

NORTHERN VIADUCT TRUST

NEWSLETTER 2007

It is twelve months since we issued a Newsletter telling our benefactors about our progress, and as a number of things have happened since then now is an opportune time to tell you about our continuing activities.

Our last Newsletter mentioned that we had won a National Railway Heritage Award for our Hartley-Stenkrieth footpath and cycleway project, including Podgill and Merrygill viaducts, for which our chairman Michael Sewell and Secretary Michael Pettigrew attended a presentation in London where they received an inscribed plaque. In May, the noted mountaineer and environmentalist Sir Chris Bonington unveiled it for us on a Merrygill parapet, after which we all repaired to the newly restored station at Kirkby Stephen where he did the same for our friends the Settle & Carlisle Railway Trust who had won a similar award. Sir Chris borrowed Mike Sunderland's bicycle for a press photograph at Merrygill, and the sun shone beautifully. Afterwards we decided to have a replica plaque made to match it on Podgill.

Since then we have completed a number of tidying up jobs, and of course there is the ever-present maintenance work. At this time a path and steps are being constructed down the embankment alongside Podgill viaduct, where we own a small area of woodland bequeathed to us by the railway. This will enable visitors to view the viaduct properly, including the underside where they will be able to see how it was widened to take two tracks instead of the original single line.

You will remember that the massive Smardale Gill viaduct, 14 arches 90 feet high, was the first to be restored. During the summer we had it inspected free of charge by David Hanson, a retired Chartered Civil Engineer who worked for British Rail, and he gave it a clean bill of health subject to some minor repointing and clearance of growth in one or two arches. This work is now in hand, with the help of a contractor who is an expert abseiler. We have also instituted a system of annual inspections for all three viaducts and our bridges, using a checklist devised by David, with major inspections by a professional at five year intervals. We are most grateful to David for his work and advice.

Recently a group of people from Sedbergh proposed, that the old railway from Kirkby Lonsdale to Sedbergh and Low Gill might be made into a footpath, cycle way and equestrian route through highly scenic country. A feasibility study by Ove Arup and Partners was commissioned by Cumbria County Council and the Yorkshire Dales National Park. It was positive, although such a scheme essentially would be long-term as agreements would be required with landowners to whom the trackbed has been sold piecemeal over the years since it closed in 1967. Two fine viaducts still belong to the government organisation set up to handle redundant railway property, and a large and handsome iron skew bridge carries a gas pipeline. Although there will be difficulties, they are not insuperable. We have been asked if we can help by using our experience of obtaining grants and dealing with contractors, particularly in respect of the structures. We are cautiously supportive, although we have to ensure of course that we enter no financial commitments which might endanger our own work and reserves, and subject to that we have offered to help where we can. A meeting to test general feelings was held early in January, which was agreeable, and possible support from landowners and other local interests is now being investigated. Cumbria Tourist Board is keen to participate.

During the year our treasurer, Pat Barwell, retired and one of our trustees, Tim Bounds, has taken her place. We are grateful to Pat for the work she has put into keeping our finances in good order. Also, our chairman, Michael Sewell, decided that after ten years in office it was time for him to retire. Without his unstinting hard work and dedication the Trust would not be where it is today. He is one of the original four who set up the trust and campaigned for support, and it is to him that we owe so much. We are delighted that he is remaining a trustee, and Gordon Biddle has taken the chair in his place. Mike Sunderland remains vice-chairman and indefatigable project manager who so ably supervises work on the line. Without

his almost daily visits maintenance would be very much more difficult. Also in 2006 we have welcomed Glenys Lumley and Jonathan Miller as trustees. Glenys teaches in Kirkby Stephen and seems to know everybody - an invaluable attribute - while Jonathan is a chartered accountant and acts as our very able financial adviser.

As a consequence of these changes, the trust is now made up as follows.

Chairman	Gordon Biddle
Vice-chairman	Mike Sunderland
Hon Secretary	Michael Pettigrew
Hon Treasurer	Tim Bounds
Trustees	Michael Sewell, Peter Robinson, Glenys Lumley, Jonathan Miller.
Member	Bill Willink (former trustee)

Hon Consulting Engineer David Hanson
Hon Environmental Adviser Margaret Albon (Cumbria Wildlife Trust)

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We hope that you will enjoy walks to the viaducts and along the Hartley - Stenkrith footpath outside Kirkby Stephen. The local Tourist Information Offices have our free brochure and there are particularly fine walks to Smardale Gill viaduct from Newbiggin-on-Lune and Ravenstonedale.