

Tales from DalesRail

DalesRail – An Appreciation (part I)

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.

My first DalesRail experience

The first walk I did for DalesRail was in 1995, it was a lovely day and we had caught a bus connection from Kirkby Stephen which took us to the start of the walk at Langdon Beck in Teesdale. The walk was a portion of the Pennine Way from Langdon Beck to Appleby (about 16 miles) and was led by a man named Peter Walker. A wonderful walk in the most remote and beautiful countryside along the River Tees to Cauldron Snout and across the moors to High Cup Nick and on to Appleby.

How was this made possible? On the train was a bustle, people walking about the train organising the walks, counting the numbers; certain names were bandied about were Howard Hammersley, Bob Sanderson, Peter Walker, Harold Jones and several others, but who were they? I found out later that they were part of the organising committee of the Lancashire Rail Ramblers and it was this committee which organised the walks programme and whose members were the walk leaders.



The naming of unit 156464 'Lancashire DalesRail' with Howard Hammersley next to Matt Beaton from Northern Rail and many of the Lancashire Rail Ramblers team.

So how did this all come about? I decided to find out and this is the result of my research.

The Lancashire Rail Ramblers Committee

Arising from an initiative by British Rail in 1974, the Rail Ramblers Committee was formed to organise and lead walks from British Rail excursion trains.

The Committee's objective of promoting walks using public transport continues with its own programme of walks on Saturdays throughout the year. The Committee also organise and lead walks from the Lancashire DalesRail service operated by Northern (and before that Northern Rail and First North Western) and organise and lead walks for the Clitheroe Line and East Lancashire Line Community Rail Partnerships. Some walks are also organised and led from the Ribble Valley Rambler service operated by Northern between September and May each year.

The DalesRail connection

The Settle – Carlisle railway was constructed between 1869 and 1875 to carry traffic from the Midlands and West Riding of Yorkshire to Scotland. The line was constructed through some of the finest fell-walking area in what is now the Yorkshire Dales National Park (YDNP).

The Yorkshire Dales National Park

The YDNP consists of 680 square miles of the central Pennines and includes much of the finest limestone scenery in the British Isles, with one of the most extensive areas of underground potholes and caves in Europe. Much of the area is of geological or botanical interest.

The origins of DalesRail

The following is an extract from DalesRail – Settle Carlisle Line, a guide to the scenic rail journey between Leeds and Carlisle. It was published by the YDNP Committee in 1976.

“Dales Rail is a unique co-operation between British Railways, the National Bus Company, Cumbria County and Eden District Councils and the YDNP Committee who operate the project, with the support of the Countryside Commission. The objective of the scheme is to restore local passenger services from certain stations on selected weekends during the summer months, and to use such services as the basis of an integrated bus-rail service for the benefit of both visitors and local people. In addition, certain interpretative services, in the form of guided walks, are provided by the National Park Warden Service.

Dales Rail

Commenced in 1975, with a service between Leeds and Appleby, calling at the following stations which had been restored for 'occasional use between Settle and Appleby. These were Horton in Ribblesdale, Ribblesdale (southbound platform only), Dent, Garsdale and Kirkby Stephen. A special linking bus was operated to and from Hawes and Sedburgh to Garsdale, which was extended to Dent village and to Keld in Swaledale on Sundays.

In 1976 it is planned to open three more stations in the Eden valley – Langwathby, Lazonby & Kirkoswald and Armathwaite and to operate the Saturday trains into and out of Carlisle, thus providing a much better service for local shoppers from the Dales and Cumbria, as well as being able to bring Carlisle people into the YDNP.

The purpose of the service is to provide fast, congestion free transport at a reasonable price into and out of the YDNP, both for the benefit of visitors who do not have access to a car, or who can be encouraged to make use of the free park and ride facility at certain stations rather than the often congested road system of the National Park. The service also restores an essential link for local Dales people, who can now make regular visits or a shopping trips to west Yorkshire or Cumbria from their local station.

On Sundays, the guided walks help the visitor to understand and appreciate the magnificent countryside of the Yorkshire Dales.

Local stopping passenger services ceased in May 1970, and this has meant that for a very large area of the Pennines and Eden valley, the local community has had virtually no public transport services, or bus services which are so delayed along tortuous roads that long journeys are impossible. Equally, much of the finest fell-walking area of the YDNP has been inaccessible to the many people in cities without their own car, at a very time when traffic congestion has become an increasing problem in the southern half of the National Park. It has been the intention of the National Park Committee to try and partially restore this local service through its Dales Rail project”.

The Lancashire Service

The first recorded DalesRail trip from Lancashire was on Saturday 13th September 1975 under the heading ‘Lancashire goes by rail to the Dales’ from Blackburn, Colne, Nelson, Burnley and Accrington calling at Hellifield, Settle, Horton in Ribblesdale, Dent, Garsdale, Kirkby Stephen and Appleby. A programme of walks led by an experienced National Park guide was provided.

Following a very good response to the one train from East Lancashire which operated in 1975, it was decided to operate two Lancashire trains during 1976, one from Preston and Colne, the other from Manchester.



10th May 2010 – celebrating the naming of 156 464 Lancashire DalesRail at Clitheroe Station with Howard Hammersley (left) and Matt Beeton (right)

From 1978 the Lancashire trains called at Clitheroe station, especially re-opened to accommodate DalesRail services. The restoration of simple platforms was commissioned by Ribble Valley District Council at a total cost of £2,800, for which a 50% grant was made cby the Countryside Commission and additional support provided by Lancashire County Council and Clitheroe Town Council.

[To be continued]