

Tales from DalesRail

**Kirkby Stephen and Smardale
John Barnes**

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.

Map: Ordnance Survey Explorer OL19 – Howgill Fells & Upper Eden Valley

Kirkby Stephen station is situated in an elevated position 1.5 miles west of Kirkby Stephen town and commands excellent views of the surrounding countryside. Prominent in the near landscape are the Nine Standards Rigg, Mallerstang Edge and Wild Board Fell, Cross Fell can be seen in the north.



The commanding position of Kirkby Stephen station - Richard Watts

A note by Howard Hammersley written in 1997:

“Given the choice of alighting from the train at any station on the Settle-Carlisle line and spending the day exploring the location I would probably choose Kirkby Stephen. Not that the town is easy to find from the railway station for it lies one and a half miles to the north east. Once you arrive at Kirkby Stephen on the bus link you are in the middle of the largest town in the Upper Eden Valley. But is it really a town? It feels like a village yet is surely large enough to be a town.

There again, Kirkby Stephen has few buildings of outstanding architectural merit, and no momentous, historic events have taken place there, indeed even the history of the town is largely unknown or unwritten.

Given these apparent contradictions why should we visit Kirkby Stephen? The answer is because it is a fascinating place.

The origins of the town are shrouded in the mists of time, but it must have been an important settlement since the seventh or eighth centuries, shown by the large number of Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian names in the area, including Kirkby itself (the place of the church)."

That is view from an antiquarian's standpoint.

From a walkers point of view the possibilities are endless; within walking distance from the train we have a large part of the Eden Valley with many historical associations such as Wharton Hall, Lammerside Castle, Pendragon Castle, Croglin Castle and The Highway which was travelled by Lady Anne Clifford on her perambulations from Skipton to Appleby. The surrounding fells are a magnet for keen walkers, we have Mallerstang Edge, Wild Board Fell, Nine Standards Rigg and the Howgill Fells are within walking distance via Ravenstonedale – a 13 or 14 mile walk will cover all of these whether returning to the station or going to Garsdale station. Smardale Fell and the nature reserve are within easy reach as is the area round Potts Valley and Crosby Garrett. Spoilt for choice.



Signposting the way – Richard Watts

Smardale nature reserve

A moderate circular walk of 13 miles from Kirkby Stephen Station taking in the Smardale Nature Reserve:

From Kirkby Stephen Station we take the A685 to Lane Head turning north onto the minor road continuing to School Lane where we join the dismantled Stainmore Railway at the old Smardale Station.



The former Smardale Station - Richard Watts

There has been a dwelling at Smardale Hall since the 14th century and the present buildings date from the 15th and 16th centuries having had considerable alterations.



Smardale Hall from the Stainmore Railway Line - Richard Watts

We now proceed westwards along the trackbed through Smardale Gill Nature Reserve and Site of Special scientific Interest. The river we are following is Scandal Beck which begins at the confluence of Tarn Sike and Heck Gill below Bowber Head and joins the River Eden at Soulby. Continuing along the trackbed we pass underneath Smardale Viaduct which carries the Settle Carlisle line over Smardale Gill and at the end of the wooded section we come to Smardale Gill Viaduct.



The imposing Smardale Gill Viaduct on the former
Stainmore Railway - Richard Watts

Smardale Gill Viaduct predates Smardale Viaduct and is a stone structure completed in 1861 at a cost of £11,928. The viaduct is built of local stone, has 14 arches, is 90 feet high and is 550 feet long. The viaduct and the area around it, is featured in another Tales from DalesRail. Continuing now with views of the Howgill Fells in addition to the wild flowers, butterflies etc. we come to a path below Brownber which takes us southwards to St Helen's Well which we follow and continue through Newbiggin on Lune to Will Hill. At Will Hill we follow the path eastwards coming to a minor road north of Low Greenside Farm and continue by road to Ravenstonedale.



Ravenstonedale station framed by trees is now in private ownership - Richard Watts



Smardale Bridge
close to the old railway and a meeting point of paths - John Barnes

Ravenstonedale, historically known as “*Russendale*”, is on the watershed between the River Lune and the River Eden. In Ravenstonedale we may take time to visit St Oswald’s Church which was built in the 18th Century and contains rows of box pews facing a central aisle in the collegiate style and has good example of a three-decker pulpit. Passing through the village we come to a path by Scandal Beck which we follow eastwards through fields to Bowber Head where we may see a collection of classic buses which are regularly used in the area. From Bowber Head we now continue to Lytheside Farm and go northwards to Ash Fell Edge at



the triangulation pillar No. SI0788 Windy Hill. Having reached the summit wall we go eastwards to the A685 which we cross to Tommy Road and follow this to a path north of Pudding Howe Hill and continue northwards to Christopher Brow Top and Moor End continuing by road northwards to Lane Head and back to Kirkby Stephen Station.



Scandal Beck from Smardale Gill Viaduct - Richard Watts

If you want to find out more about Kirkby Stephen and the surrounding area, then the following links may be helpful:

Northern Viaducts Trust

Smardale Gill Viaduct is in the care of the Northern Viaduct Trust

The website address is: www.nvt.org.uk

Kirkby Stephen East station

The station is now looked after by volunteers of the Stainmore Railway Company and further details can be found by using the following link to their website:

<https://www.kirkbystepheneast.co.uk/>

For a detailed history of the line take a look at Peter Walton's 'The Stainmore and Eden Valley Railways' published by the Oxford Publishing Company (OPC).

Kirkby Stephen:

For more information about Kirkby Stephen then use the following link to the Visit Cumbria website:

<https://www.visitcumbria.com/evnp/kirkby-stephen/>