

Tales from DalesRail

Dentdale: The Coal Road

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DalesRail is back but we very much hope that you will continue to 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

Dentdale is one of the remotest of the Yorkshire Dales so much so that it was never found by the invading Scots on their forays into England. The main reason for this was the fact that roads/tracks into and out of the Dale were few and those at the eastern end extremely steep. One of these - the Coal Road - gave access to Wensleydale for travelling salesmen and packhorse trains.



Dent station

As its name suggests it was also used to bring coal down from shallow coalpits which were located on the high fells above Dentdale and Garsdale. How the carters could control their horses and loaded carts on the twisting descent is testimony to their skill. Those who know the Coal Road are aware that the descent from Dent Station to Cowgill has a 1 in 3 gradient and even modern vehicle drivers find it a challenge.

The Coal Road also gives access to a once more important routeway - the Galloway Gate - which runs from the head of Wensleydale across the top of Dentdale and into Ribblesdale. In former times this was a busy drovers' road along which cattle from Galloway were driven to the markets of Yorkshire.

The opening of the Settle-Carlisle Railway had a major impact on the two roads. The coalpits ceased production as they couldn't compete with cheap coal brought in by rail and likewise cattle could be sent by rail in hours rather than weeks. However, deliveries by rail still had to descend the 1 in 3 gradient into Dentdale.

Today, the Coal Road is still used by DalesRailers to gain access to Dentdale and to reach the Galloway Gate. The latter route provides spectacular views down Dentdale, to the Lake District Fells and to Whernside and Wild Boar Fell. The Coal Road is also popular with cyclists who like the challenge of a 1 in 3 but walkers don't enjoy the climb back to Dent Station at the end of a long walk in the dale below.



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