

## Tales from DalesRail

### A Journey of a Lifetime Craig Ward

*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).*

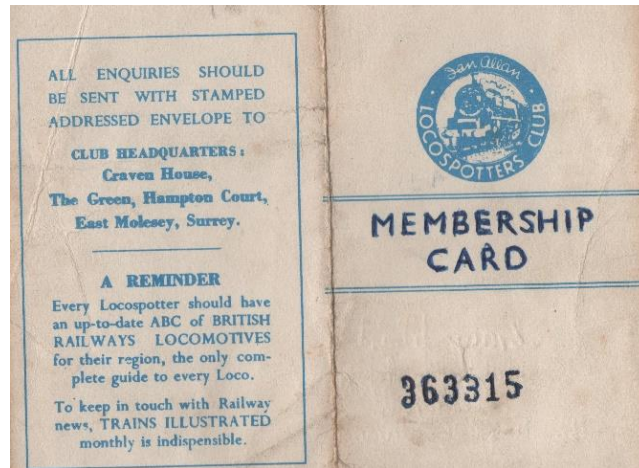
It's strange how one's life turns out. Is it a series of coincidences, luck, opportunities, chances or a combination of all of them? How did I become interested in and involved with DalesRail over the past forty-five years?

Growing up near Liverpool in the 1950's, I lived miles away from the Yorkshire Dales and Ribble Valley but at least once a month my parents and I would spend the weekend at my aunt and uncle's cottage at Copster Green near Blackburn. There, I spent hours playing in the surrounding fields and it was there that I became aware of the long, slow goods trains being pushed up Wilpshire Bank by banking engines.

In the early 60's my aunt and uncle moved to a house in Blackburn at the rear of which was the railway to Clitheroe. Back then it was a busy freight route though the passenger service had ceased. Heavy freight trains would pass quite frequently and I would put a ladder against the railway wall to get a better view of them. Lying in bed at night one could hear them struggle up the gradient – wheels slipping as they crawled past. On Sunday mornings a passenger train would sometimes pass which, I was told, was filled with ramblers going to Hellifield and beyond.

Whenever the name Hellifield was mentioned it always seemed to carry an air of mystery – some distant place where trains met then journey on to distant places, a gateway to far off country. Even today the mention of Hellifield conjures up an air of anticipation – the beginning of somewhere beyond, of adventure.

You've probably guessed by now that as a young boy, growing up in the 50's I had, like thousands of others back then, become interested in trains and railways. My primary school stood next to the Liverpool & Manchester Railway so trains of all types passed frequently. After school a friend and I would dash out to the nearest lineside location to collect train numbers and, like many boys of that era, was a member of Ian Allan's Locospotter's Club avidly collecting train numbers in his special books. Alas, my numbers' book has been lost but I still have my membership card, initial acceptance letter and badge to remind me of those happy days.



Locospotters Club – membership card

Even though I was interested in trains my family rarely travelled by them as we had a car. Rail journeys were few and far between and usually confined to long distance summer holiday journeys to the south coast but, even these stopped after a journey from Liverpool to Plymouth in old and dirty carriages, probably brought out for the summer. After this experience my parents gave up on the railways as did so many others as car travel increased.

The 1960's weren't a good time for the railways. Lines were closing steadily and the car was king. I gave up my loco spotting but not my interest in trains. My parents weren't walkers so we didn't explore the countryside on foot either. I discovered that pleasure at secondary school on trips out with enthusiastic teachers. In the mid-60's my family moved to a village near Chorley on the edge of the West Pennine Moors and it was there that my enjoyment of walking developed and, with teenage friends, went on trips to the Lake District or further afield.

At the age of eighteen I went off to teacher training college and continued my interest in walking and railways with friends met there albeit against a backdrop of further railway closures. The long summer holidays and access to more money gave me the opportunity to really explore the North West's rail network for the first time. Using the bargain 'Town Holiday Runabout' tickets priced at £2:5s:6d (£2.27) I travelled all the possible routes from Southport to Annan and Blackpool to Hexham as well as the Windermere steamers then part of British Rail. I discovered the scenic Cumbrian Coast route and Tyne Valley line and managed to travel from Penrith to Keswick before that line closed. Most important of all, I journeyed down the Settle-Carlisle Line from Carlisle to Skipton on one of the twice daily local stopping trains. It was on this trip that I discovered the landscapes of the Yorkshire Dales, an area I hadn't visited previously. I even passed through the 'mysterious' Hellifield but was unable to change there for Blackburn as the passenger service had ceased six years earlier. At Skipton I was able to catch a train to Colne, another route to be closed in a couple of years' time.



Town Holiday Runabout Ticket

However, I still hadn't managed a trip on the Ribble Valley Line and it seemed unlikely that I would. That experience was fulfilled, almost by chance, in 1970. British Rail decided to hold a Rail Week in Blackburn with exhibitions and promotions one of which was the opportunity to travel on a special train to Hellifield and back. Tickets were limited and I managed to secure one. The train was full of enthusiasts and curious locals taking advantage of this very rare event. For reasons best known to B.R. officials the passengers weren't allowed to alight at Hellifield, and we spent only a few minutes there before returning to Blackburn.



Special train to Hellifield



Special return ticket Blackburn to Hellifield

The 70's saw something of a revival on the railways and the locospotters of the 50's and 60's became campaigners and enthusiasts. Railway preservation societies, anti- closure groups and line supporters' groups sprang up all over the country. Walking groups and countryside campaigners flourished. Even enterprising rail managers caught the mood and promoted Merrymaker Excursions and Mystery Trips which became very popular. It was out of this era, in 1975, that two local initiatives were born – DalesRail and Rail Ramblers. Both were promoted by people who were interested in combining rail travel and walking in the countryside. Back then 'green' was just a colour.

For me it was dream come true. Now I could enjoy three interests in one – travel, trains and walking. I travelled on the first DalesRail service and quite a few more in following years including the first train to stop at the reopened Clitheroe Station in 1978. One of the most memorable DalesRail trips I can recall was towards the end of the season in the late 1970's on a beautiful, warm day. Our party, led Pat and Frank Parrott, alighted at Garsdale and walked via High Dyke and over the fell to Cotterdale returning via Wensleydale to enjoy a drink or two at the Moorcock Inn at the end. It was dark when we walked the mile up the road to the station. The evening was balmy and calm and a large harvest moon shone down on us from above Bubble Hill. The station and surrounding countryside were in total darkness save for a Tilley Lamp provided by a National Park warden who had arrived in his Land Rover. Eventually, out of the darkness, the train carriage lights could be seen as it emerged from Moorcock Tunnel some distance away and came towards us over Dandry Mire Viaduct – a rather atmospheric moment.



DalesRail train arriving at Hellifield in the 1980's



During the 70's and 80's most of my rail and walking trips were on the Rail Rambler excursions visiting walking areas as far apart as Swansea and Stirling, Edinburgh and Ely. These Saturday excursions grew in number and popularity. In the mid 80's I was asked to become a walks' leader and committee member and, as a result, became ever more involved in organising excursion and guided walks' programmes. Every year a couple of Rail Rambler excursions would visit the stations on the Settle-Carlisle Line. On one very snowy and cold weekday I travelled up to Appleby by train to recce a walk for a forthcoming excursion. Many Dales' roads had been blocked but the trains were still running as normal. This was quite ironic as, at the end of my recce, I managed to sit in on a public meeting being held to hear objections against the closure of the Settle-Carlisle Line. The meeting had started late that morning because those organising it, and many attendees, had travelled there with difficulty by car.

Many of those campaigning against closure of the Settle-Carlisle and Ribble Valley lines were walkers and users of DalesRail. In the end the campaign was successful and both lines remained open. DalesRail would continue.



Ribblehead station in the 1980s

Alas, around the same time, 1989/90, British Rail ran out of suitable rolling stock and, sadly, our Rail Rambler excursions ceased to run. But, as the saying goes, 'As one (train) door closes another door opens'. At this time the Yorkshire Dales National Park, who provided the leaders for DalesRail guided walks, decided to withdraw from their support for them. Lancashire County Council asked our Lancashire Rail Rambler Committee if they would step in and organise and lead the guided walks. So, from 1990 to the present time we have continued to do so.

I consider myself extremely fortunate to have enjoyed two interests – railways and walking which have come together perfectly in DalesRail. I have met many interesting people and made good friends brought together to enjoy what I call the 'fellowship of the fells'. Every summer Sunday morning I look forward to walking down to our local station, to chat to fellow DalesRaiers there and to journey through some of the most beautiful landscapes these islands have to offer before setting out to walk in the glorious countryside of the Dales and Eden Valley. Long may DalesRail continue.