

End of an Era - Production notes

My interest in the GWR Yelverton to Princetown line was sparked by the discovery in my garden of original granite 'sleepers' from the horse drawn tramway upon which the steam line was built. Part of the line ran past my garden hedge, and much of it is still used as a convenient, relatively level, walkway across Dartmoor.

Yelverton station has now reverted to private ownership, and I am grateful to Mrs Spencer for allowing access to film the site. The tunnel under Yelverton village is still in excellent condition, and forms the video link between the archive footage of Burrator halt and the verdant clips of the current state of the station site.

The movie was constructed using as many of the transitions as possible that Adobe Premiere supplies. As a result the movie appears rather gimmicky, and one would normally keep the type of transitions to a couple of alternatives. Unfortunately the quality of many of the transitions has been lost when re-compressing to the Intel Indeo format used for the CD-ROM AVI file. I feel that the best transition is the 'peel back' type used for the first edit to the Burrator Halt shot, though the luminance dissolve from the reservoir to dam clip sequence just before is very effective.

Background sound effects were recorded using a SoundBlaster AWE32 as uncompressed WAV files. Steam sounds came from various video and disk sources and were mixed on a separate track to the birdsong etc. Commentary was assembled and overlaid on a third track. For the final AVI file the sound was reduced to mono and 11kHz bandwidth to ensure compatibility with all players.

All new video sequences were shot with a Sony Handycam Video 8 TR485E and captured to hard disk using FAST's Movie Machine Pro with M-JPEG compressor card on a Red Box Pentium 75 computer with 32Mb RAM and a 1083MB Western Digital hard drive. M-JPEG hardware assisted compression at a ratio of 20:1 produced high quality clips suitable for auditing to the final CD-ROM file format. For this movie 140 Mb of AVI and WAV clip files were required.

Original archive video sequences were captured from the VHS video, 'Shadows on the Moor', kindly supplied and available from Aarchive Film Productions, 57 Lalebrick Road, Plymouth PL9 9RP. The monochrome film was shot on a train journey on the Yelverton to Princetown line in the 1950s.

The graininess and blemishes on this old film stock give the video compression system a hard time, and detail losses are at their worst here. The most noticeable effect of the re-compression is a loss in contrast compared to the M-JPEG original. I also output to an M-JPEG format AVI file (98MB), and this could be used for playing from hard disk at full screen (640x480) for presentation purposes. The high data rate and hardware decompression requirement are, however, unsuitable for this SuperCD.

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