

# GREAT RAILWAY JOURNEYS OF THE WORLD

## A SEVEN DAY TOUR OF BRITAIN BY RAIL FROM NEWARK

BY STEVE CHADDERTON

**Eric Bell** and I decided to travel on the railways of Britain for seven days, to enjoy a stress free week and because it could be done. We decided to travel by day and by night to exacerbate the feeling of the journey being 'a bit of an adventure'. Using our railcards starting from Newark station, we could travel first class on any train in Britain for £370. Bed and Breakfast on sleeper trains was an extra £39 a night.

### Day 1

We set off to Kings Cross on an early train and strolled to Euston Station, admiring St. Pancras on the way. The first truly high speed train leaves from here in November this year, and all tickets for this train are already sold out. At Euston, we enjoyed coffee and cakes in the 1st. class lounge before catching the GNER service to Glasgow. We travelled the next lap to Aberdeen with Scotrail - I wished to know if their trains had improved. They had, but 1st class was cramped and almost full. 9 hours from London and we were looking forward to the hotel that Eric had booked - and a meal. Alas, the hotel was only average and we had to have a liquid evening meal as all the restaurants were full.

Our last bar was rough, but all present were friendly. We were to find this in all the bars in Scotland. **The rougher they were, the more friendly the locals.**



### Day 2

The Northern Lights Train to Kings Cross. 7.5 hours on an elderly train. It departed on time and arrived in London on time. On Euston Road we established a routine which was to hold us in good stead whenever we passed through the capital - a pint or two in The Euston Flyer pub followed by an Italian meal in Pizza Express next door.

The sleeper to Fort William was to depart at 20.17. Each sleeper train has a lounge car with drinks and snacks on sale, to be enjoyed sitting in leather armchairs. This night we met a past Lord Mayor of Birmingham, and Les Ross - a DJ from the Midlands who owned his own electric locomotive. Many other rail buffs were there, all talking at once, so we retired to our cabins.

Each 1st.class cabin has one berth, a sink, air-conditioning, a towel and a sponge bag. I soon fell asleep. We were woken with a light breakfast brought to our cabin. We found out that we were to be detained at Kingussie and taken by taxi to Fort William. We arrived at 8.50am. We were lucky to find two seats on The Jacobean - a steam train to Mallaig and back. A busy train because it had been used in the first Harry Potter film.



A very enjoyable trip taking us over the first concrete viaduct to be built - by Sir Robert McAlpine (Concrete Bob). Back at Fort William the rain started again and so we retired to another rough bar.



There were two locals present, and they both offered to buy us a drink. We declined - we didn't want to take advantage. They were drunk anyway. A slow train took us four hours to return to Glasgow, through some beautiful scenery. We crossed Rannoch Moor, where the track is laid on wood and reeds-no deep stones possible because of the boggy conditions. The Victorian engineers were magnificent in their ingenuity. We trudged across Glasgow from Queen St. Station to Glasgow Central to catch the 23.41 night train to London.

### Day 3

We arrived in London at 7am and caught the bus to Paddington. We did of course visit the first class lounge, which was situated in a fine Victorian building on the station. After more coffee and biscuits, we boarded the First Great Western train for Penzance. The rolling stock was thirty years old, but had recently been renovated with leather seats and bright, cheery decor. Very successful - the coaches looked new from inside. We travelled on the line that Brunel had built as a broad gauge railway. It was known at the time as 'The Railway On A Billiard Table'. To achieve maximum speed from his big locomotives, he designed the line with minimal gradients. We rode slowly across the Brunel Bridge, built 1859 and recently smartened up, and finally arrived in Penzance at 15.11 - one minute late - not bad for First Great Western !

Now we had a small problem. Our next sleeper wasn't due out of Penzance until 22.00 and it was starting to rain.

We contacted Carol at *Mission Control* in Burton who recommended 3 restaurants. We had a few beers in each and eventually turned up at 'The Bakehouse'- a fine restaurant managed by a bevy of beautiful blondes - from what I can remember ! The sleeper from Penzance was £1 more than the others, scruffier, and it dumped us back at Paddington at 05.40. First class lounge and then the bus back to Euston.



#### Day 4

Today I had promised Eric a trip on the Virgin Pendolino 1st class to Glasgow and back. The tilting train was originally designed in Britain. A prototype was built and tested. Unfortunately, the train had too much of a tilt and further development was cancelled. The train can be seen from the West Coast Main Line at Crewe - a sorry sight. Apparently the interior of the train is rotting away and very mouldy. The Pendolinos are, of course, built in Italy. Travelling by Virgin Pendolino 1st class has advantages - free food and drink. Going North, full English breakfast followed by sandwiches and plenty of wine. Travelling South, crayfish salad and wine. Later, goat's cheese tart and more wine.



The journey up and down took 11 hours, but a good day out. It seems a shame that we invent things, only for other countries to develop them. When we arrived back to Euston, 'tired and emotional', we had just 45 minutes before catching the next sleeper back to Scotland.



#### Day 5

We alighted at Aviemore and joined the Highland Chieftain GNER Train down to London. A 30 year old train, but comfortable. The wine wasn't free, but was much better than Virgin wine ! After arriving at Kings Cross at 4pm we visited the Euston Flyer and Pizza Express again. Along to the 1st class lounge at Euston.

We caught our final sleeper at 9.15pm to Aberdeen. This was to be the most efficient service we had encountered. We were offered a choice of breakfast ! The lounge was closed to Standard Class passengers because 1st class was fully booked. We were able to enjoy our nightcap in peace, not having to get out of bed until 7am. I slept well and awoke to a glorious sunrise as we passed through the lowlands.

#### Day 6

When we detrained at Aberdeen, Eric wished to take photographs of all the bars that we had visited on the first night. We were able to find them all !



After coffee, we caught our penultimate GNER train back down to Kings Cross, all stations south to Edinburgh, and then stopping only at Newcastle, York and Peterborough. It was dramatic to blast through Newark Station at 100mph, I plan to take my grandson to see it - 3.40 pm. After a final biscuit at Kings Cross we took the 18.20 to Newark. Prue picked us up and we finished the week drinking more wine in Carol and Eric's house.

#### In Conclusion.....

Dentists make interesting travelling companions. I had long conversations about dental health - especially that of Scottish people. Sleeper Trains are better than you expect. They are a good way of travelling around the country. Bed and Breakfast for £40 isn't too expensive these days.



The pleasure of watching the British landscape rolling past you whilst in a comfortable seat is hard to beat. The railways of Britain are remarkably efficient - don't believe all that you read in the papers ! Only one train failed to reach its destination on time, and that was only 10 minutes late after a journey of 5 hours.

We travelled 5460 miles, which we could, and perhaps will, surpass another year. If we had purchased the tickets for each journey at the station on the day of travel, the cost would have been £1702 instead of £370. We stopped at 136 stations.

*When travelling, always plan to eat at Pizza Express - ask Eric!*



**Springline Good Neighbours**  
**Tel: 07724 626 719**  
**email [springline\\_neighbours@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:springline_neighbours@yahoo.co.uk)**  
**"We do the things that good neighbours do".**  
**Could you spare us a little time as a volunteer, or give us support as a member?**



Registered charity, no 1115048, supported by Healthy Communities.