



1836

The Whitby to Pickering Railway Line

In the early 1800's Whitby's merchants decided they needed a way to increase trade in order to compete with merchants in Stockton. Stockton had good transport connections due to the Stockton and Darlington railway built by the engineer George Stephenson, which helped develop trade. Whitby had poor land transport connections because routes across the boggy moorland were difficult. In 1832 George Stephenson was asked to plan a route, and work began.

At first the line ran from Whitby to 'Tunnel' (Grosmont). It was then extended to Pickering and opened in 1836. But the line had been built cheaply and was unable to carry the heavy steam locomotives used on other lines. Passengers were transported in carriages which were pulled along the rails by horses. It was too steep for horses to get up onto Goathland's moor and a mile-long incline (gentle slope) was constructed. The carriages were attached to ropes and heavy tanks full of water slid downhill on rails, dragging the carriages up the slope as they went down, in a balanced system.



Entrance to horse-drawn railway tunnel at Grosmont

The line lost money because it did not carry a lot of goods or passengers. In 1845 it was improved by George Hudson, a businessman who invested in railways. At Grosmont a bigger tunnel was built and new stations were made. Importantly, the line was connected to the new Scarborough and York line that Hudson had developed. By 1847 the Whitby line was connected to York.

But there continued to be problems. At Goathland, trains were still being lifted and lowered by rope, and two people were killed in a runaway train accident in 1864 when the rope snapped. There needed to be change.

In 1860 The North Eastern Railway took over the railway and in 1865 improved the line, mainly because of the increasing ironstone trade in the area. A new line was built above Goathland from Grosmont to Moorgates, bypassing the rope incline but needing heavy engineering works due to its steep gradient.

A century later, due to the increasing use of motor cars, the government made cuts to the railway network across Britain, and the line from Grosmont through Pickering to Malton closed in 1965. The public outcry when the service south of

Whitby was cut resulted in a Preservation Society being formed in 1967, supported by enthusiastic volunteers who raised funds. In 1968 work started to revive the railway.

The North Yorkshire Moors Railway opened in 1973 and now carries over 300,000 passengers annually. The railway meets the Network Rail line at Grosmont: this runs on to Whitby, and the Whitby to Pickering Railway has therefore been reinstated.

QUESTIONS

1. Why was it difficult for Whitby merchants to develop trade as well as their Stockton rivals did in the early 1800's?
2. Which engineer was asked to help improve the transport connections?
3. What had been the problem?
4. When was the Whitby to Pickering line originally opened?
5. Why was the line unable to carry heavy steam locomotives?
6. How do you think the water-balanced system worked to get carriages up and down the incline? Work in groups and discuss this with your teacher.
7. Who helped save and improve the line in 1845 when it had lost money?
8. What important changes did he make?
9. Why did there need to be change after 1864?

10. What reason is given for the North Eastern Railway to take over the railway and improve the line in 1865?

11. Why were cuts made to the railway network a century later?

12. What happened as a result of the closure of the *Grosmont to Malton* section of the line in 1965?

13. How has the *Whitby to Pickering* railway been reinstated?

Find out more:

- North Yorkshire Moors Railway, <https://www.nymr.co.uk/>
- 'A History of the Whitby and Pickering Railway' by G.W.J.Potter (1906, reprinted 1969)