1A diesel-electric locomotive, owned by Direct Rail Services

City of Carlisle – LMS Princess Coronation 8P 4-6-2 steam locomotive, owned by Cumbrian Engines Enterprises

Craig – CR 0F 0-4-0ST steam locomotive, owned by Cumbrian Engines Enterprises

Ewan – BR Class 37 Co-Co diesel-electric locomotive, owned by English Welsh & Scottish

Fred and George – BR Class 142 “Pacer” diesel multiple unit, operated by Northern Rail

Michael – LMS 5MT 4-6-0 steam locomotive, owned by Cumbrian Engines Enterprises

Roger – BR 9F 2-10-0 steam locomotive, owned by Cumbrian Engines Enterprises

Rory – BR Class 156 “Sprinter” diesel multiple unit, operated by First ScotRail

Scafell Pike – BR Class 44 diesel-electric locomotive, owned by Cumbrian Engines Enterprises

A Cumbrian Christmas

Winter had arrived in the county. Thick blankets of snow covered the mountains, and the rivers froze up. The birds stopped singing and went to sleep, and all the people were rushing about trying to prepare everything in time for Christmas.

It was Christmas Eve. The manager was holding a Christmas party at Carlisle station that night, and all the engines were bustling about the lines getting everything ready. Arthur and Calder had the jobs of clearing the line so that Fred and George had a clear route through. Roger was puffing about pulling long goods trains full of stock for the supermarkets and high street shops.

City of Carlisle was at Carlisle sheds. He was assigned to pulling the special train that night, and the workmen were polishing him up to make him look very posh.

Ewan the Scottish diesel was called in to help assist the engines. He pulled heavy expresses along the line, only stopping at the major stations.

There was to be a train coming up the west coast main line from the south. It would stop at Oxenholme, and then it would follow City of Carlisle's train north to Carlisle.

Roger had stopped in the siding at Whitehaven station. His driver and fireman had gone into the building to find out a weather report. They came out looking glum.

"Bad news, I'm afraid," said Roger's driver. "There's a snow storm working it's way south this afternoon. By the time it hits us, we'll have a blizzard on our hands. We should be alright, but it is the diesels that I'm worried about."

Roger ploughed his way to Workington, where he found Fred and George parked up. Their driver was inspecting George's engine. George was looking very sad. Snow had gotten into his air intake and now he could not start. They had put a filter on Fred's so that the same could not happen to him.

"The worst's yet to come." said Roger's fireman, and he explained to the twin's driver about the bad weather that was on its way south.

Calder then whooshed past, with his snow ploughs fitted at both ends, cutting through the powdery snow that lay on the tracks.

By now, all the necessary goods had been unloaded from Roger's train, and he puffed off up the line towards Carlisle.

Ewan was clearing the lines in and around Carlisle station. He had a coach full of workmen, and several merry-go-round wagons that were full of grit. Grit poured out of them onto the tracks to melt the ice so that the engine's wheels could get a proper grip on the icy rails.

Rory the railcar prepared to leave with the train to Stranraer. He would return later on that night, before the party began.

"Be careful up there!" warned Ewan. "We haven't got round to doing that line yet."

“I’ll be fine.” scoffed Rory. “You needn’t worry about me. I know how to take care in icy conditions.” And with that he rattled out of the station.

Michael had to do a passenger service from Carlisle to Preston, because the overhead power cables were temporarily offline.

As promised, the blizzard arrived just after midday. It swept viciously across the land, creating big drifts of snow, up to ten foot deep at some parts. There was chaos on the road on Victoria Viaduct, which crosses the mainline just north of the station.

The rush-hour had already begun. Christmas lay on a Friday this year, so the shops were busier than they usually were on Christmas Eve. They were all closing early, so the customers were already attempting to drive home. The sensible shoppers knew that they would get home much faster using the train, and they clambered into Fred and George, all laden with their purchases.

George was still feeling ill. The men tried hard to make him better, and cleared a lot of snow out of his air intake, but he still felt bad. They ended up shunting him into a siding and having to attach a spare brake coach to Fred.

Fred was having to travel much slower now that he didn’t have his twin with him, and Jack had to take some coaches to help make up for lost time.

Arthur arrived in the station, covered in snow. “There’s big drifts of it on the main line, yonder.” He said to Ewan. “I’ve tried to clear it as best as I could, but it still keeps piling up again. It’s over to you with the gritter now.”

Ewan then set off down the main line with his trucks full of grit salt. The workmen in the trucks used spades to shovel the salt out of the trucks and onto the rails and into the snow.

Craig was shunting more trucks around full of grit salt for Scafell Pike. He was also helping Ewan to grit the line.

Up at Carlisle, a diesel came into platform 3. He had a Virgin Red livery and was pulling a long train of red coaches.

“Hello there,” he said to Arthur. “I’m Alexander, and I’m going to be bringing a train up here tonight from Crewe.”

“Will you be meeting City of Carlisle at Oxenholme?” inquired Arthur.

“Yes,” replied Alex. “I will then follow him up the main line. I hope that it will be cleared so that we can get a straight run up.”

“It should be alright by the time that the party starts.” assured Arthur. “Ewan has just taken some trucks of grit salt down there now.”

The guard on Alex’s train then blew his whistle, and Alex had to get on his way down to Crewe.

Calder then arrived in the station. “Our line should be alright for a while yet.” He informed Arthur. “We’ll need to redo it in about half an hour or so.”

The dark clouds came over head, and the gloom depressed the engines. Roger arrived back at Carlisle, and Arthur set off on his trip down to Barrow.

Meanwhile, up at Haig Pit, the four small engines peered out of their shed and over the mount of snow that had collected in the doorway. It was cold and miserable, and everybody had gone home at lunchtime. They tried to amuse themselves with games such as “I spy” but they still felt cold and sad.

Several trucks pulled up in the car park, and out of some cars that had pulled in behind them were all the people that worked at the museum.

The engines were delighted to see that they had not been forgotten about. Using Jeffery, the big rail crane, the engines were lifted, one by one, onto the big lorries.

The men said that they had all been invited to a part that had been organised up at Carlisle station. The engines were very excited. They twittered to each other about that they would see big engines and big trains. The lorries pulled out onto the road and set off down the hill.

At Barrow, City of Carlisle was being oiled up ready for his journey. Arthur arrived at the sheds after a run down the line.

“Are you all ready there?” Arthur called.

“Oh yes, I’m absolutely fine!” replied City of Carlisle. His paint glimmered and his brass shone brightly.

“I’ve sorted your coaches out for you.” said Arthur. “Then you needn’t waste anytime getting them ready.”

“Thanks a lot, Arthur.” City of Carlisle said to his friend. “I have a feeling that the party tonight is going to be a great success.”

“Me too.” agreed Arthur nervously. “I hope the snow doesn’t cause too much problems. Alex’s train from the south might have been delayed by snow. I don’t know, because we only covered as far as Lancaster, and Ewan’s just redoing that part now, so you should get a clear run.”

“That’s a relief.” sighed City of Carlisle. He didn’t want to get stuck in the snow drifts.

“I’d better get going back up.” Arthur said. “I’ll see you up there, then.”

“See you later.” City of Carlisle replied cheerfully. He then set off to the platform to collect his coaches. The signal arm fell and he proudly puffed away towards Lancaster and the main line.

At Lancaster he ran around his train whilst the passengers climbed on board, and he then set off again for Oxenholme. Alex and his train were already waiting at the platform.

“I see you’re here early.” Alex said. “I’m glad the snow hasn’t slowed you down.”

City of Carlisle’s passengers climbed onboard and they set off again, Alex trailing behind them. The wind was howling, blowing snow at their faces. They could hardly see anything, even when they put their headlamps on.

At Penrith, Alex found that he could go no further. His engine spluttered weakly and stopped. His diver inspected him. It was clear that he, like George, had gotten snow into the air intake.

The only way that they would make it to Carlisle on time would be if Alex and his train were coupled to City of Carlisle, and he would have to pull them, along with his own heavy train.

Then, as if a miracle, they heard a deep “Poop poop” up ahead. Roger appeared out of the snowstorm, with snowplough plunging through the frozen drifts.

“Having problems?” he called cheerfully to City of Carlisle. “Don’t worry, I’ll help you out in no time.”

He backed onto the front of the train in front of City of Carlisle. “Are you ready?” he called to the others.

“Yes!” came the reply faintly heard through the blustery wind.

The cavalcade set off for Carlisle. The steam engines were snorting and puffing at the front of the train. They created such a noise as they moved the heavy train through the snowy waste.

At Carlisle, the manager paced the platform. Fred and George watched anxiously from their platform, while the other engines all stood on the middle roads under that station roof. The Haig Pit engines were in the far sidings where the trains from the North East let their passengers disembark at.

The stationmaster looked at the clock. It chimed seven thirty. They’d give them ten more minutes, or they’d have to begin the party without them. The guests all stood and sat, looking for a sign to see the train arriving.

The engines didn’t need the ten more minutes. They didn’t even need five more minutes. They came puffing into the station, great clouds of steam blowing everywhere with the wind. They finally came to a halt at the platform. All the guests at the party cheered as the passengers climbed out of the carriages.

The party then began in full swing. There was a big buffet and singing and dancing. The engines all swapped tales of their adventures in the snow.

Later on in the evening, the manager grabbed a microphone and stood on the footbridge, where everyone could see him.

“Ladies, Gentlemen, and engines,” he began, “I would like to take this opportunity to wish each and every one of you railway fans a very merry Christmas and a happy new year. Over the course of this year, our engines have consistently tried their hardest to help out their friends, and to make sure that all the trains ran on time. An example of this endeavour was shown this evening, when our steam engines helped Alex the diesel, after his engine had failed. So, I propose that”

“Wait for us!” came a voice from outside the station. All heads turned to see who it was. Ewan growled into the station, pulling Rory behind him.

“Well, well, well.” chuckled Fred. “Looks like old Rory got a run in for his money!”

The engines all laughed as the manager congratulated Ewan. It had turned out that he had slipped away to see if Rory was managing OK on his way back from Stranraer, and it had turned out that he too had failed because of the snow.

The manager returned to the bridge to conclude his speech. "I would like to propose a toast to our magnificent engines that always bring the train home, whatever the weather may be, as was proved this evening."

All the guests raised their glasses in honour of the engines. This was acknowledged with a chorus of whistles and toots from engines large and small.

"Merry Christmas!" exclaimed all the engines together.