



OFFICIAL OPENING: Sir Neil Cossons, chairman of English Heritage, cuts the ribbon to officially open the viaduct at Hartley, with Michael Sewell, chairman of the Northern Viaduct Trust, and guests looking on.

Restored viaduct a new heritage asset for district

THE newly-restored Merrygill Viaduct, next to Hartley Quarry, near Kirkby Stephen, was officially opened on Wednesday by Sir Neil Cossons, chairman of English Heritage.

Following the completion of the £50,000 project to open up the viaduct for pedestrians, which includes the creation of an upgraded footpath, walkers now have good access all the way along the stretch of the old railway from Hartley to Stenkrith, which is owned by the Northern Viaduct Trust.

The work to restore the viaduct, which was undertaken as part of the Northern Viaduct Trust's latest project, started in February and took two months to complete. The previous owners of the viaduct, RMC, which owns

the adjacent Hartley Quarry, signed over the rights to enable the restoration to take place.

Sir Neil said: "We are delighted to have worked in partnership with the Northern Viaduct Trust, the Countryside Agency, and RMC Aggregates to help restore Merrygill Viaduct, an important grade II monument, and so secure its long-term future.

"This project has created a significant new heritage asset for Cumbria and the newly-restored viaduct will act as an important reminder of the role this area once played in the industrial life of the North West."

The project to upgrade the 1½ mile route from Stenkrith Park to Merrygill, which also included the creation of Stenkrith Park's Millennium

Bridge and the restoration of Podgill Viaduct, started in 2000 and cost £250,000.

Locals and tourists, including coast to coast walkers who stay at the Kirkby Stephen campsite next to Stenkrith Park, will be able to benefit from the new walk which joins directly with the coast to coast path.

Along with the footpath upgrade, information boards about the Merrygill and Podgill viaducts have been situated in the former platelayers' huts. They document the history of the viaducts and the railway, from their building in the mid-19th Century to their widening in the 1880s and their usage in the early to mid-20th Century.

Michael Sewell, chairman of the Northern Viaduct Trust, said: "These struc-

tures are magnificent examples of the engineering skills and manual workmanship of the railway age, and deserve preservation. We would like to express our grateful thanks to anyone who has contributed to the trust in order to make this project possible.

"Together with funding from English Heritage and the Countryside Agency, we have been able to go-ahead with the restoration and access work."

Work on the viaduct restoration and improvements to surfaces, drainage, fencing and gates has been carried out by Abbeley-based contractor Philip Mawdsley, who is a general builder, groundwork and plant hire specialist. At the opening he thanked Northern Viaduct Trust for awarding him the contract and wished the trust all the best for the future.

Also attending the viaduct opening were representa-

tives from English Heritage, which provided financial support to the project, including Henry Owen-John, regional director for the North West, Caroline Mathews, project officer, historic environment commissions, Sarah Cole, aggregate levy sustainability fund adviser, northern territory, and Sir Neil, who was accompanied by Lady Cossons.

