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£250,000 National Lottery funding to restore historic Railway Pullman Camping Coaches

Two of the Lake District's most iconic visitor attractions have been awarded £250,000 from The National Lottery Heritage Fund for an innovative restoration project, which gets underway from Tuesday 8 September 2020.

Made possible by National Lottery players, the funding has been awarded to a partnership between a charity - the Ravenglass Railway Museum Trust – and the commercially-run Ravenglass & Eskdale Railway.

The project will see the transformation of two 1917 Pullman Camping Coaches into quirky self-catering accommodation, together with a new sensory garden. The historic vehicles are currently in a critical state of disrepair, but this vital restoration will conserve their structures and preserve original interior features such as the highly-crafted, decorative marquetry panels.

Originally built more than 100 years ago as part of a World War One Ambulance Train, '*Elmira*' and '*Maid of Kent*', are the oldest Railway 'Camping Coaches' still in their original location - uniquely situated in a coastal setting within two UNESCO World Heritage Sites: The Lake District National Park and Hadrian's Wall (Frontiers of the Roman Empire).

The historically important coaches were rebuilt as Pullman Dining Cars in 1921 and converted into Camping Coaches by British Rail in 1960. Work will now get underway to restore the coaches' historic features to their former glory, combined with striking new visitor accommodation for between four and six people.

The coaches will also be opened up at selected times for pre-booked, socially distanced visits. The project will unfold on social media so people can follow the project every step of the way, enabling more people to enjoy them and learn about their heritage.

The exciting new plans even include planting a sensory and wildlife garden to support the natural ecosystem and enhance visitors' stays. Located in close proximity to the Cumbrian Coastal Way, this is a timely boost for people's renewed focus on health and wellbeing following lockdown.

"These coaches are of national significance, but work is urgently needed to prevent their further deterioration" says Ravenglass Museum Trustee, Peter Hensman. "They have been an integral part of railway history for many years and by restoring them, this project is an innovative way of offering quirky accommodation with a rich heritage. In turn, this will help attract more visitors and raise awareness of the wider heritage of the Western Lake District.



"This National Lottery funded project also has a real legacy, by providing an innovative experience for visitors to Cumbria for future generations to enjoy. It will provide a sustainable income for the Ravenglass Railway Museum, future proofing the attraction at a time when heritage tourism needs it most."

Rachel Bell, from Ravenglass & Eskdale Railway, adds, *"We are excited to be working on this restoration partnership with the Museum and the National Lottery that will bring these Railway Camping Coaches back to life; they hold a very special place in all of our hearts. We particularly look forward to sharing their stories 'Carriages off the Rails' and bygone memories of Railway heritage and family holidays".*

David Renwick, Area Director, North at The National Lottery Heritage Fund, says, *"We're incredibly excited to see these fantastic examples of our railway heritage being restored and being repurposed in such an innovative way, as a result of our funding. The unrivalled location of the coaches in not one, but two, UNESCO World Heritage Sites, and their unique nature will surely make for an unforgettable experience for any future visitors in Cumbria."*

Work on the project will get underway from 8 September, with the aim of finishing the restoration by early Spring 2021.

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Notes to Editors:

For further information or to arrange interviews or press trips, please contact:
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The story of the ‘Carriages off the Rails’ dates back to after World War I where they were used as ‘homes for heroes’. Some became animal shelters and barns, while other redundant carriages in attractive locations – often coastal – were turned into affordable holiday accommodation linked to the railways in the 1930s. During World War II, many were pressed into the war effort. By 1958, they saw a revival as British Railways were able to offer ‘delightful inexpensive holidays’ in more than 130 locations. Branch line closures following the Beeching Report, combined with cheaper overseas travel in the 1970s meant many of the carriages did not survive.

Ravenglass & Eskdale Railway is a family-owned business operating a heritage, narrow gauge steam railway on the Western Coast of the Lake District. The railway is surrounded by stunning views and walks and is based in Ravenglass, the only coastal village in the Lake District National Park. The business’s awards include a British Coach Tourism Award 2019, Transport Trust Red Wheel Plaque, Silver Green Tourism award, Cumbria Tourism’s 2019 Large Visitor Attraction of the Year, GoingPlacesUK Cumbria & Yorkshire Historic Attraction of the year 2019/20.

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*This funding award was made in February 2020