



Leeds - Morecambe Community Rail Partnership

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Feature by Mark Sutcliffe

DISCOVER THE EASY WAY TO EXPLORE ONE OF LANCASHIRE'S BEST-KEPT SECRETS

Hop aboard the Bowland Explorer – the car-free way to experience the beautiful landscapes of the Forest of Bowland.

The Forest of Bowland is truly one of England's hidden gems – an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) tucked well out of the way off the beaten track between Clitheroe, Longridge, Lancaster and Settle.

The Forest of Bowland isn't the easiest place to get to and its narrow single track roads can be challenging to navigate by car. But there is a solution that allows keen walkers and discerning day-trippers to explore the Forest of Bowland without a long drive at either end of the day.

The new 833 Bowland Explorer bus service links railway stations at the northern and southern gateways to the Forest of Bowland, providing easy access to the heart of the AONB.

Operating on Sundays and Bank Holidays throughout the summer months, the Explorer leaves Lancaster Bus Station and heads to the market town of Bentham, where it meets rail services from Leeds and Carnforth.

The Explorer then travels via Ingleton and Clapham through the AONB to wind up at Clitheroe, where it collects passengers from Blackburn, Bolton and Manchester before making two more trips into the Forest, ultimately returning via Bentham to Lancaster.

The route provides visitors from both Bentham and Clitheroe with several hours to explore

some of the most scenic parts of the AONB before returning to catch the train home from the most convenient station.

And as well as offering access to some superb walking country, the journeys to and from the start point for your walk offer outstanding views of this spectacular landscape – and of the National Parks adjoining it.

With no need to keep an eye out for oncoming traffic, passengers can relax and admire truly stunning views of the Yorkshire Three Peaks and – on a clear day – the Howgills and the Lakeland Fells.

From the highpoints of Bowland Knotts and Cross o' Greet, the spectacular views stretch for dozens of miles offering a tantalizing foretaste of the day's adventures and a fitting finale to a perfect day.

Driver, Dave Hill, explained that the service was attracting more and more passengers as word spread among local walkers. "A couple of weeks ago, I had a couple of blokes who had come up from London," said Dave. "They caught the train from Leeds did a walk from Slaidburn then caught the bus to Clitheroe and got the train back to London."

John Eaton, who lives on the edge of the Dales, said, "I don't drive so it's wonderful to be able to get out into such beautiful countryside and walk. I often walk in the Yorkshire Dales, but it's quieter this side of the border and it's great to explore new walks in new places."

Part-funded by the Seed-Corn Fund of Arriva Rail North Ltd (Northern), the Bowland Explorer bus service is a joint initiative between the Leeds-Morecambe Community Rail Partnership, the Forest of Bowland AONB and the Dales and Bowland Community Interest Company, which manages most of the Sunday DalesBus network in and around the Yorkshire Dales.

The service runs on Sundays and Bank Holiday Mondays throughout the summer until 24th September 2017. Timetable and fare details are available at www.communityrail Lancashire.co.uk and also from www.forestofbowland.com/Bowland-Explorer where you can find information about walks along the route, including a guided walk around Stocks Reservoir on Sunday 13th August.

Ends

Photographs and Editors information below:



Promotional signage at Bentham Station © Mark Sutcliffe



The Bowland Explorer on its route through the Forest of Bowland AONB © Mark Sutcliffe



An example of the special bus stops © Mark Sutcliffe

Notes for Editors

For further information please contact: Forest of Bowland AONB,
01200 448000 or email sandra.silk@lancashire.gov.uk

The Bentham Line is the working title for the Leeds-Morecambe Community Rail Partnership (CRP). It was set up in 2006 and has its offices at Bentham Station and works to improve services and develop community links along the railway line.

The route goes from Heysham and Morecambe, on the west coast, via Lancaster and Carnforth through the idyllic Lune and Wenning valleys with Ingleborough as a back drop. It then continues to Skipton and along the Aire valley which includes the more urban area from Keighley to Leeds, thus linking the West Coast mainline at Lancaster with the East Coast mainline at Leeds.

The CRP chairman, Gerald Townson, is also chairman of Friends of Bentham Station (FOBS) which shares the station buildings at Bentham. He is also secretary of the Lancaster and Skipton Rail User Group (LASRUG).

The website for the line is at <http://www.leedslancastermorecambecrp.co.uk/>

The Forest of Bowland AONB:

- The Forest of Bowland Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) is one of 46 AONBs in England, Wales and Northern Ireland.
- The Forest of Bowland was designated as an AONB in 1964. The AONB legislation (National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949, Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000) was designed to protect areas of unspoiled natural beauty for future generations.
- The Forest of Bowland AONB was the first Protected Area in England to obtain the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas in September 2005.
- 13% of the AONB is designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest for its extensive habitats of wet and dry heathland, particularly heather moor and blanket bog.
- A major part of the AONB's fells is designated as a Special Protection Area under the European Birds Directive.
- The Joint Advisory Committee (JAC) - informally the Forest of Bowland Partnership - guides the management of the AONB. Lancashire County Council acts as the lead authority alongside County, District, Parish, land owning and farming community, environmental and recreational partners.