

News & Views

February 2021

This month has been freezing and snowy, warm and sunny – welcome to February's edition of News&Views

IMAGES THAT WE LOVE



Steve Pendrill – Views of the Upper Eden Valley



Smardale Gill Viaduct by Steve Pendrill



The viaduct walk at Smardale by Diana Fothergill – impressive icicles



Smardale Gill Viaduct – winter sun - Feb 2021 by Diana Fothergill



Views in Smardale – walking the viaduct by Diana Fothergill

MY FAVOURITE WALK

We live in a glorious part of the country with the most glorious walks on our doorstep.

We love walking – and love welcoming visitors to our beautiful Cumbria.

All Walkers are Welcome <http://www.walkeden.org/>.

Our beautiful county is not just for adventurers but for everyone.



Kirkby Stephen
Walkers are Welcome

#leavenotrace of your visit #RespectProtectEnjoy.

Each month we will ask one of our friends to tell us about their favourite local walk.

This month the walk is recommended by Oliver Cardus. A Walk To Merrygill Through the Eyes of a 10 Year Old. With help from, and our thanks to, Mum, Dad and Granddad.



WALKING IN LOCKDOWN

As we are not in school in the usual way, my days are a bit different from normal. We start with a Zoom meeting, the whole class and Mr Dolman, our teacher. He sets out our work for the day – Maths, English and so on. Also, our homework. My mum is my pretend T.A., and she is strict! For a break, we go out for a walk. This is my description of “The Viaduct Walk” from Stenkrith which is just a few metres from our house. It is just one of the routes we take, but is always different and interesting.



The information board has recently been renewed.

The first feature we see is the River Eden from the Millennium Bridge. This gives us a good view of the river Eden as it tumbles over the weird geological rock formations which have been left behind after the limestone rock caves collapsed thousands of years ago. Locally, they are called The Devil's Grinding Mill.

The river seems to be different every day, sometimes brown and angry and sometimes quite peaceful. It is only a few weeks ago that there were two salmon in the deep pool below the bridge – probably trying to get upstream to their spawning ground. I wonder if they made it? The Eden is a river famous for its clean, pure water, an example of our wonderful environment.

Over the bridge and round to the left, the path stretches out in front of us like a black snake (or white one if it has been snowing) between white frosty edges, or green ones when the snow has gone. It's easy to see quite a long way just now because the trees are all leafless and bare. The red squirrels can be seen here as well as deer in the fields and chattering birds flitting about – nature at work.

The Poets path meanders off the main walkway. I think there are 12 stones placed at intervals, each one with a verse to describe a month in the life of a farmer. The messages are quite hard to read, I think the stones are ready for a clean. The language is old fashioned too, but at least in English.



Podgill Viaduct is a great example of structural engineering – how a bridge capable of carrying hundreds of tonnes of railway engines and wagons full of coal from the north-eastern mines to our coal depot could survive intact and looking as strong as ever. There are more information boards to explain the history of the line. I saw some old relics of old railway bogies left abandoned. What happened, there?



Remains for a train crash at Smardale

It was suggested that I could count the stones in each arch and estimate the total weight in the bridge – a sneaky maths lesson, but all the details are displayed on the board!

As we make our way to Merrygill viaduct, we see farmers to the left at Hartley Castle and to the right towards Nateby, out feeding their sheep. They all have coloured behinds at this time of year, showing that they have been mated and they will be having lambs in the spring. Part of the farming cycle.

On one occasion, Merrygill was completely covered in ice. The snow had melted and then frozen in the cold air – weird British weather!



On the way home I could see how the path had been laid out as a railway. Kirkby Stephen has a long history as a railway town. Did you know that a hundred years ago, and more, it was possible to get an

early train from here to Darlington, transfer to the London express, have a good few hours in the capital (more geography) and get home in time for supper? My grandad told me that.

Wouldn't it be good to have a new line, even a narrow gauge one like L'al Ratty at Muncaster? It would be a good attraction, and the hard work has already been done.

What is supposed to be a walk (for physical exercise) turns out to be another excuse for 10 more lessons – but interesting ones, though.

Oliver Cardus Year 5 Kirkby Stephen Primary School

PLEASE SEND US YOUR PICTURES

Our favourite image of scenes, wildlife and flora taken on any Eden Viaducts' walks and around the Upper Eden valley will be posted on our Facebook and Instagram pages and tweeted and each month.

Please email high res jpeg images to office@edenviaducts.org.uk with your email address, phone number and credit line.

SMARDALE GILL VIADUCT – ON-GOING WORKS

We are on track with the work surveying, and planning for deck renovations to Smardale Gill Viaduct. We plan to appoint a contractor to undertake the resurfacing and weather proofing of the deck and apply for major funding for the resulting work required at the beginning of March.

The next priority will be to restore the stone of the viaduct and get rid of any unwanted vegetation.

We will know how much the total project estimated cost is in March and will embark on a crowd-funding campaign. We will need all your support and help to be able to do this.

Thank you to all of you who have donated so far – we can't tell you how thrilled we are with your response and generosity.

Please help us save Smardale Gill Viaduct and keep the footpaths open for future generations by making a donation on our website www.edenviaducts.org.uk

FEEDBANK FROM JANUARY'S VIDEO OF BELAH VIADUCT – OUR HISTORY

Last month we shared with you a video by Martin Zero about Belah Viaduct. [Videos - Eden Viaducts](#)
We received the following interesting and entertaining response from Maurice Hall – retired farmer from Kirkby Stephen:

In 1949 or 1950, when I was still pram-fast, my dad was one of the signalmen at Aisgill Summit on the (now) Settle - Carlisle line. A lonely outpost, but close to the main road between Hawes and Kirkby Stephen. At some point he was "offered" the job of becoming one of the three signallers on Belah Viaduct. There was a cottage, one of two, "tied" to the position - as was the case at Aisgill. I think he was keen, but when he took Mother (and me, I guess) he had to change his mind. My mother had no intention of living THAT far out! His next posting was at Otley in W. Riding of Yorks.

In 1988, my wife and I bought Stowgill Farm, Kaber - just a little further up the hill from Belah Viaduct. When my parents came to visit for the first time, they couldn't believe that we had chosen to live in such a far-out place, especially with teenage daughters still to finish their schooling!) On the farm were several structures such as barns and bridges which had massive timbers as their main supports. I asked the outgoing farmer about them. He said that all the local farms had been offered such timbers at low or no cost in 1963/4 when the viaduct was demolished! On condition that they were removed straight away.

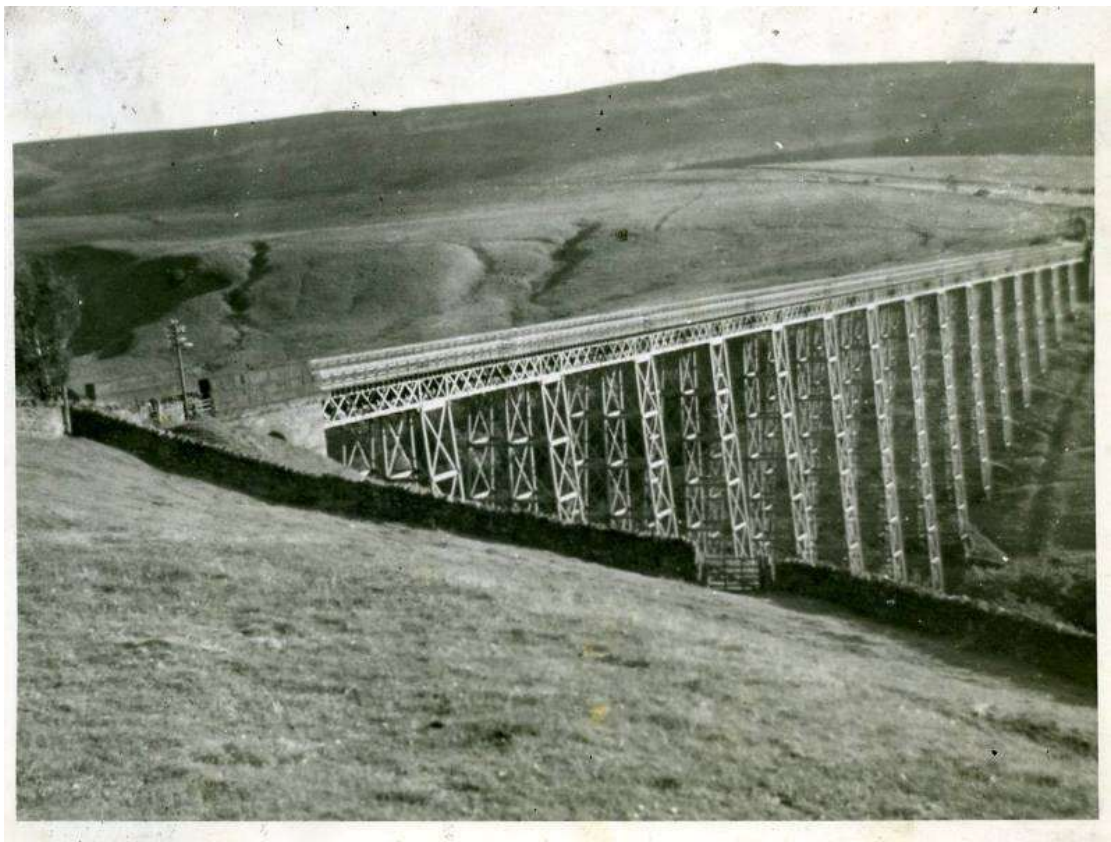
In 1991, we bought the farm next door, Wrenside Farm to add to our acres. Here we found more railway relics. Wrenside land ran right down into the Belah, including the south side of Ewebank Scar, that which scared the video maker.

In 1998, we sold the whole lot and moved down the hill to Oakbank Farm, Barras. The river Belah runs through this land, too. (We used the name Belah as our flock prefix for our pedigree Bluefaced Leicester

sheep.) For our fell flock of Swaledales, we had a right of way to the common which involved crossing the old railway line at the place where the old bridge existed.



Belah Viaduct today taken by @GaznAlSherwin. Taken from the road heading to High Ewank Scar above the Barras abutment



Belah in all its glory.

Just to remind you that we are collecting memories, stories and images of Eden Viaducts, the South Durham & Lancashire Union Railway and the old Eden lines.

Please do email us or tweet us your memories images and videos etc. office@edenviaducts.org.uk

FILMS THAT WE LOVE

We love this gorgeous film by the talented and generous **Simon Richardson**. Shot with a DJI Mavic Pro still on an Canon 450d and iPhone 6s.



Videos - Eden Viaducts

By Keyishoes Drone Services www.keyishoes.co.uk

VIEW FROM THE CHAIR



I hope you enjoy this month's newsletter.

I'd like to start by noting the sad death of Joan Johnstone, Chair of Kirkby Stephen Parish Council. I didn't know Joan very well, but I know from my wife's involvement with the local Visitor Centre how much Joan contributed to that particular facet of community life. From all I know and hear of her, she was at the heart of so much in Kirkby Stephen.

One small anecdote. Before Christmas I'd been in touch with the Town Council on behalf of Western Dales Bus, for whom I volunteer, about the planned new service to Penrith. A few days later, out of the blue, I got an email from Joan asking me to pass on her appreciation to all our volunteers for all they do to offer a lifeline to local people without their own transport.

A busy woman, but she found the time to spare a thought not only for Western Dales Bus volunteers, but also for the people who rely on our services. I am sure she will be missed by the many people whose lives she touched.

It got me thinking about local councillors like Joan; full disclosure, I was once one myself. Whether they serve their parish, town, district or county, our local councillors give up a huge amount of their time for their local community, which is why I get annoyed when I hear people denigrate politicians. Yes, there are some wrong 'uns, but very few in my experience, and they frequently get exposed for what they are. Most politicians I've met, of all parties and none, enter into it out of a sense of public duty. Sure, they often have strong opinions and can irritate, but they're involved because they care about their communities and, most of all, the people in them.

Communities need people like Joan, so as well as mourning her loss I hope people will celebrate all that she achieved for Kirkby Stephen.

Stay safe.

All the best
Neil Cleeveley
Chair



OFFICIAL PITCH OPENING - Kirkby Stephen Hockey Club - Joan Johnstone and Alex Birtles

