

# A steam effort

It runs on tea, charity and the boundless enthusiasm of its band of volunteers. **Gavin Haines** gets a taste of the hard work that goes on behind the scenes at Swanage Railway

journey of the day.

In a set of borrowed overalls, I help Mick shovel coal into the firebox – work punctuated by, you guessed it, sipping tea. “Dehydration is a big problem here,” says Ian. “That’s why we drink so much tea.” Any excuse.

Once we’ve stoked the fire, I rest and admire the passing scenery as the antiquated locomotive chugs through the Purbecks – it’s a stunning way to see the countryside.

The first stop is Harman’s Cross where a handful of tourists and locals clamber on and off.

Running on time, we pull out of Harman’s Cross at 10am and chug our way towards 1942, or Corfe Castle Station as it is known.

It takes nearly ten minutes for the castle ruins to come into view, but as pretty as they are, nobody on the platform is looking at them, they’re looking at this steam engine.

From Corfe we head further up the line to Norden, where we turn the locomotive around, refill our mugs with tea and start the return journey back to Swanage.

The novelty of being on a steam engine doesn’t wear off.

Back at Swanage I bid  
farewell to Ian  
and



Mick to help the guard, David Hales, on the 10.50am to Corfe.

“They think I’m waving at the kids,” says David, as a crowd waves us off from Swanage.

“I’m not, I’m waving at their mums.”

This cheery retiree comes from Southampton to work at the railway, where he has an important job.

“I have to let Ian and Mick know if we need to stop at the stations,” he says, leaning out of the window, waving a green flag to them.

“Green means we go straight through.”

At Corfe Castle David shows me around the old stationmaster’s house, which remains as he left it in the Sixties.

Just when I think my day’s work is over, I’m drafted in to help Philip Eakins in the signal box, where I realise exactly how arduous it is to change the points.

“There’s a knack to it,” he laughs, as I struggle to shift the lever.

The steam engines might be the main attraction at Swanage Railway, but the stars of the show are the workers.

Jovial and hardworking, I’ve never met a bunch of people so happy working for nothing.

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