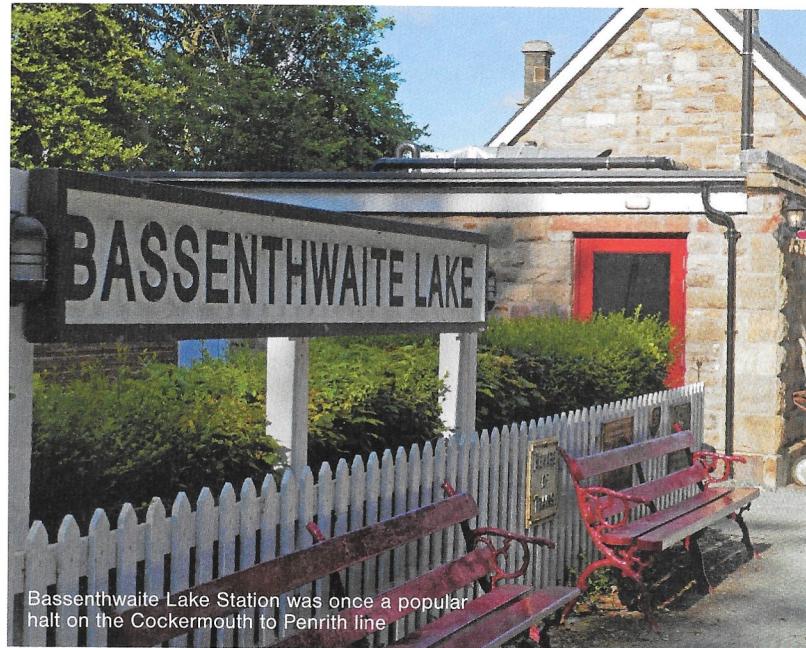


A walk on the WILD SIDE

Enjoy a dawdle around Dubwath and wander
through the centuries near Bassenthwaite

WORDS & PHOTOS: Carol Kubicki





‘Dubwath, which means a ford across the mire, is a haven for wetland plants and animals’

Park at Bassenthwaite Lake Station, shut your eyes for a second, and you may slip back in time. Your time travel might take you back to the years when hay meadows were colourful with flowers and buzzing with insects or when trains with elegant restaurant cars chuffed along the shore of Bassenthwaite Lake. You might find yourself in the 18th century, joining worshippers walking to a remote chapel surrounded by old oak trees or enjoying ale in a cosy corner of a whitewashed coaching inn, the clip-clop of horse’s hooves on cobbles reaching you from outside. Even without a time machine, you can still catch a glimpse of these treasures in the northern Lake District around Dubwath.

Back in 1865, the single-track Cockermouth, Keswick and Penrith railway opened to passenger trains, running through Bassenthwaite Lake Station and following the water to Braithwaite.

Although the Keswick to Penrith section survived until the 1970s, the line from Cockermouth to Keswick closed in 1966, but at Bassenthwaite Lake Station a memory of that line has been preserved.

A train that only travels back in time

Book ahead and you can eat breakfast, lunch or afternoon tea on board a dining carriage that will transport you

back to luxury train travel in the 1930s. After restoring the dilapidated station buildings, the new owners added the replica engine and carriages from the 2017 film *Murder on the Orient Express*, organising it as a café. The Art Deco restaurant car is perfect for train and film buffs for appetising meals and for hyper-elegance, the salon carriage can be booked for afternoon teas.

All the food is excellent but I must say that breakfast is my favourite meal here. My plate arrives heaving with a delicious selection, including perfectly cooked eggs and their signature homemade potato cake. Slicing through the crisp shell to the fluffy potato filling is a moment to savour. Accompanied by excellent coffee from local roaster, Carvetii, this is a luxurious start to anyone’s day. After eating everything on my plate, I don’t really need to eat for the rest of the day!

If you’re the spontaneous type, you can turn up and sit at tables in the station building or at the outdoor seating next to the train. Bringing your dog is no problem, either, Bassenthwaite Lake Station is so dog-friendly and even has a stick library where your pooch can borrow, swap or return a stick!

On my last visit, after eating, I took a moment to admire the bulky replica engine, took a turn around the garden and duck pond and checked out the second-hand books and the shop packed with Cumbrian foods. ☺



A haven for wildlife

But it takes a longer walk to use up the energy from that breakfast and so I cross the road to Dubwath Silver Meadows wetland nature reserve. Dubwath, which means a ford across the mire, is a haven for wetland plants and animals that opened to the public in 2008.

Breathing in deeply, the smell of freshly-cut grass takes me back to sunny days helping my grandparents with haymaking. As I followed the boardwalk towards damper areas of the reserve, the grass combined with the fragrance of honey and medicinal notes as I was surrounded by clouds of white meadowsweet flowers. The humming of so many insects told the story of Dubwath's success as a nature reserve.

The reserve has a couple of unique wooden huts and seating areas as well as clusters of bird feeders. I watched blue tits and a coal tit feeding on the nuts and seeds while a robin pecked at scraps on the ground. The traditionally made Norse wooden shelter has crossed horses' heads on the gable to ward off evil and a sightings board inside with a long list of bird species. Outside, I was struck by the tall umbrella-shaped flowers of angelica in the wet heath and interested to read on the information board that angelica can be used in the making of vermouth, one of my favourite aperitifs.

Reaching the wet woodland known as willow carr, the breeze caught the leaves and plants, conjuring up whispers and a cloud of seed heads. On the edges of the





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reserve, hawthorn bushes were laden with red berries and, beyond these, views to the surrounding fells opened up. The slopes of Sale Fell overlook the reserve and the round lump of Binsey is distinctive in the distance. On an open section of path lined with thistles and nettles, hordes of tortoiseshell, painted lady and other butterflies flitted between flower heads, rarely still for long.

The reserve was never crowded, even on a fine morning, but families strolled by as they explored the natural world while others power-walked around the one-and-a-half miles of accessible footpath. This is a nature reserve for everyone and for every season. I want to visit when frost glistens on the grasses; I want to hear the multitudes of birds calling during the spring mating season and I want to witness the golden leaves on the willow lit by a flaming setting sun before darkness falls.

A chapel in nature

Still need to work off that breakfast? Dubwath might be a hamlet but there is more nearby. About a mile along the road towards Wythop Mill you reach the small church of St Margaret’s, tucked into the flanks of Sale Fell.

Dating from the 19th century, this church replaced an older modest chapel more than a mile away. This now ruined chapel lies on the secluded southern flanks of Sale Fell near Kelwick Farm in old oak woodland.

Sunlight filters through the leaves when I find the carved memorial stone that lies between the crumbling walls. Whether you ➤

ANIMALS & NATURE



Looking over Dubwath Silver Meadows and Bassenthwaite Lake

walk to the chapel over Sale Fell or around it, breakfast will fast be turning into a distant memory.

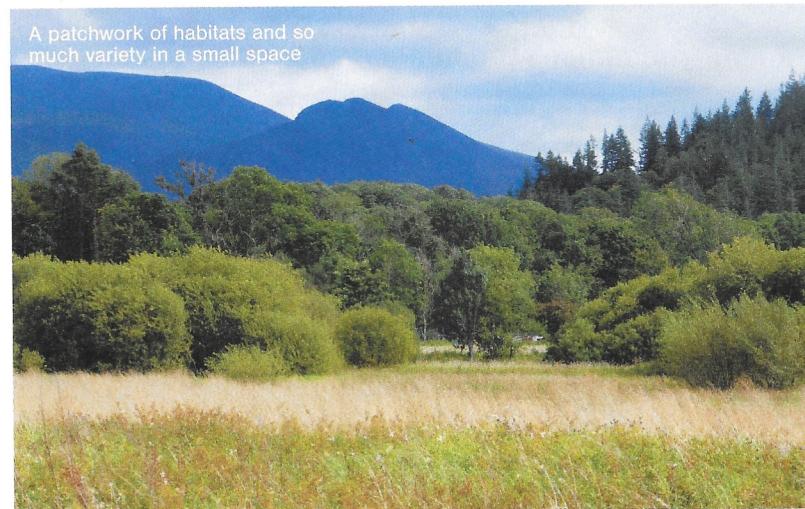
Where better to finish than in an old coaching inn? The Pheasant Inn has welcomed travellers on foot, with horses, on trains and now in cars over the centuries and although refurbished, has retained many features from the past that give it character and charm.

The terraced beer garden is a relaxing spot for a drink on a sunny day, with benches that overlook a woodland garden that, at first glance, looks natural. Closer inspection over a drink will betray how much hard work this informal look requires. In cooler months, the snug warmth of the wood-panelled bar would still be recognisable to tourists from bygone times.

Sipping my beer, I am grateful this isn't a blast from the past but comes straight from a local 21st century brewery and is bursting with fresh and crisp flavours. Living in the past is all very well but modern hygiene standards have a lot going for them!



The secluded beer garden at The Pheasant Inn



A patchwork of habitats and so much variety in a small space

FIND OUT MORE

Bassenthwaite Lake Station

basslakestation.co.uk

Dubwath Silver Meadows

dubwathsilvermeadows.org.uk

The Pheasant Inn

inncollectiongroup.com/pheasant-inn