

PICNIC SITE AND VIEWING AREA OPENS AT PODGILL

ON Saturday, Peter Bullard, director of the Cumbria Wildlife Trust, opened a viewing area and picnic site below Podgill Viaduct, near Kirkby Stephen, for the Northern Viaduct Trust.

For the first time, it is now possible for visitors to the popular "Northern Viaducts Round" walk to view the imposing structure of one of the two viaducts on the route, both of which were designed by Cumbrian-born engineer Thomas Bouch.

The viewing area is directly below two of the viaduct's arches in the narrow and tranquil valley of Pod Gill, now managed as a nature conservation area.

Gordon Biddle, chairman of the Northern Viaduct Trust, said: "We have been planning for some time to provide access for visitors to see the fine design and construction of Podgill viaduct, and we are very pleased to acknowledge our sponsors for their support. We owe special thanks to the Cumbria Waste Management Environmental Trust for facilitating a grant from the Cumbria Aggregates Levy Sustainability Fund to provide the safe access route into the viewing area and to the Upper Eden Rotary Club for funding the picnic site itself.

"The Rotary Club has also given us practical help with our annual cleanup and tidying of the main footpath and its surroundings."

New interpretation panels have also been provided to explain the building and widening of the viaduct, with some unique history and pictures of some of the key people involved.

Mr. Biddle said the trust was also indebted to its contractors who undertook the work on site, principally John Nicholson and Keith Fawcett.

The Northern Viaduct Trust was formed in 1989



to acquire and repair the elegant Bouch-designed Smardale Gill Viaduct and opening of the picnic site and viewing area is a further development by the trust of its original conversion of the former railway line east of Kirkby Stephen into an easily graded walking route.

The first section of one mile of trackbed was taken over by the trust in 2000, including the Grade II listed, 11-arch viaduct. Access to the route for walkers was provided by the Stenkrith Millennium Bridge from Stenkrith Park. The route was later extended to provide a through-

route to Hartley village by the acquisition of Merrygill Viaduct.

ABOVE: At Saturday's ceremony (left to right) are Bill Watkin, Upper Eden Rotary Club; Glenys Lumley, Northern Viaduct Trust; Peter Bullard, director of Cumbria Wildlife Trust; Tony Brunskill, vice-chairman of Eden District Council; Helen Squires, Cumbria Waste Management Environmental Trust; and Gordon Biddle, chairman of the Northern Viaduct Trust, with Podgill Viaduct behind.

Photo: Peter Robinson, Northern Viaduct Trust.