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FEATURE: Heritage Railways

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Young volunteers and their parents
posing in front of former JNR's Class
C12 tank locomotive preserved by
Japan National Trust and working on
Oigawa Railway
(Japan National Trust)

Editorial

Modern heritage

Studying and preserving the heritage of modern industries, including old railway rolling stock and buildings, are becoming increasingly popular in Japan. Japan's modernization started just 135 years ago when a new government was formed under the young Meiji Emperor in 1868. One of the new government's first achievements was the 1872 opening of Japan's first railway, a 29-km line between Tokyo and Yokohama.

The railway led Japan's modernization and industrialization through the following 100 years, culminating in the 1964 opening of the world's first high-speed railway—the Tokaido Shinkansen between Tokyo and Osaka. Although Japanese people quickly learned modern technologies and succeeded in developing new industries, it took nearly a century to catch up and rank with European and American forerunners.

A mountain climber never looks over his shoulder when climbing a steep slope, but once he reaches a ridge near the peak, he can afford to look back and see how he has managed to forge a path through difficulties. Japan has arrived at the point from where she can look back on the past, explaining why industrial archaeology and preservation of modern heritage is getting popular. However, the question is how to find a way forward based on studies of the past.

T. SUGA

Contents

Features

Heritage Railways

Heritage Railways as Museums: Occupations and Landscapes Colin Divall 4

From Preservationists To Operators: Impact of Changing 1990s Regulatory
Regime on Heritage Railways in New South Wales, Australia Robert Lee 10

The Preservation of Railway Heritage in Japan:
An Outline History and General View Eiichi Aoki 16

The Future of Heritage Railways and Rail Conservation in Germany Rolf Höhmann • 20

Heritage Railways on the Brink of Commercial Operation Heimo Echensperger 23

Perspectives on Cooperation between State and Private Societies in
Development of Heritage Railways in France Frédéric Dufetrelle 30

Appendix

Railways, Tourism and Heritage: French National Charter for Development of Tourist and Historic Railways •• 35

The Japanese Railway Society Richard Tremaine 38

Another Perspective

Bubble or Not, Tokyo Keeps Changing Bénédicte Barroux 40

Railway Operators in Japan 4

Central Tokyo Makoto Aoki 42

Topics 54

Photostory: Railway Heritage in Japan (part 1) 2 & 57–59