



## The Trains and Treasures of Wales and England

### A Geoff's Trains tour

27 August to 09 September 2017

*Wales is a mecca for narrow gauge rail enthusiasts with magnificent scenery and an outstanding collection of heritage railways. This tour explores the best railways and other iconic attractions before travelling through the south-western part of England to visit historic towns, railways, ships, museums and stone age sites before spending time in London.*

#### Highlights:

Mainline trains from Porthmadog to Fairbourne, Aberystwyth to Welshpool and the Great Western main line from Swindon to London.

Welsh male voice choir concert.

Twelve steam railways.

One preserved underground and two funicular railways.

Steam depot and workshop visits.

At least four railway museums.

Castles, cathedrals, stately homes and ancient monuments.

Travel with a small group, hosted by Geoff Cooke throughout.

Luggage transferred between hotels.

Exclusive London City tour.

#### Before your tour starts

If you prefer to arrive and leave from London, Manchester Airport is a three hour train ride from Euston Station, London. There are a number of good hotels at Manchester Airport, making it convenient to travel from London to Manchester on Saturday, 26 August, spend a night at the hotel and join the tour on the following morning.

#### Day 1. Sunday, 27 August 2017

##### **Conwy Castle and the walled town. Betws y coed. Male voice choir concert**

Meet at the Manchester Airport railway station at 10h00 for a coach journey to Conwy, a pleasant journey that will take you along the Dee estuary and Colwyn Bay. Geoff will host a walking tour around the walled town and castle. Conwy castle is amongst the finest surviving medieval fortifications in

Britain. The grandeur of its high towers and curtain walls to its excellent state of preservation never fail to impress. Two barbicans (fortified gateways), eight massive towers and a great bow-shaped hall all sit within its distinctive elongated shape, due in part to the narrow rocky outcrop on which the castle stands. Geoff will show you the outer ward containing a great hall, chambers and kitchen, and a more secluded inner ward with private chambers and a royal chapel, explaining how Conwy functioned when the royal entourage were in town as well as how it was defended. There will be a break for lunch before heading inland up the Conwy River valley to Betws-y-Coed, where we will spend the night.

Betws-y-Coed is North Wales' most popular inland resort. It is where the River Conwy meets its three tributaries flowing from the west. Much of it was built in Victorian times and it is the principal town of the Snowdonia National Park. The attractive small town that boasts four different railway gauges, a small railway museum and interesting model shop, a tea room in a dining car and much more.

This evening, enjoy a male voice choir concert. There is no sound quite like the stirring sound of a Welsh male voice choir, with the passion and hwyl that blends the choral tradition of the past with musical talent of the 21st century. St Mary's Church has presented a series of male voice choir concerts on Sunday evenings during the summer every year since 1989.

Overnight: The Stables, Royal Oak Hotel, Betws y Coed. Dinner included.

### **Day 2. Monday, 28 August 2017**

#### **Conwy Valley Line. Ffestiniog Railway. Welsh Highland Railway**

After a relaxed breakfast, take a train to Blaenau Ffestiniog, where you will change trains and gauges to the narrow gauge Ffestiniog Railway. Your trains will probably be powered by a double Fairley articulated steam locomotive on your journey to the Irish sea at Porthmadog.

The Ffestiniog Railway is the world's oldest narrow gauge railway with almost 200 years of history, taking you on a 13 mile journey from the slate-quarrying town of Blaenau Ffestiniog to the harbour in Porthmadog. The railway still operates three of our original locomotives; over 150 years old - and original carriages, offering an unrivalled journey back into the golden age of rail travel. Your historic trains will drop over 700 feet from the mountains through tranquil pastures and magnificent forests, past lakes and waterfalls, round tight bends (even a complete spiral) clinging to the side of the mountain and tunnelling through it as you decent to the sea.

After a break for lunch at Harbour Station in Porthmadog, take a train on the narrow-gauge Welsh Highland Railway, this time operated by a Garratt articulated steam locomotive for a 25 mile journey through the Snowdonia national park to Caernarfon. The Welsh Highland Railway is Britain's longest heritage railway and runs from Porthmadog, through the stunning Aberglaslyn Pass and past the foot of Mount Snowdon before arriving at Caernarfon. Ride in some of the most comfortable carriages on any heritage railway in Britain with freshly-prepared refreshments delivered to your seat. On arrival, transfer to our hotel, a short drive from Caernarfon.

Overnight: Seiont Manor Hotel. Breakfast and dinner included.

### **Day 3. Tuesday, 29 August 2017**

#### **Snowdon Mountain Railway. Slate Museum. Llanberis Lake Railway**

North Wales is slate country. At one time, it was said that this area roofed the world. Today, we will make a short coach journey inland to one of the main slate quarries at Llanberis, scenically located at

the base of Mount Snowdon, the highest in Wales. This morning you will join the Snowdon Lily, a steam train to the top of the mountain on the 3ft 6in gauge Snowdon Mountain rack railway, the only rack railway in Britain.

The Snowdon Lily is built using chassis and bogey from the original carriage of 1896. The unique original nature of this railway means that you will experience exactly what your ancestors did back in 1896 and see for themselves how beautiful the mountain is as you journey through the clouds to Yr Wyddfa, Snowdon. Pushed by one of three working steam locomotives from 1896, the Snowdon Lily is an accurate re-construction of the original Snowdon Mountain Tramroad Hotels Co Ltd 1896 observation carriages. Journey time to the summit is one hour with a 30 minute stop over at the peak.

Your lunch break will be at the National Slate Museum, a fascinating museum built into the original quarry workshops that were powered entirely by the largest waterwheel on mainland Britain. The waterwheel is still there, as are the original machine tools and forges.

This afternoon, ride the 2ft gauge Lakeside steam railway along the shore of Lake Pardarn. This railway uses steam locomotives that previously worked on the terraces of the Dinorwic slate quarries, high above the present line. The little engines take you on a five-mile return journey alongside Lake Padarn, past the 13th century Dolbadarn Castle and across possibly Britain's shortest river. The return trip takes around 60 minutes.

Overnight: Seiont Manor Hotel. Breakfast and dinner included.

#### **Day 4. Wednesday, 30 August 2017**

##### **Caernarfon Castle. Boston Lodge Works. Cambrian Coast train. Fairmourne Railway**

Before we leave Caernarfon this morning, visit the castle where Geoff will explain the reason for its very existence, why it was built in such a distinctive shape, how it was defended and why it is still important today.

Later this morning, travel by coach to Porthmadog where you will visit the Boston Lodge workshops of the Ffestiniog Railway. This amazing workshop opened in the 1830's, and has been the engineering headquarters of the Ffestiniog Railway since then.

This afternoon, take a train on the Cambrian Coast line from Porthmadog to Fairbourne. Hugging the coastline, the line offers spectacular views and a crossing of the Mawddach Estuary over an unusual swing bridge and wooden trestle.

Ride a fun steam train across the beach on the Fairbourne Railway that has been running from Fairbourne village to the mouth of the Mawddach Estuary, connecting with the ferry to Barmouth for over 100 years. It started as a two foot gauge horse-drawn tramway which was then converted to a 15 inch gauge railway in 1916. The line was completely re built to a 12.25 inch gauge in 1984.

Overnight: Aber Park Lodge, Aberystwyth. Breakfast and dinner included.

#### **Day 5. Thursday, 31 August 2017**

##### **Tallyllyn Railway. Corris Railway**

Travel by coach this morning to Tywyn, where our first stop will be the Tallyllyn Railway's railway workshops at Pendre. Watch the first steam locomotive of the day being prepared before travelling to

Tywyn station to join a train from there to the end of the line at Nant Gwernol before returning to Aberginolwyn.

The Talylyn runs for seven and a quarter miles through the beautiful Fathew valley. Built on a gauge of 2 feet 3 inches, the Talylyn Railway is one of a number of narrow-gauge lines in north and mid Wales built in the 19th century to carry slate. In 1950 the future for the railway looked very bleak as it had been losing money for some years. A group of enthusiasts formed the Talylyn Railway Preservation Society, the first such organisation in the world, to take over the running of the line.

Leave the train for a short coach ride past Talylyn lake and up the mountain pass to Corris, home of the Corris Railway. Enjoy tea and welsh cakes in the Corris Railway museum before boarding a steam train bound for Maespoeth, the line's depot and workshops and presently the end of the line. This short 2ft 3in gauge railway is being extended, but whilst it is probably the shortest we will ride, it is a firm favourite with many. Later this afternoon, return to Aberystwyth by coach.

Overnight: Aber Park Lodge, Aberystwyth. Breakfast and dinner included.

#### **Day 6. Friday, 01 September 2017**

##### **Vale or Rheidol Railway. Aberystwyth Cliff Railway**

This morning, take a tour of the Vale of Rheidol workshops before riding the 2ft gauge Vale of Rheidol Railway to Devil's Bridge, a scenic line that was originally built to serve lead mines up the valley, but has now become a popular tourist attraction. There will be time to visit Devil's Bridge, where three bridges have, over many centuries, been built one on top of the other.

Arrive back in Aberystwyth in time for lunch and an afternoon exploring the attractive seaside promenade dominated at one end by a castle and at the other by a funicular cliff railway up Constitution Hill, which we will ride.

Dinner tonight will be in a restaurant on the original Victorian Pier in Aberystwyth, perched high over the Irish Sea.

Overnight: Aber Park Lodge, Aberystwyth. Breakfast and dinner included.

#### **Day 7. Saturday, 02 September 2017**

##### **Cambrian Railway train. Welshpool and Llanfair Train. Birmingham**

This morning, travel by mainline train from Aberystwyth to Welshpool up the Cambrian line. Our coach will meet us at Welshpool station for a short ride through town to Raven Square station, terminus of the 2ft gauge Welshpool and Llanfair Light Railway.

The Welshpool and Llanfair Railway will be having their annual gala over this weekend. This is the biggest event of their year, held over three days with every operating engine will be in use. Traction engines, steam cars and lorries, a model railway exhibition, demonstrations and trade stands, and a shuttle bus to the associated Llanfair Garden railway Show up the hill at Llanfair High School.

If a day on the railway is too much for some, Welshpool is an interesting town to explore and the coach can be used to visit the nearby Powys Castle, a National Trust property with an interesting history, fine gardens and an unusual museum featuring artifacts collected by Clive of India. (Extra cost for entry.)

Continue to Birmingham where you will spend the night. Birmingham is Britain's second largest city, a blend of both historic and modern architecture. Your central hotel will be within easy walking distance of the town hall and Victoria Square as well as the modern redevelopments around the symphony hall and Brindley Place, a waterfront development on the city's canals.

Overnight: Holiday Inn Express, Snow Hill. Breakfast and dinner included.

#### **Day 8. Sunday, 03 September 2017**

##### **Shakespeare Express Steam Train. Stratford Upon Avon**

Breakfast today will be different, it will be served in a dining car on the Shakespeare Express main line steam train as you leave Birmingham, headed for somewhere far more tranquil, Shakespeare's Stratford Upon Avon. Vintage Trains maintain the traditions of the Great Western Railway by running The Shakespeare Express over genuine ex GWR routes and wherever possible using the fleet of thoroughbred ex-GWR steam locomotives restored and maintained by their Tyseley Locomotive Works. We will ride in superb premier coaches, with breakfast served on the outward journey and a very British high tea on the return trip to Birmingham this afternoon.

Geoff will host a walking tour of Stratford Upon Avon, pointing out the more interesting locations such as Shakespeare's birthplace, his school, the Royal Shakespeare Theatre and the church where the Bard is buried. The town itself is attractive and a stroll down the River Avon a delight. Return to the station in time for your steam train return to Birmingham.

Overnight: Holiday Inn Express, Snow Hill. Breakfast and high tea included.

#### **Day 9. Monday, 04 September 2017**

##### **Train to Kidderminster. Severn Valley Steam Railway. Funicular Railway. Enginehouse Museum**

This morning, take a commuter train from Birmingham's Snow Hill station to Kidderminster, where you will walk to the adjacent Severn Valley Railway station and spend the rest of the day on the standard gauge railway that runs to Bridgenorth. This is one of the longest standard gauge preserved lines in Britain, you will ride in period coaches powered by a mainline steam locomotive. Visit the railway museum at Kidderminster and the Enginehouse at Highley.

Wander into the attractive town at Bridenorth for a pub lunch and to ride the unusual inland funicular cliff railway. For over a century Bridgnorth Cliff Railway has been transporting the people of Bridgnorth up and down the 111 ft sandstone cliffs that separate High Town from Low Town, and the River Severn. It is first and foremost a working railway; its importance to both the townspeople of Bridgnorth and to visitors to the town is undiminished by age. The railway operates two cars on parallel tracks. Connected by steel ropes, the carriages serve to counterbalance each other - as one rises to the top station, the other runs to the bottom station. The cars are now powered by an electric winding engine, but were originally driven by a system of water balance, each carriage carrying water ballast in a tank beneath the passenger compartment.

Return by steam and mainline suburban train to Birmingham for the night.

Overnight: Holiday Inn Express, Snow Hill. Breakfast and dinner included.

#### **Day 10. Tuesday, 05 September 2017**

##### **Ludlow. Brecon Beacons. Brecon Mountain Railway. Severn Crossing**

Drive to Ludlow in the Welsh Marches. Wander through the medieval streets on a walking tour hosted by Geoff, with free time to visit some of the interesting independent shops, the castle and the parish church, often called The Cathedral of the Marches.

Later this morning, motor back into Wales as we continue through the scenic Brecon Beacons National Park to Methyr Tydfil for a ride on the 2 foot gauge Brecon Mountain Railway. This railway operates a Baldwin steam locomotive rescued from South Africa and a set of American outline coaches. The journey takes you into the Brecon Beacons National Park, through Pontsticill and along the full length of the Taf Fechan Reservoir before climbing to Torpantau high in the Brecon Beacons and the summit of the original line.

Stop for a photo opportunity at a memorial in Merthyr Tydfil that commemorates the journey of Richard Trevithick's steam locomotive from Penydarren to Abercynon on February 21st. 1804, the first journey of the very first steam locomotive in the world.

Continue your journey by road as we cross the Bristol Channel over the Severn Crossing, an impressive suspension bridge that links Wales with England. Spend tonight in the city of Bristol.

Overnight: Novotel, Bristol. Breakfast and dinner included.

#### **Day 11. Wednesday, 06 September 2017**

##### **SS Great Britain. Avebury stone circle. Silbury Hill**

Spend the next two days exploring the works of Britain's greatest engineer, Isambard Kingdom Brunel. Visit his famous ship, the SS Great Britain. Experience the sights, sounds and smells of life on board! Stroll on the decks and take in the views and the sounds of animals and general bustle of the ship preparing to set sail. Take a look down at the dockside where the cargo, cases and crates are waiting to be loaded - the SS Great Britain, the world's first great ocean liner is about to depart. And you are aboard! Below decks you can peep inside the luxury cabins of First Class passengers. Eavesdrop on a conversation, dodge the harassed cook in his cramped galley, and marvel at the massive engine. Listen to the stories the passengers tell. Before you experience all the sights, sounds and smells on the ship, go beneath the waterline. Below the glass sea is a fish's-eye view of the world's oldest iron hull. State-of-the-art technology keeps the air down there as arid as the Arizona desert to prevent rust attacking the ship's delicate iron hull.

Continue to Avebury to explore a fascinating history dating back over 4,000 years. Recognised as a World Heritage Site for its outstanding Neolithic and Bronze age landscape, Avebury is a place not to be missed. The stone circles and henge monument are unusual, not just for its size but also for the fact that it is the only stone circle with a village built within it. The Henge consists of a huge bank and ditch approximately 1.3km in circumference. The Stone Circle which lies within it is the largest in the world and contains within it two smaller inner circles. There will be time to visit the museum and the National Trust Manor House (extra cost).

As we drive to our hotel at Swindon, visit Silbury Hill. At around 4,400 year old, this is the largest prehistoric mound in Europe. Nobody knows why 30 metre high Silbury Hill was built. Although equivalent to the pyramids of Egypt in scale and effort involved in construction, unlike the Egyptian structures, Silbury Hill has no burial nor any evidence that one was ever intended. It is estimated that it took over 4 million man hours to build - but one can only speculate as to why.

Overnight: Holiday Inn Express Swindon. Breakfast and dinner included.

**Day 12. Thursday, 07 September 2017**

**STEAM Museum. Great Western Railway to London**

Your first visit today will be STEAM - Museum of the Great Western Railway is housed in a beautifully restored Grade II railway building in the heart of the former Swindon railway works. Situated right opposite the Swindon Designer Outlet, the museum tells the story of the men and women who built, operated and travelled on the Great Western Railway, often referred to by historians and railway fans as "God's Wonderful Railway". The pioneering vision and engineering genius of Isambard Kingdom Brunel led to the Great Western Railway network becoming regarded as the most advanced in the world.

Later this morning, take a train down the original Great Western railway to London, arriving at Brunel's Paddington Station. The line was built by the Great Western Railway and engineered by Isambard Kingdom Brunel as a dual track line using a wider 7 ft (2,134 mm) broad gauge and was opened in stages between 1838 and 1840. The alignment was so level and straight it was nicknamed "Brunel's Billiard Table". It was supplemented with a third rail for dual gauge operation allowing standard gauge trains to also operate on the route in stages between 1854 and 1875. The broad gauge remained in use until 1892, evidence of the original gauge can still be seen where bridges are a wider than usual, or where tracks are ten feet apart instead of the usual six.

Your hotel for the next two nights will be the Mercure Paddington Station Hotel, next to the station. Your luggage will be transferred from the hotel in Swindon to London.

After an early dinner, make your way back to Paddington Station for an exploration of the underground railway. Travel across 150+ years of history in just two-hours aboard an outstanding London Underground and Tube Tour. Hear the captivating twists and turns of the Tube's history on this fun and informative walking tour. Learn about the evolution of the design of the Underground and its undeniable iconic success from the map to the upholstered seats. This tour covers all interests from engineering to design to the social history of the city which was directly impacted and altered due to the construction of the world's first subterranean railway. Absorb the fascinating history of this network which keeps London's heart beating.

Overnight: Mercure Paddington Station Hotel. Breakfast and dinner included.

**Day 13. Friday, 08 September 2017**

**London City Tour. Post Office Railway.**

Enjoy a city tour of London today in a private coach with a blue badge guide. Visit iconic sights including the Houses of Parliament, Buckingham Palace, Westminster Abbey, the Tower of London and the South Bank. Enjoy a hosted tour of St Paul's Cathedral and a short walking tour to explore the origins of London's financial centre and the world's first Stock Exchange. The capital's rich history and the quirky unusual features will also feature in our enjoyable and informative exploration. A highlight for today will be a ride on the unusual Post office underground railway that previously carried letters under the streets of London between various sorting offices. This railway has been closed for many years, but will reopen in 2017 as part of the Royal Mail museum, making it possible for the first time to ride through the tunnels in new, purpose built trains. Details of this ride have not yet been released, if it is unavailable we will visit the London Underground Museum in Covent Garden instead.

Overnight: Mercure Paddington Station Hotel. Breakfast and dinner included.

## **Day 14. Saturday, 09 September 2017**

Your tour ends this morning with breakfast.

### **There is an opportunity to visit the Statfold Barn Railway today.**

Visits to the privately owned Statfold Barn Railway are by invitation only, there is no charge but a donation of £10 is requested. The Railway has kindly given Geoff's Trains an opportunity to visit as a group on one of their rare public open days and this is now offered as an option following the end of your main tour.

Depart by train from London Euston Station for Tamworth, arriving shortly after 09h00. We will then take a taxi to the Railway, arriving in time for the start of activity at 09h30.

The Statfold Barn Railway is a mixed gauge railway of standard gauge, 2 ft 6 in and 2 ft narrow gauge near Tamworth, Staffordshire. The 'Field Railway' is a dual 2 ft 6 in and 2 ft gauge line approximately 1.5 miles long with a balloon loop at one end with a station at the other end. The running shed has a triple gauge line leading down to standard gauge storage sidings and then across the Field Railway. The railway has an extensive workshop where locomotives are built and restored, with about 50 locomotives, either in an active condition or waiting for restoration or rebuild.

Passenger trains will start running at around 09h30 and operate frequently throughout the day until about 15h30 when the service starts to wind down to release all the locomotives in steam to be gathered for a cavalcade and massed sounding of whistles at around 16h30. The Roundhouse museum is open for viewing throughout the day and there are also model railway layouts, historic road vehicles and sales stands. Catering is available.

This afternoon, return to Tamworth station and from there to London by train. Geoff Cooke will accompany you for the day, but will travel from Tamworth to Kidderminster that afternoon instead of returning to London.

The cost, including train tickets, taxi and entry to the Railway should be about £60, to be confirmed later.

Please let us know when you book if you would like to see this rarely visited railway.

## **Prices**

£3,176 per person sharing

£1,028 single room supplement

### **Your tour includes:**

- 13 night's accommodation in 3 or 4 star hotels.
- Breakfast every day.
- 12 Dinners and 1 high tea.
- Travel in a quality coach.
- All activities, train journeys and heritage train tickets described in the programme.
- Geoff Cooke as your tour manager.



**Your tour does not include:**

Air travel.

Gratuities.

Items of a personal nature such as drinks, phone calls and laundry.

Meals not detailed in the programme.

**Useful information:**

**Before and after your tour:** If you would like to stay longer before or after your tour, Geoff can suggest, or book, suitable hotels and advise on touring options.

**Suitability:** This small group tour is suitable for anyone interested in Britain's heritage railways. Some walking is involved and the transport is not wheelchair friendly. If you have any mobility or health issues, please talk to Geoff about them before booking.

**Dress code:** Casual dress is appropriate. The temperature should be warm, but there is always a possibility of rain. A light weatherproof jacket is recommended.

**Maximum group size:** 16

**Geoff's Trains Limited**

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