

Eden Valley Railway – A Description of the Journey

This is a description of what can be seen from the left-hand window facing the direction of travel on the current passenger service.

The mile-posts are on the left-hand (southern) side going away from Warcop. The remaining original ones were in a poor condition and have been replaced by modern replicas. The distances are miles (and quarter-miles) from what was Kirkby Stephen West Junction. The mileage at Warcop Station is between 5½ and 5¾ miles, the latter post being just beyond the end of the platform.

We cross a minor road between the A66 and Warcop village. The small wood you see on the left just before the road is known locally as 'Corky Wood'. Shortly after crossing the road the line crosses a footpath and Hayber Beck. The railway here is going down a slight gradient.

We then pass the army camp. It was the presence of the army camp and ranges at Warcop which led to the survival of the line from Appleby to Warcop after the rest of the Eden Valley Railway had closed. Through the trees you can see the camp's climbing tower. At the far end of the accommodation area is a patch of rough ground which used to be a rifle range – it has also been used for clay pigeon shooting.

Just past here the Ordnance Survey map shows an "ancient earthwork" close to the railway which here is going very slightly uphill. The hill to the left is called Vicarage Bank.

Another footpath crosses the railway here and

heads up Vicarage Bank after crossing a small drainage ditch on a little footbridge. This ditch shortly joins a stream called Cringle Beck which comes under the railway, which is now going gently downhill.

The line now enters a cutting through the lower slopes of Wildboar Hill. Just after exiting the cutting the buildings on the left are known as Eden Vale. Another footpath crosses the line here and crosses a small old stone bridge before heading to the farm.

Eden Vale is on the B6259 which links Warcop to the A66 and is coming closer to the railway at this point before passing underneath the railway. This point was the terminus of the line for several years before the extension to Southfields opened in 2013.

On a clear day the Lake District fells can be seen on the horizon to the left from this point onwards and looking back slightly the Mallerstang Ridge and Wild Boar Fell can be seen. Once over the bridge the line descends gently again, past a small field where goats can often be seen and then past marshy ground known as Sandford Mire.

At the end of this straight section of line is a small wooded area which has grown around an old gravel pit, and it is at the far end of this wood that the train terminates, near a platelayers' hut. This is Southfields, currently the limit of public operation of the Eden Valley Railway and there are no facilities for the public to leave the train. There is a short wait here whilst the driver walks to the other end of the train.

The train reverses here, so the 'left-hand side facing direction of travel' is now at the opposite side of the carriage!

From the left hand side of the train at Southfields the Warcop Fells are prominent, as are some of the more northerly Pennine fells.

As the train, heading uphill, departs and rounds a curve there is a small damp wooded area. Shortly after this is a curious section of fencing, about one wagon's length, which is further from the line than the rest of the fence. This is the site of a derailment where a wagon deposited its load of lime on the embankment. The vegetation on this patch is sparse compared to the surrounding areas.

The large field on this side is used exclusively for crop growing, usually maize, and is a good place to see oystercatchers, lapwings and partridges in the spring before the crop grows too tall.

Once over the road bridge notice the group of farm buildings. These are Dike Nook, now the base of an agricultural engineering firm. Just behind the buildings the A66 is at this point following the course of a roman road, and nearby are the remains of a Roman temporary marching camp.

As the train enters Wildboar cutting the remains of another platelayers' hut can be seen. The bulk of Wildboar Hill is apparent and some of the effects of the 2013 landslip can be seen on the hillside, below the fence.

We then come to the footpath crossing again. On

this side the path goes to the A66 to buildings which are now known as Wheat Sheaf Farm, but which on an 1863 map were shown as Wheat Sheaf Inn.

The next footpath to cross the railway, at the Warcop end of the army camp, leads to the A66 close to Walk Mill. It used to continue up the fells beyond but this is now an army range with very little public access. The range opened in 1942 and now covers 24,000 acres. It is used for all weapons, from small arms to heavy artillery.

We then pass the Army sports field and helicopter landing area. Part-way up the fells can be seen an army command post on stilts, used for controlling activity on the ranges.

We then cross over to road to Warcop again and return to the platform. The Warcop Fells are visible in front of you at Warcop Station. From left to right they are Roman Fell, Long Fell, Middle Fell and Musgrave Fell. Towards the right-hand end of these fells (looking from the station), on a small hillock about half-way up the fell you can see a structure known as The Fox Tower. Its form is a short round structure with a taller and thinner structure protruding, resembling a small mine. It was built by John Metcalfe Carleton in 1779 when he took ownership of Helbeck Hall above Brough and is a folly which was used mainly for picnic parties with fine views over the Eden Valley.

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A Very Brief History

The Eden Valley Railway opened to goods traffic on 8th April 1862 and passenger traffic on 7th June 1862. The Stockton & Darlington Railway took on the running of the line from the outset, services running from Kirkby Stephen to a south facing junction at Clifton on the Lancaster & Carlisle Railway. This inconvenient arrangement came about due to the L & C Railway fearing the Eden Valley Railway could become part of a rival through route to Scotland. This arrangement was soon revised and a direct route to Penrith was built, the through service to Penrith starting on 1st August 1863, by which time the line had become part of the North Eastern Railway. Initially the passenger service was two trains per day: this eventually became five per day, a pattern which continued with only minor changes throughout the NER period.

The opening of the Redhills Curve and the Cockermouth, Keswick & Penrith Railway allowed direct running to the industry of West Cumberland and much freight passed over the Eden Valley line. In 1887-1889 coke traffic reached over 200,000 tons per annum: although this traffic declined dramatically thereafter it revived during the First World War before declining again. The Redhills curve was removed in 1936 and from then on freight traffic was purely local.

In LNER days passenger services were extended to Darlington over the Stainmore line with the Tebay section becoming a branch in passenger terms. This continued into British Railways days until the introduction of DMUs in 1958 when the service was reduced to three trains per day.

Following a closure proposal in 1959 and a long battle the passenger service was withdrawn on 22nd January 1962, with the Appleby to Hartley Quarry section remaining open for freight traffic. Traffic from Hartley Quarry ceased in 1974 leaving just the Appleby to Warcop section open for Army traffic until 1989. A few special trains ran over the line in 1990 after which the line fell into disuse.

The Eden Valley Railway Society, now the Eden Valley Railway Trust, was formed in 1995 to preserve the Warcop to Appleby section and if possible to extend to Kirkby Stephen once the initial section was in operation.

In 1995 BRB was contacted with a view to purchasing the line. Talks continued until 1998 when the Trust was informed that the line had been sold to Sustrans. The Eden Valley Railway Trust and Sustrans reached an agreement to share the line and in 1999 permission was given to start work on the line. Working from Warcop towards Appleby ten years of vegetation was cleared from the trackbed. The Trust was also given the option to purchase the first two miles of the line from Warcop, an option which has been taken up.

After a lot of work Good Friday 2006 saw the first passenger train run from Warcop, the service being extended to Sandford Bridge as track renovation progressed. Services had to be suspended in May 2007 after an Army lorry struck the Warcop road bridge. After 18 months of discussions with the MOD the bridge was repaired, this repair taking only three weeks. Services restarted at Easter 2009 and an extra half-mile beyond Sandford Bridge opened for passenger service in April 2013.