

## Tales from DalesRail

### Ribblehead – not just a majestic viaduct John Barnes with additional material by Richard Watts

*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](mailto:richard.watts.crl@gmail.com) or Simon Clarke at [simon.clarke.crl@gmail.com](mailto:simon.clarke.crl@gmail.com).*

Map: Ordnance Survey Explorer OL2 – Yorkshire Dales Southern & Western Areas.

The area around Ribblehead Station is probably the most visited on the line. The station is situated within the Three Peaks of the Yorkshire Dales and is adjacent to Ribblehead Viaduct and Blea Moor Tunnel. The view west is dominated by the ridge of Park Fell, Simon Fell and **Ingleborough**; north west is **Whernside** and the view continues clockwise to Crag of Blea Moor, onto the Roman Road over Cam Fell and further round to Cosh Outside, Plover Hill and **Pen-y-Ghent**<sup>1</sup>.



Ribblehead Viaduct looking towards Whernside – Chris Watts

The most popular walk seems to be the circular route round Whernside, the shortest route is about 8 miles but this can be extended to suit one's ability; whichever route is taken Whernside has to be climbed and this includes an ascent of 495 metres (1620 feet).

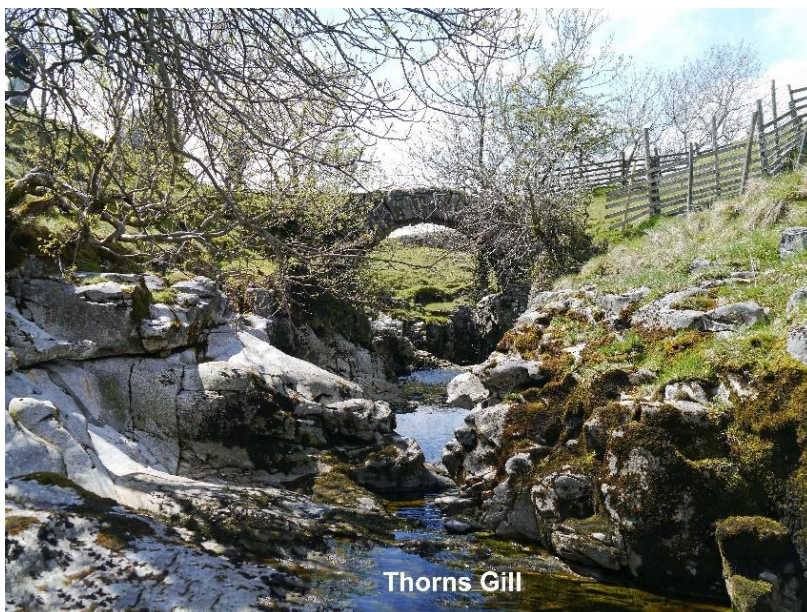


Majestic Ingleborough from Ribbleshead station – Richard Watts

There are many low-level routes with interesting features including Great Douck Cave, the Viking Farmstead at Brock Holes and Chapel le Dale (which was the original starting point for the annual Three Peaks Race from 1954 to 1974). The nature reserves around Gauber and Colt Park with a profusion of wildflowers are also worth a visit.

### **Ribbleshead Circular Walk (8 miles)**

I like this walk for the wild flowers and the places of interest along the way such as the Viking Farmstead and the settlement of Thorns with the packhorse bridge over thorns Gill (this is the River Ribble in its infancy).



Thorns Gill and packhorse bridge – John Barnes

Starting from Ribblehead station we cross underneath the line by the Station Inn and walk into the quarry where there are many wild flowers to be seen (June is a good time to visit) and following a marked route we proceed to a gate which takes us on to a path where we go west and pass round the quarry edge to the Viking Farmstead at Brock Holes and then continue to Selside Shaw and the hamlet of Selside. From Selside we take the path east to Hornsey Hill and crossing the River Ribble continue along Copy Gill to Low Birkwith and High Birkwith. At High Birkwith we join the Ribble Way and go North to God's Bridge, Nether Lodge and over the moss to Thorns. At Thorns we turn left and make for the old pack horse bridge, cross this and come to Blea Moor Road at Ribblehead House where we head back to the station.



God's Bridge – John Barnes

### **Ribblehead Viaduct (extra notes by Richard Watts)**

*“The viaduct when completed will be the admiration of all lovers of imposing and massive masonry, and no doubt generations unborn will look upon it with wonder and think how clever were their forefathers to rear such a structure” (newspaper of 1873<sup>2</sup>).*

The exposed location of Batty Moss is crossed by possibly the most notable structure on the line, Ribblehead Viaduct simply numbered by the Engineer's Department as bridge No 66. The viaduct is 440 yards long, has 24 spans and took around 5 years to construct. Located in a very isolated area the navvies who built the viaduct lived in shanty towns close to the viaduct. The extreme weather that could be experienced during the winter must have made living and working here exceedingly hard and difficult. The stone for the viaduct was quarried between Selside and Ribblehead – little did the quarrymen of the time realise how their work would become a cause célèbre in the twentieth century.

Yes the condition of Ribblehead Viaduct and in particular the limestone it was constructed from was hotly contested during the campaign to close or save the line – depending which side of the fence you were on! British Rail claimed its condition was too dangerous, the limestone was life expired (!) and that the cost of repairing it was out of all proportion to the use currently being made of the line. Well, if you take all the trains away, close all the stations bar two and run the

two remaining trains at inconvenient times it is perhaps not too surprising few people used it. However, the campaign to retain the line had plenty of counter arguments and in the end, they were the ones that counted when the politicians made the correct decision in 1989 to retain the line. Personally, I was glad to be able to draw a line under the campaign and move on. For nearly 8 years it had dominated my life as Chair of the NW Branch of the Railway Development Society, a Director of the Settle Carlisle Joint Action Committee and a member of the Friends of the Settle Carlisle Line. A great learning experience through which I met many fantastic people and, possibly more importantly, developed a love of the line and the area. Whilst not a great distance or fell walker like many of our DalesRailers I enjoy many lesser walks and to holiday in the area. All of which has helped when planning each seasons DalesRail, which I have done more or less since 1990, when I joined Lancashire County Council as its rail officer, in partnership with the Lancashire Rail Ramblers and the rail industry. It has been great fun with the occasional frustrations.



The homeward bound DalesRail train crossing Ribblehead Viaduct  
on 22<sup>nd</sup> August 2010 - Richard Watts

There is plenty of literature about the Settle - Carlisle line and Ribblehead Viaduct. Here are two worth tracking down:

*'The Story of Ribblehead Viaduct'* by W. R. Michell and Peter Fox, 1990.

*'Stations and Structures of the Settle & Carlisle Railway'* by V. R. Anderson & G K Fox, 1986.

**Notes:**

1. Highlighted are the Three Peaks.
2. Extract taken from *'The Story of Ribblehead Viaduct'* by W. R. Michell and Peter Fox, 1990.