

Summary

The Welsh Highland Railway is a regenerated steam railway line passing through parts of the beautiful Snowdonia National Park. The railway represents an environmentally sensitive way of extending access to the Snowdonia National Park as well as enhancing transport for some of the area's more remote villages. It has mobilised large numbers of volunteers in its construction by the Welsh Highland Railway company, and continues to attract volunteers in its operation, helping a core of employed staff. As a tourist attraction, passenger numbers have more than doubled this year and businesses along the line report significant increases in visitors and income.

Areas of North West Wales have suffered from deindustrialisation as far back as the 1920s when mining activity in the area declined. Tourism has since become a key economic driver in a county of Gwynedd which includes, and provides access to, the beautiful Snowdonia National Park. However, economy and opportunity in Gwynedd's towns remain subdued, and the areas continue to see high levels of social and physical deprivation. If Gwynedd is to grow its tourist economy, a challenge is to ensure that it develops sustainably and without damaging its own natural assets.

Economic & Catalytic

The evidence is strong that the Welsh Highland Railway has had a palpable impact on a local economy that was in great need of economic restructuring through tourism, job creation and skills. Snowdonia already has a high level of tourism relating to outdoor activities; however these groups do not traditionally make a large contribution to the area's economy. The 150,000 - 200,000 people using the railways each year are using hotels, shops and restaurants along the route. The tourist information office of Beddgelert reports an increase in visitors since the railway station opened,

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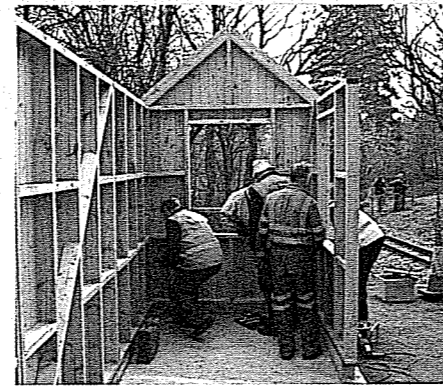


and one hotel owner estimated that 40% of trade comes from visitors to the railway.

Gwynedd has suffered from a limited employment offer. The railways employ a small core of eighty full-time staff who are supported by 180 volunteers and some seasonal workers. Additionally, the construction and operation of the railway has safeguarded 430 jobs and provided an opportunity for local businesses to tender for work. Engineering and construction businesses have grown and diversified as a result of the specialised work offered by the railway. Work with local schools takes place to engage young people in engineering, with work placements on offer to interested youth.

Social & Community

The railway is not only a tourist attraction but a useful transport route for Gwynedd residents. Currently local people make up 15% of railway users, helped by a railcard scheme and lower ticket prices for permanent residents. Similarly, in response to community demand, extra stops were included at Bont Newydd and Plas-y-Nant,



with two more to be added in the future. The railway was not uncontroversial when proposed, but careful work has been done to accommodate local views and address concerns, often on an individual basis. In fact, local support for the scheme is evident in the local crew of regular volunteers, numbering over 50, and the financial support gained through sponsorship for the project works. The railway is technically innovative, for example dealing with a steep 1 in 40 gradient, and stands as a proud achievement not least because it was driven forward by the human and technical resources of the community. As an attraction it celebrates Welsh culture, industry and landscape, and with the use of the Welsh Language promotional material and signage there is no feeling of the railways being primarily for tourists.

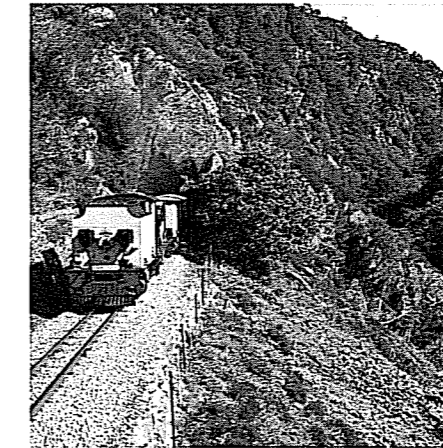
Physical & Environmental

A sensitive response to the natural environment was essential for this project which sought to open up access to the National Park. Following full environmental impact assessment, responsible environmental management to protect habitats and minimise disturbance to birds and fish was ensured. Recycled materials were used for 50% of track-laying and aesthetic considerations were important to the heritage aspects of the railway. The importance of this railway to promoting sustainable tourism is significant. In itself, it minimises environmental impacts of tourism to the area by providing a car-free alternative to touring, an aspiration furthered with the Snowdonia National Park 'Green Key' initiative which encourages people to leave cars at home.

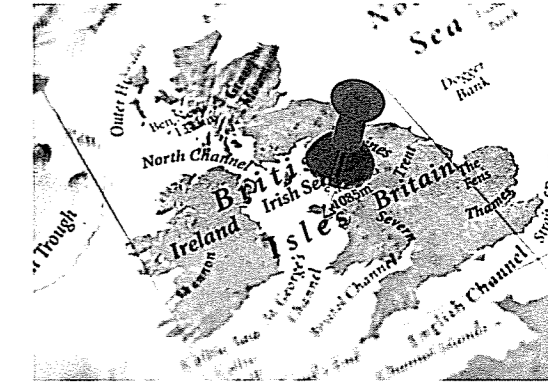
Management & Finance

The total cost of construction was £24m, coming from the Millennium Commission, EU Objective 1 and the Welsh Assembly Government. Volunteer time and over £2.5m of sponsorship raised were used as match funding to meet the conditions of these streams of income. The trains are now operated by the Ffestiniog Railway Company,

a not-for-profit company. The Welsh Highland Railway company is wholly owned by the Ffestiniog Company but was set up as a separate company to shelter Ffestiniog from the risks associated with construction and refurbishment, and all labour and finance is channelled through the company's voluntary Welsh Highland Railway Society. A real strength here is the willingness and tenacity of a volunteer-led, charitable organisation to take risks and be ambitious. The raising of £750,000 in order to obtain a Transport & Works Act Order for authorising the construction and operation of the railway, is one just one example of this.



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Partners

- Ffestiniog Railway Company Ltd
- Cymdeithas Rheilffordd Eryri also known as Welsh Highland Railway Society
- Halcrow Group Ltd
- Brunswick Ironworks Ltd
- Arup Group Ltd
- Datrys Consulting Engineers Ltd
- Bob Francis Crane Hire

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