

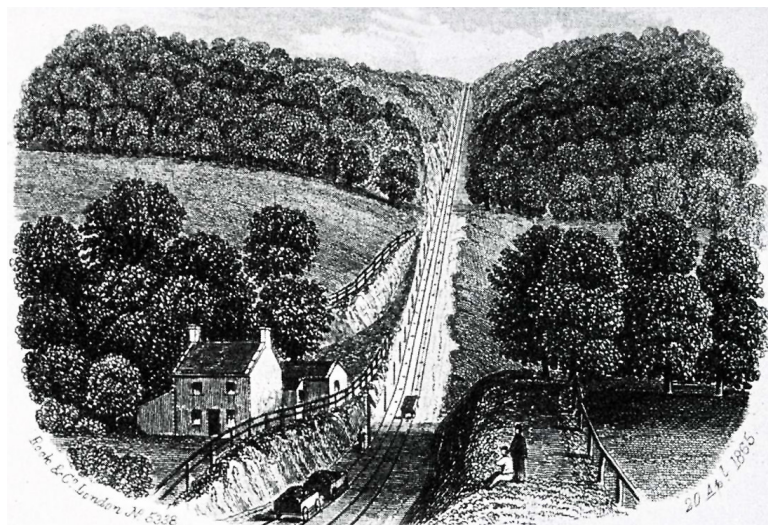


RAILWAYS AND GEOGRAPHY – STEEP HILLS AND DISUSED INFRASTRUCTURE

Railways up steep hills were usually built to obtain minerals but they carried passengers too. Why were they built and, if subsequently abandoned, how may we use the infrastructure to benefit society today?

Brendon Hills incline on West Somerset Mineral Railway. (1865).

The Railway was built to transport iron ore from mines in Somerset to blast furnaces in South Wales – via railways and ships



Railways And Geography – Steep Hills And Disused Infrastructure: Some railways were built in relatively unpopulated and physically challenging terrain. The promoters built them – at great capital cost – to obtain minerals but they carried passengers too. Indeed, new consumer-oriented mobility was encouraged and engendered by these railways and some of their spectacular infrastructure encouraged tourist interest. The civil engineering which made them possible remains in the landscape as exemplars of 'transport and mobility on display.'

There are still cultural and social rôles for these railway remains. The Ffestiniog and the Welsh Highland Railways have been preserved as working railways for passengers who are generally voyagers of choice making a journey for pleasure rather than travellers making a journey of need. The West Somerset Mineral Railway was finally abandoned in 1923 but the trackbed remains so Exmoor National Park has used it to improve access and mobility in the Park. The author has visited all his examples, researched their histories, walked some of the trackbeds, photographed, and will combine his on-the-ground experience with academic knowledge and practical museology.



Rob Shorland-Ball BA FMA. Museums & Heritage Consultant:

Rob is a former Deputy Head and Development Project Director of the National Railway Museum, York, UK. Since 1994 he has worked widely in the UK, a little in Europe, and in the USA, on heritage and railway-related projects.

His paper explores several railways which have been built, despite difficult terrain, for economic and social purposes and examines their use and sustainable future in the 21st century.