

# Gossiping to Garsdale with Deeply Dippy



Colin Raw

Evening light at Ribbleshead Viaduct with Ingleborough in the background

IT BEGAN, as do all great English adventures, with cups of tea. We assembled outside Skipton railway station for a ride on the Settle-Carlisle to within a mile or two of its summit. The object was to record a programme for Radio York.

James Whale, the presenter, best-known for his early-morning disc-jockeying in London, confessed (proudly) that his Yorkshire home had originally been railway property. Martin Cooper, senior producer at Radio York, carried a tape recorder of modest size but considerable power. It was a digital recorder, one of the latest playthings of broadcasting.

Guests on the train were Richard Haste

and Alec Wray, of Regional Railways, and Michael Owen, Chairman of the Friends of the Settle-Carlisle. I was there as teller and to describe the passing scene.

It was an imaginative trip, in the "Out to Lunch" series, intended to occupy most of Sunday afternoon. There would be recorded musical interludes – contemporary music, such as "Lovecats" and "Deeply Dippy".

As we clattered along the valley bottom before taking to the hills, I related how oystercatchers – birds of the coast – spread inland, the first pair nesting on the ballast between railway lines near Gargrave. The season ended prematurely

when the sitting bird, rising at the approach of train on the "up" line, was struck by one on the "down".

### Two-hour Wait

James now held the microphone inches from the mouth of Michael Owen, who told him he joined the Friends of the Settle-Carlisle Line as a member in 1984 when the line was issued with a closure notice. "And here I am, 11 years on, as chairman."

Michael recalled that the railway was reprieved from closure by the then Transport Secretary, Paul Channon, in April, 1989. Questioned about finances, Michael thought the line paid its way. "But we are at odds with British Rail over figures. There are, we think, approximately four million people per annum using it."

Which led into talk about how passengers on an early train miss their connections at Leeds by anything between five and ten minutes. The consequence was a two-hour wait at Leeds. Richard Haste, the Marketing Manager of Regional Railways, disagreed – as the Friends had suggested and James quoted – that it was a rather cynical ploy on the part of British Rail to try and make the Settle-Carlisle unworkable.

Richard added that research had always shown that the number of people wishing to connect into the other services was very low. "We do our best to provide good connections and we can't always do it. Next summer we are providing a better connection from Glasgow to the Settle-Carlisle line, so we are answering one of the criticisms which have been levelled at us."

The discussion about current affairs between Michael and Richard ran on. Richard said there was no intention of closing the route and he thought the future of the line lay with modern diesel units "which are cheap and economical to run; they have good visibility for people to see the scenery, and that's what tourists come for . . ."

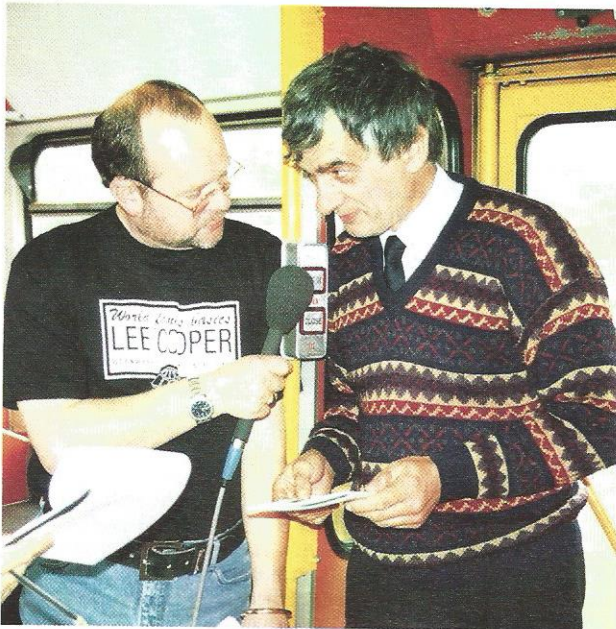
Meanwhile, the diesel clattered from the Aire Valley at Gargrave – where the ubiquitous Karen Smith in a radio car spoke from a point near the canal locks – and crossed into Ribblesdale. Now Karen was interviewing Lynn at the Dales-made Centre at Watershed Mill, near Settle. Lynn explained that it provided an opportunity for Dales craftsmen and women to test the market before expanding and having a retail outlet of their own.

Karen popped in to a Falconry Centre and was next heard speaking from the base of Ribbleshead Viaduct.

### Across the Viaduct

On the train itself, I mentioned the westerly gale's which, sweeping up Lunesdale and Chapel-le-Dale, have at the viaduct their first real obstruction. I told the hoary story of the frolicsome wind which took away the cap of a railwayman, carried the cap between one of the arches and dropped it back on to the man's head, though he complained it was the wrong way round.

James quizzed Michael about the appeal of the



James Whale interviews Michael Owen



### Karen Smith at the base of Ribbleshead Viaduct

famous line and Michael mentioned Settle-Carlitis, "which is like a disease – it gets in the blood." Karen read from the plaque commemorating the completion of the three million pound renovation of the viaduct. The plaque, dated 1875-1991, shows an old navy with a pick standing in front of the viaduct and shaking the hand of a modern-day workman whose other hand clasps a pneumatic drill.

She also read a notice "Beware of Falling Masonry". Although fully restored, the limestone used in the construction of the viaduct has a natural tendency to flake.

As the train burst from Blea Moor tunnel, and Dentdale was revealed far below, Alec Wray mentioned that sometimes it was possible to look down on passing military aircraft.

Leslie Clark, who lives at Settle, told James he was having his fifth trip on the line, this time with a party of 44 members

of a one-make owners' club, the make being the "Cheltenham". The other 44 club members who were attending a special club rally had gone by bus to Kirkby Stephen and would return to Skipton by train. It was a neat arrangement.

Asked to comment on the fascination people have in the line, Leslie remarked: "It's like anything else; if there's a fear of execution, it becomes more popular. It was never so popular as when it was going to be closed, although it's well-known as being an important railway in an area where railways ought not to have been built.

"We use it for shopping, not so much to Carlisle, but to Leeds. The station in Leeds is very convenient, being at the centre of the city."

Karen described the cobbled streets and Sedgwick memorial at Dent. When we disembarked at Garsdale, James had a chat with the train driver. Then we walked to the *Moorcock Inn* for haddock and chips.

W. R. Mitchell