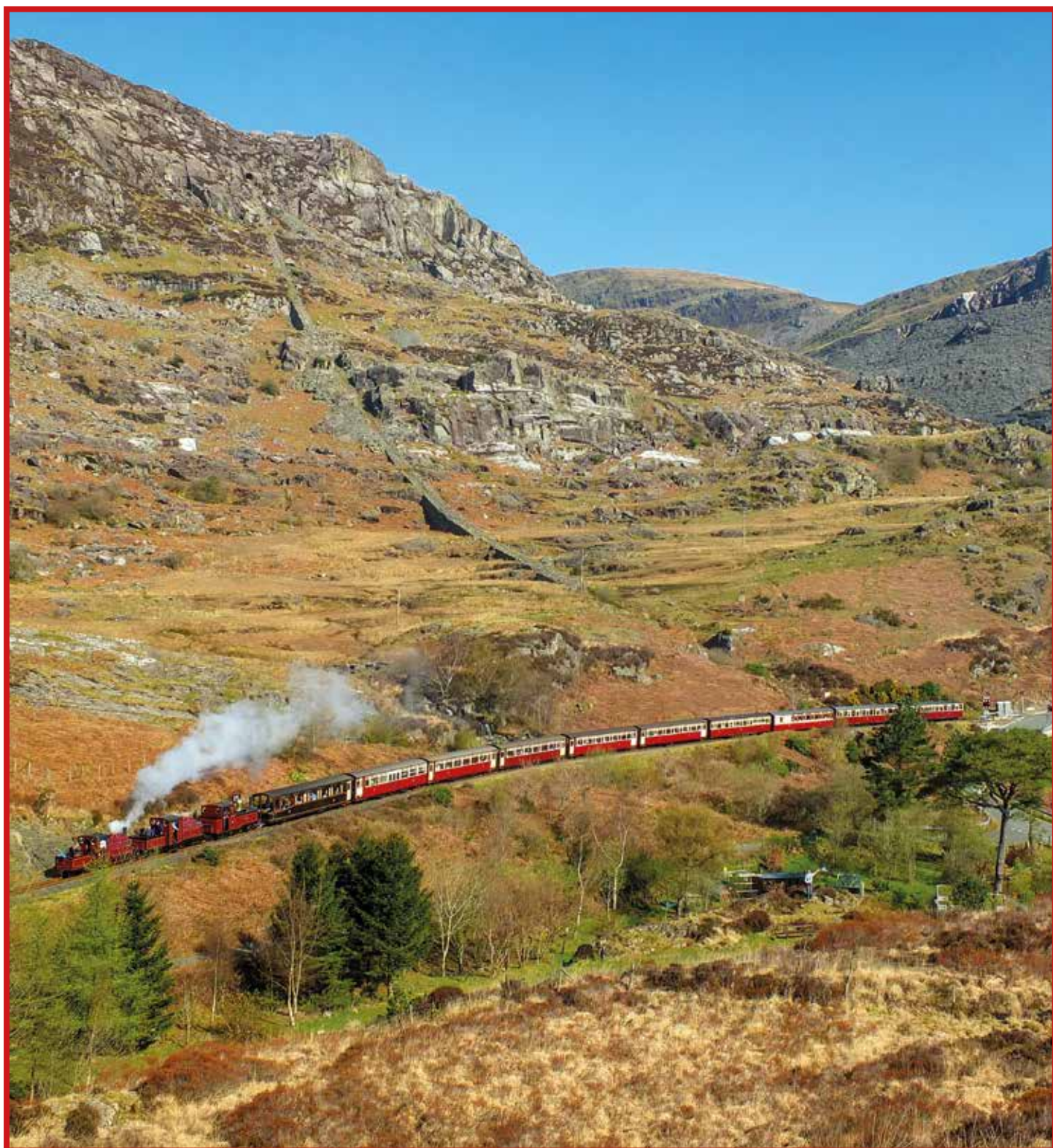


STEAMING THROUGH Snowdonia

IN THE TOP LEFT-HAND CORNER OF WALES



Love Snowdonia ♥ Great Scenery ♥ Fresh Air ♥ Plan Your Trip

Croeso Welcome

Welcome to our brand-new edition of *Steaming Through Snowdonia* and the UK's premier heritage steam railways – The Ffestiniog & Welsh Highland Railways - where your journey IS the destination.

In recent years £40m of investment and the tireless work of hundreds of volunteers has created an incredible new railway which runs through the scenic heart of Snowdonia. Described by *Discover Britain* magazine as 'one of the most beautiful railway journeys in Britain', the recently restored Welsh Highland Railway connects directly with the Ffestiniog Railway to create a magical 40-mile coast to coast journey from the World Heritage site of Caernarfon through the stunningly beautiful scenery of the Snowdonia National Park to the harbour town of Porthmadog. From here, the Ffestiniog Railway steams past mountains, lakes, waterfalls and forests teeming with wildlife, as it climbs to the fascinating Victorian slate capital of the world at Blaenau Ffestiniog.

In 2019 we invite you to begin your journey from our brand new £3 million station in Caernarfon. This exciting architecturally-designed station, cleverly fashioned from glass, metal and stone, is a key component of Caernarfon's £16 million Waterfront Regeneration Project and includes a shop, booking desk, exhibition hall and a coffee shop, which offers dramatic views over Caernarfon Castle, the Afon Seiont river, the harbour and the Menai Strait with Anglesey beyond.

Here, at the Ffestiniog & Welsh Highland Railways it really is the best of both worlds for our passengers. We update our fleet of heritage-style carriages annually to ensure everyone receives the benefits of modern-day comfort, all-ability access and panoramic windows, whilst at the same time experiencing the excitement of being transported by at least one of our historic steam locomotives, several of which are over 125 years old.

If you are looking for that extra luxury, perhaps for a special occasion, then our First-Class Pullman observation cars will be just perfect for you. Reflecting a golden era of rail travel, our modern

take on First Class travel offers a hint as to what 1930s journeys on the Orient Express would have been like.

A journey on the Ffestiniog and Welsh Highland Railways is however not just about looking back in time, it is also about looking forward. Our business is two-fold; firstly, ensuring our passengers have a wonderful experience every time they travel with us and secondly ensuring we conserve this nationally important historic railway and its infrastructure for future generations to enjoy. Just like the National Trust does with its historic properties, we use the income generated from fares and fundraising to rebuild historic locomotives, as well as preserve original Victorian railway buildings, bridges and engineering works.

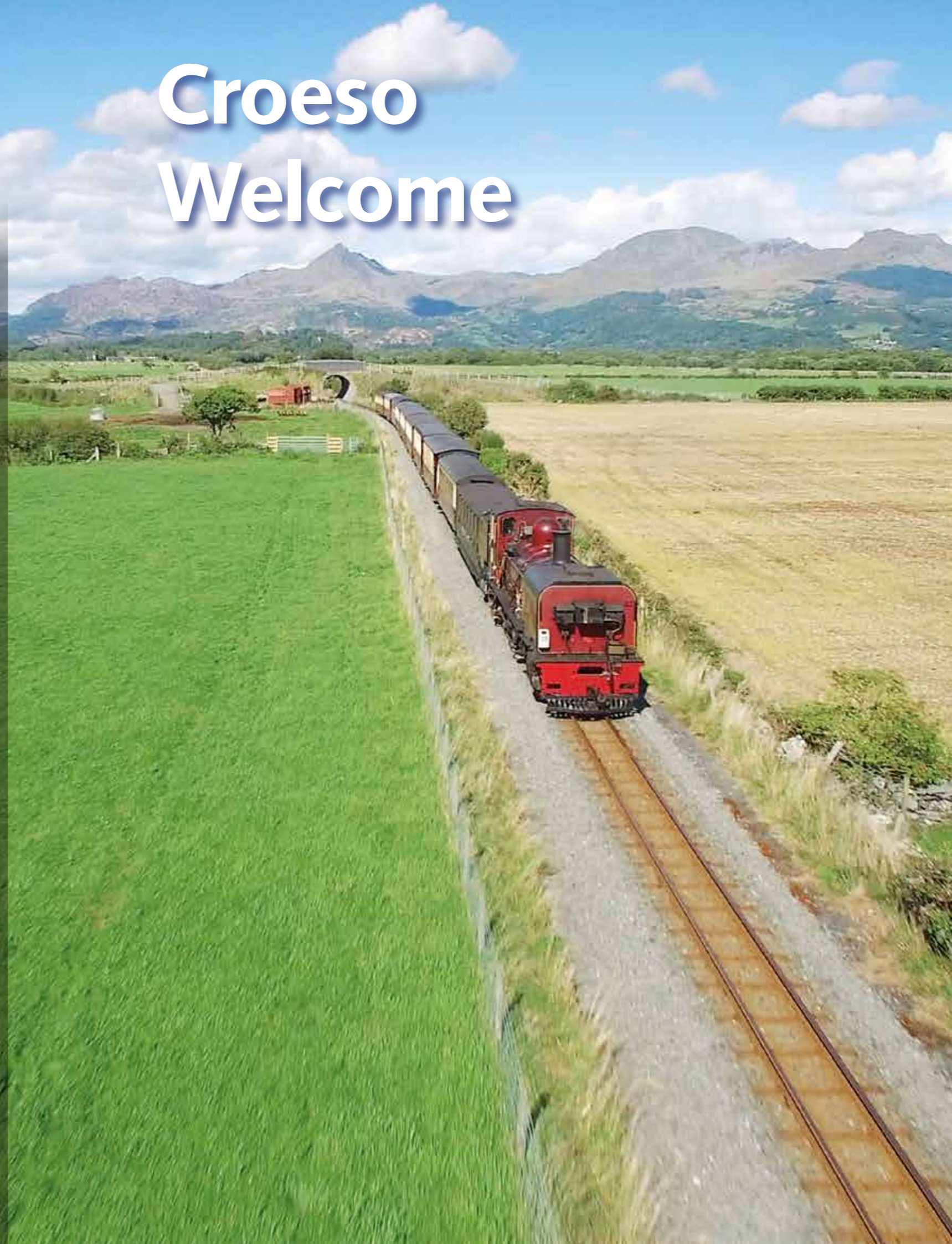
Our business is important to the local economy too. Visitors to the Railways bring £25 million annually into the local community, its shops, cafes, hotels and ancillary businesses. Collectively we provide local work for over 100 people. We also run numerous training and apprenticeship schemes for young people, covering a range of skills from engineering to tourism and customer care.

No matter what time of the year you choose to make a journey on the Ffestiniog and Welsh Highland Railways (remembering that your journey IS your destination) I guarantee there will always be something to see and do. Special events and activities are run throughout the year and information on these can be found in the following pages.

Make 2019 the year you come and enjoy one of the most beautiful railway journeys in Britain and by doing so you too will be helping to conserve this historic and nationally important railway, as well as supporting the local communities who live amongst this unique and dramatic landscape in North Wales.

Paul Lewin

General Manager Ffestiniog & Welsh Highland Railways



Steam railways are as much a part of the scenery of the top left-hand corner of Wales as the mountains, lakes, forests and coastline they travel past. The sight of heritage steam engines and carriages on the Welsh Highland Railway heading from Rhyd Ddu in the direction of Llyn Cwellyn, with the whole panorama of the western flanks of Snowdon behind, is one of the finest views to be had anywhere in the world. Just as awesome is the journey on the Ffestiniog Railway as it crosses Cei Mawr; at 62 feet (19 metres) tall it is the largest free-standing dry-stone wall in Europe. Combine the two lines and you have the longest heritage railway route in Britain, running for 40 miles (64 km) from high in the mountains at Blaenau Ffestiniog, down to the coast at Porthmadog and then back up into the mountains, where it reaches its highest elevation at 650 feet (198 metres) near Pitt's Head Rock (a natural rock, the outline of which is said to resemble the profile of British Prime Minister William Pitt the Younger) before

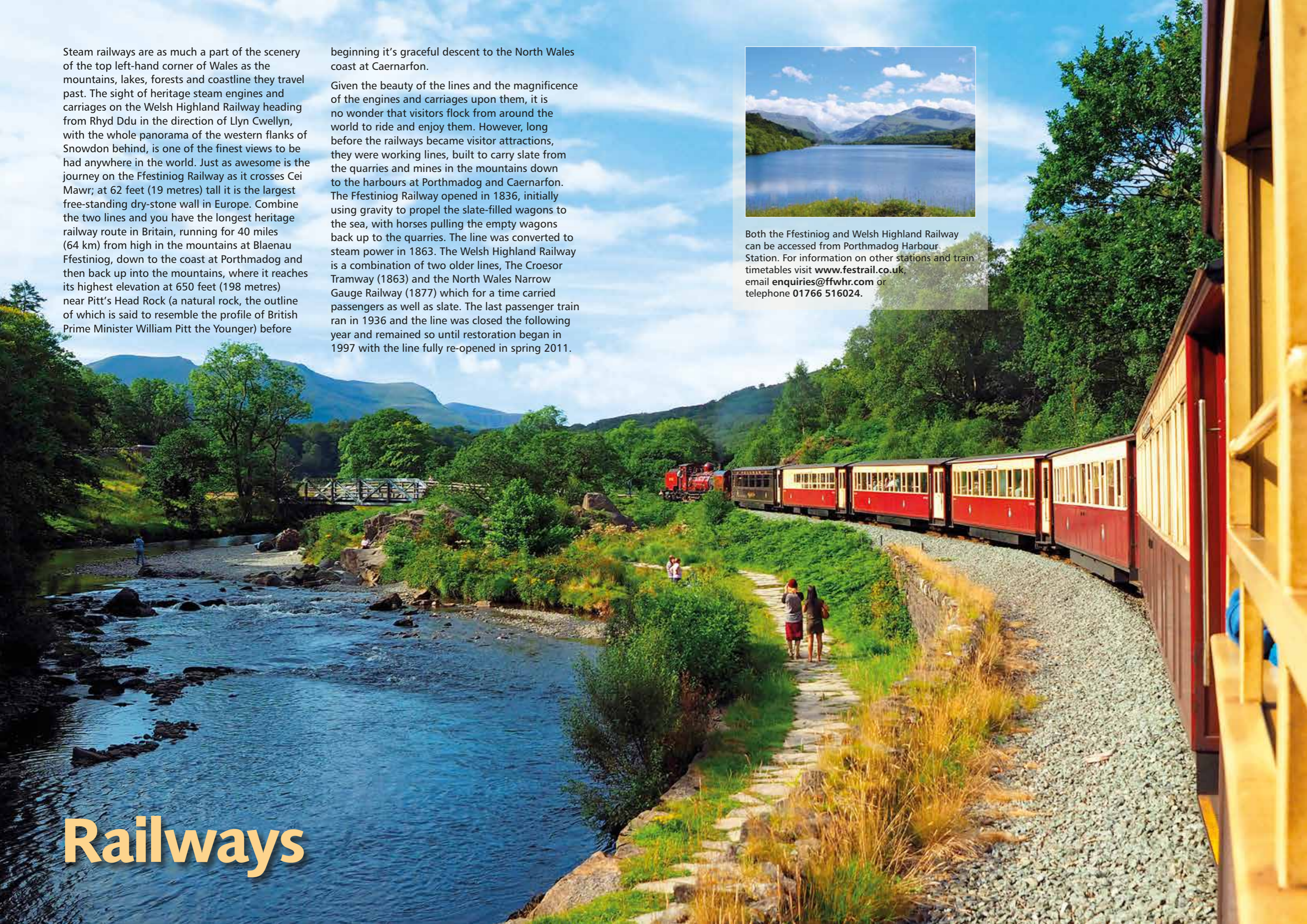
beginning its graceful descent to the North Wales coast at Caernarfon.

Given the beauty of the lines and the magnificence of the engines and carriages upon them, it is no wonder that visitors flock from around the world to ride and enjoy them. However, long before the railways became visitor attractions, they were working lines, built to carry slate from the quarries and mines in the mountains down to the harbours at Porthmadog and Caernarfon. The Ffestiniog Railway opened in 1836, initially using gravity to propel the slate-filled wagons to the sea, with horses pulling the empty wagons back up to the quarries. The line was converted to steam power in 1863. The Welsh Highland Railway is a combination of two older lines, The Croesor Tramway (1863) and the North Wales Narrow Gauge Railway (1877) which for a time carried passengers as well as slate. The last passenger train ran in 1936 and the line was closed the following year and remained so until restoration began in 1997 with the line fully re-opened in spring 2011.



Both the Ffestiniog and Welsh Highland Railway can be accessed from Porthmadog Harbour Station. For information on other stations and train timetables visit www.festrail.co.uk, email enquiries@ffwhr.com or telephone 01766 516024.

Railways





We are proud that all our new carriages are built in our workshops at Boston Lodge by our own craftsmen. We are even able to take on young local apprentices to ensure these skills are passed on for the next generation. We were delighted that the quality of our craftsmanship was endorsed when first class Pullman observation carriage, 'Glaslyn', was officially named by Her Majesty The Queen.

Welcome Aboard



Our trains may be small but our welcome is huge! From the friendly chap in the car park who helps you find a space and who can give you some tips on which stations to visit, to the driver giving the engine a polish while he waits for departure time, everyone is here to help you enjoy your trip. Many of our staff are actually volunteers, giving their time to make sure the railways are a great place to visit. They love their railway and they want you to love it too.

We are constantly investing in our carriages - after all, that is where you will spend most of your visit so your comfort is important. In 2016, we launched a whole new train with a beautiful observation saloon, kitchen, toilet and some modern standard class saloons with double glazing, heating and extra leg room. Three more new carriages have been added to the fleet in 2017 with more on the way. Once on board, our stewards are there to look after your needs

with an at your seat refreshment service on both railways and freshly prepared hot and cold food on the longer Welsh Highland Railway. Imagine yourself sitting back in your seat with a freshly prepared snack and a glass of local beer or a soft drink whilst gazing out at the stunning scenery passing your window - what a way to travel!

To make the most of your visit, it is a good idea to allow a whole day, especially for the Welsh Highland; this will give you time to explore as well as travel. There are, however, a myriad of shorter journeys, one way trips and circular tours using other forms of transport so we hope you will find a journey to suit you. There is a lot more information on our website www.festrail.co.uk. You can book many of our tickets and other services online.

We look forward to seeing you

Have you been to Caernarfon recently? Well if not, you should because something exciting is happening. Caernarfon now has a stunning new £3 million railway station, which not only provides the gateway to the amazing Welsh Highland Railway – considered by many to be the most scenic steam railway in the UK – but also includes a shop, exhibition hall and great coffee shop offering panoramic views of Caernarfon's World Heritage Castle and the adjacent Waterfront. This really is the place to start your visit to Caernarfon, whether you arrive by train or not.

*Want to know more?
Then read on.....*

The first railway station in Caernarfon opened in 1852 to serve the recently-opened standard-gauge London & North Western Railway line. By 1869 Caernarfon Station served routes heading east along the North Wales coast, west down the Llyn Peninsula and south to Llanberis. All routes to and from Caernarfon were closed and the track lifted as part of Dr Richard Beeching's restructuring of the British Rail network in 1963-65.

In 1997 railway track was once again laid into Caernarfon, this time as part of the restoration of the narrow-gauge, Welsh Highland Railway. In the same year the WHR built their first station in Caernarfon, which consisted of a 'temporary' small booking office, shop and toilets. This station continued in service for 20 years, only closing in 2017 to make way for an exciting 21st-century-architecturally designed and improved terminus.

The first steps to the creation of Caernarfon's new station took place in 2013 with the launch of an architectural design competition. Seven designs were submitted to a panel of judges which included representatives from the Ffestiniog & Welsh Highland Railways, the Welsh Government and Gwynedd County Council. Other independent advisors that became involved in final

design discussions included CADW and the Caernarfon Harbour Trust. All parties agreed the design should sit comfortably alongside the nearby World Heritage site of Caernarfon Castle but make its own statement and not be a 'mock castle, nor a Victorian pastiche'.

The eventual winners of the competition were Purcell, a renowned international architectural company who also designed the award-winning visitor centre for Yr Ysgwrn, Snowdonia home of Welsh bard and First World War poet Hedd Wyn.

By September 2017 groundworks for the new station were complete and building construction commenced. In January 2018 alterations to the rail track (to accommodate the new station platform) took place. By May 2018 the building was taking shape and in November 2018 external construction was complete, allowing the winter months to finalise all internal work including the installation of a new café, shop, toilets and exhibition hall in readiness for the 2019 visitor season.

Today, Caernarfon's new £3 million station, with its sleek sinuous lines and clever use of glass, metal and stone is a triumphant testament to the hard work and resolve displayed by all partners involved. It also forms a key part to Caernarfon's £16 million Waterfront Regeneration Project, which has been led by Gwynedd County Council and part funded by the European Regional Development Fund through the Welsh Government.

For those who arrive at Caernarfon Station by Welsh Highland Railway steam locomotives, the new station acts as your launch pad to a fascinating and enjoyable visit to one of the world's finest castles, the bustling medieval town of Caernarfon and its network of footpaths, some of which follow the water's edge of the Menai Strait and afford glorious views of the Isle of Anglesey (Ynys Môn) beyond.

The people of Caernarfon are rightly proud of their town, now for the first time in over half a century they have a railway station to be proud of too.



Stations are all about a sense of arrival, be it at the beginning of a journey or the end. For those excitedly arriving at Caernarfon station ready to commence their journey on the Welsh Highland Railway the sense of arrival begins in the station's welcome rotunda. Here you can select a direct route through to the booking desk, platforms and trains, or choose alternative routes which lead either to the café, where you can gaze over Caernarfon's magnificent castle and adjacent waterfront, or to the shop and exhibition area.

All Change at Caernarfon Station!

Caring for our Heritage

There are two very important sides to the work of the Ffestiniog and Welsh Highland Railways. Firstly, running as a successful tourist attraction, one of the most important and popular heritage steam railways in Wales and secondly, conserving and maintaining the historical infrastructure that the tourist attraction is built upon. This not only includes rolling stock, carriages and locomotives, but also historic buildings, stations, bridges and other structures.

Visitors to the Ffestiniog and Welsh Highland Railways love the experience of travelling on an iconic train pulled by historic steam locomotives (some well over 125 years-old) whilst at the same time enjoying the modern-day comforts found on-board expertly reproduced 'vintage' carriages. Indeed, by simply travelling on the railways, visitors are helping to conserve this remarkable Victorian masterpiece for future generations to enjoy. There are however scores of other on-going conservation projects, which ensure the survival of these unique and beautiful railways. Three of these conservation projects are featured here.

CEI MAWR

At 100 metres long and over 18 metres high, Cei Mawr is the largest drystone wall in Europe and one of the most impressive structures on the Ffestiniog Railway. It was originally constructed in the 1830s to take the railway line and its wagons of dressed slate from the quarries around Blaenau Ffestiniog, across a river and wide ravine, to ships waiting at Porthmadog harbour. The Ffestiniog and Welsh Highland Railways constantly monitor, maintain and where necessary repair this magnificent and historically important structure. Between 1989 and 1992 repairs were carried out to the culvert at the base of the wall and more recently the Railway has worked in partnership with the National Trust to clear conifer trees from the wall and its immediate surroundings. This operation has opened up stunning vistas for train passengers crossing the wall, as well as allowing those following the public footpath at its base to view at close proximity this wonder of Victorian construction.



Strengthened with stone buttresses in 1887 and 1890 at the cost of £1000, the wall has, over the past 130 years, transported thousands of tonnes of slate as well as thousands of passengers safely across the ravine.

COED Y BLEIDDIAU

During 2017 and 2018 an abandoned cottage alongside the Ffestiniog Railway line called Coed y Bleiddiau (wood of wolves) was faithfully and beautifully restored by the Landmark Trust in partnership with the Ffestiniog and Welsh Highland Railways.

Coed y Bleiddiau was originally built in 1863 to house Ffestiniog Railway linesman Henry Hovendon and his family. It stands close to where the last wild wolf in Wales was sighted in the 17th century. It was from this cottage that Hovendon oversaw the transportation of thousands of tonnes of slate from the quarries of Blaenau Ffestiniog to ships at berth in Porthmadog Harbour.

By the early part of the 20th century the slate industry was in decline and therefore the importance of the Ffestiniog Railway too. Coed y Bleiddiau was no longer needed to house employees of the railway and was leased out to a succession of tenants including the music composer Granville Bantock (a close friend of Edward Elgar) and the family of Russian spy Kim Philby.

BOSTON LODGE REGENERATION PROJECT

With a history stretching back over 200 years, Boston Lodge is the only railway works in the world to have built steam locomotives in the 19th, 20th and 21st centuries. One of the oldest buildings on the site is the barracks built in 1811 to house men working on the construction of the nearby sea wall known as The Cob. Other buildings from the first sixty years of the 19th century include an iron foundry, blacksmith's shop, Superintendent's office and the first ever narrow-gauge locomotive shed built in the UK.

Until recently much of the historical fabric from this early period was in decline, partly lost or obscured by later development. However, the Ffestiniog and Welsh Highland Railway is now working on a ten-year, £5 million match-funded comprehensive regeneration project in partnership with the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) which will conserve the historical heritage of the entire site and enable the railway to tell the fascinating story of its development over three centuries.

Included within the first phase of the project is protecting the site from rising sea levels and restoring nine of the original buildings, including the historic locomotive shed and the smithy, which will be returned to its former glory as it was in the 19th century (including working hearth, bellows and anvil).



Alongside this work a dynamic and interactive £5 million interpretation programme is being developed which will enable visitors to access the site, learn about the unique history of Boston Lodge and even work on heritage projects through a series of training and apprenticeship schemes. The Ffestiniog & Welsh Highland Railways is currently working hard with grant funding bodies to secure vital match-funding that will enable this programme to go forward, thereby equipping the next generation of young people with the skills to ensure Britain's railway heritage is conserved for the foreseeable future.

Caring for our Heritage



Bringing Steam Locomotives Back To Life

Garratt Locomotive 130

Since the Welsh Highland Railway fully reopened in 2011 it has been operating with three Beyer Garratt locomotives, each powerful enough to pull up to ten carriages full of passengers from sea-level at Porthmadog to a summit point of 650 feet (198 metres) near Rhyd Ddu and then back to sea-level at Caernarfon. These engines work for two hundred days each year and if they require a running repair, they often need to be allowed to cool down for up to two days before work can commence on them. With their ten-year major overhaul on the horizon and just one further engine under restoration, it became clear in 2014 that the WHR would have difficulty running a full service by 2020, if another engine was not found.

Enter Gloucestershire-based Steam Powered Services Ltd. (SPS) and its Managing Director Peter Best, who had recently acquired an ex-South African Railways NGG16 Garratt locomotive, number 130, from the Exmoor Steam Railway. The locomotive was one of a batch of 12 built by the Manchester firm of Beyer Peacock in 1951, to a design dating from 1937 and exported to South Africa for use on the extensive two-foot-gauge railways of the Cape and Natal. Following over 30 years' service, during which she 'clocked-up' several hundred thousand miles, 130 was last operational on the Port Shepstone-Harding branch in Natal, where she was withdrawn from service in 1985.

Already in a tired condition, the locomotive was plundered for her expensive brass and bronze parts and left to rot in an African siding until, in the 1990s, she was brought back to the UK, initially to be restored and put into service on the proposed Whitby to Robin Hood's Bay Railway. When this scheme failed to get off the ground, 130 was moved to the Exmoor Steam Railway. Although carefully coated in oil and watched over, the time stored outside on Exmoor did nothing to improve her condition, so when Peter Best's company SPS acquired her at the end of 2014, it really was 'the best thing' that could have happened. Having funded the successful restoration of four engines before, Peter knew 130 would be a challenge and therefore decided

to involve the Ffestiniog and Welsh Highland Railways in her restoration, with SPS acting as sponsor for all the work required.

Inspections carried out in 2015 on the rest of the locomotive showed that the metalwork of the water tanks, bunker and cab were all wearing thin from years of corrosion. Since 2015 new ones have been fabricated in situ at Dinas.

The chassis however was found to be in better condition (being made of much stronger material) and so it has been restored, updated and fitted with WHR's standard system of vacuum brakes. No stone has been left unturned in the overhaul, every part has been measured and checked and everything (other than the boiler) that needed to be replaced has been fashioned to the original drawings at the Dinas workshops and reusable parts carefully brought back into good condition. This includes the tyres, which unlike car tyres, are made of rolled steel to enable them to last up to 30 years. Sadly, 130's original tyres were beyond repair and so had to be carefully cut off and new ones fitted. A Beyer Garratt has twenty wheels that collectively cost around £15,000 to produce and that is before the fitting process, which also takes rather longer than fitting car tyres!

Throughout the process, Peter Best has been on hand, not only regularly visiting Dinas workshops but working tirelessly to find missing parts, which sometimes has involved trips back to Africa. All the Garratts on the Welsh Highland Railway carry unique liveries and Peter has a very special livery in mind for 130. So much so, that it is being kept a closely guarded secret throughout the restoration process and will only be revealed when the paint tins are opened for the railway's craftsmen to apply.

With all efforts going into restoring Garratt locomotive 130, it is hoped that she will be operational on the Welsh Highland Railway during 2019. Who knows, by the time you read this, it might well be the locomotive that is pulling your train!



In June 2015, the first major components of 130, including two power units, boiler cradle, bunker and water tank, were delivered by road from the Exmoor Steam Railway to the Welsh Highland Railway's workshops at Dinas near Caernarfon. It was quickly determined that the locomotive's boiler was beyond restoration and would need to be replaced. WHR engineers worked on an updated design and put this design to Adam Dagleish Engineering Ltd in Stockton On Tees, who built and delivered the new boiler to Dinas in December 2018. It was the first new boiler for one of the NGG16-type locomotives.

Mountains



Two popular routes up Snowdon begin from Welsh Highland Railway stations – the Rhyd Ddu Path and the Snowdon Ranger Path. Both routes approach the mountain from the west and offer superb views of coastline as well as mountains. By studying the railway timetable it is possible to use the train to reach the beginning of one path, climb to the summit and then descend the other path, where you can take the train back to your original starting point.

The Snowdonia National Park covers 823 square miles (2,130 km²) and is one of the most mountainous regions of the British Isles. Within its boundary there are 15 mountains over 3,000 feet (914 metres) in height and a further 130 that are over 2,000 feet (609 metres). The tallest of them all is Snowdon, which at 3,560 feet (1,085 metres) is the tallest mountain in both Wales and England. The Welsh name for Snowdon is Yr Wyddfa, which translates as 'the tumulus', 'the barrow' or even 'the tomb'. All three names are said to refer to a legend which states the mountain is the final resting place of a giant killed by King Arthur (see page 31). On occasions, the name 'Eryri' is used for the mountain, although strictly speaking this is the generic Welsh name for the region of Snowdonia. Eryri translates as 'the land of eagles'; however, recent evidence suggests it may derive from the Latin 'oriri' which simply means a 'rising' or 'highlands'.

Each year around 360,000 people climb to the summit of Snowdon making it one of the most climbed mountains in the world. There are seven main routes to the summit ranging from the relatively 'easy walking' Llanberis Path (9 miles, 14.6 km) to the difficult Crib Goch route (7 miles, 11.2 km) which requires some scrambling and a very good head for heights.

Connoisseurs of mountain walking in North Wales will tell you there are many other mountains in the region that are more enjoyable to climb and less busy and that may be true; however, there are few people who can resist the opportunity to climb one of the world's most iconic mountains and marvel at its stunning views which, on a clear day, can stretch as far as the Wicklow Mountains of Ireland.

Lakes

Where you find mountains you normally find lakes and that is certainly the case in North Wales and particularly within the Snowdonia National Park where there are over 100 lakes or llynnoedd (llyn is the Welsh for lake) greater than one acre (0.4 hectares) in size - this is arguably more than within the Lake District National Park.

The majority of lakes are natural lakes formed as a result of glaciation and these include the largest, Llyn Tegid (Bala Lake) which has a surface area of 1,196 acres (484 hectares) or 678 full size football pitches. Of a similar size is Llyn Trawsfynydd, a man-made lake originally constructed in the 1920s to supply water to a local hydroelectric power scheme at Maentwrog. Other lakes are reservoirs, using the natural geography to store water off the surrounding hills and supply it to many towns and cities.

There is much discussion as to which of Snowdonia's lakes are the most beautiful; to some extent 'beauty is in the eye of the beholder' and each lake can look dramatically different in varying weather conditions and seasons. However, most agree it is on calm, blue sky days when the lakes mirror the surrounding hills, mountains and forests which have the best aesthetic appeal, and these would include large lakes such as Llyn Gwynant and Llyn Dinas in the Nant Gwynant valley to the east of Beddgelert, Llyn Ogwen near Bethesda and Llyn Cwellyn on the western side of the National Park. In this instance though size is not everything and smaller llynnoedd, such as Llyn Mair near Tan y Bwlch, Llyn y Gader near Rhyd Ddu and Llyn Glaslyn immediately below the summit cairn of Snowdon are equally as beautiful and atmospheric.



From Rhyd Ddu station on the Welsh Highland Railway, you simply cross the road to reach an accessible path along the shores of Llyn y Gader. Looking back towards the station, across the lake gives stunning views of the summit of Snowdon. This is start of the Lôn Gwyrfa Trail which will take you all the way to Beddgelert.

Rivers & Waterfalls



Both Nantmor and Beddgelert stations on the Welsh Highland Railway provide easy access to The Fisherman's Path, a two mile (3.2 km) walk which follows the river and waterfalls through the Aberglaslyn Pass. It is possible to disembark at one station, walk the pass and then continue your railway journey from the other station.

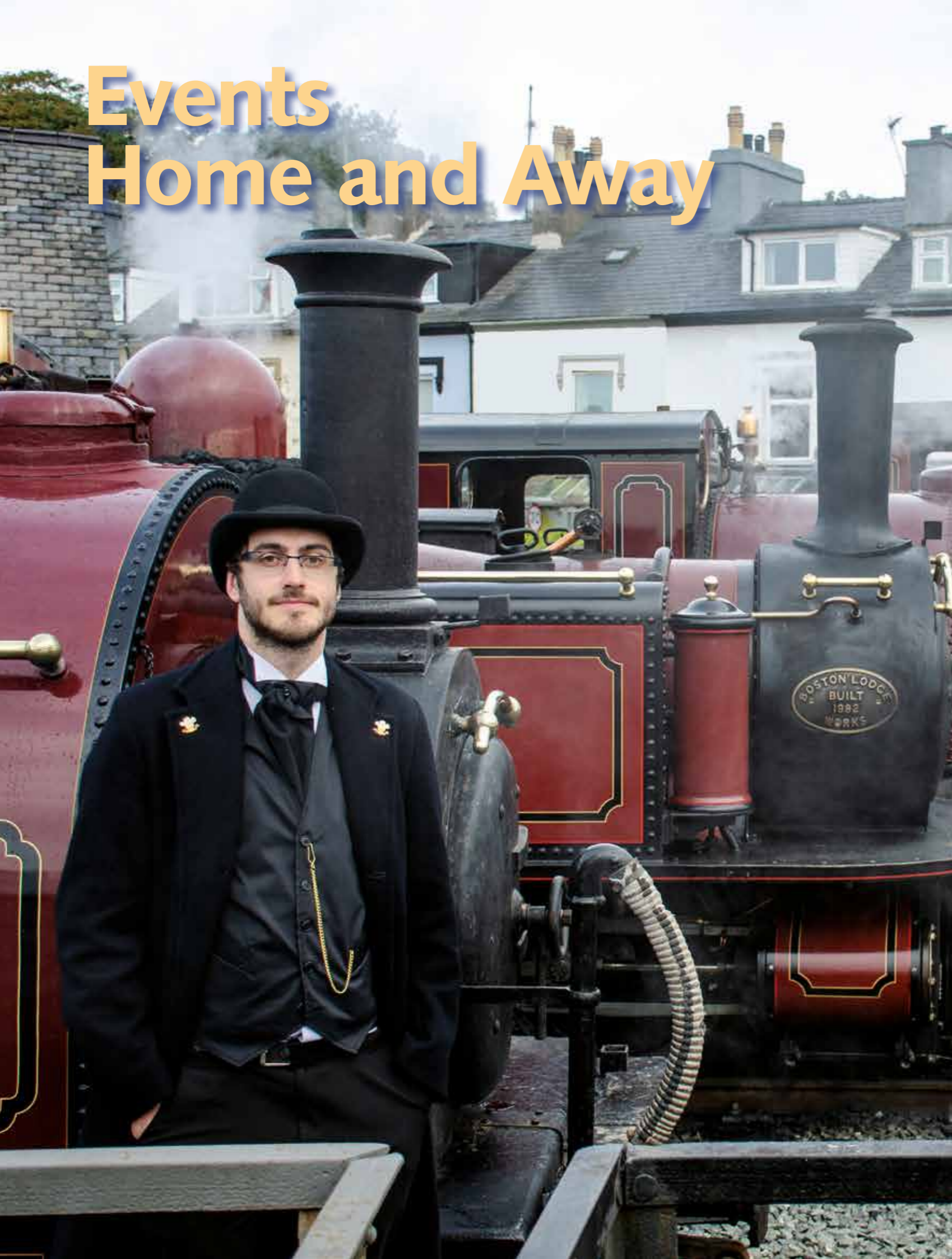
The Ffestiniog Railway runs through the forests high above the Afon Dwyrdd. There are great walks to be had in this valley with some fantastic views out towards the coast. As it approaches Blaenau Ffestiniog, waterfalls abound, tumbling down the steep hillside. The train passes over the foot of one such waterfall as it crosses the river before entering Tanygrisiau station.

The top left-hand corner of Wales is blessed with numerous rivers and waterfalls, all of which add to the beauty of the region. One of the longest is the Afon Conwy (River Conwy) which runs for 27 miles (43 km) from its source high in the Arenig Mountains, through the popular tourist destination of Betws-y-Coed and along the eastern boundary of the Snowdonia National Park before entering the sea close to Conwy town and castle. There are several scenic waterfalls along its length, but perhaps the finest of them all is Swallow Falls (Rhaeadr Ewynnol) which is located just north of Betws-y-Coed on the Afon Llugwy, a tributary of the Afon Conwy. A tourist attraction since the Victorian era, the Falls are probably seen at their best after heavy rain in early spring or late autumn when the surrounding trees are leafless.

Far more visible throughout the year are the beautiful cascades which descend Cwm Llan, a valley on the south side of Snowdon. Here, the foaming white water plunges into a series of rocky pools which run parallel to the Watkin Path route to the summit of Snowdon. The water eventually feeds into the Afon Glaslyn, a river which initially flows calmly in the direction of Beddgelert, where it is joined by the Afon Colwyn, a river that rises on the western flanks of Snowdon. From here, the river enters a second phase of spectacular waterfalls, rocky cascades and pools as it descends a narrow mountain pass to the Aberglaslyn (mouth of the Glaslyn) close to the village of Nantmor. Often described as one of the most beautiful and dramatic scenes in Britain, you can view it all from the comfort of your railway carriage, as the Welsh Highland Railway runs alongside the river all the way through the Aberglaslyn Pass.

Many of the rivers run along the bottom of what were once glaciated valleys such as the Afon Dwyrdd in the Vale of Ffestiniog. The Ffestiniog Railway runs high along the valley side with glimpses of the river snaking out towards the estuary, beside which is Portmeirion, the famous Italianate village.

Events Home and Away



The Ffestiniog & Welsh Highland Railways are well known for their excellent events featuring their original locomotives and carriages, such as the annual Victorian weekend; but did you know they put on a wide variety of extras throughout the year on both railways? Not only that, they also go out 'on tour' promoting the railways, and the Snowdonia area, at major destinations such as Kings Cross Station and the Shrewsbury Flower Show.

Our 'Home' events are to provide added value for our customers. There is a mixture of events to suit all tastes, some of which are featured below. In addition, there are often music nights and family treats such as footplate rides. Be sure to look at our website or Facebook page for up to date news of all events.

Cwrrw ar y Cledrau Rail Ale Festival. – Mid May.

This event is now in its fifteenth year and is a lively weekend combining steam trains with quality local real ales and ciders, live music and food. It is a popular date with locals and visitors alike.

Victorian Weekend – October

The Ffestiniog Railway is often described as 'History on the Move'. Many of our locomotives are from the Victorian era while some of our older carriages and wagons have been lovingly restored. So this weekend give a chance to showcase all this wonderful and sometimes quirky rolling stock. And it is not just about trains – watch the Victorian costumed ladies promenade along the platform, the cloth capped railwaymen riding the gravity trains and visit the stalls of the Victorian market. Great fun for all whether you are watching or taking part.

Santa Specials – December

Santa trains run on both railways during December, and what better time to travel with the splendid crisp scenery, and Santa and his elves on board to hand out presents and entertain the kids.

Our 'Away' events are for a very different audience as we introduce ourselves, the railways, and the wonderful area in which we live to people in different parts of the country. You may well have been given this magazine at such an event.

These events are very much about teamwork. Local volunteers will come and talk to you about their favourite little railways, drivers entertain with short trips or foot plate rides while others will have organised the track, polished the carriages and ensured that everything is there to give a good show.

...and the most frequently asked question – "How did you get it here?" Well, we could not do these trips without the support and care of our hauliers, The Milner family from Stoke on Trent. They treat our little trains with the greatest of care and never blink when we suggest they take their lorry into Kings Cross station at midnight or into the middle of an indoor caravan show in Manchester. Then comes the 'Wallace & Gromit' style shifting into position – you just wouldn't believe it!

If this has left you intrigued, have a look at our You Tube channel, F&WHR TV, which can be found on our website www.festrail.co.uk. There are lots more videos for you to watch from our in-house cameraman. Enjoy!



Coastal Path

May 2012 saw the official opening of the 'All Wales Coastal Footpath'; a long-distance trail which follows, or runs close to, the coastline of Wales. Its total length is 870 miles (1,400 km) and it runs from Chepstow in the south to the mouth of the River Dee near Queensferry in the north and it is the first coastal path in the world to trace a country's entire coastline.

Over 350 miles of the route follow the coastline of the top left-hand corner of Wales, including a 120 mile (193 km) stretch around Anglesey (Ynys Môn) and 91 miles (146 km) around the Llyn Peninsula. This latter route runs from Porthmadog to Caernarfon and takes in the most north-westerly tip of Wales overlooking Bardsey Island (Ynys Enlli). In places, the path follows the ancient pilgrimage route to Bardsey, which is reputed to be the burial place for 20,000 saints. Bardsey

became an important religious site when Saint Cadfan built a monastery there in 516, although by then the island was already being used as a refuge for persecuted Christians.

The coastal scenery around the Llyn Peninsula with its hidden rocky coves, soaring sea cliffs and stunning views is undoubtedly some of the finest in Britain, as well as being a haven for wildlife. bottlenose dolphins, porpoises and grey seals are regularly sighted in the coastal waters of the Irish Sea and red-billed choughs, Manx shearwaters and puffins all nest in the region. From the highest cliffs of the Llyn Peninsula on a clear day it is possible to see the coastline of Ireland running south from Dublin.



Sections of the 'All Wales Coastal Footpath' can be easily accessed from Dinas and Caernarfon stations on the Welsh Highland Railway and Porthmadog Harbour Station where Ffestiniog Railway and Welsh Highland Railways meet. The Welsh Highland line runs 'coast to coast' from Porthmadog to Caernarfon and takes in the glorious scenery of the Snowdonia National Park along the way. A circular section of the coastal footpath also runs inland alongside the Afon Dwryd to its bridge-crossing by the delightful village of Maentwrog. Access to this route can be achieved by disembarking the Ffestiniog Railway at Penrhynudraeth or Tan y Bwlch station.

Beaches

One of the surprises for many people when they arrive in the top left-hand corner of Wales for the first time is the abundance of lovely beaches. Some liken them to the beaches of Cornwall but with one major difference, North West Wales beaches rarely, if ever, get overcrowded. The peace and tranquillity is beguiling, as is the cleanliness; around the coast there are no fewer than 20 Blue Flag beaches, compared with just seven in Cornwall.

Anglesey and the Llyn Peninsula alone boast over 100 stunning beaches and that is without including those east of the Menai Strait and south of Porthmadog. In truth, it is difficult to pick out the very best of all North West Wales' beaches, but some worthy of highlighting are Porth Neigwl (Hell's Mouth), a four-mile-long dog-friendly beach with good waves, making it popular with surfers; Aberdaron with its delightful village and St Hywyn's Church clustered along

the shoreline; Porth Oer (Whistling Sands) which gets its name from the distinctive 'squeaking' sound the sand particles make as you walk upon them; Porth Dinllaen, probably best known for Ty Coch, the pub on the beach frequented by actress Demi Moore in the film 'Half Light'; Dinas Dinlle, just south of Caernarfon, which has unrivalled views of Anglesey and Holyhead Mountain; the Anglesey beaches of Treath Cymyran, White Beach, Newborough and the National Trust's Porth Dafarch; Harlech Beach, accessed through the internationally famous Royal St David's golf course and backed by sand dunes designated as a National Nature Reserve (NNR) and a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI); and finally Black Rock Sands, a two and a half mile (4 km) stretch of golden sand near Porthmadog.



It is just a 15 minute stroll from Porthmadog Harbour Station to the attractive little port and sandy coves of Borth y Gest. From here, footpaths lead through the dunes to the delightful beaches of Morfa Bychan, Samson Bay and Black Rock Sands. From Caernarfon station, there are walks along the foreshore of the Menai Strait and access to the 'All Wales Coastal Footpath'. It is an easy 40 minute walk from Dinas station to the Blue Flag Beach at Dinas Dinlle...

A well-marked trail through the woodlands to Plas Tan y Bwlch starts from Tan y Bwlch station on the Ffestiniog Railway. A trail guide is available free of charge from the station café and the walk normally takes less than one hour.

A four mile (6.5 km) wonderful forest walk through Beddgelert Forest can be accessed from both Beddgelert and Rhyd Ddu stations on the Welsh Highland Railway. Walk in either direction and then take the train back to your original starting point.

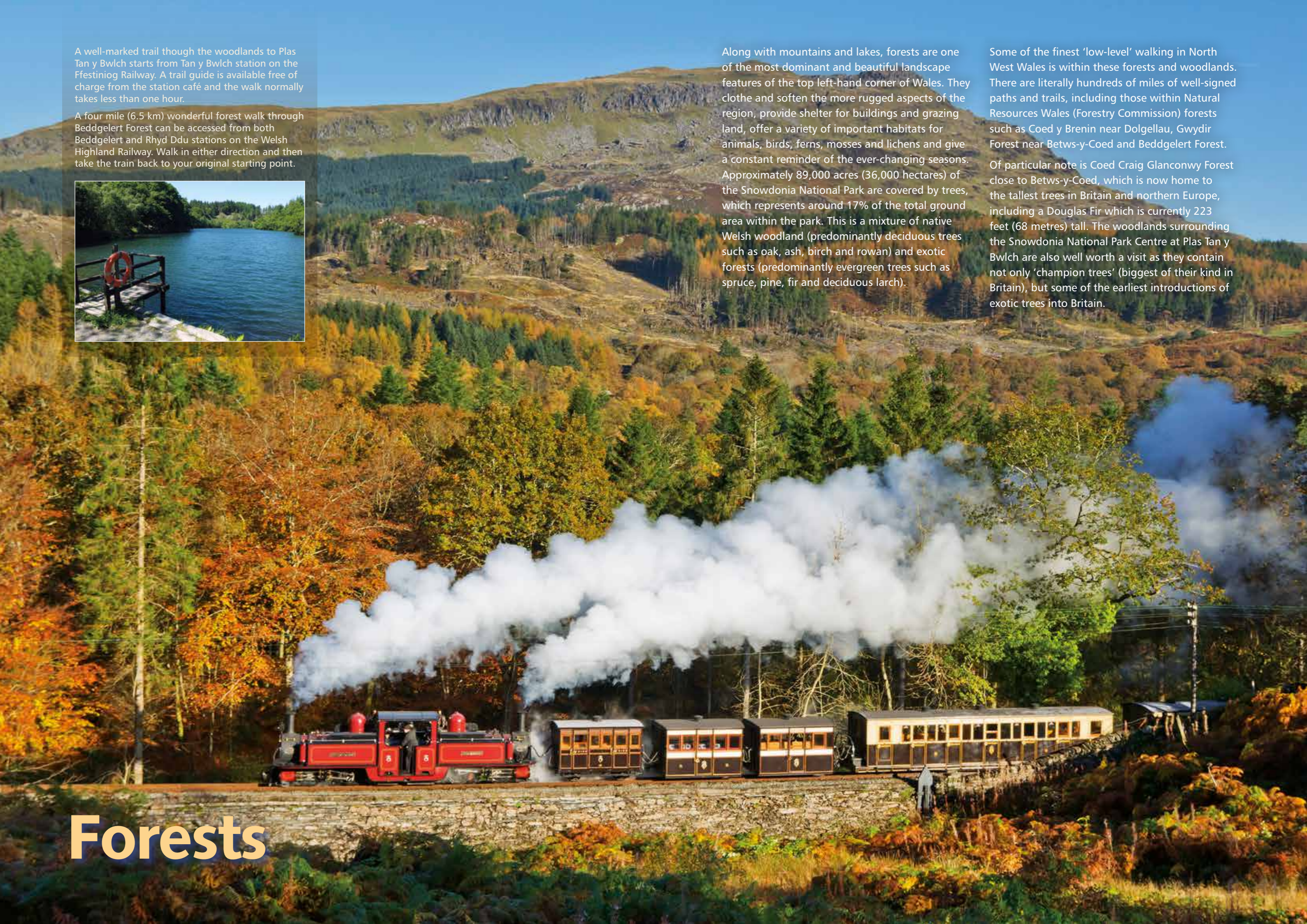


Along with mountains and lakes, forests are one of the most dominant and beautiful landscape features of the top left-hand corner of Wales. They clothe and soften the more rugged aspects of the region, provide shelter for buildings and grazing land, offer a variety of important habitats for animals, birds, ferns, mosses and lichens and give a constant reminder of the ever-changing seasons. Approximately 89,000 acres (36,000 hectares) of the Snowdonia National Park are covered by trees, which represents around 17% of the total ground area within the park. This is a mixture of native Welsh woodland (predominantly deciduous trees such as oak, ash, birch and rowan) and exotic forests (predominantly evergreen trees such as spruce, pine, fir and deciduous larch).

Some of the finest 'low-level' walking in North West Wales is within these forests and woodlands. There are literally hundreds of miles of well-signed paths and trails, including those within Natural Resources Wales (Forestry Commission) forests such as Coed y Brenin near Dolgellau, Gwydir Forest near Betws-y-Coed and Beddgelert Forest.

Of particular note is Coed Craig Glanconwy Forest close to Betws-y-Coed, which is now home to the tallest trees in Britain and northern Europe, including a Douglas Fir which is currently 223 feet (68 metres) tall. The woodlands surrounding the Snowdonia National Park Centre at Plas Tan y Bwlch are also well worth a visit as they contain not only 'champion trees' (biggest of their kind in Britain), but some of the earliest introductions of exotic trees into Britain.

Forests



Wildlife

There is no shortage of wildlife within the top left-hand corner of Wales and particularly within the 823 square miles (2,130 km²) of the Snowdonia National Park. Otters now thrive in rivers such as the Glaslyn which flows south from Snowdon to the coast at Porthmadog, polecat numbers are on the increase and a population boom of 'wild' mountain goats, means they are regularly seen grazing on the lower slopes of the Nant Gwynant valley and in the Beddgelert area. Although the goats have existed in North Wales since the end of the last Ice Age 10,000 years ago, they are officially not 'wild' but 'feral' as they were domesticated about 8,000 BC by nomadic tribes living within the area.

On the Isle of Anglesey (Ynys Môn), the number of red squirrels have increased dramatically over the past twenty years: in 1997 there were just 40; today there are over 500 and a small number have made it back onto the mainland and are

living in woodland close to the Menai Strait. Good places to spot red squirrels are in the grounds of the National Trust property at Plas Newydd, Plas Cadnant Hidden Garden and Newborough Forest.

Perhaps the most exciting wildlife story in recent years has been the return of breeding ospreys to several locations within the region including the Dyfi valley near Machynlleth and the Glaslyn valley near Porthmadog, where osprey chicks have been successfully raised every year since 2005. Visitor centres are now open at both sites and nest webcams beam footage of the osprey's progress to hundreds of followers around the world.



The Bywyd Gwylt Glaslyn Wildlife visitor centre is located next to Pont Croesor station on the Welsh Highland Railway and is open during the day throughout the breeding season from April until September. Walks from Beddgelert station on the Welsh Highland Railway lead into Nant Gwynant, where mountain goats are often seen.

The diversity of the Glaslyn estuary beside the Ffestiniog Railway at Porthmadog offers an excellent place for birdwatchers with a wide variety of waders and wildfowl. The Porthmadog station signalman has the best view from his box of any in the country and can spot Little Egret fishing from his door!

It is no secret that North West Wales contains some of the most beautiful scenery within the British Isles. The region has long been admired and visited for its rugged mountains, waterfalls, tranquil lakes, forests, seaside resorts, miles of glorious sandy beaches, secluded rocky coves, magnificent castles, historic mansions, heritage steam railways, slate caverns and even gold mines.

However, the gardens of Snowdonia and North Wales are not so well known and yet within the region there is a stunning collection of world class gardens to be discovered; gardens which thrive because their westerly location allows them to benefit from the warmth and moisture of the Gulf Stream. Hard frosts are rare and droughts seldom long, particularly in the coastal regions, making it an ideal place to grow plants collected from every corner of the world.

Some of the finest gardens within the region include Bodnant Gardens, a National Trust garden which has superb collections of rhododendrons, camellias and magnolias and extensive views to the mountains of Snowdonia from the west-facing terraces; Plas Cadnant, a beautiful ten acre (four hectare) private garden (now open to the public) situated close to the Menai Strait on Anglesey and lovingly restored over the past 21 years by its owner Anthony Tavernor; and Plas Brondanw, the ancestral home of Portmeirion architect Sir Clough Williams-Ellis, which is surrounded by a unique and very beautiful 'garden of rooms', with each room given a different theme and bordered by yew hedging and flamboyant topiary, which also frame the sublime views of the surrounding mountains. In late May and early June each year, the gardens of the region come together to stage a North Wales Festival of Gardens, www.gardenstovisit.net



The gardens of Plas Brondanw (www.plasbrondanw.com) are situated on the outskirts of Garreg, Llanfrothen, which is a 30 minute easy walk from Pont Croesor station on the Welsh Highland Railway. The gardens of Plas Tan y Bwlch (www.plastanybwlch.com) can be accessed from both Tan y Bwlch and Plas Halt stations on the Ffestiniog Railway. The railways themselves are justifiably proud of their floral displays, especially the long flowerbed at Minffordd Station which is lovingly maintained by our volunteers and is an attraction in its own right.

Gardens

There are over 20 castles in the top left-hand corner of Wales, some almost as intact as the day they were built, others gloriously romantic ruins hinting at past glory. Interestingly, despite being well and truly in Wales, they are not all 'Welsh' castles; a good number were built for the English King Edward I as part of his 'Iron Ring' of fortresses, constructed in the late 13th century to subdue the Welsh and reduce the risk of rebellion against English control. These castles include Conwy, Caernarfon, Beaumaris and Harlech. Each of these castles is strategically sited close to the sea which enhances defence, provides a way of escape and also a route for incoming supplies when under siege. Perhaps the mightiest of all of Edward I's castles is Caernarfon. Now a World Heritage site visited by thousands of people every year, it was the location for the investitures of 'recent' Princes of Wales in 1911 and again in 1969.

True Welsh castles tend to date from an earlier age and have associations with the original Welsh princes, such as Criccieth Castle, which stands so magnificently upon an imposing rocky prominence above the coastal town of the same name, with far-reaching views across Tremadog Bay. It was built in the early part of the 13th century for Llywelyn ap Iorwerth (Llewelyn the Great), who resisted English domination of Wales for over 40 years. Other castles built by the original Welsh princes include Dolbardarn Castle which is located by Llyn Pardarn near Llanberis and Dolwyddelan Castle which lies to the north east of Blaenau Ffestiniog and is said to have been built close to an earlier castle which was the birthplace of Llywelyn ap Iorwerth.



The entrance to Caernarfon Castle is within five minutes easy walk from Caernarfon station on the Welsh Highland Railway. Dolwyddelan Castle is little more than a ten minute bus or train ride from Blaenau Ffestiniog station on the Ffestiniog Railway. Similarly, Criccieth Castle is only a fifteen minute bus or train ride from Porthmadog.

And as you head up the Vale of Ffestiniog as you travel on the Ffestiniog Railway, look back towards the coast and you will see the silhouette of Harlech Castle guarding the edge of Cardigan bay.

Castles

Slate

Llechweidd Slate Caverns which run quarry tours both above and below ground, are just over one mile (1.6 km) from Blaenau Ffestiniog station on the Ffestiniog Railway. From Tanygrisiau station, also on the Ffestiniog Railway, fascinating walks lead through the ruined slate workings and dwellings of Cwmorthin, a derelict quarrying hamlet up in the mountains. From Beddgelert station on the Welsh Highland Railway, a flat level path of 40 minutes duration leads to the Sygun Copper Mine, which runs underground visitor tours. Paths from Tan y Bwlch station on the Ffestiniog Railway lead to Plas Tan y Bwlch, the Victorian mansion and home of slate mine owners, the Oakeley family.

On special occasions, it is possible to watch a reconstruction of a gravity train with original wagons, which have been carefully restored by our volunteers.



Nowhere in Britain does the geology of an area play such an important part in the landscapes of today than in this part of Wales. In particular, the geology of Snowdonia is both complex and varied, with rocky outcrops (and indeed whole mountains) collectively representing all geological periods from the Precambrian era 600 million years ago to the Jurassic period 150 million years ago. 450 million years ago, Snowdon was an active volcano, twice the height it is today and with a crater that stretched as far as Moel Hebog, a mountain now two miles to the west of the summit of Snowdon. Glaciation from successive Ice Ages since has carved and eroded the outlines of the mountains and the shapes of the valleys which are so familiar to us today.

It is past volcanic activity that produced the majority of the region's mineral wealth, which has been mined and quarried by humans for at least two thousand years. The Romans mined here for lead, silver, copper and gold and seams of all four still exist beneath our feet, but it is the mining and quarrying of slate that has had the biggest effect on both the landscape and the people who live here. Extracted from the ground and turned into roofing slates which were then exported around the world, slate brought prosperity and jobs to the area and was the catalyst for the building of

the Ffestiniog Railway as a means of transporting slate from the mountain quarries to the ships waiting at port. In the 1890s, 17,000 men were directly employed in the industry, producing over half a million tonnes of roofing slates out of more than 200 quarries and mines. The three biggest producers were the Penrhyn Quarry near Bethesda, Dinorwic Quarry near Llanberis and the Oakeley Quarry near Blaenau Ffestiniog.

The slate around Blaenau Ffestiniog was of particularly high quality and in big demand. The Ffestiniog Railway provided the ideal way to transport large quantities from the quarries down to the harbour at Porthmadog. Initially built as a gravity line, trains of wagons packed with cut slates, rolled down the line, often at great speed, with just the skill of the brakemen keeping them under control. The roaring sound of the train and the haunting wail of the head brakeman's horn would have echoed round the valley. It was the continuing demand for more and more slate that brought about the introduction of tiny steam locomotives in the 1860s, soon to be followed by the larger and powerful 'Double Fairlie' locomotives for which the railway is so famous.

Blaenau Ffestiniog is known as 'The Town That Roofed The World' and now the slate industry of North Wales is currently bidding for World Heritage status. This exciting initiative will certainly put the area on the map.



'Zip World' at Llechwedd is just over one mile (1.6 km) from Blaenau Ffestiniog station on the Ffestiniog Railway, www.zipworld.co.uk

The slate workings of Cwmorthin are within easy walking distance of Tanygrisiau station, also on the Ffestiniog Railway. For 'extreme caving', 'Go Below' with their trained guides is great, www.go-below.co.uk

Traditional activities such as hill walking and mountaineering have set hearts pumping in visitors to the top left-hand corner of Wales for nigh on 200 years, but more recently the region has seen a whole new range of activities emerging that offer the opportunity for thrills and 'adrenaline-rushes' of a completely different kind. Zip wires, high ropes, gigantic trampolines, toboggans and inland surfing are perhaps the most extreme examples of this new wave of tourist attractions and although not for all, they are very popular and introduce a whole new generation of visitors to the area. For many, it is a gateway to a landscape they have never experienced before and some then go on to explore, discover and enjoy other aspects of Snowdonia and North Wales. Not only that, these new visitor attractions breathe new life into old industrial sites that may have been ignored and forgotten for decades; it is recycling on a grand scale! Even the most ardent thrill-seeker cannot help but gaze in awe at mountains of waste slate and wonder about the industry and the workers that created them.

'The Slate Caverns' at Llechwedd near Blaenau Ffestiniog have become a mecca for those wanting to take part in these adrenaline activities.

'Zip World' have no less than three different options here – 'Zip World Titan' above ground and 'Bounce Below' and 'The Cavern' experience underground, including hurtling on zip wires through illuminated caverns deep inside the mountains, as well as three giant trampolines suspended in a cavern twice the size of St Paul's Cathedral! Meanwhile, on the same site, Antur Stiniog operate a world class downhill biking centre with five different routes from the top of the quarries. The views are amazing, as is the course! The world's largest slate quarry, Penrhyn Slate Quarry near Bethesda in the Nant Ffrancon valley, is now home to 'Zip World Velocity', the fastest zip line in the world and the longest in Europe; it is 1706 yards (1560 metres) long, drops 718 feet (219 metres) in height from start to finish and those taking part reach speeds of up to 102 miles (165 km) per hour!

Another thrilling activity is 'extreme caving'. Similar to potholing, it is organised by 'Go Below' and enters the subterranean world of Cwmorthin slate quarry near Tanygrisiau. A little further afield near Dolgarrog in the Conwy Valley, you will find 'Surf Snowdonia', a brand new inland surfing lake with artificial waves that guarantee the surf is up whenever you arrive.



Heart Pumping!



There is access to good cycle routes from most stations on the Ffestiniog and Welsh Highland Railways and cycles can be taken on the train for a fee of £3.00 (please book in advance 01766 516024). You don't even have to bring your own bikes as there is cycle hire in both Beddgelert (Beddgelert Bikes) and Caernarfon (Beics Menai Bikes) close to the station. From Caernarfon, you can cycle south on the Lôn Eifion Cycle Path, or north along the Menai Strait to Port Dinorwic.



With recreational and sport cycling at an all-time high in popularity across Britain right now, one of the most popular destinations for those wanting to cycle, is the top left-hand corner of Wales. This is little wonder, given the wealth of beautiful landscapes to cycle through, the relative lack of traffic and the diversity of signposted cycling routes that the region offers. Within North Wales there are cycling opportunities to suit everyone, ranging from extreme downhill mountain bike tracks to family-friendly waymarked cycle trails.

In all, there are over 1,000 miles (1,609 km) of recognised cycle routes and trails to be enjoyed, including Sustrans routes like 'Lon Las Cymru North' (NCN Route 8/82) which runs for 175 miles (281 km) from mid Wales via Caernarfon to Anglesey. Other Sustrans routes include the

'Dolgellau Loops' (NCN Route 8/82) a 53 mile (85 km) route around Cader Idris and the 'North Wales Coastal Route' (NCN Route 5) 41 miles (66 km). Find out more at www.sustrans.org.uk

As UK's first dedicated mountain bike trail centre, with around 90 miles (145 km) of routes, Coed y Brenin Forest, a few miles south of Blaenau Ffestiniog, offers off-road forest cycle routes to suit everyone from 'Green' (easy/novice) to 'Black' (very difficult/expert). Head for the Natural Resources Wales' Visitor Centre off the A470, where several cycle routes begin; also on site is bike hire, a café, shop, picnic area and play equipment for younger children. Both Beddgelert and Gwydir Forests also offer good 'off-tarmac' cycle routes through spectacular scenery.

For some serious downhill cycling, 'Antur Stiniog' near Blaenau Ffestiniog is a must. It is one of only a few 'uplift centres' in Wales, which means when you reach the end of your descent, there is a shuttle service to take you back to the top again! Find out more at www.anturstiniog.com



Cycling

Next Steps

Planning Your Trip

We hope you have enjoyed reading about Snowdonia and North Wales in this edition of 'Steaming through Snowdonia' and we hope we can welcome you to the region very soon. As you have seen within these pages, there is so much to see and do here in the top left-hand corner of Wales and undoubtedly something for everyone, be you seven or seventy, looking for a relaxing holiday or a pulse-racing experience. When it comes to accommodation, you really are spoilt for choice; take your pick from campsites, glamping pods, caravan parks, farmhouse B & Bs, holiday cottages, town apartments, guest houses, hotels and spas.

The following information should help you to plan your trip.

BY ROAD

The A55 expressway from Chester is the main route into North Wales with connections off the M56. For those travelling from further south, the A5 runs from the end of the M54 and the A470 comes up from South Wales. These are main trunk roads but remember once you have left them, the pace of life is slower in North Wales - that's why you want to visit - so give yourself a little extra time as the roads are a little slower and you need time to stop and take in those views!

BY PUBLIC TRANSPORT

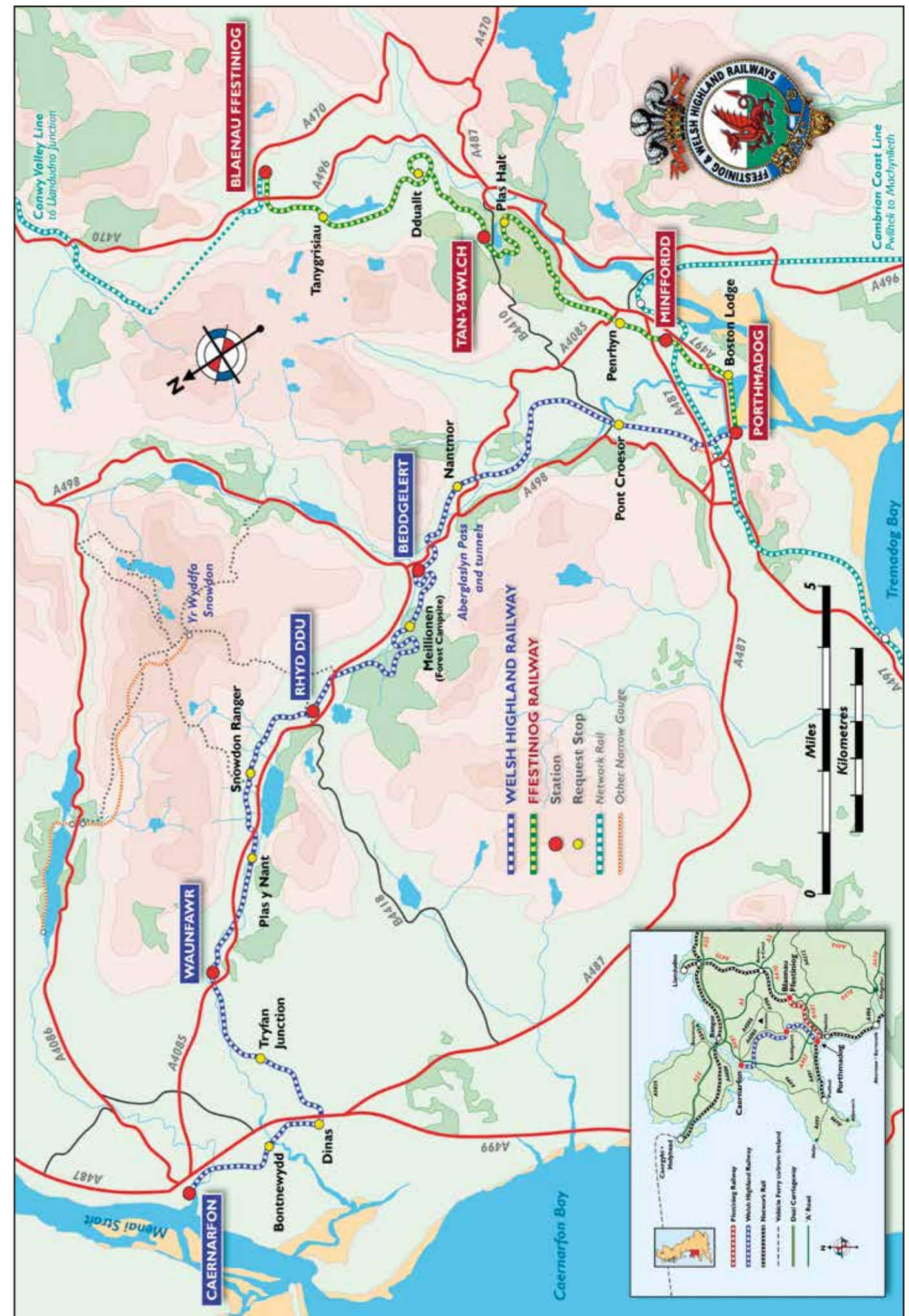
Did you know that Llandudno Junction is only three hours by Virgin Trains from London and two hours from Manchester? Once in Wales, there are a number of great value rover tickets which mean you can explore by bus and train from just £10 a day. Why stare at the road ahead when you could be taking in the view? If you are coming from the Midlands, the stunning Cambrian Coast line will bring you from Birmingham via Shrewsbury, right into the heart of Wales.

REALLY USEFUL WEBSITES

Ffestiniog & Welsh Highland Railways:
www.festrail.co.uk

Public Transport:
www.tfwrail.wales
www.virgintrains.co.uk
www.traveline-cymru.co.uk
www.bigtrainlittletrain.com

Accommodation, attractions and things to do:
www.greatlittletrainsofwales.co.uk
www.gonorthwales.co.uk
www.visitmidwales.co.uk
www.visitwales.com
www.walescoastpath.gov.uk
www.showmewales.co.uk
www.snowdoniapass.co.uk



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