

## TRAINS IN THE HILLS

Steam locomotives of the London Midland Region and the Western Region at work on steeply graded sections of line. On hills in the north at Shap and Blea Moor, on the Lickey hills near Bromsgrove and on the Monmouthshire hills near Abergavenny

### SIDE ONE

On the hills in the north.

#### Band One

An evening at Shap Wells, about three-quarters of a mile from Shap Summit, in May 1960.

Northbound trains on the Crewe–Carlisle line of the former LMSR face a continuous climb of 5¾ miles from Tebay to Shap Summit, 914ft above sea level. The gradient on the final four miles, past Shap Wells to the summit, is 1 in 75.

On the moors overlooking the line near Shap Wells sheep crop the short, tough grass, a cuckoo calls and lapwing wheel and dive overhead as the bubbling cry of the curlew is heard in the background.

The down 'Caledonian' express has been signalled. The sounds of the approaching train are, at first, hardly distinguishable from the incessant distant grumbling of heavy traffic on the A6 main road, a mile and a half away. The train is more distinctly heard as it climbs from Scout Green and bursts out of a cutting. No. 46255 *City of Hereford*, a 'Princess Coronation' class 4-6-2, roars past the farm cottages, over the bridge which crosses the lane to Shap Wells, and on into the deep rock cutting that leads to Shap Summit. From there *City of Hereford* will have a little more than 30 miles to go to Carlisle where 'The Caledonian' makes its first, and only intermediate, stop on the 401-mile journey from London to Glasgow.

In the fading light of a golden evening another train is soon heard approaching from Scout Green, much more slowly than 'The Caledonian' and with quite a different rhythm from the engine, a 'Jubilee' class 4-6-0, No. 45617 *Mauritius*, without the help of a banking engine, pounds up the gradient past Shap Wells and on towards the summit with a delayed northbound passenger train. Cattle noisily settle down for the night as the sounds of the train fade away in the cutting to the north.

#### Band Two

At Tebay, in the meadows by the River Lune, on a breezy May morning in 1960.

With a good head of steam for the climb to Shap Summit, 'Princess Royal' class 4-6-2, No. 46210 *Lady Patricia*, leaves Tebay Station with the midday passenger train for Carlisle and heads north, though the rock cutting below Loups Fell, on the rising gradient of 1 in 146.

#### Band Three

On the Settle–Carlisle line of the former Midland Railway.

At lonely Ribbleshead Station a cold damp wind blows blusteringly down from the north west, making the oil lamps flicker and dip along the platform where three railwaymen, their work on the line finished for the day, wait hopefully for the last stopping train of the day from Hellifield. The train is already overdue, but the stationmaster and signalman give a far from optimistic estimate of at least another half hour to wait. Toiling up the 1 in 100 gradient against the wind an '8F' 2-8-0 No. 48356

heads a goods train through the station and out on to Batty Moss Viaduct. One of the waiting men whistles resignedly as he strolls down the platform to shelter from the wind and drizzle.

Out on the moors at the Blea Moor end of Batty Moss Viaduct on another, calmer, night.

In dimly lit Ribbleshead Station, three-quarters of a mile away across the wide misty valley, a 'Royal Scot' 4-6-0 waits with the evening passenger train. The engine whistles and, with steam hissing from one of the train pipes, starts out on the 1 in 100 climb across the viaduct, at the end of which the train curves away behind a rock outcrop and heads towards Blea Moor Tunnel which takes the line, itself more than 1,100ft above sea level, under the 1,750ft high crag of Blea Moor.

In the far distance a lorry rumbles down the road past the quarry plant as a 'Crab' 2-6-0 heads a goods train towards the now deserted Ribbleshead Station. The engine's exhaust echoes briefly from the station buildings before the train heads out into the open on the continuing 1 in 100 climb across Batty Moss Viaduct. Nearing the end of the viaduct the engine slips briefly, several times, on the mist-dampened rails, but each time the slip is expertly controlled.

As the 'Crab' pounds away towards Blea Moor, on the curve, behind the rocks, a Stanier 'Black Five' (Class 5 M-T 4-6-9) swings down the gradient with an up fitted freight train, rattling across the viaduct and finally disappearing into the misty darkness towards Ribbleshead.

## SIDE TWO

### Band One

From Bromsgrove, at the foot of the Lickey Incline, the Bristol–Birmingham line of the former Midland Railway rises on a gradient of 1 in 37¼ for slightly more than two miles to Blackwell. Most trains travelling towards Birmingham are assisted on the climb from Bromsgrove by one or more banking engines at the rear of the train.

At Bromsgrove 'The Pines Express', bound for Manchester from Bournemouth, has just arrived in the South Yard on an August afternoon in 1959. The train engine, 'Standard class 5' 4-6-0 No. 73087, whistles a request for banking assistance. When the two banking engines are ready at the rear of the train, each whistles in turn. No. 73087 whistles a brief acknowledgement, then whistles again before starting the train away from the yard. The two banking engines, '9400' class 0-6-0 pannier tanks Nos 8405 and 8402, blast past at the rear of the train, quickly gathering speed through the station and under the bridge to start the climb to Blackwell.

### Band Two

On the Lickey Incline, not far from Blackwell, in June 1959.

A goods train, headed by an ex-Midland 0-6-0 class '3F' No. 43762, toils slowly up the 1 in 37¼ gradient from Bromsgrove, banked by a single '9400' class 0-6-0 PT No. 8403. The two engines raise echoes from the surrounding woods and hillsides, drowning the early summer birdsong, as the train passes slowly by towards the deep cutting which leads to Blackwell Station, approximately half a mile away.

An aircraft drones in the distance, a car hoots its way under the nearby bridge, a crow caws and insects buzz in the warm sunshine as another train approaches from Bromsgrove.

The urgent three-cylinder exhaust beat of an un-rebuilt 'Patriot' 4-6-0 contrasts with the slower rhythm of the engines on the previous train as No. 45519 *Lady Godiva* brings a Bristol–Newcastle express up the gradient, with banking assistance from two '9400' class 0-6-0 pannier tank engines. In

the cutting the two bankers put on a final effort to speed the train through Blackwell, while factory hooters down in Bromsgrove wail in the distance.

### Band Three

At the Abergavenny end of Llanvihangel Station on the Newport–Hereford line in November 1960.

Llanvihangel is at the summit of a climb from either direction. Trains from Hereford approach by a three-mile climb, mostly on a gradient of 1 in 100. From Abergavenny there is a four-mile climb on gradients of 1 in 85, 1 in 82 and, for the final 1½ miles, 1 in 95.

A '7200' class 2-8-2T No. 7241 leaves Llanvihangel after banking a train from Abergavenny. As No. 7241 runs light down the gradient towards Abergavenny a goods train comes up the gradient, headed by No. 5322, a '4300' class 2-6-0, with a single banking engine at the rear of the train. In the background there is the hiss of steam from the direction of Llanvihangel where a goods train stands in the loop waiting for a clear road down to Abergavenny. No. 5322 gives a prolonged whistle as it approaches Llanvihangel, then, as it takes the train on over the summit, a signal arm clatteringly changes position and the banking engine, '5700' class 0-6-0 PT No. 4639, drops back from the train and coasts into the station to wait for a while before returning to Abergavenny for the next duty.

No. 48419, an '8F' class 2-8-0, now brings a goods train out of the loop and through the station to a noisy stop. Wagon brakes are then pinned down in readiness for the downhill run to Abergavenny. No. 48419 eases forward, stops again, then whistles in acknowledgement of the hand signal from the guard. The engine's whistle echoes back from the hills as the train moves cautiously away down the 1 in 95 gradient.

A 'Castle' class 4-6-0, No. 5024 *Carew Castle* (fitted with a single chimney) comes steadily up the gradient from Abergavenny and on over the summit with the Plymouth–Liverpool express. The return working of this train is approaching the summit from the opposite direction, headed by another 'Castle' fitted with double chimney. No. 5095 *Barbury Castle* brings the Liverpool–Plymouth express through Llanvihangel and on down the gradient towards Abergavenny.