

Tales from DalesRail DalesRail – then and now Pat Parrott

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.crl@gmail.com.

This tales from DalesRail was first written in 2009.

When I was asked to write an article for DalesRailer about the changes that had taken place since its inception in the late 20th century, I agreed. Confident that here was a subject which would write itself. However, when I sat down to the task, I was stuck for words. “Well”, I thought, “there aren't any! At least not many”. It was then I realised the Yorkshire Dales National Park (YDNP), had in fact got it right in the first place, for them, as for us, it is the nature of the countryside itself which has shaped the programme, and continues to do so now.

Let us look at the obvious routes, the ‘bread and butter’ of the scheme. These routes which stand out as the backbone of the programme from north to south. What more obvious than a walk from Armathwaite up to Wetheral, and get a train back to Carlisle, or walk down to Lazonby – ideal moderate terrain. From Lazonby down to Langwathby – the patron saint of walk planners must have put Lacy's Caves, Long Meg and her daughters and Little Salkeld to be joined.

Appleby! It has not been the skill of the planners to make two moderate walks up to Dufton via the Gorge, and down to Rutter Force and back along the banks of the River Eden. Longer variations are walked but the basic is there for the taking.



Hoff Beck and Rutter Falls August 2020 (Richard Watts)

Kirkby Stephen offers Nine Standards Rigg and Smardale Nature Reserve (it was necessary in the early days to get permission to walk this). Then, it must have been some celestial power overseeing the country from Garsdale, with three perennials – Lady Anne Clifford’s (moderate), Wild Boar Fell via Swarth (moderate/strenuous) and Mallerstang Edge (strenuous).



Kirkby Stephen Cloisters (Richard Watts)

Dent! There has always been a bus to Dent. From the earliest days, the planners had the problem of numbers on buses – how many people needed to be brought back from Dent in the evening? How many people, not on the guided walks were going to turn up unexpectedly at Dent to be taken back to the station? It is not for nothing that leaders try to ascertain numbers before people have finalised their plans for the day.

Ribblehead! – historical and cultural heart of the Settle - Carlisle Line. No hard-core path to the Viaduct in the early years. So many routes here direct from the train, but very much now as it has always been. But from here the bus down to Wensleydale and Swaledale takes us into different terrain. The list of walks is endless. It is here that many of the ‘freelancers’ make their own routes, and from these people, the leaders and planners have learned a lot about what is possible, new and interesting - it’s why the leaders take such an interest in other people’s routes.



Ribbleshead Viaduct (John Barnes)

It is the use of buses that a little variation from the old YDNP routes has taken place. In the old days Keld Youth Hostel used to let parties in and allowed them to use their facilities to make tea and perhaps shelter whilst waiting for the bus. Much use was made of this facility, and in Dentdale of the same facility at Whernside Manor. Against this, Lancashire DalesRail has introduced us to Grassholme, Romalldkirk, the Teesdale Way et al, though there were always trips to include High Force, Low Force and Middleton in Teesdale.

Down to Horton, then onto Settle and the range and variety has always been limitless – always was and always will be. Recently, the Right to Roam legislation has put routes into the perspective of today's walk planners which were out of bounds, off limits, to the early pioneers. Today, these routes are mainly used by our 'freelancers' as they are often longer than a guided walk – even the strenuous ones are able to be attempted. East and West Baugh Fells and Lovely Seat could not be used.

The changes I started to look for are part of a natural development and no comparison is made or intended about competence, training or commitment of leaders between the early days and the present. We used to carry very heavy radios which seldom worked and were very cumbersome. Those early walkers were true pioneers, no mobile phones for them. No GPS, no SAT-NAV. We relied solely on our map and compass abilities, as most people still do. Walk leaders had to submit written reports on each walk, backmarkers were a luxury. Litigation was unheard of. Dent and Garsdale Stations were unlit, and we had to huddle in the dark getting what shelter we could. The sight of a lighted train appearing raised a cheer. The safety and comfort has been gained – the excitement lost.

I should draw these notes to a conclusion by saying that DalesRail is unique, always was, always will be! The walking routes mentioned are only a fraction of those available, but they are the core on which the programme is based. Give us two years of your time and your knowledge of northern England from Hellifield to Hadrian's Wall and Gretna Green, and from Fox's Pulpit and the Lune Viaduct to High Force, Langdon Beck and Barnard Castle will be imprinted forever on your mind. How lucky and how privileged we are to have been given the opportunity to be here!