

Tales from DalesRail

A great walk from Hellifield

By John Barnes (& Jessica Lofthouse)

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.

Maps:

Ordnance Survey Explorer OL41 – Forest of Bowland and Ribblesdale

Ordnance Survey Explorer OL2 – Yorkshire Dales Southern & Western areas.

Hellifield is the first port of call on the Leeds – Carlisle railway for the Lancashire DalesRail service. In days gone by Hellifield existed for cattle and cattle dealers as well as for trains and railway workers and is much older than a first glance would indicate.

This is how Jessica Lofthouse described the countryside and places around Hellifield (edited):

John Ogilby in his map shows the way to Settle as crossing a moor. No road could be less like a moor than the modern highway, but the old coach road from Town Head at Long Preston climbed to the wild heights of Hunter Bark and dropped even more steeply into Settle. It is quite the best pedestrian way. I find it irresistible. I forgot I had intended to take the train to Settle. A green grass-grown way it is, open to the flax-coloured bents and miles of heather covered fells. The Craven old way of the Romans, the invading route of Angles and Danes penetrating from the Aire Gap, the drove road of shepherds and cattle men from Scotland, the only coach road for centuries, and still used by countryfolk to avoid tolls long after the lower turnpike road was made. Up on the tops, over a thousand feet up, the prospect is vast. Pendle, Bowland, the wide flat dale with the Ribble serpentine there, so flat a basin that it is easy to see it as an arm of the sea (a complete whale skeleton was dug up in the low land once) and beyond, the villages of Wigglesworth and Rathmell backed by the moors around Whelpstone Crag.

These two are quiet little spots. When we pass through either village, we carry away nothing remarkable, only the impression of pleasant homes set in a pleasant pastoral scene. Above the villages are old stone-built farms, and, if one knew where to search, there are traces of the homes and the burial places of our Celtic forefathers. It is a good landscape to gaze upon, smooth and green to the west, but it is northward that the most inspiring country lies. One can never breast the last rise of the old track on Hunter Bark and catch the first glimpse of the Attermire rocks and ramparts of the Craven fault without feeling uplifted and heartened.

Can you place Bend Cottage on the map? It is excusable if you cannot for it is only one of the many delightful groups of farms and cottages along the roadside as we travel the West Pennine ways north along Ribblesdale. This cluster of typical Craven buildings stands at the meeting of roads from Hellifield, Gisburn and Wigglesworth. The buildings seem to be an integral part of the landscape, the walls grow out of the soil, the dwellings seem to have been there for ever. They must have looked much the same in the 18th century travellers who met and gossiped here after their journey from the Fells of Bowland and markets of Settle or Gisburn or Clitheroe. And talk was then, as now, of lambs and sheep, and the weather, of cattle and fat stock and the weather, of seedtime and hay time and harvest and the weather. The scenery is changeless too and I know the pattern of the months on the gardens, the crofts and the hedgerows – February's snowdrops, March with the first primroses down the lane to Cow Bridge and curlews calling along the Ribble only a mile away, April full of the lambs bleating – a pattern constant through the summer months and on to autumn and the winter's raging.

There is nothing to hold us at Bend Gate; we go north to Hellifield, Long Preston and Settle, or west to the nearest Ribble bridge. Cow Bridge is a great place for anglers, a tranquil stretch of the river. A lane climbs on to Wigglesworth village. Over the pastures on the right of it, which were once the park of a great Craven family called Hammerton, is Wigglesworth Hall, now a farm but having several signs of richer days. The Hammertons fell on bad days following the risings in the 16th century, after which the hall was too shorn of former dignity. There is a splendid tithe barn near the farm, but to see it you must leave the road – take a path from the Cow Bridge road or a track from the road to Giggleswick north of the village”.

The following is a 12-mile walk from Hellifield to Settle also described by Jessica Lofthouse:

Any seasoned walker will tell you that the most difficult stage in path finding is the first half mile from the starting point, but once you have found Hellifield church you are safe. Our road is immediately opposite. We cross the railway line and after half a mile of lane we take the grass track on the left, uphill to Newton Moor, first over a bare slope, and then turning left along the walled-in ‘Langer Lane’. There are many such lanes marked on the Craven hills. Most of them are of great age, centuries old tracks dating from the pack-horse days and earlier. Bookilber Barn is surrounded by the most prolific warrens of my experience the land around is just wick with rabbits. Bookill Gill Beck runs alongside for a while until we come to Wild Share and see ahead an oasis of green trees above the desert moorland. Here Scaleber Beck, after an uneventful infancy in Stockdale suddenly plunges from bare treeless heights into a narrow, deeply wooded limestone gill and gives Craven one of its most bewitching waterfalls.



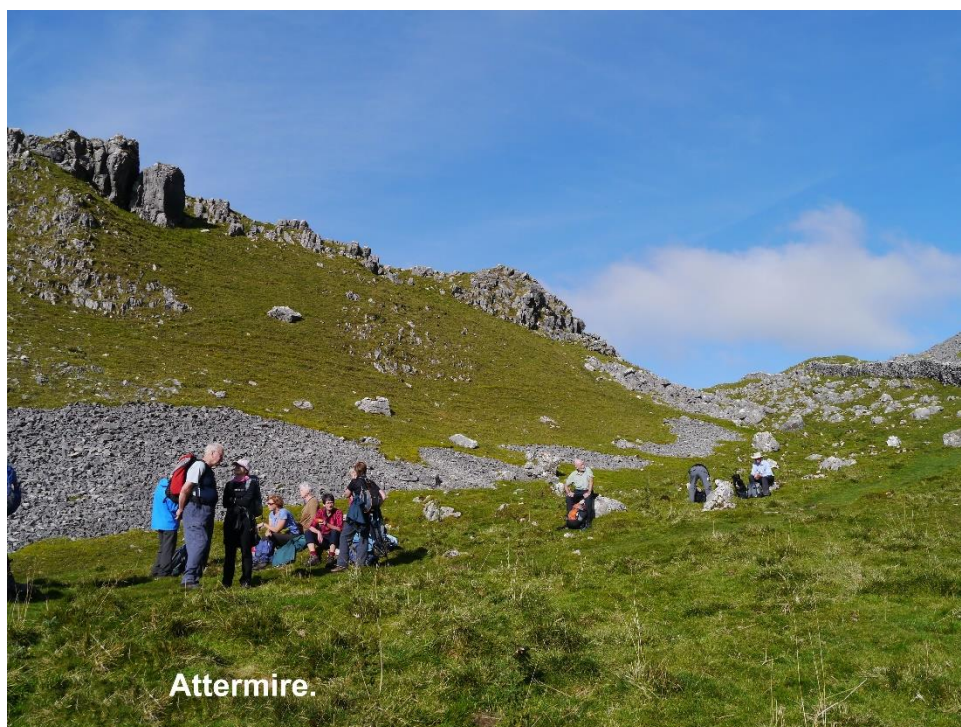
Scaleber Force (John Barnes)

Craven scenery is always dramatic because it is so unexpected. You will want to linger here. Many a blue summer afternoon I have lazed away at Scaleber, in unrepentant idleness. Half a mile ahead we meet the Stockdale track which climbs from Settle, in the valley a mile westward, to Malham, about four miles to the east. The indicates a Roman camp, now a square of green turf, of importance in those stormy days when Rome kept an eye on the Britons lurking on the hills, and cohorts marched on over Mastiles Moor into Wharfedale. Look around you, ahead where the grey limestone cliffs rise like a barrier, and contrast this with the bare placid fells to the south. The grey wall stretches from Lonsdale

to Wharfedale, 40 miles long. And eons ago that limestone was laid down at the bottom of a great sea. Ingleborough and Penyghent, over 200 feet high, Malham Cove, Goredale Scar, were all sea-bottom rocks. Ages ago was a colossal crack in the Earth's crust and a terrific thrust from below pushed the underlying limestone far above the rest. You can read more of it under the heading of 'The Craven Fault' and be well rewarded by studying the geological survey map side by side with your Ordnance Survey sheet of the Craven district.

Now we enter a playground of giants, hemmed in by high cliffs, with dark caves like unwinking eyes among the rocks. You will see Attermire Scar a desolate valley walled in by rocks, strewn with strange, shaped boulders broken away from the scars long ago. As children we christened it the Valley of the Dead. I can think of no fitter name now. Only the cawing of black crows disturbs the strange silence.

Of all the caves in Attermire, Victoria Cave is the most accessible, a yawning mouth above a rock-strewn slope. You can potter about among the fallen rocks of the entrance and look out upon a scene very little different from the one which greeted the eyes of its prehistoric tenants or those of the Britons who hid here from the conquering Romans. Archaeologists have worked here, uncovering layer by layer the cave floor, finding first Roman coins and bronze rings, then lower, prehistoric flint knives and remains of reindeer and deer. Below these finds they came to clay, left by glaciers in the days when our country was under ice, and in the last and lowest bed there were the bones of elephants, rhinoceros and animals who roamed at will from the Continent when the North Sea was dry land.



Attermire Scar (John Barnes)

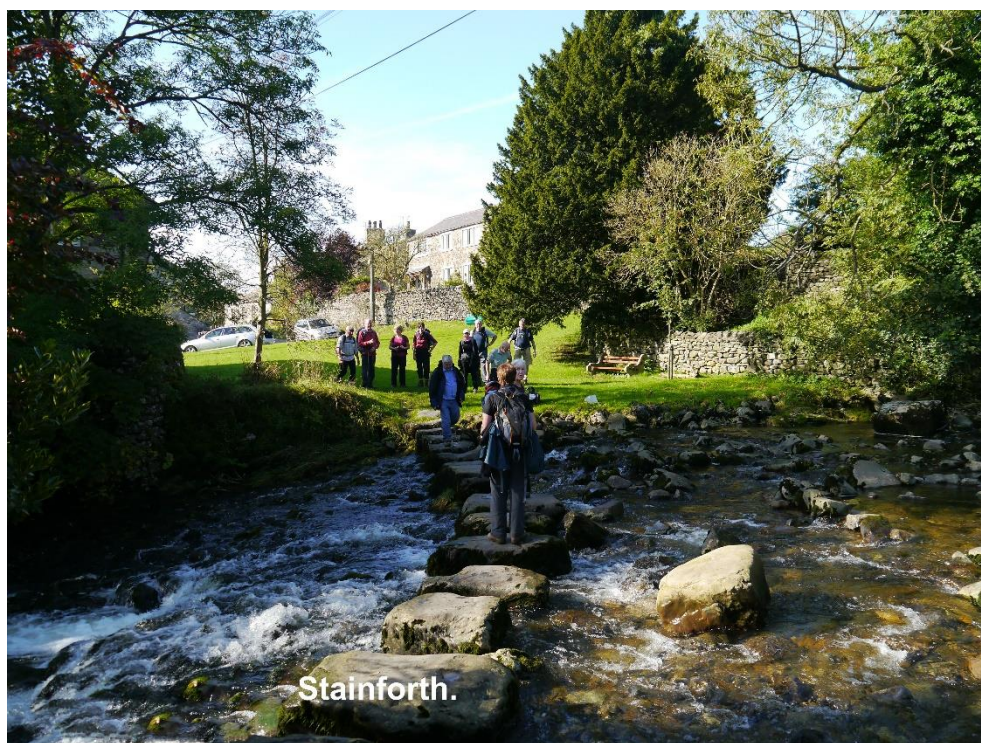
Attermire Scar is on our right all the way to the Langcliffe - Malham road. Cross over to the pastures where at Winskill Stones the limestone outcrops have been weathered into smooth slate with ferny fissures, where heartsease 'wild pansies' flutter in late spring, and wild thyme weaves a carpet and perfumes the summer air. We pass a large glacial erratic boulder deposited here in the last Ice Age 12,000 – 13,000 years ago, known as Samson's Toe, it is named from being shaped like a giant toe and according to legend Samson lost his footing when jumping across from Langcliffe Scar to Ribblesdale breaking off his toe in the attempt.

From Upper Winskill, a path winds down the precipitous scar to Stainforth but we continue due north until we see below us the tree filled gorge where the Catrigg Beck and Cowside Beck combine and together plunge from the uplands 80 feet into the green depths. Damp, moss covered steps descend into the gill and the foot of the force. It is always chilly and dim down here, but when a ray of sunshine filters through the high roof of branches and finds the veil of falling water, then it is a faery place. You can climb back to the lane above and descend that way to Stainforth, but I always prefer to cross the stepping stones by the pool below the fall and follow the right bank of the beck as it cascades to valley level. Sometimes, with a crashing of branches, I have been startled to see a grey heron fly upwards from a pool, to perch on the topmost branch of a tall larch tree.

Stainforth is one of the Pennine hamlets which claim one's affection from the start. Do you remember Wordsworth's 'Peter Bell'?

*"And he had trudged through Yorkshire Dales
Among the rocks and winding scars
Where deep and low the hamlets lie
Beneath their little patch of sky
And little lots of stars."*

Stainforth is like that. Its clustering grey cottages lie on each side of the beck, about a green; tall trees dispose themselves as a thick screen about, and a limestone precipice forms a protection on the east.



Stainforth (John Barnes)

The Ribble is nearby, but those who know only the smooth reaches of Salmsbury and Sale Wheel will not recognise the stripling river here, chattering around the boulders, bridged by a lovely old grey medieval arch. On both sides are larch woods, primrose banks and hazel copses. You will hear a thundering sound and be drawn to the banks, where the Ribble rushes over a succession of steps into an abysmal pool. The stretches of the Ribble about Stainforth Force are always a delight, and beauty goes with us all the way along the banks to Stackhouse, Giggleswick, and the bridge at Settle a mile away.

Settle is a grey town with character and individuality. The market square, with the Shambles, the 'Naked Man' sign outside a house which was formerly an inn, and old buildings, is shadowed by the Castleberg, a crag like those crowned by the castles of Rhineland.

You may wish to tram on to Long Preston by a hilly track over Hunter Bark and so to Hellifield, about six miles in all, but for the less energetic, to whom twelve miles is a satisfactory day's tramp, the train awaits at Settle.

Here is another walk from Hellifield Station to Settle – 13 miles moderate:

From Hellifield station we go south by road to the A65(T) and turn right to a footpath which we follow northwards to Little Newton continuing northwards along Newton Gill to water fall Rock. We now cross Newton Moor to join a footpath which takes us eastwards to Langber Lane. If triangulation pillars are of interest, we may make a diversion to Newton Top Moor to visit the Ordnance Survey pillar No 5192 (SD858587). We turn north westwards along Langber Lane and continue, passing Bookilber Barn, to Scaleber Bridge. After passing Bookil Gill beck there is a plantation and nature reserve which is accessible and may add interest.

At Scaleber Bridge we come to Scaleber Force, an impressive sight after rainfall, the descent to river level below the force is rather tricky. At Scaleber Bridge we continue northwards along High Hill Lane and at Stockdale lane turn right along Stockdale Lane and follow the footpath by Sugar Loaf Hill on to Attermire Scar continuing along the scars past Victoria Cave to the Pennine Bridleway. We now take a footpath north to the Langcliffe-Henside road which we cross and follow the track across Winskill Stones to Higher Winskill. Crossing Winskill Stones we pass a large glacial erratic boulder deposited here in the last Ice age 12,000 to 13,000 years ago, known as Samsons Toe. It is named from being shaped like a giant toe and according to legend Samson lost his footing when jumping across Langcliffe Scar to Ribblesdale breaking off his toe in the attempt. From Higher Winskill we may take time to visit the nature reserve at Lower Winskill to see the variety of wildflowers and take in the views of Ribblesdale from above Stainforth Scar.



Winskill – Samson's Toe (John Barnes)

We now continue north to Catrigg Force and after visiting the force take the track westwards to join the Ribble way at Stainforth. From Stainforth we follow the Ribble Way to Stainforth Force, a popular beauty spot at all times of the year – October is a good time to watch the salmon negotiating the waterfalls. We now follow the River Ribble southwards to Stackhouse and cross the river to Langcliffe High Mill. Langcliffe High Mill is now a paper mill but was built in 1784 – 1794 as a cotton spinning mill. In the early 1800s it was enlarged and cotton weaving commenced in the 1820s. It was made a grade II listed building in 1977. Continuing eastwards we cross the Settle – Carlisle Railway by the oldest footbridge on the line and enter Langcliffe at Langcliffe Hall. Turning southwards we take the minor road via Barrel Sykes and enter Settle at Castleberg Plantation and Constitution Hill.

This walk may be shortened to 8 miles moderately easy as follows:

Following the above walk to Attermire Scar we turn west around High Hill towards Blue Crag and drop down to Settle via Castleberg Plantation and Constitution Hill.



Catrigg Foss (John Barnes)