

Tales from DalesRail

Great walks from Garsdale – Garsdale Head

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.

A walk around Garsdale Head

Map: Ordnance Survey Explorer OL`19 – Howgill Fells & Upper Eden Valley

Garsdale is probably the most remote station on the line. Set in wild country where Garsdale has its junction with Wensleydale, there are fine views to the surrounding hills of Grisedale Pike, Swarth Fell, Wild Boar fell, Abbotside Common (Lunds Fell and Sails) and Mallerstang Edge can just be seen to the north. If as I do you like remote countryside with plenty of footpaths, lovely views, wild flowers and interesting history then this is the place for you,

A popular walk from Garsdale Station is over the High Way to Kirkby Stephen (commonly called Lady Anne's Walk because of its association with Lady Anne Clifford). To get to the High Way now, walkers most often use the Pennine Bridleway via Dandrymire Viaduct, Moorcock Inn and Cobbles Plantation to join the High Way at Johnston Gill. Before the Pennine Bridleway was laid down there were several route options which walkers would use to get to the High Way and some of these would pass through the old farm house of Shaws, this was a Youth Hostel until fairly recent times but is now in private ownership.

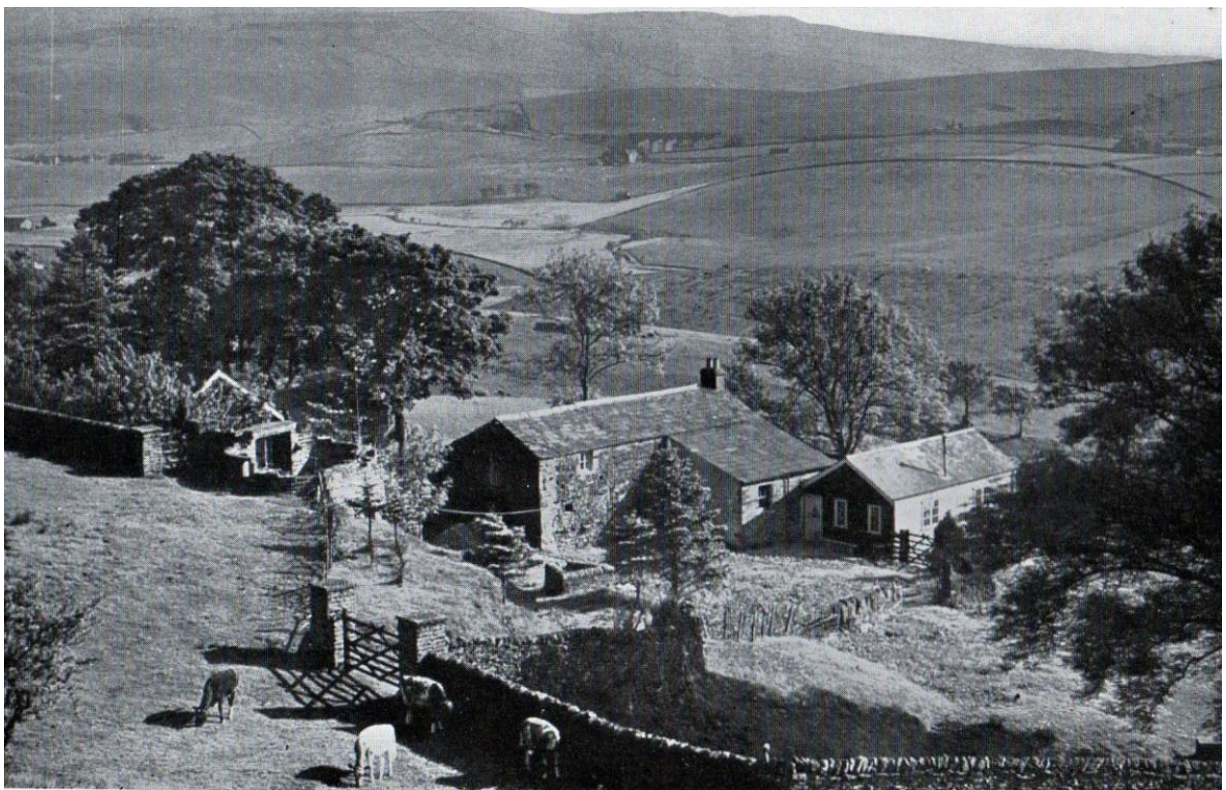
Here is an extract of an article from The Youth Hostel Story:

In a 1949 "Ruksack" article Margery Price describes her first visit to the Garsdale Youth Hostel, a farmhouse on the side of Lunds Fell. "It was two years since a hostel had been opened in West Riding. Then, one day in August, a letter came, bearing an imprint of a gypsy girl in one corner and the magical address of Shaws, Lunds, Sedbergh, in the other. It offered a farmhouse for sale, and the description of it sent me hunting for my beloved O.S. one-inch No. 20, which covers most of the county I love best in England. There it was, on the fellside a mile north of the Moorcock Inn, off the Kirkby Stephen road leading to the magnificent Mallerstang Valley.

I rang up the chairman, who sounded as thrilled as I was, and a couple of days later, I took my bike on the 11 o'clock "Scotsman", got the little local train at Hellifield, and made for the back of beyond which is Garsdale. Past the Three Peaks, over the Ribbleshead Viaduct, through Blea Moor Tunnel, and then I went and stood in the corridor, for there one can look down into Dentdale and Garsdale, dreaming in the Pennines.

There was mist on the fell-tops and the scent of hay in the valleys; bracken sprouting damply in the gullies, and the stone walls running up the hillsides to the rough pastures above; the countryfolk coming and going about their everyday business, unmindful of tourists and the like. It is on days like this, even more than in sunshine, that the dale country turns something in the heart of me, and I would not change if for any other.

At Garsdale I unloaded the bike and rode to the ornamental drive leading to Shaws ... As I went round the property with the owner, I became completely fascinated ... Like Hole Bottom at Pately Bridge it was a place that simply cried out to be made a Youth Hostel. Ure Head lay behind it, Swarth Fell and Wild Boar Fell ringed it in front, and in clear weather, Whernside, my beloved of the Three Peaks, peeped over the Garsdale hills ... In due course, the usual formalities were set in motion for Shaws, with its unique beauty, its haunting associations, set in the austere majesty of the Upper Yoredale fells, to become west Riding's."



Shaws as it was in 1949

If we look at the picture above, a keen eye will spot the Lunds Viaduct on the Settle Carlisle railway directly above the farmhouse. The Moorcock Inn can just be seen on a level with and to the left of the top of the group of trees on the left of the farmhouse.

A pleasant day can be spent exploring the paths around Garsdale Head without too much effort, starting from Garsdale Station and at the end a pause for refreshment at the Moorcock Inn before returning to the station and the train home. For the walk the Moorcock to Garsdale Station allow 30 minutes.

Here is a walk 8.5 miles; taken slowly to absorb the scenery and history this will be about 5.5 hours station to station leaving ample time for refreshments at the Moorcock Inn.

From Garsdale Station we go west to Garsdale Head and take the road east. At East Mud Becks we take the footpath opposite continuing north across Garsdale Low Moor and Cock Lakes to Grisedale Crossing. Crossing the railway, we continue to Blades Footbridge and north to Lunds Chapel at Beck Side. Now going east, we pass the old farmhouse of Shaws and join the High Way at Calf Moss. Long ago the High Way was a busy thoroughfare with drovers, packmen, horse dealers, farmers all journeying along.



The High Way at High Dyke (John Barnes)

The Scots came along the High Way as raiders, Lady Anne Clifford came this way with a retinue of several hundred strong, and Mary Queen of Scots also came this way to Bolton Castle with her retinue. We now go south to high Dyke (once called the Drovers Inn and was the favourite haunt of the highway man Swift Nick Nevison) and continue to Cotter End. We drop down to thwaite Bridge House and take the path westwards via Holmesett Scar to Yore House (Yore was the old name for the River Ure hence in some old books you may come across Yoredale and wonder where it is as I did – it is now Wensleydale), across the River Ure at Ure Force and so the Moorcock Inn for refreshment.



Yore Bridge - Yore being the old name for the River Ure today (John Barnes)