The Riverside Tramway at Christow

By 1983, when the railway took over, the narrow public footpath leading from Christow Bridge went through almost impenetrable growth.
The old county council railings can be seen at right. The old bridge spans had been taken down in 1980 and a new footbridge installed at a higher level.

Some clearing had been done and a start made on fencing the footpath.

After the site had been mostly cleared, the course of the old road was revealed. The road surface was buried beneath material deposited by the river during flooding. The overhead ropeway supports which had been encased in concrete, were also dumped here.
The photographer is standing on tipped material, which was roughly at the same level as the yard.
The concrete hopper at right, after being demolished in 1988, would fill much of this space.

After the broken concrete had been tipped and dressed with spoil in 1989.

A few years later, a little of the course of the old road is seen filled with flood water.

The last of the sycamores has been felled and a horse chestnut planted.

By 1995, enough tipping had occurred to allow a path to be made beside the river.

In 1999, track sections recovered from E.C.C. Ball Clays at Kingsteignton were thrown down on the path and a rough tramway took shape.

This was as far as the track had reached before an extension was planned beside the river.

The extension was made possible by the turntable, made from an old lorry turntable trailer.

The track was allowed to vegetate just like a half abandoned tramway. A line was laid in the foreground but was not connected.

This was dubbed "Rustic Rail."

The observation saloon at the end of the line in 2004.

Preparatory to re-laying in 2007, the line was cleared of vegetation.

It can be seen that the formation had not been engineered.

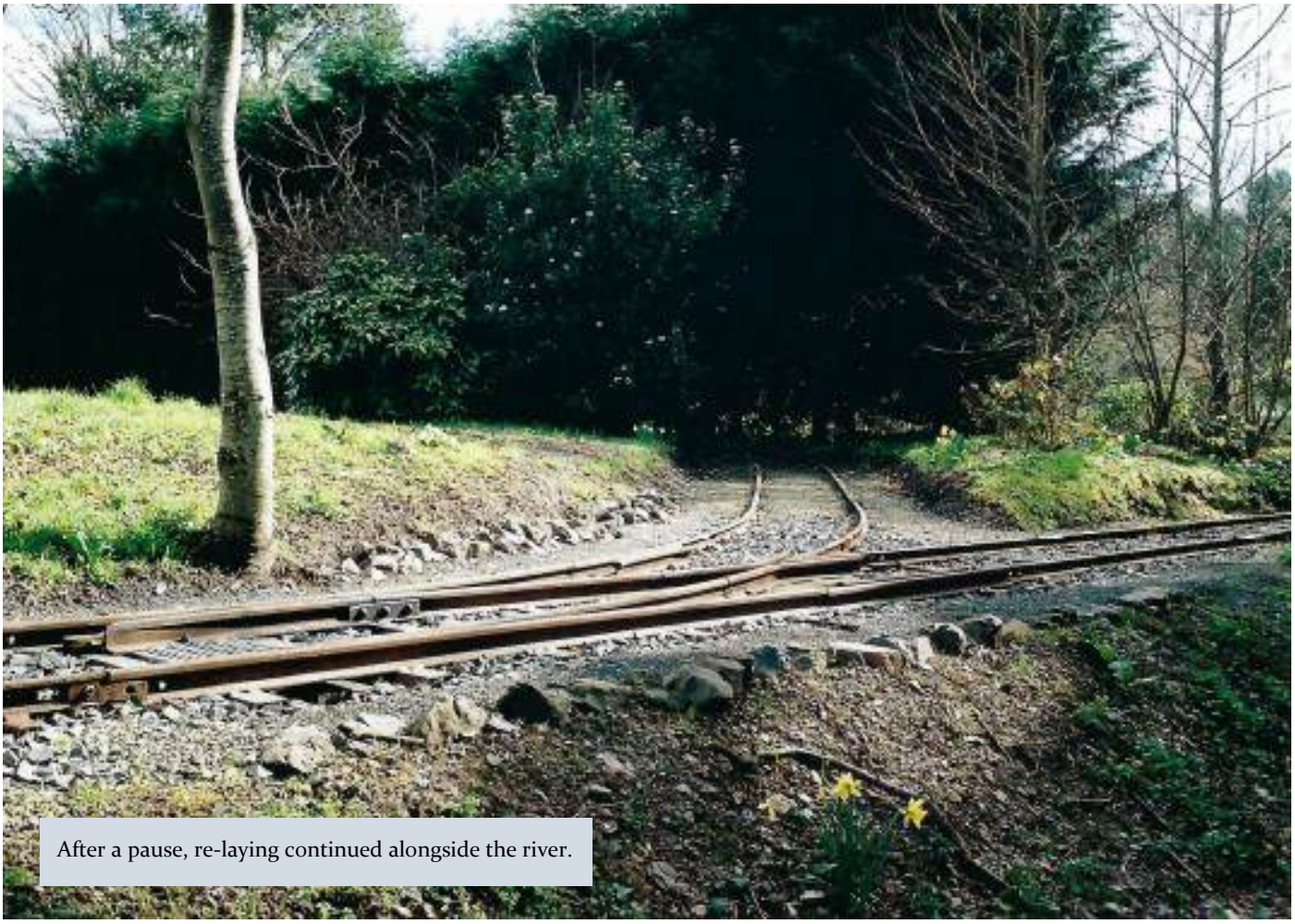
As part of the re-laying, a new turnout was installed at what became Heartbreak Junction and the very severe curve was taken out, to be installed later at the end of the line.

The turnout has a short straight section so the new alignment would be curve, straight, curve.

The new turnout in position. The chestnut would eventually have to be removed.

It didn't look as if the connection could be made.

But it was.



After a pause, re-laying continued alongside the river.

Two sections beyond the turnout have been re-laid.

A bridging length was made which allowed movement to continue, albeit very slowly.

The oak was felled later. The trunk was sold to Devon Timber, which firm supplied Chagford Parish Council with sawn timber for a boardwalk on Padley Common.

Re-laying is well underway in the summer of 2007. The track had to be raised to make it level. Rails were straightened and spiked to wooden sleepers. “Junction” fishplates had to be made for almost every joint.

The formation here was retained by a sleeper and made into a feature.

The formation was raised as re-laying progressed.

The level was set by the concrete base which had been part of the old ropeway “bridge.” The rail fastenings here were chemically anchored to the concrete.

Six new 20 foot, 20 lb. rails were bought for this section. The vertical transitions at either end were done in old 20 lb. 12 foot lengths.

This was the river in July, 2007. It was intended that this section would grass over so that it would withstand flooding.

Standard ballast and Meldon crusher dust were used.

It can be seen that the chestnut would have to be removed.

The severe curve from the “junction” temporarily was laid at the end of the line.

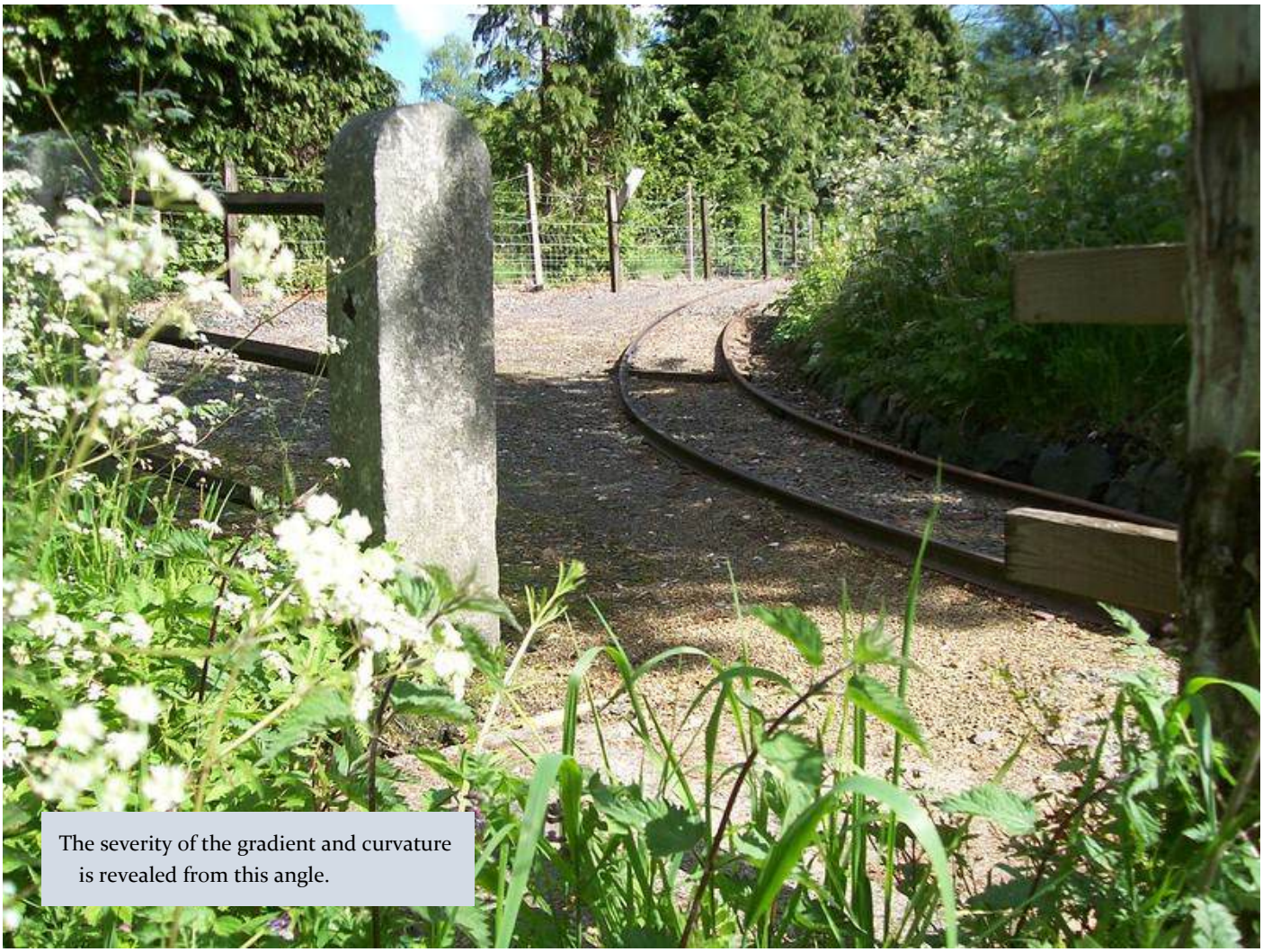
The battery-electric loco kept briefly at Christow, at 1½ tons, was far too heavy for the line.
The bank to the right was cut away to allow the line to be extended.

This tandem turnout, or “three-way,” recovered from Balfour Beatty’s railway equipment depot, was overhauled and placed at the top of a short, but severe, incline.

The severe curve was used again as a siding.

The incline is 1:16, steepening to 1:12 in this direction.

It is enough to gain sufficient momentum for the 1:37 leading to Heartbreak Junction.



The severity of the gradient and curvature is revealed from this angle.

It looks as if the tramway has been there for yonks. Three feet beneath it lies the old public road.

Wild garlic proliferates in this spring scene.

Heartbreak Junction.

On the hillside above Sheldon Lane, another line was surveyed. A start was made on the formation but nothing more was done.

During an Open Day, while under the control of a trainee, the observation car became derailed on the severe curve.

It was moved and partly rerailed before the cause of the derailment could be found. Tests later involving the car being loaded with rail chairs to destabilize it did not reveal any tendency to derail. Marks on the gauge face of the rail showed that the gear fitted to the leading axle, when it was thought that the car would be electrified, had acted to restrain it. As a precaution, the car has since always been run like this.