

The Horrocksford Branch and a couple of its former branches

- a Sunday afternoon stroll by Bill Briggs.

Alight from the train at Clitheroe station. Out of the gate turn right and walk down the back of the station. Pass the Royal Mail sorting office and at the far end of Chester Avenue turn right into Waddington Road and under the railway bridge. At the top of Waddington Road turn left into Pimlico Road. The left hand side of Pimlico Road runs out of footpath for a short distance just before bending to the right when Horrocksford Signal Box comes into view. Bungalows have replaced the allotments that once took up the space between road and railway. Take a few moments to walk up the steps on your left up to the railway side and view the signal box.

Returning to the road, carry on up to the bridge over the main Clitheroe - Hellifield line where there is a good view of the rail junction. Astute observers will note that there is no direct connection from the down line to the branch so that trains approaching from the south have first to reverse over to the up line before drawing in. Trains from the north are propelled across the down line onto the branch.

About twenty yards further along Pimlico Road, on the left, an accommodation bridge crosses the branch from where the junction can be observed from a different angle. The line is doubled to form an almost half-mile loop from about 50 yards from the junction, under the bridge to about 50 yards from the entrance to the Johnson Matthey (formerly ICI) works.

Return to the road and turn left. Glimpses of the branch may be had through the hedge/trees as it rises from its shallow cutting onto a low embankment. Nearly opposite Moorland Road is Johnson Matthey's emergency access gate from where a short track rises to cross the railway lines. A little further along, the original entrance to the former ICI "button works" went beneath the tracks but of the bridge there is now no visible evidence.

You are now entering the once isolated hamlet of Pimlico or "Black Horse" Village (nicknamed after the pub). Just past the farm on the left a railway line crossed the road on a high bridge to connect Coplow Hill Quarry and lime works with the Horrocksford branch. This was worked by small tank engines, possibly the same ones that worked Lane Head Quarry. After the quarry closed in the late 1940s the bridge and its rail line remained in-situ for many years but has now disappeared almost without trace.

By the bus stop on the opposite side of the road is a footpath sign. Follow the track indicated up the hill and cross over the stile to the left of the quarry entrance gate. A pleasant leafy path then takes you through the woods surrounding the old quarry which may be glimpsed on the right. It once formed a vast amphitheatre with a lake in the bottom but has now largely been filled in.

Most of the small quarries in this part of the Ribble Valley worked the reef knolls which once formed a coral reef surrounding the northwestern shore of an island, the remains of which form Pendle Hill. This white or reef limestone was burnt locally in kilns to produce lime for agricultural purposes and, prior to the coming of the railway, was transported from the district by pack ponies known as "Lime Gals" (Galloway ponies). Horrocksford and Lane Head quarried deeper strata "blue" limestone for roadstone and cement-making.

Rounding a bend in the track, the Clitheroe - Hellifield railway line comes into view once more. The path here has been reinforced with bricks and stones suggesting that it is probably muddy in wet weather. The path emerges between Nos 52 & 54 Moorland Crescent, starts again opposite No. 40, and leads back over to Pimlico Road down the side of Rock Mount, a large Victorian house, once the residence of Horrocksford Quarry managers.

Turn right to complete the circle and the turn left at the junction with the Pimlico Link Road and West Bradford Road. [Straight ahead is the truncated stump of Chatburn Old Road which used to cross the hill to Chatburn but was obliterated when Horrocksford and Lane Head quarries finally "coalesced" around thirty years ago. From the top, the workings of Lane Head Quarry could be observed. I remember, in the 1950s, watching the little 0-4-0 saddle tanks working the wagons on the temporary railways in the bottom of the quarry. One of the last of these locos was broken up in Clitheroe goods yard about 1958.]

At the top of the rise West Bradford Road crosses the Horrocksford branch by an ungated crossing complete with flashing lights and sirens. The branch then disappears into the Castle Cement works, bending away out of sight to the right through points whilst the straight-on line disappears into the lorry

park. This is where the cement trains are loaded. The northern end of the loop can be observed from the road crossing or, more easily, from the adjacent Johnson-Matthey level crossing. This end of the loop is controlled by a single-lever point.

Walk down West Bradford Road to a point opposite CCL Gate 3. It was at about this point that the tramway from Cross Hill Quarry crossed the road. Today, there is no evidence to be seen. Leave the road here and follow the path formed by the original trackbed as far as the first waymarker. Fork left here up the hill and turn right at the top. The path here then takes you across the top of one part of the old quarry which, 50 years ago formed a wonderful adventure playground with a pond containing great crested newts. This part was filled in some years ago and now the rest of the quarry bottom, where cattle once grazed, is totally overgrown and looks like a Lancastrian version of the Corsican maquis!

The path, another former tramway, leads along the top of the quarry face affording stunning views of the River Ribble at Dangerous Corner and Spike's Pit as well as Waddington and West Bradford villages and fells. Notice that much of the fencing on your right is constructed using old tramway rails of fairly light construction, perhaps 20-25lbs/ft.

Pass through a small gate, noting its ingenious but simple return mechanism, and at the second "snake" bench bear left and take the path along the field side (ignoring the stile to the right). Pass Moorland School's Nursery & Baby Unit, through a "chicane" and cross the road. To your left, Moorland School occupies the former residence known as Knunck Knowles. Follow the track until it bends to the left. At this point cross the stile (which also has a "dog gate"). Cross the next stile on the left of the barn and, at the top of the slope remake your acquaintance with the bridge over the Horrocksford branch. Turn right and retrace your steps as far as Waddington Road railway bridge. Turn left immediately before the bridge and return to the station via the Interchange and Maxwells!

Start/Finish Clitheroe railway station.

Distance 3 miles.

Time - can be walked easily in about 75 minutes but allow 2-3 hours to enable exploration and observation.

Maps - O.S. Landranger 103.

Other transport - not required

Watering holes - Wagon & Horses, Pimlico Road: Maxwells Cafe & Wine Bar in Dawsons, at the bottom of King Street.

Public toilets - Waddington Road end of Brungerley Park (off route), CITF Control Room.

Stiles - 3.

Suitability - all. Equates to a DalesRail "Easy". Stout walking shoes or boots may be required after wet weather.

7th November 2008