

Water-powered railway has its ups and downs

LYNTON — This English village is only 150 metres from its twin village of Lynmouth — but it's 150 metres straight up. The two are connected by one of the oddest railways you'll ever see — it's powered by water.

The railway has only two glass-box cars — reminiscent of the cable cars used on ski hills — and each is mounted atop steel tanks that hold 3,100 kilograms of water.

As the car at the top takes on the water, at the same time pulling up the second lighter car attached to it by steel cables.

At the bottom, the car discharges its water as the other car, now at the top, takes on a new load of water and the procedure continues.

The railway has been carry-

ing passengers since 1890. An act of Parliament was even passed to give the railway the perpetual right to water — which is piped in from two kilometres away in the West Lyn River and then held in storage tanks at the top of the lift.

You don't ride it for the view — trees mask that — but it's the ideal way to beat the precipitous climb. Before it was built, visitors paid sixpence to be carried up the hill by pony or donkey.

A dozen of us took the smooth, two-minute ride down from our Valley of the Rocks Hotel to the water-side fishing and resort village of Lynmouth, where there is the Rising Sun Hotel which dates from the 14th century.

We strolled an esplanade along the river with a variety of shops lining the road across from us. A footbridge over the river leads to the east beach.

Famous visitors used to stop by here in earlier days. William Wordsworth and his sister stayed in Lynmouth, as did Samuel Coleridge. The area also stirred the poetic heart of Percy Bysshe Shelley, who lived here with his young bride and wrote glowingly of the area's incredible grandeur.

It's still unspoiled, still worth visiting.

Back up at Lynton there are spectacular views. This village, about 270 kilometres west of London, is at the edge of Exmoor National Park.

From Lynton you can see the rugged coastline far below and take paths that show the tumbling East Lyn and West Lyn rivers, cascading over moss-covered rocks and slashing through ravines into the thickly wooded valley below, finally to merge and flow into Lynmouth Bay and the Bristol Channel. Wales lies mistily across the channel.

They still talk of the flood disaster in 1952 when, at the end of a rainy month, a cloudburst turned the Lyn rivers into raging torrents that hurled huge boulders down to the sea and swept a path of destruction through the village below. The rushing waters swept cars out to sea and 34 residents died.

If you enjoy walking — and it's really the only way to see the country around here — you can clamber through the Lyn valley and see some of the monumental boulders that tumbled down the hills in that flood of '52.

Then you can take footpaths through a wooded gorge and among luxuriant ferns with sudden views of waterfalls where the West Lyn cascades through a steep ravine.

Footpaths at the top lead to the Valley of the Rocks, a dry, grass-covered treeless amphitheatre where huge rocks, some of them hundreds of metres high and weathered into eerie shapes, leave you awestruck. Wild goats sometimes wander here.

This is Lorna Doone country. Part of R. D. Blackmore's story was set here in the Valley of the Rocks, where the local witch lived in a cave.

The rest of the story took place nearby on wild Exmoor, a beautiful national park where you may see red deer. Some 500 of them live here. And you're almost certain to see some of the wild Exmoor ponies.

An information centre operated by the National Parks, in Minehead on Highway A39 about 30 kilometres east of Lynton, lists walks that cover the best areas.

— Jim O'Neil
(Distributed by PN)

TWEEDSMUIR PARK

Anniversary plans set

Plans to celebrate the 50th anniversary of Tweedsmuir Park during the 1988 season are well on the road, according to Visitor Services Officer Jim Beck, Cariboo District office, Parks and Outdoor Recreation Branch, Ministry of Environment and Parks.

The public are invited to visit the one million hectare park during 1988 to enjoy its diversity and join in ongoing events.

Consisting of more than 20 per cent of B.C.'s parklands, the huge park contains, in Lord Tweedsmuir's own words, "some of the loveliest lakes, rivers and mountains on the continent."

The half-century celebration will be centred in the Bella Coola valley from June 30 to Aug. 1 with a host of planned events, including a re-enactment of Alexander Mackenzie's arrival in 1793 staged by members of the Alexander Mackenzie Trail Association.

Participation by many organizations, including the Cariboo Tourist Association, will add to the diversity of the program. Black powder shoots are scheduled and horsemen from the Great Cariboo Ride will ride into the Rainbow Range. Nature and interpretive talks are available for the less adventurous. A vintage car parade and display are on the books, and spectators may take a helicopter, hike or take a boat trip to Mackenzie Rock and Alexander Mackenzie Park in the Dean Channel. Salmon barbecues will be featured and more demonstrations are being planned.

B.C.'s Minister of Environment, Bruce Strachan, will be on hand along with officials from both the federal and provincial governments, for the unveiling of a cairn at Burnt Bridge commemorating the designation of the Alexander Mackenzie Trail as a heritage trail.

Cheddar gorge is no cheesy tourist trap

CHEDDAR — If you get tired of looking at castles and museums on your trip to England, you can always drop by Cheddar Gorge for a little North American-style hullabaloo.

Not surprisingly, the gorge, about 40 kilometres south of Bath, is a big hit with children, who are apt to have a low tolerance for high-brow culture.

Visitors can climb one of the many marked paths for a spectacular views at the top of the cliffs.

It is said that these cliffs contain enough caves to hold 100,000 people.

One of the best-known is Cox's Cave, which has dramatic, crystalline stalactites creeping down from the roof and stalagmites growing up from the floor.

Lights have now been added to artfully show off the shapes and colors, which range from yellow to ruby red.

An equally impressive cave is Gough's, where a skeleton of one of England's early inhabitants — known as the Cheddar Man — was found in the early 1900s. It is believed that the skeleton, which was encased in a stalagmite, keeping it remarkably preserved, was that of a man who drowned in the cave 50,000 years ago.

The skeleton is on exhibit at the nearby Cheddar Caves Museum, which also has displays that show what life might have been like in the caves for a Stone Age family.

A ticket good for all the

above-mentioned attractions is about \$7 Cdn.

Those who prefer to see the gorge in a less packaged way can go adventure caving — for about \$10, you'll be equipped with a helmet, lamp and boiler suit. A guide will then lead you down a 12-metre ladder to the ancient chambers and passages below.

If the crush of tourists becomes overwhelming, you can follow the 2.5-kilometre circular walk through the serene woodland of Black Rock Nature Reserve at the north end of the gorge. Or you can visit the charmingly tranquil Cheddar village.

Cheese lovers can see traditional cheddar cheese-making about 10 kilometres from the village at the Chewton Cheese Dairy, Priory Farm, Chewton Mendip. The cylindrical cheeses are made every morning and sold in the farm's store, while the restaurant serves coffees, lunches and cream teas.

And if your appetite for caves is not sated in Cheddar, Wookey Hole Caves, run by the Madame Tussaud's organization, offers more of the same only a few kilometres away.

Cheddar is 2.5 hours from London, and only about 18 kilometres from Bristol. Bus tours from Bath and Bristol are readily available. For tourist information, write to The Library, Union Street, Cheddar, Somerset.

— Charles Kahn
(Distributed by PN)

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