

NEWSLETTER No 3

February 2008

Following last year's Newsletter we were surprised and delighted that so many of our benefactors responded with further donations, totalling over £1,400 before taking into account some £300 from Gift Aid. With responsibilities and potential liabilities such as ours we have to exercise careful financial prudence, so a windfall like that was very welcome. As a consequence, the trustees decided to make the Newsletter an annual informal report, not only to act as a heartfelt 'thank you' for your generosity but to keep you informed about what we are doing.

During 2007 several people asked what our next project will be, to which our reply was that looking after three large listed viaducts and other structures is plenty to be going on with. So for the present our policy is 'consolidation.' The work on Smardale Gill viaduct referred to last year was held up waiting for the contractor to start. In the end we found another, a local firm experienced in restoration work who was sub-contracted to make masonry repairs during the original rescue operation 15 years ago. He has erected some low scaffolding against one of the piers in order to replace a small area of cracked stonework, but unfortunately there is now another setback: we have to carry out a bat survey! Someone from English Nature, formerly the Environment Agency, saw the scaffolding and asked whether a bat survey had been made, as apparently bats, which are a protected species, like to hibernate in cracks in masonry. This was news to us, and it made no difference when we pointed out that no such request had been made when we restored Podgill and Merrygill viaducts with the help of environmental grants. So work has been stopped while an accredited bat expert takes a look. We hope it won't be too expensive and that by the time you read this we will have been able to resume.

Close to Smardale Gill there is a two-arched underbridge which we also own, called Drygill viaduct although, strictly speaking, with less than four arches it is a bridge. Built on the steep valley slope, it incorporates massively buttressed drystone retaining walls at each end on the lower side, which suggest that landslips were encountered when the railway was built. On inspection, the whole structure was found to be sound, needing only the removal of some weed growth on the deck and some saplings close to the arches.

On the Hartley-Stenkrith path some minor work is needed on Podgill and Merrygill viaducts, and of course routine maintenance of the path itself, such as cutting undergrowth and saplings, and drainage, continues under the eye of our vice-chairman Mike Sunderland. To meet the terms of our Countryside Commission grants we have to conserve the wild flowers, which means cutting the grass, including the steep sides of the cuttings. This would be difficult with a mower, so next summer we are paying a local farmer to graze his sheep on them at the appropriate time.

The steps down to our piece of woodland alongside Podgill viaduct have been completed, enabling the viaduct to be viewed from below. Two picnic tables have been installed, and all that remains is to spread soil over the ash ballast that was thrown down at some time in the past, ready for seeding with spring grass. Two overline bridges on the Podgill path have also been inspected and found to need some minor repairs and repointing on the parapets. A schedule of work priorities on this section has been prepared for the summer. We have also looked at three nearby culverts. One provided access between farmland on each side of the line, and the other two, which are smaller, take streams. All were in good condition.

Turning to miscellaneous matters, there have been no more developments regarding the proposed footpath on the old Kirkby Lonsdale-Sedbergh-Low Gill railway line which we reported on last year, but we continue to watch for any progress. Our trustee Glenys Lumley has been elected to Eden District Council, giving us a valuable voice in local government circles. Jonathan Miller, who lets us use his address as our registered office, has moved, so our registered address as a charity is now Low Dale Bank, Crosby Ravensworth, Penrith, Cumbria,

CA10 3JD. Peter Robinson has updated our website on www.nvt.org.uk. A new free TV channel on the internet devoted to countryside affairs, www.countrychannel.tv, carries a feature on the trust. In addition to our free brochure we have recently published a walking guide to our viaducts and footpaths. It is on sale at local tourist offices and other outlets. We are pleased to enclose a copy with this Newsletter and we hope you will enjoy reading it.

Finally, we are very mindful of and grateful for your past generosity. While specifically this is a news letter and not a begging one, contributions towards our maintenance costs are always much appreciated. May I therefore close by referring to the Gift: Aid form below? Thank you again for your continued interest and support.

Gordon Biddle, Chairman.

Kendal, Cumbria.

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