

The Skipton to Carlisle Route Described

This description of the route is based on the railway facilities that existed in 1960.



Our route commences at **Skipton**, an important market town and the commercial and industrial centre serving the surrounding Craven District. Skipton also stands at the crossing of two natural lines of communication.

One is the valley of the River Aire which runs NW to SE towards Leeds. The other is an East to West link between the Vale of York and Lancashire. These two natural routes gave easy access between industrial West Yorkshire and North Lancashire, so in the railway mania years Skipton quickly acquired two railways. One was to Leeds and Bradford, the other to Colne and onwards to Blackburn.

Skipton station stands on the sharp curve that links these two railways' lines. It has 5 through and one bay platform. Trains for Carlisle all pass through the two platforms closest to the station entrance. Leaving the station our route passes the North Yard and the motive power depot before parting company with the line to Colne at Skipton North Junction.

There is a severe speed restriction on the sharp curve beyond the junction then the line crosses the flood plain of the River Aire in a North Westerly direction. For the next 12 miles, as far as Settle Junction, Carlisle traffic makes use of the old main line of the North Western Railway which used to link Skipton to Lancaster. It is a busy section of line, the regular provision of goods refuges is testimony to that. This line starts to climb into more hilly country after passing the first goods refuges at **Delaney's Sidings**.

Gargrave station serves a small town on the River Aire, the station facilities include a small yard and goods shed. Beyond Gargrave the River Aire is crossed on a small 3 arch viaduct and shortly after the Leeds and Liverpool canal is also crossed.



At **Bell Busk** the River Aire is crossed again, this time on a 5 arch viaduct. Bell Busk station was closed in 1959 but the signalbox remains open to control the down goods refuge. From Gargrave the line has been climbing at 1 in 132/300 and this continues for 2 more miles to the summit which separates the valleys of the Aire and the Ribble.



After 2 miles of favourable gradients the small town of **Hellifield** is reached. There are extensive facilities here, far more than the present traffic justifies. Prior to the 1923 railway grouping this was a very important junction with 5 daily expresses each way between both Liverpool and Scotland, and Manchester and Scotland. The station was built for this exchange traffic, having a long island platform with outer goods loops and also two bays. The large, disused yards also used to be very busy, sorting the goods trucks for destinations in Lancashire, Yorkshire and Scotland. The motive power depot still operates but its allocation of locomotives has been severely reduced.

Down trains have the advantage of the downgrade for a quick start. The next station, **Long Preston** serves the nearby village and has a small goods yard as well as an up goods refuge. The River Ribble runs close to the line before **Settle Junction** which is also preceded by goods refuges. At the junction we part company with the line to Lancaster at the southern end of the Settle and Carlisle Railway. Immediately the line starts on the long uphill gradient of the Long Drag, 15 miles of mostly 1 in 100 that ends high in the Pennines, in Blea Moor Tunnel.



Settle has a large 2 platform station with a spacious goods yard and shed with up and down refuges. This is in keeping with this important market town, which is situated where the narrow valley of the River Ribble widens into a flood plain. Steep hillsides and limestone bluffs overlook the town. A disused quarry on the far side of the valley only slightly compromises the beauty of the landscape.

Beyond Settle station there are two viaducts, the small 4 arch Marsh Viaduct is followed by the larger 6 arch Church Viaduct. Our line climbs northwards up the narrowing valley passing the village of Stainforth. At **Stainforth Sidings** there are disused sidings associated with the nearby, abandoned Craven limestone quarry and lime kiln. A long, rock cutting precedes the short 120 yd Taitlands Tunnel.



At Sheriff Brow the valley is more of a gorge and the railway crosses the river in quick succession on two skewed three arch viaducts. Next the sidings of the Helwith Bridge Granite Co. are passed on the down side, and then **Helwith Bridge** itself where the Ribble is crossed for the last time. The valley here is wide and flat and provides the only substantial break in the 1 in 100 of the Long Drag. In this level stretch there is a triangular junction leading to the quarry and lime kilns of Ribblesdale Lime Works.

At **Horton-in-Ribblesdale** the station yard contains a cattle dock. There is a refuge for down goods trains and a siding leading to the quarry and lime kilns of Settle Limes Ltd. Northward from Horton the line keeps to the western slopes above the valley. After **Selside** signal box the next station is **Ribblehead**, the first in a sequence of three stations in the middle of nowhere. Ribblehead has up and down goods refuges as well as a small yard. One of the sidings leads into the premises of the small limestone quarry of H. Austin.



At Ribblehead the line curves to the right over a dry valley and crosses the 24 arch Ribblehead (Batty Moss) Viaduct. This is the longest and largest viaduct between Skipton and Carlisle. A little further on the goods loops at **Blea Moor** signalbox are passed and then a long, straight rock cutting leads to the southern portal of Blea Moor Tunnel, at 1 mile 869 yds long it is the longest on this line. The summit of the Long Drag is a few hundred yards inside the tunnel. the line profile is thereafter moderately undulating as far as Garsdale.

Emerging from Blea Moor Tunnel the line is on the eastern side of Dentdale, high above the valley floor. Two side valleys are crossed on large viaducts, The 10 arch Dent Head and the 11 arch Arten Gill viaducts are separated by **Denthead** signalbox and Shale Cutting. The line leaves Dentdale beyond **Dent** Station with its small yard and goods refuges. This station is the highest in England.



The railway pierces the ridge that separates Dent Dale and Garsdale through the 1213 yard Rise Hill Tunnel. Once again the valley floor is far below the line. Less than 1 mile further on are Garsdale water troughs, the only ones encountered on this line. They have the distinction of being the highest watertroughs in the world.

A small engine shed and water tower mark the approach to **Garsdale**, the junction for Hawes. The station has two main line and one branch line platform. There is a small goods yard and beyond the station there is a turntable, goods refuges and exchange sidings for the branch. The turntable has a protective windbreak built round it to make it easier to turn engines in the frequent high winds.

Immediately after Garsdale the railway crosses Dandry Mire on the 12 arch Moorcock viaduct. The Hawes branch recedes on the right hand side, heading for Wensleydale. The main line starts to climb again at 1 in 165 on the final stretch to Ais Gill summit. There are two short tunnels, Moorcock Tunnel (98 yd) and Shotlock Hill Tunnel (106 yd) separated by the 5 arch Lunds Viaduct. The signal box and goods refuges at **Ais Gill** mark the summit of the line. At 1169 feet above sea level this is the highest point of any main line in England.

Immediately the line descends at 1 in 100 for Ais Gill is the summit of a long and formidable gradient facing southbound trains. It is not regarded as being quite as testing as the Long Drag because there are two stretches of less severe gradient at Mallerstang and Crosby Garrett. However the total length of this downgrade to Ormside Viaduct is 15 miles.

The 4 arch Ais Gill viaduct is 1 mile beyond the summit then the line tracks along a steep hillside high above the River Eden, whose course will be followed almost to Carlisle. **Mallerstang** is the next signalbox which is soon followed by Birkett Tunnel (424 yds).



The high peaks, moors and valleys of the Pennines have now been left behind. Our line crosses more undulating country as it passes **Kirby Stephen** station, built at the nearest point to the town, 2 miles away. The station possesses a goods yard, cattle dock, goods shed and goods refuges. The next location of significance is the graceful Smardale viaduct, a 12 arch structure and at 137 feet high the tallest on the line. A single line passes under our route through the first arch of the viaduct.

This is the Tebay branch of the line that links Co. Durham and Penrith. It rarely sees traffic in 1960 and will close soon.

Crosby Garrett Tunnel (181 yd) follows and then the 6 arch Crosby Garrett Viaduct which dominates the village. **Crosby Garrett** station was in the following cutting but it closed along with the goods yard. However the signal box still controls up and down goods loops.

The line now cuts through a series of low ridges and valleys in deep cuttings and high embankments. Grisedale Viaduct (7 arches) precedes the now closed **Grisedale Sidings** although the signal box remains open. The sidings used to hold mineral trucks loaded with ballast from the adjoining quarry. After the next high embankment the line threads the 571 yard long Helm Tunnel before passing the closed Ormside station and signal box.





The pleasantly located 10 arch Ormside viaduct crosses the River Eden and also marks the end of the long descent from Ais Gill. On the up side we pass the Express Dairy from whose siding milk tankers are despatched to many places including London. The **Appleby** goods yard, goods shed and refuges precede the station. Appleby is the county town of Westmorland and the largest town between Skipton and Carlisle. The station reflects this with full length platforms and a passenger overbridge, the only one on the Settle and Carlisle Railway. Beyond the station there is a junction on the up side forming a short link to the previously mentioned line between Co. Durham and Penrith. The S&C climbs to cross this line as we leave Appleby.



Our route now crosses open country on favourable gradients. On the approach to **Long Marton** a 5 arch viaduct is crossed. The station possesses a small goods yard and shed. About 2 miles further on the large Kirby Thore plaster works is passed on the down side with sidings for despatch of plaster board. **New Biggin** is the next station on the line, it has similar facilities to Long Marton and also possesses goods refuges.

Crowdundle Brook is crossed on a 4 arch viaduct, the ensuing deep cutting contains a substantial overbridge. At **Culgaith** the line starts its longest section of level track of the whole journey. The station has a small yard and the signal box controls the level crossing for the road that leads to the village on the hill.

The railway cuts through the hill in a 661 yard tunnel then follows a shelf cut into the hillside above the River Eden as far as Waste Bank Tunnel.(164 yd). The village of **Langwathby** has a station with a yard, a goods shed and a down goods refuge. Shortly after a small 7 arch viaduct **Little Salkeld** station is passed. Just beyond it is the station yard which also has goods refuges. The next point of interest is Long Meg Sidings on the up side serving the anhydrite mine of the same name. The mine is visible from the line as it makes its second and final crossing of the River Eden by the attractive 7 arch Eden Lacy Viaduct.

The railway has been on favourable gradients from Langwathby but for the next few miles the trend is uphill so that the line can be well above the level of the river when the Lune Gorge is reached. Lazonby sand pit and sidings are on the up side, a few sand wagons are despatched each week to the motive power depots at Carlisle for locomotive sand. The short Lazonby Tunnel (99 yds) immediately follows. **Lazonby** station is in the centre of the village and has a goods shed and yard, locomotive watering facilities and a goods refuge for up trains.

Two miles further on the line follows a course high above the Eden Gorge. This has entailed some heavy civil engineering work with high embankments and long rock cuttings through the woods that cover the slopes of the valley. At Baron Wood two tunnels are threaded. No.1 (207

yd) is separated from the 251 yd No.2 by a short rock cutting. The disused Baron Wood Sidings on the downside were used to despatch timber from the forests. Armathwaite Tunnel (325 yd) follows then the line curves right over a 9 arch viaduct and enters **Armathwaite**.

The station stands above the village and has a goods shed, yard and refuges. Although still 10 miles from Carlisle this is the last open station that we will pass. A high embankment follows and then Dry Beck Viaduct, a 7 arch structure. **Low House Crossing** signalbox is passed, it controls a road level crossing. Then there is another section of line built into the hillside above the Eden Gorge which is followed as far as the 4 arch Cotehill Viaduct. The site of the former Cotehill Station is passed. All traces of this have been removed but some railway cottages mark the location.

At this point the line turns away from the River Eden and makes directly towards Carlisle, mostly on favourable gradients of 1 in 132. This gradient, which stretches 7 miles as far as Petteiril Bridge Junction is a severe test for up trains leaving Carlisle. **Howes Sidings** service a small plasterboard factory and a Ministry of Supply oil storage facility, including a down goods loop.



Cumwhinton Station, signalbox goods yard and refuges are all closed. Scotby Station, a mile further on suffered the same fate. The first sign of the approach to the important industrial border city of Carlisle is the **Durranhill South** yard on the up side. These are the sorting sidings for southbound traffic. **Durranhill Junction** controls the entry to and exit from goods loops. It is also the junction for down goods trains to the goods shed and for light engines bound for Durranhill motive power depot. Although servicing of locomotives at this depot ceased many years ago it is still used for storage of surplus engines during the winter. Petteiril Bridge goods yards follow on both sides of the line. The North Eastern Region Newcastle to Carlisle main line can be seen beyond the up yard.

The Settle and Carlisle Railway actually ends at **Petteiril Bridge Junction** where the Newcastle line is joined over reverse curves. At **London Road Junction** a sharply curved line diverges to the left towards Upperby yards and motive power depot. The same signalbox controls the next junction where the goods avoiding lines carry straight on, whereas our line to Carlisle Citadel Station climbs away from them, past a crane works sidings and then curves to the right.

The area south of Carlisle is a maze of railways with the lines from Newcastle, Settle, Lancaster and Maryport all converging on **Citadel** Station and crossing the goods avoiding lines and the line to the Crown St. goods depot. Our line climbs up and passes beside this depot on the up side and joins the Lancaster and Carlisle (WCML) before entering the Citadel Station which has 3 through platforms and 5 bays.

