

Trevor

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VIDEO TO FOLLOW FROM — DAVID

# A BAD ATTACK OF RAILWAYITIS

26 March, 2003.

*Dent to Ribbleshead, with a branch line to the summit of Blea Moor.*

*The wayfarers: David, Trevor, Bill. Weather: Hazy sun, warm, relatively calm.*



In the morning, Shirley took David and Trevor to Dent Town, letting them loose at the car park, from where they bestrode the Craven Way over the fell to cross the railway just south of Blea Moor Tunnel. Bill, having a morning appointment with the Nurse (blood pressure was quite high, now normal), set off for Ribbleshead in the early afternoon.

Trevor had been promised a walk in people-less terrain. The footpath was, at one stretch, quite crowded. Bill had promised himself some time to secure Settle-Carlisle video film. So having parked at Ribbleshead (and sold six copies of his book on Ribbleshead Viaduct to Pat Wood, at her mobile café), he followed the old tramway, leaving it to photograph a lime kiln, a heap of discarded Ribbleshead bricks (made of local clay) and a northward-bound gypsum train. He chatted with an old friend, waved at a signaller, just relieved from Blea Moor box and walking down the side of the track to where he had parked his car.

He then photographed the aforementioned box, with its toilet attachment. (One signaller lit his pipe while sitting in state and passed what he thought was the spent match between his legs; it set fire to the chemicals in the toilet. He had a narrow shave). Beside the box was a dwelling, in course of restoration, a white cockerel and red hen in a coop (they crowed when a laden coal train passed) and a wallside where the last of the (tart) Blea Moor rhubarb was putting out crinkly leaves.

Bill headed towards the south portal of Blea Moor as the local ravens had a round of gruff calling. He then saw David and Trevor, minus Popsie the dog, who was ill. (Lump on spine being attended to by David's daughter, who specialises in such matters). We decided to scale the heights of Blea Moor, following a path through a

landscape where, in the long absence of rain, the vegetation was crisply dry. Except for some dubs on the path, where frogs were in mating mode, amid a mass of fresh spawn that resembled semolina. One puddle had dried up. The spawn deposited here was just grey mush.

We followed the old track between heaps of debris drawn up the tunnel shafts in buckets operated by vertical steam engines. Some boulders were huge. Green railings around one depression were supposedly painted that colour for camouflage. Which was laughable. Trevor pointed out they were conspicuous against the dun colours of the moorland. A curlew called distantly. Pipits chirruped.

We saw rusty grills that, in Victorian times, had covered the tops of the shafts. They were now protected by strands of barbed wire. Bits of old drainage piping was half-buried in grass and debris. At the summit of the path (where it prepared to descend to Denthead) we examined the crumbly mortar in the old winch house. Bill proposed we visit the quarry from which the Midland drew sandstone, to be crushed into sand for mortar needed at the two viaducts and the tunnel walls.

We trudged across mossy ground, between tufts of dry rushes, to where we could walk along a ridge and attain the summit plateau of Blea Moor and the trig point that would normally offer a fabulous view of the district (now wrapped in mist). We now made a bee-line to the track we had used for the ascent, thankful that a normally sodden moor was now suffering from sunstroke.

On the way back to Ribblehead, we met a lady with a curious dog. She told us that in its lofty, shaggy frame were traces of deerhound, collie and greyhound. The collie had determined the pattern. The white tip to its tail was a useful indicator when it was being taken for a walk at night. We noticed the dog's white face. We discovered that the dog's name was Megan and that it was given a diet of chicken carcasses and meaty bone with raw pulped vegetable, suitable for the diet of a wolf. That day, in the wild, it would be seeking rabbits.

We stood beside a deepish, rush-fringed, pathside pool where frogs were engaged in doing what comes naturally. We heard a sound that David likened to the *brrr, brrr* of a motor-bike engine. We saw the water stir as frogly games were enacted. And we saw a welling up of frog-spawn. The pub had closed at 4-00 and it was now 5-10. We walked to Bill's car and were conveyed to Settle, where (in David's case) some Old Peculier (not forgetting Popsie) awaited him.

