

22 Beddgelert and its Railways: Short Introduction



The village of Beddgelert, a staging point on the 1802 Caernarfon-Aberglaslyn road and nowadays jammed with coaches and cars in the summer season, was for just a short while the “frontier station” of a remarkable narrow-gauge railway system..... when this original account was written in 1978, it had already been closed for over 40 years, and we little thought then that it would ever be rebuilt in its entirety to operate again. The fact that this project is now (2008) entering its final exciting phase means that the fortunes of the district will be considerably revitalized.....and we have left this description of the railway features exactly as it was written, serving to highlight the contrast between what was to be found then with the present-day scene.....

.....The Welsh Highland Railway had its origins in the North Wales Narrow Gauge Railway built in 1873, running from Dinas near Caernarfon to tap the slate quarries on Moel Tryfan. Meanwhile another scheme had been promoted to reach Beddgelert from the south as the “Portmadoc, Beddgelert and South Snowdon Railway”. In its latter form this was to be an electric railway and some construction was commenced around Beddgelert involving gradients of 1 in 25..... from 1922 the NWNG route was extended to Beddgelert, and the PBSSR realigned and completed with gradients suitable for steam engines.....the section south of Beddgelert amongst others contains some truly remarkable scenery.....

....the line enters a cutting, at the far end of which two routes diverge. That straight ahead crosses the road by means of a substantial stone bridge which has never carried a train; this is the unfinished course of the PBSSR electric line, and further uncompleted work can be seen in the field beyond. Meanwhile the WHR proper turns to the right, passes under the road and straightaway crosses the Afon Glaslyn on a magnificent 70 ft-span steel girder bridge..... the view of the narrow pass is far superior to that obtained from the road....

.....Above the line, various isolated copper mine workings dating from circa 1782 may be noted, and there is a more extensive one of particular interest in the valley just beyond the south end of the long tunnel, at Cwm Bychan.....an overhead cableway conveyed ore down the valley to a loading point on the WHR just outside the tunnel mouth; parts of the system survive and represent a transport system unique in this area of the country.....

.....hereabouts a number of farmhouses and cottages have waterwheels.....most are small 8 or 10 ft wheels installed to operate threshing



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machinery, fulling stocks and butter churns. A logical later use was to drive a generator.....

.....The workings of Glanrafon Slate Quarries were connected to the main railway by an incline.....the ruined building at the foot was a weighbridge..... at the far end of Quellyn lake, a pleasant stretch of trackbed closely follows the river past sites of woollen and corn mills. Further sidings and inclines served iron ore mines, a fascinating rabbit-warren of workings..... in the vicinity of the junction large amounts of old fish belly tram rail will be found.....

.....a most remarkable branch diverged at remote Tryfan Junction to pursue a switchback course into the hills and tap another group of slate quarry workings.....beyond the incline drumhead no less than four routes converged....that to the left is worth following: features such as a $\frac{1}{4}$ chain radius 180 degree curve on a 1 in 25 gradient around Hermon Chapel, and a 30 ft high embankment eventually lead it into the opencast pit of Alexandria slate quarries.....



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