



steamsounds on the North Yorkshire Moors

again!

Of all the preserved lines on which I have made recordings, the one which has provided me with some of my most atmospheric tracks is the North Yorkshire Moors Railway so, since producing the last CD of recordings from this line back in 2008, as I've made a few more recordings that I've been well pleased with, I thought it was about time for another disk of tracks from the railway.

The first track on my previous disk was from the north end of the line so this time, I'm starting further south with a few recordings made at one of my favourite locations...

1. If I were asked to pick my favourite place on the North Yorkshire Moors Railway, and not just for sound recording, I'd have to pick Levisham.

For a railway sound recordist it has a number of very attractive features, the most important of which is plenty of peace and quiet. While there is a road, it isn't all that well used and the nearest busy road is a long way away.

North of Levisham the gradients become steeper and the railway runs through Newton Dale, a steep sided, wooded valley which often provides shelter from the wind and, as you'll hear in some of these recordings, has excellent acoustic properties.

As this recording begins a Pickering bound train hauled by the ex S&DJR Class 7F 2-8-0 53809 is just about to depart and after a brief slip is heard heading south while a Grosmont bound service prepares to leave from the other platform. This is hauled by the ex Southern Railway 'V' 4-4-0 30926 Repton which, with the 'Right Away' from the Guard is soon on its way heading north into Newton Dale.

2. The next track was recorded a little further north, about a mile from the station opposite Yorfalls Wood and the loco hauling this Grosmont bound train is also one originally from the Southern Railway; S15 4-6-0 825.

As some trackwork had been done near here, there was a temporary 15 mph speed restriction in force and as 825 approaches, the regulator is eased which causes the safety valves to lift briefly.

Once clear of the speed restriction, the loco is opened up once more and begins to accelerate on the rising gradient further into Newton Dale.

I felt that this was well worth recording even if only for the bird song!

3. This next recording was made not far from Raygate Slack which is about a quarter of a mile north of Levisham station but my recording position was high up on the hillside west of the line with an excellent view up and down the valley but, with lots of trees in the way, I had no view whatsoever of the trains I was recording. At times I had to try to guess what the locomotive was!

Having seen it earlier in the day, the Stanier Hooter heard as the recording begins made guess work unnecessary and I knew that I was recording the ex LMSR Black 5 4-6-0 45212. This locomotive was on the NYMR thanks to an agreement with the Keighley & Worth Valley Railway where the locomotive had been awaiting a major overhaul for a number of years. The agreement meant that the NYMR would get the locomotive back in running order in exchange for a 10 year period of use and, at the end of that time, the K&WVR would get the loco back in a much better state than when it left.

45212 makes a fine sound departing from the station. Thanks to a light breeze from the north, sound was carrying very well on this day so, from high up on the hillside, the train can be heard for a long time after it passes and the Black 5 is well on its way to Newtondale Halt, the next station, before the sound of its exhaust fades away.

Time to move on from Levisham to the north end of the line where the steep gradient from Grosmont to Goathland usually guarantees good, noisy recordings but don't worry, we'll be back at Levisham for more recordings later.

4. We'll start at Esk Valley just a little way south of Grosmont where the 3 mile climb at 1 in 49 to Goathland actually begins.



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The locomotive heard in this recording is the same Black 5 that we heard in the last track and, instead of the usual 7 coaches, it has 8 coaches behind the tender.

As the recording begins 45212 can be heard approaching on the easier gradients past the loco shed but once on the 1 in 49 speed begins to fall until power and the gradient balance out and the Black 5 makes steady progress past Green End and on towards Goathland.

5. Moving a little further towards Goathland, this next recording comes from another favourite recording spot at the opposite side of the Murk Esk valley from the railway, on the hillside below Dowson Garth Farm looking across to Green End. I've spent many happy hours on sunny days sitting here; I've had a few rainy ones too!

During the summer, with a steam hauled train every hour, it can be a very pleasant place to spend a day and, unlike many of my recording spots, it has the added bonus of a good view of the trains I'm recording.

As this recording begins the ex LNER Q6 0-8-0 63395 can be heard accelerating past the loco shed; obviously the driver has decided to take a run at the bank.

As the Q6 climbs the gradient, at times it sounds like the driver is trying to give the loco a bit more then changing his mind. Perhaps there was a bit too much water in the boiler?

6. My recording spot below Dowson Garth has another feature that is very useful in that it is often sheltered from the wind; always an important consideration.

On this particular day, having tried recording elsewhere I ended up back on the valley side in my usual spot which proved to be well sheltered.

The next train from Grosmont was running somewhat late and was hauled by the BR Standard Class 9F 2-10-0 92214 which is first heard approaching past the engine shed.

The 9F with its high tractive effort should be an ideal engine for the line and sounds to be making very good progress on the 1 in 49 gradient with its 7 coach train.

7. This next recording features another BR Standard locomotive. This one is the Class 4 4-6-0 75029 which is heard further up the gradient towards Goathland at Beck Hole.

Unlike many of my recording spots, this one, close to the road bridge near Hill Farm is quite near the line and often there is little warning of an approaching train so, as this recording begins, 75029 isn't far away.

As the train passes, it sounds as though one of the coaches has a faulty dynamo belt.

Continuing on the gradient the sound of locomotive going very well with its 7 coach load eventually fades away as the train reaches the curve leading to Darnholm.

8. Still at Beck Hole, the loco hauling the next train doesn't sound to be going quite as fast as the 'Standard 4' was in the last recording.

Hauling this train is the loco that we last heard passing Green End, the Q6, 63395 and, unlike the last recording, we did get a bit of warning of the train's approach.

When conditions are right it's sometimes possible to hear sound echoing off the opposite valley side and this was just such a day.

While not going quite as fast as the 'Standard 4' was, 63395 is still going well, making steady progress on the gradient and sounds fine as it passes.

9. Further up the gradient is Darnholm, a spot that will be very familiar to many, even some who have never visited the line as it is very popular with photographers and photographs taken here often appear in books and magazines illustrating items about the line. Indeed, this CD's cover picture was taken there.

I had intended to spend this particular day at Levisham but news that the railway had problems with fire risk put an end to that idea as trains would have a diesel pilot between Levisham and Goathland while Levisham to Pickering and Grosmont to Goathland having less risk were Ok so Darnholm seemed like a good place to go.

The first train off Grosmont that morning was hauled by a loco which had arrived on the railway not long



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before and one which at the time, I was keen to get a recording of. This was the 9F 92214 which we have already heard on the 1 in 49 gradient to Goathland. As I commented then, it should be an ideal loco for the line and, as you will hear in this recording, this definitely seems to be the case.

At the time there was a temporary 15 mph speed restriction in force which ended close to the road bridge at Darnholm. Now, many locos hauling 7 coaches on this gradient would struggle to maintain 15 mph at this point but just listen to the 9F, once clear of the restriction, accelerate its train on the final part of the gradient to Goathland station. Most impressive!

10. Attracting the general public to a preserved railway is always helped if there is a high profile loco resident and, in the case of the North Yorkshire Moors Railway, that high profile loco is the ex LNER A4 Pacific 60007 Sir Nigel Gresley.

Now, while some might say that a main line express loco like this isn't best suited to such a line, it certainly does attract some publicity which must help to increase visitor numbers and without plenty of visitors the railway would struggle to pay its way.

Heard from close to the road bridge at Darnholm, the A4 can be heard coming up the gradient from Beck Hole before passing under the bridge and making a fine sound as it continues towards Goathland.

11. Time for another Black 5.

I have always thought that 45428, a locomotive that has been resident on the line for many years, was one of the loudest of its class. After a long period of being out of traffic I was very pleased to see it back in use in 2010 and curious to discover if during its protracted overhaul any adjustments had been made to the volume control; I'm pleased to say that, judging by this recording of it hauling its 7 coach train past Darnholm, the volume control appears to be still set at max!

As you will hear, Darnholm can be an excellent place for recordings but it sometimes does suffer from one problem; it is a very attractive spot and on fine days sees lots of visitors, some of whom spend the day picnicking there. Sometimes these visitors can be a noisy bunch, so much so at times as to make recording impossible but very occasionally they just add a bit to the atmosphere such as on this day when there was a family enjoying the fine weather and watching the trains go by.

At the start of the recording as the Black 5 comes up the gradient you will hear a young spectator down by Eller Beck playing and singing happily, however, at the end, she sounds far less happy. Not a Black 5 fan perhaps? If so, someone should look to educating her properly...

12. As well as noisy people, Darnholm can also be problematic for recording due to being exposed to the wind which, when it comes from certain directions, is unavoidable. Luckily, when those conditions prevail there is an alternative spot available not far away at the top of the deep cutting between Darnholm and Goathland station although, while there can be more shelter available there, the trees can be quite noisy in the wind.

On the day that this recording was made, although there was a bit of noise from wind in the trees, that same wind was carrying sound towards us very well and we started to hear 63395 quite clearly as it passed under the bridge at Beck Hole.

The Q6 was going well and, as usual making plenty of noise for us as it came up the gradient before passing and continuing towards Goathland station where the regulator is closed ready for the stop.

13. Time to return to Levisham which, as I've said, is a favourite place but for the last two tracks on this CD, we'll also be there at a favourite time of day.

Without a doubt the best time to record is at night when there are fewer extraneous noises, fewer people about, less traffic and often the wind falls light in the evening but opportunities to record at night are few and far between. Fortunately, the North Yorkshire Moors Railway provides regular opportunities to make after dark recordings when they run evening dining trains from Grosmont to Pickering and back and Levisham becomes an ideal place to record them.

On this particular evening 75029 was in charge of the diner, a heavier train than those that run during the



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day as it includes a number of Pullman cars and this recording was made not far from the station.

75029 makes a solid start from the station but once clear, is opened up a little more and fills the valley with sound. As an added bonus the Owls were calling and while recording we were able to watch, of all things, the International Space Station pass silently overhead!

14. Every sound recordist dreams of perfect conditions and almost never gets them but I've had one very nearly perfect evening not far from Levisham.

This recording of the returning diner was made near Kale Pot Hole about a mile and a half north of Levisham station late in the evening. There was hardly a breath of wind and all that disturbed the silence was the sound of moisture from mist that had gathered in the valley dripping from the surrounding trees, the faint sound of Pickering Beck in the valley below and, once again, Owls calling across the valley.

As the recording begins, you can hear a distant whistle from 45428. The most remarkable aspect about this evening was the way sound was carrying. Sounds were so clear that, if you listen carefully just after that first whistle, you can hear a car rattle over the cattle grid near Levisham station; I've never heard sounds here so clearly and from so far away.

A second whistle is followed by the Black 5's exhaust as it arrives at Levisham station where 75029 was waiting on a light engine move to Pickering; you can hear it whistle as the diner arrives.

Station duties don't take long and after a short whistle, 45428 departs slipping a little on the damp rails.

Once under way the Black 5's exhaust echoes in the valley as it comes up the gradient towards us and what a fine sound it makes despite a little more slipping as it passes.

On this occasion I had been out all day with a friend who, after we had recorded the diner on its outward journey was ready to call it a day and not keen to bother going to Levisham for the return. I on the other hand, would not have missed this for the world!

A good fifteen minutes or more after we had first heard the train, with a distant whistle, the sound of the Black 5 faded away then the Owls, who had stopped calling, perhaps to listen as the train passed, began again, we switched off our recorders and I turned to my friend and asked him; did he see why I wanted to stay for this one? 'Now I get it!' was the reply!

