

Furness trip July 2016

A short break in Cumbria starts with the train to Newcastle and then Carlisle. After the dreadful weather of December 2015 which caused landslips and flooding on many railway lines there is obvious work along the Tyne Valley line to stabilise embankments and prevent a recurrence. It is July but it is dull – days without cloud cover have been rare

The onward train from Carlisle to West Cumbria is a single coach, and reasonable busy. West Cumbria is a far cry from the idyll of the Lake District. It is noon and the guy opposite heading home from the rigs is reading the Daily Record is making his way through bottle after bottle of Bud. Behind me is a bloke on his way home after being released on bail in the middle of the night by Greater Manchester Police and he's drinking his way through a bottle of fortified wine. He is certain that, whatever he was up to, he won't have been picked up by the CCTV cameras. He arranges a promise from a girlfriend in Workington so staggers off the train in Workington, and heads for an afternoon of bliss.

We are by the sea but it is not a pretty coastline. Flimby looks like a miserable place, then we pass large chemical and cardboard big works and into Workington. After the station is the site of the former steel works. Near Harrington there has been recent work to stabilise the line as it passes along the raised beach. Parton looks lifeless and the guy on the Bud tells us that the last pub in the village has closed. After we tunnel beneath Whitehaven there is a stretch of pleasant countryside and coastline around St. Bees. At Nethertown and Braystones there is a row of shack style homes built directly on the beach - it looks idyllic now but what is it like during winter storms?

Then it is back to industry and the enormous Sellafield nuclear fuel reprocessing and nuclear decommissioning site and stop at its own station, surrounded by massive barbed wire fencing and ominous notices. What seems to be the low-level waste pipeline goes out to sea just by the station. This is followed by the yard for nuclear flask trains from power stations around the country, and next to is a golf course, where the players are gently glowing. There is then another fenced-off nuclear site at Drigg where the nastier waste is being buried.



I alight at Ravenglass for an hour, for a quick look round, and the village is pretty. At the end of the single main street is a little harbour. There is a path across the estuary (pictured) though it is under water as the tide is in. It would not be wise to cross anyway as on the other side is an MoD range and, judging by the racket, they are busy playing boy's games and firing off noisy things. There's nothing else to do but walk back up the street and have a pint

of Ennerdale Darkest in the Ratty Arms. It is nice enough to sit outside and at this time of day it is busy serving food to people visiting the village and the Ravenglass Railway. The railway is worth a visit – we were here in 2000, and stayed overnight in a pub in Boot, at the far end of the line. It is in the middle of lovely countryside, but it was the year of foot and mouth disease, and there was no off-road walking allowed.

The next train takes me to Foxfield, a request stop and the nearest station to my base for the night Broughton in Furness. Next to the station is the Prince of Wales, which we visited in 2000 and it has remained in the Good Beer Guide ever since. I arrive a few minutes after it opens and it is quiet but the beer is excellent (of course I didn't note what it was). It is about 25 minutes walk into Broughton

where I check into the Manor Arms. This is another pub which has been in the Good Beer Guide for donkey's years but I've never managed to reach it until now. It is 5pm and the pub is a busy with locals and I have a pint before a short siesta.

Later on I wander out to find what Broughton has to offer as the Manor Arms doesn't do food. The Black Cock Inn does, but the couple who arrive just before me are being asked if they have a reservation (on a Wednesday night). The food looks good (and expensive) but I'd rather have a basic pub meal when I'm on my own. The Old Kings Head is better – the beer is reasonable and it does pizzas and I'm happy enough. When I get back to the Manor Arms it is almost deserted – there is a Euro football match and Wimbledon on the TV and it is quiz night in the Old Kings Head. I have a quiet couple of pints and an early night.

In the morning, the breakfast is fine and, when I check out, the landlord offers a 10% reduction if I'm a CAMRA member. B&B for £31.50 is not at all bad. Then I stroll back to Foxfield station and stick my hand out to stop a passing train to Barrow, where I change for Lancaster. The Lancaster train is full and standing at ten o'clock on a Thursday morning, and the conductor gives up collecting fares. I have a window seat and look at the passing scenery as we cross the various rivers Leven and Kent as they flow into Morecambe Bay.

I have almost two hours to spend in Lancaster so there is time for a look round – it is 25 years since I did more than change trains here it does not seem familiar. I manage time for a drink in the Sun Inn and the Three Mariners, both Beer Guide pubs which I would happily recommend. Then it is time to catch the bus to Kirkby Lonsdale, back over the border in Cumbria. On the road out of Lancaster there are still buildings being renovated following the floods of last winter.



Kirkby Lonsdale is new to me and is a pretty little place. There is a market on in the Market Place and there are plenty of day-trippers. I wander round the town and through the Churchyard to Ruskin's View over the Lune valley (pictured). Pubwise I visit the Orange Tree which I like, and the Red Dragon, which has been modernised and lost any character, but is friendly. Then I catch the last bus of the day (at 1648!) to Kendal.

Time for a rant. Cumbria Council has obviously given up supporting bus services in any way and prefers to see the young, old and disabled being dependent on cars and other people. The bus service is appalling. I'm on the first bus out to Kendal since 12something and I'm charged an outrageous £6.90 for the 14 miles to Kendal – much dearer than the fare from Lancaster, operated by the same company. The information on the bus stops is non-existent or incomplete and on the national Traveline journey planner site (I presume the council are responsible for providing the information) it is wrong. The Council produces a map which makes it clear than unless you can use one of a very few key routes you might as well forget it.

In Kendal I have time for a quick pint in the Castle Inn, newly reopened after flooding. Many of the houses round about re still being renovated. Then I head for the station and home, changing at Oxenholme, Carlisle and Newcastle to Durham. I've had more than enough to drink over the last two days, I'm tired, and I head straight home.

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