

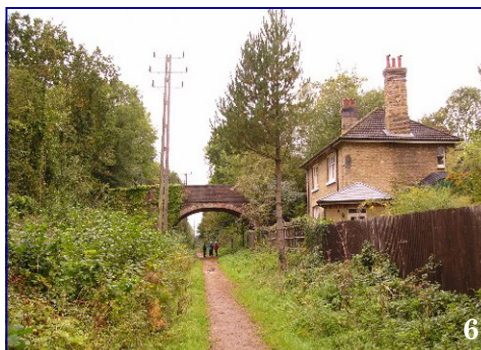


'Old railways provide uniquely fascinating routes through both town and country, but they remain man-made, artificial routes. Almost inevitably, one finds questions coming to mind - why does the line go this way rather than that? who travelled this route and why? and what sort of machines were in use? The more you think you know, the more the questions multiply and the more fascinating the whole exercise becomes - and I use the word "exercise" deliberately for, if railway walking does nothing else, it does get us out of the dusty archives and into the open air.' (Anthony Burton, *Walking the Line*, Blandford Press, 1985)



Aims

- To discover, explore and document disused railway lines.
- To encourage interest in the walking and conservation of abandoned railway lines.
- To bring to the attention of the appropriate authorities those disused lines which we consider to be suitable for conversion into public footpaths or cycle ways.
- To promote signposting, clearing of undergrowth etc. on converted lines.
- To create regional groups of the club throughout the UK with area teams to organise local activities.
- To bring together members of Railway Ramblers to walk the routes of abandoned railways in different parts of the country.
- To disseminate up-to-date information through reports, newsletters etc.
- To respect private property and the Country Code at all times.



RAILWAY RAMBLERS



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Have you ever looked over the parapet of a bridge and seen not a road, nor railway, nor stream but a level stretch of unkempt grass punctuated by bushes, saplings and possibly a rough footpath and wondered what it was, where it was leading and why it was there? Have you ever seen two high banks coming towards each other with a gap over the road on which you were travelling and wondered what had disappeared and why it had done so? The answer in each case is probably a railway. It had once carried trains but has now ceased to do so. Perhaps closure was comparatively recent, as a result of the 'Beeching' proposals for streamlining the railways in the 1960s, or perhaps it happened long before that.

Who is responsible for Britain's closed railways? What, if anything, are they used for? Disused lines have been ploughed under by farmers who have added them to their fields. Some have been converted to roads or had bungalows, factories, offices etc. built over them. Others have been made into formal paths for walking, cycling or horse riding. But in many cases, they have simply been left to nature. They may still be owned by the railway property board or a local authority, but such bodies do not actually have to do anything with them. If they want, they can just let them fill up with weeds.



Is there an organisation which can answer questions and takes an interest in disused railways?

Yes — Railway Ramblers. The club was founded in 1978 and is represented throughout Great Britain with about 500 members. Many are keen railway historians with an encyclopaedic knowledge of Britain's railways, past and present. They are aware of the history and location of disused lines and explore them whenever possible. Usually their findings are published in the club's quarterly magazine 'Railway Ramblings'. There, a potted history of each line is given along with a description of a walk along it, and information about what railway relics or buildings remain. However, once the club's members have explored a line, that is not necessarily the end of the matter. The club aims to encourage their conversion to public paths, along with clearance, signposting and maintenance. So Railway Ramblers want to make sure that disused railway lines are not left to rot. Where club members feel that a disused line could be converted into a well-used path, they encourage public bodies such as county councils, charitable organisations etc. to convert the lines into 'rail trails' for the benefit of all.

The club has also provided finance from its Footpath Fund to help various organisations convert disused railways into high quality trails. Recently, this has included financial support for the restoration of important structures such as viaducts.

Railway Ramblers, however, is not just a study group or pressure group: it is a social group as well. Through its area teams across Britain, it organises walks along disused railways; not only railways, indeed, for canals, Roman roads and other interesting features are visited should they be close at hand. Interesting features can, of course, include pubs and inns, which may be handy or even essential! The club also negotiates with landowners for occasional one-off access to old lines which are privately owned and therefore not open to the public. The 'Railway Ramblings' magazine keeps members up to date about walks undertaken, forthcoming walks, new path openings, developments planned by official bodies, and so on. It is illustrated with members' sketches, drawings and photographs, some of which appear in this brochure.

Acknowledgements. Photographs: (1) Bowes Railway, Tyne and Wear; (2) Near Bugsworth Canal Basin, Derbyshire; (3) Crook o'Lune West Viaduct, Lancashire; (4) Instow, Devon; (5) Wadebridge, Cornwall; (6) Ash Green, Surrey. With thanks to Kevin Arnold, Richard Lewis, Ralph Rawlinson and Ivor Sutton. **Text:** Duncan McLeish and Jeff Vinter. **Brochure Design:** Jenny Cooper.

