

NORTHERN VIADUCT TRUST

NEWSLETTER No. 4

MAY 2009

Smardale Gill Issues

Bats in the Arches?

In last year's Newsletter we reported that repair works at Smardale Gill had been stopped when we were alerted to the possibility of bats nesting in voids in the viaduct. We are pleased now to be able to report that, in the event, the required bat survey proved necessary only on the areas needing repair. Having been put in touch with a local accredited 'bat surveyor' who charged a modest fee, we were relieved to hear that she found no evidence of bats nesting, so enabling the work to be completed.

Hartley – Stenkrith News

New Landscaped Entrance and Car Park at Stenkrith

In celebration of the Trust's twentieth anniversary we are pleased and proud to announce the forthcoming opening of our new landscaped entrance to the Northern Viaduct Round, and car park, at Stenkrith Bridge, just outside Kirkby Stephen. This development has drawn much favourable comment locally, and addresses problems with roadside parking on the B6259 Nateby Road near the entrance to Stenkrith Park where there are real hazards for local residents and visitors seeking to walk to Hartley. When local landowners Alan Law and Ian Gowing generously offered to give us a small piece of sloping land bordering the end of our path and the river on the west side of the road we accepted with alacrity, and work on the new entrance and car park on this land is now nearly finished. Alan and Ian are Ravenstonedale contractors specialising in masonry work on historic structures and have done a wonderful job for the Trust on this latest project. Alan worked on our original Smardale Gill restoration and has done other more recent work for us. Alan and Ian's generosity in donating the land was matched by that of Hartley Quarry owners CEMEX U.K., who once more gave us the stone to level the land – no less than 1000 tons. We are very grateful to them all, and also to the local Highways and Planning authorities for their help and support. Off-road parking for about ten cars will soon be available, together with sloped access for the disabled and less agile down to the footpath under the Nateby Road.

With landscaping, fencing and planting to minimise the impact on the environment this project, although small in apparent scale, is proving relatively expensive. To our aid have come our friends at Natural England with a grant from the DEFRA Aggregates Levy Sustainable Fund for the car park, while the Cumbria Waste Management Environment Trust (C.W.M.E.T.) has come up with a smaller grant from the Cumbria Aggregate Levy Sustainable Fund, for access to the car park, works on the footpaths and boundaries, landscaping, fencing, drainage and signage. Grateful thanks are due once more to these bodies for their support, and especially to Helen Squires (CWMET) and Rachel Howgate (Natural England) for facilitating our grant applications again.

Overbridge Repairs

Last year we reported that two brick and masonry overbridges near Stenkrith looked as though they would require some attention before long. David Hanson, our Honorary Consulting Engineer, has now inspected them and recommended that work be done over a three to four year period. During his inspection he spotted a slight bulge in a spandrel wall on one of the bridges which needs further investigation, and possibly the insertion of a rock bolt. Total repair cost will probably be in excess of £9000.

We approached a charity associated with The Westmorland Gazette, seeking a grant towards the cost of this work, but were unsuccessful. We have since contacted The Manifold Trust, which contributed to the Smardale Gill restoration in the 1990s, and they have generously awarded us £1000 to kickstart the programme. We are now seeking further grants from other bodies.

During the autumn a hole appeared in the deck of Hartley Castle overbridge which connects a local farmer's land on each side of the cutting between Merrygill and Podgill. The deck comprises 9 x 4 inch timbers on wrought iron girders and was renewed in 1989 before the Trust became responsible for the bridge. Temporarily the hole has been plated over, pending replacement of the failed timber. The two patches of rot appear to have resulted from mud deposited by farm traffic and livestock. We have also collaborated with the farmer and contributed to the cost of improving the drainage of his land along the top of the cutting.

We must acknowledge our indebtedness to David Hanson in respect of his professional services. A retired railway civil engineer living in Northampton, he gives freely of his time and says he enjoys his visits to Cumbria, on which he is met off the train at Oxenholme.

Routine Maintenance Works

It did not prove possible to keep the grass under control by means of grazing, so we have invested in a second-hand mower to trim all but the steepest slopes, which will have to be scythed. There is also a tendency for saplings to grow along the tops of the retaining walls, and their removal is essential to prevent roots disturbing the masonry. This work will be undertaken as part of our winter maintenance programme which also includes clearing growth from both sides of the parapet walls on both Merrygill and Podgill viaducts. The determined small bush to our annoyance growing downwards from the underside of one of the high arch barrels at Podgill has recently been removed by a local tree contractor who it appears did not need the services of a trapeze artist! The question remains as to how it managed to seed itself there.

Viewing Area Completed

The big event of 2008 was the completion of the viewing area alongside and below Podgill viaduct. Until now visitors have not really been able to see the viaduct itself, but they can now descend from the footpath via steps at the east end. Once below the structure it can be seen how it is actually two viaducts side-by-side, striding across Podgill gorge. Picnic tables have been provided on a level area, together with two panels of interpretative text. One is about Sir Thomas Bouch, the engineer who built

the original single line viaduct in 1861, and the other describes the widening to take double track in 1889.

The viewing area was inaugurated on 17th May 2008 by Peter Bullard, Director of Cumbria Wildlife Trust, in the presence of trustees, members of Eden District and Kirkby Stephen Town Councils and other guests. We are very grateful to C.W.M.E.T. (the 'Landfill Tax') for a substantial grant, to Upper Eden Rotary Club for a further financial contribution and to CEMEX U.K. for giving us surfacing material. The local press gave the event good coverage, with photos taken by our trustee Peter Robinson.

The Trust

During 2008 we welcomed Paul Thompson as a new trustee. Paul is a local builder with a particular interest in old structures, and his advice has already proved valuable. He is also an accomplished photographer.

We pride ourselves on having working trustees, all performing various functions for the organisation, but above all we must acknowledge the effort put in by our vice-chairman Mike Sunderland, who not only keeps a close eye on our property but also ably acts as our project manager. On the Stenkrith entrance and car park scheme he literally 'burnt the midnight oil' in preparing detailed grant applications against a very tight deadline.

We must express thanks to our numerous benefactors and donors. We are sometimes asked why we have no general membership; this is something we have considered on several occasions, only to conclude that for a small organisation like ours the amount of work needed to promote ourselves, collect subscriptions and produce a periodic journal, which we think would be necessary to retain members, would be greater than the return. As it is, with just nine trustees we find that we can achieve our aims efficiently and with maximum benefits.

We have continued to rely on grants and donations for exceptional work, aiming to reserve investment income (rapidly dwindling at present) for routine maintenance. Our investments form a nest-egg against any unforeseen eventuality, as required by the Charity Commission. We are constantly amazed at the number and size of the donations we receive from far and wide, including overseas. In 2008 newsletter donations alone amounted to £2390, before the Gift Aid claim – a very heartfelt thank you to you, our donors. Through this newsletter we hope we express our appreciation and can keep you informed about our work.

We hope also that you will feel able to continue to support the Trust in the future.

Gordon Biddle, Chairman

Mike Sunderland, Vice-Chairman

Tim Bounds, Treasurer

Michael Pettigrew, Secretary

Peter Robinson, Publicity

Glenys Lumley

Jonathan Miller

Michael Sewell

Paul Thompson

And Finally...

Mike Sunderland was out with his dog one day, checking, as always, that the path was in good order, when he spotted in the bed of a stream a rusty cast iron plate bearing the number 138. It turned out to be the bridge number plate from Merrygill viaduct, probably of North Eastern Railway origin. Cleaned up and repainted, it is now back in position.

For more information about the Trust please visit www.nvt.org.uk

Northern Viaduct Trust Limited

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Other Donations and Bequests

If you would like to consider making a longer term donation to the Trust, or a bequest in your will, please write to Michael Pettigrew, 6 Norton Road, Stourbridge, West Midlands DY8 2AE.