

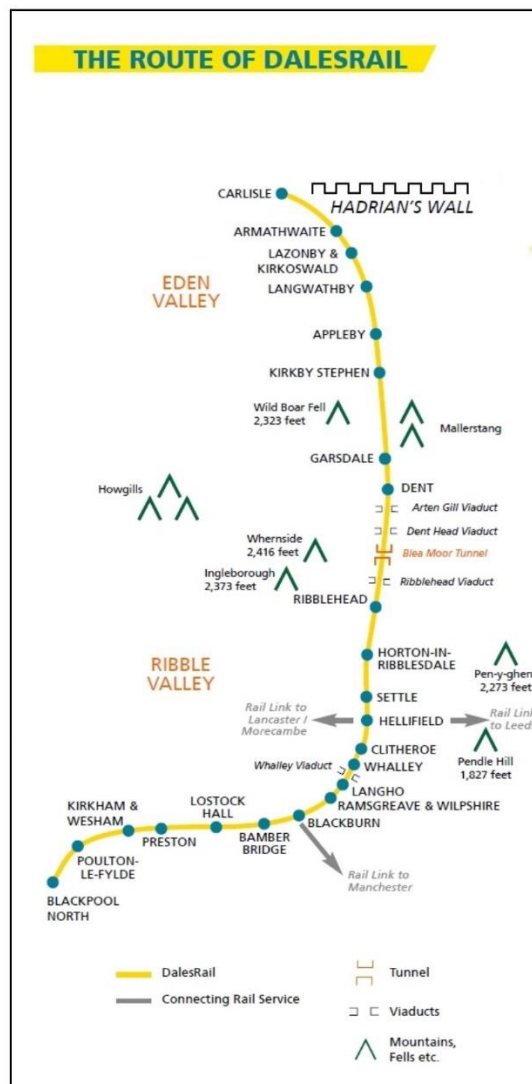
Tales from DalesRail

DalesRail – the Scenic Route Simon Clarke

DalesRail may not be operating in 2020 but that doesn't stop us sharing our many interesting experiences about our journeys. We hope you will share your interesting stories, favourite walks, fascinating anecdotes, and pictures about DalesRail. Please send them to richard.watts.crl@gmail.com or Simon Clarke at simon.clarke.crl@gmail.com.

DalesRail over the years has primarily been aimed at walkers, with over 70 guided walks each season led by the experienced volunteers of the Lancashire Rail Ramblers, ranging from the easy 2 or 3 mile wander around a town or city centre to the more strenuous 15 mile yomp over fell and mountain in the Yorkshire Dales.

But is it just for walkers? No of course not, there are many people who just use this summer Sunday seasonal service as an excuse to travel over the scenic route from Blackpool to Carlisle via the Ribble Valley and the Settle Carlisle Line. Is there stunning scenery and glorious railway architecture to enjoy? Yes – in abundance.



The journey starts at Blackpool North although you can join at any of the other 21 stations before you arrive in Carlisle. The first place of historic interest is Kirkham North Junction where the line used to divide into the three different routes into Blackpool. Back in August 1935 the signal box here dealt with 600 trains in a 24-hour period. Next is Preston, where the first station was opened in 1838. The current station was opened in 1880 and extended twice and ended up with 15 platforms – now reduced to 8 operational platforms.

Now we join the East Lancashire Line and after Lostock Hall, site of one of the last engine sheds to house steam locomotives in 1968, it is on to Bamber Bridge with the oldest surviving station buildings (1846) on this part of the line.

The next significant structure is Hoghton Viaduct, a three arch structure that towers 116 feet above the River Darwen. We are soon at Blackburn and the station although very modern and functional is a shadow of its former self and other than the fine 1888 red brick frontage is hardly worth a mention.



Blackburn Station Frontage – Simon Clarke

Just through Blackburn tunnel (435 yards) we take the left fork at Daisyfield Junction and join the Clitheroe Line and once through Wilpshire Tunnel (324 yards) the views of the Ribble Valley to the left and Pendle Hill to the right open up.

The next big piece of railway architecture is the stunning Whalley Viaduct that strides across the River Calder on 48 arches and constructed of 7 million bricks. Into Whalley station where some of the original buildings survive now in private ownership. As we approach Clitheroe you will get a view, on the right, of the Castle that stands high over the town and is a medieval motte-and-bailey layout with England's second smallest surviving keep. The original station buildings survive and are in use as an art gallery and craft space.

Now we are out into idyllic Ribble Valley countryside as we travel the 12.5 miles to Hellifield where we join the famous Leeds (Settle) to Carlisle Line. Hellifield station forms the junction for three lines; to Clitheroe, to Morecambe (The Bentham line) and to Leeds & Carlisle. The station retains its Victorian canopy with Midland Railway wyverns in the roof trusses. Some parts of the original

buildings are still in use especially the café Shed 24H which has just reopened for takeaway following Covid-19 lock down regulations.



Hellifield Station – Network Rail



A Midland Railway Wyvern – Simon Clarke

Next is Settle, the true start of the scenic 73 mile run to Carlisle. Built on the instructions of James Allport, General Manager of the Midland Railway Company who decided that he wanted his own route to Scotland. Allport said; “Hang the terrain. Don’t bother me with trivia! Just build me a railway to Scotland that will be better than all our competitors, by God!” And so a pencil line was drawn over the moors and 6000 men built it over six and half long years that saw the deaths of hundreds of men including the young Tasmanian, Charles Sharland, who surveyed the line on foot but died before it was completed at the age of 26.

It doesn’t really matter which side of the train you sit on as there is fabulous views to both sides. The next station is Horton in Ribblesdale and if you look out to the right over one of the station’s running in boards you will get a glimpse of Pen-y-Ghent one of the Yorkshire Three Peaks.



Pen-y-Ghent from Horton in Ribblesdale Station – John Barnes

Next along is Ribbleshead which is close to Ingleborough another of the Three Peaks and just a stones-throw away from probably the most magnificent structure of the Victorian railway building

mania – Ribblehead Viaduct. 440 yards long and of 24 arches, 104 feet high marching across the bleak wastes of Batty Moss. There is no finer brick and limestone faced viaduct across the whole of the country. Over 2,300 men lived in shanty towns close the viaduct and worked in appalling conditions to complete the viaduct, although over 100 men died in the process. The viaduct took just over five years to build from first foundations to opening for freight traffic in 1875. If you sit at the rear of the train on the right-hand side, you may get a glimpse of the viaduct as it is gently curved.



Ribblehead Viaduct – Wikipedia Commons (Michael Beckwith)

Once across the viaduct we are soon into the dark and dank Blea Moor Tunnel and at 1 mile 869 yards it is the longest on the line although in total there are 14 tunnels and over 20 viaducts.

Once through the tunnel we are soon approaching Dent a lovely little station in the classic Midland Railway 'Derby Gothic' style, although due to the terrain the station is a good 4.5 miles from the village it serves which sits 400 feet lower down in the valley. Dent has the pleasure of being the highest mainline station in England at 1500 feet, but it may not be a pleasure if you get caught in one of the ferocious storms that can blow through.



Dent Station – John Barnes

The next highlight along the way is Garsdale station where a statue of Ruswarp stands sentinel. Ruswarp, a collie, was the only dog to have its paw print on the petition to save the line when under threat in the 1980s, he was owned by Graham Nuttall who hailed from Burnley but went missing whilst walking in Wales and his body was found 11 weeks later. Ruswarp was found alive by his side but sadly died after the funeral.

After Garsdale we reach the highest point on the line at Ais Gill Summit, 1169 feet above sea level and then it is downhill all the way. Next is Kirkby Stephen, which has two stations although Kirkby Stephen East was closed by British Rail in 1962. It is now the home of the Stainmore Railway Company.



Kirkby Stephen East – Richard Watts

Next is Appleby one of only two staffed stations on the route between Settle and Carlisle, Settle being the other. Appleby is famous for its Horse Fair, an annual gathering of Gypsies and Travellers and is basically a horse sale with the added entertainment of horses being ridden in the river.

Appleby has other attractions including a Norman castle and crosses at either end of Boroughgate that mark the former limits of the town's market. There is also a fine church that was restored by Lady Anne Clifford in 1654. Another legacy of lady Clifford was the Hospital of St. Anne that opened in 1653 and was endowed by lady Clifford for the maintenance of a mother, a reader and 12 sisters forever.

Soon we are at Langwathby where one should alight if you wish to see Long Meg and her Daughters an ancient stone circle approximately 4500 years old. On the right as we travel along you will see on the right-hand-side Cross Fell dominating the skyline. You can also walk from here via Little Salkeld and Lacey's Caves to our next station Lazonby & Kirkoswald. The parish church of St. Oswald at Kirkoswald is unique in having a 19th century bell tower on top of the hill 200 yards from the church itself.

On leaving the next station is found at Armathwaite after a gentle run through the Eden Valley and then finally arriving at the Border City of Carlisle.

You arrive at Carlisle Citadel station, a masterpiece built by the famous architect Sir William Tite who also built a number of other railway stations including Carnforth and Lancaster Castle. The station was once used by no less than seven independent railway companies.

On your left as you leave the station is the mighty Citadel. These two oval towers dominate the southern entrance to the city and once housed the civil courts (east tower) and criminal courts (west tower).



The two bastions of Carlisle Citadel – Visit Cumbria

There are two other must-sees close to the station: Carlisle Cathedral and Carlisle Castle. The Citadel and the others are all built out of the soft red sandstone of Cumbria.



Carlisle Cathedral – Days out with the Kids



Carlisle Castle – England Originals

Further reading:

[Historic Appleby](#)

[Border City of Carlisle](#)

Michael Williams, *On the Slow Train and On The Slow Train Again* (Arrow Books)