

Ravenglass Railway Museum secures Heritage Lottery Fund investment

The Museum at the Lake District's oldest heritage railway, Ravenglass and Eskdale Railway, has received a confirmed grant of £488,700 from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) for its Renovation, Extension and Volunteer and Events programme. The project aims to restore and extend the existing museum at Ravenglass station, so that it can make a significant contribution to tourism, education and the community in the Western Lake District.

The project involves building a new exhibition area, more than doubling the existing space, in which to display the Railway's vintage rolling stock, and will create exciting new interactive and accessible displays of Ravenglass and Eskdale documents and artefacts. It will also allow for digitisation of historic photographs within the collection and enable the Museum to tell more fully the story of the unique interaction between the Railway and the Eskdale Valley, focusing particularly on its historic connections to iron ore mining and quarrying.

Larger, significant items will now have a permanent and secure home that enables them to be put on display for the public's enjoyment. These include two original 15" gauge steam engines dating from 1912-15 (Synolda and Katie), a 19th century coach from the 3ft gauge era and granite tubs and other pieces of 20th century rolling stock.

The project will also create diverse learning opportunities for local schools, families and the Railway's various communities, making the history of the Railway relevant to a larger and more diverse audience. Significant links to the history and geography curriculum will be of particular relevance to primary schools.

New volunteer opportunities will also become possible in restoration work and through interpretation roles within the extended museum, which has, to date, been a self-guided experience. A new museum website will tell the story of the Railway and the Eskdale Valley online and help attract extra visitors to the Western Lake District. The support of the HLF will enable the Eskdale (Cumbria) Trust which runs the Museum to preserve the Railway legacy and remain rooted in the local Western Lake District community, as the narrow gauge line has been for the last 100 years.

Peter Hensman from the Eskdale (Cumbria) Trust said: "This is magnificent support from the Heritage Lottery Fund. We shall now be able, with additional assistance from the Preservation Society, to complete our development project, preserving the heritage of this much-loved railway and opening up new opportunities for visitors, volunteers and the local community."

Explaining the importance of the HLF support, Sara Hilton, said: "The museum extension will provide new insights into the rich history of the Ravenglass and Eskdale Railway, and its interaction with the lives of those living in the local area since its arrival in the Western Lake District. Its fascinating collections will now become more engaging and accessible, whilst new learning opportunities will enable the museum to attract a diverse range of visitors. HLF are pleased to support this worthwhile project thanks to money raised by National Lottery players."

ENDS

Notes to editors

Ravenglass and Eskdale Railway is a much-loved heritage railway tourism attraction marking 100 years <http://ravenglassrailwaymuseum.co.uk/> of its 15-inch narrow gauge line in 2015. It operates a seven-mile line, running between the Lake District coast at Ravenglass and the Dalegarth (for Boot) station, located in the shadow of England's highest mountains. This idyllic line, often said to offer England's most beautiful heritage railway journey, was re-gauged in 1915, from 3 feet to 15 inches.

The original 3-foot gauge line was the earliest public narrow gauge railway in England, built from 1873 and typical of such works in difficult terrain, hugging the mountainside with side cuttings, sharp bends and severe gradients. Ravenglass and Eskdale's two surviving buildings from that time – the Ravenglass loco shed and Irton Road Station, are little altered from their first construction.

The decision to re-gauge the line was taken by acclaimed miniature railway engineer, WJ Bassett-Lowke. He and his friend, R Proctor-Mitchell, representing Narrow Gauge Railways Ltd, acquired the line in 1915 – in the midst of World War 1 - and used it as a base for testing their model locomotives in fairly harsh operating conditions. By 1916, the re-gauged line ran as far as Irton Road, before being extended to cover the full length of the line by the end of 1917.

This is just part of the rich history of Ravenglass and Eskdale Railway, which stretches back to 1873. The Museum (located in the Ravenglass station car park) first opened in 1978 under the auspices of the Eskdale (Cumbria) Trust, a separate charity. Grants from FLAG and the Copeland Community Fund, earlier in 2015, enabled a programme of renovation, conservation and sustainable development to begin; this can now be completed thanks to the new HLF grant.

About the Heritage Lottery Fund

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