



steamsounds on the North Yorkshire Moors

1. Grosmont is the northern terminus of the North Yorkshire Moors Railway where the line connects with the Esk Valley Line from Middlesbrough to Whitby. Here also are the Railway's engine shed and workshops.

Let's start with a recording of the first train of the day departing for Pickering.

At the south end of the station is a level crossing and, as this recording begins, the crossing gates can be heard clattering shut against the road and the signalman pulls off the starting signal ready for the ex LMS Black 5 4-6-0 45407 to depart for Pickering.

As the driver gets the 'Right Away' from the guard the safety valves lift before 45407 pulls its six coach train away from the platform, over the crossing and into the short tunnel not far beyond.

Once the train is clear, the crossing gates re-open and the road traffic can proceed once again.

2. The NYMR is particularly notable for having some very steep gradients and the longest and steepest of these is at the north end of the line climbing at an unremitting 1 in 49 almost all the way from Grosmont to Goathland, the next station.

The climb begins a little way south of Grosmont, not far beyond the engine shed, and in this recording you can hear the BR Standard Class 4MT 2-6-4T 80135 approaching and beginning the climb.

This loco has been a very regular and stalwart performer on the NYMR and sounds to be coping well with its 7 coach load.

The sound of the loco carries back well as the loco climbs past the row of cottages at Esk Valley, over the viaduct across the Murk Esk river and only fades away when the train is beyond Green End.

3. Another stalwart performer on the NYMR is the WD 2-10-0 3672 which now carries the name *Dame Vera Lynn*.

Although of locos of this type did run in the UK, 3672 was originally shipped to Egypt in 1944 for use by the British Army. The loco was never actually used in Egypt but was eventually sold to the Hellenic State Railways and ran in Greece until withdrawal in 1979. After withdrawal it was purchased by a group of UK enthusiasts then repatriated and restored to full working order.

First used on the NYMR in 1989, it soon proved itself a very capable performer being quite able to cope with up to 10 coaches on the steep gradients.

In the usual NYMR timetable, trains are allowed 15 minutes for the climb from Grosmont to arriving at Goathland and while trains are usually able to adhere to this schedule, often taking a minute or two less but I have travelled on trains which have taken 20 minutes, occasionally more.



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As this recording begins we are travelling in the front coach of an 8 coach train hauled by *Dame Vera Lynn* and are just passing *Green End* going very well about a third of the way up the climb from *Grosmont* and, as you can hear, *Dame Vera* is not quiet when climbing!

A little further along, beyond *Beck Hole Bridge*, the regulator is closed while the loco negotiates a speed restriction over a weak bridge at *Thomason Foss*. The respite is only brief however and the noise soon resumes as *Dame Vera* continues to climb past *Darnholme* and through the deep cutting leading to *Goathland* station at the top of the 1 in 49 gradient.

As I mentioned above, 15 minutes is the time allowed for the full journey from *Grosmont*, on this occasion we came to a stand in the platform at *Goathland* in just a few seconds over 9 minutes.

4. Another regular performer on the line is the ex SR Schools Class 4-4-0 30926 *Repton* which, when it first ran here was considered to be an unsuitable choice for this steeply graded line, pessimists and other prophets of doom suggested that it would throw the railway in to chaos by slipping to a stand on the steep gradients!

While this loco has had occasional problems with adhesion, as have others, it has proved itself to be quite capable of handling the climbs.

In this recording we continue the journey south, now on a train hauled by *Repton*, heard in this recording leaving *Goathland* heading for *Pickering* on easier gradients.

5. One of the most popular locos on the line in recent years has been the streamlined ex LNER A4 Pacific 60007 *Sir Nigel Gresley* classmate of the legendary *Mallard*, holder of the world speed record for a steam locomotive.

This recording was made at *Moorgates* where one of the roads leading to *Goathland* village passes under the railway. Not far from here is *Goathland Summit*, the highest point on the line. The gradients here are far less severe than those encountered on the climb from *Grosmont* and 60007 can be heard heading towards the summit with a train of 7 coaches.

6. Once over the summit there is very little of interest for the sound recordist as the line goes down through *Newtondale* to *Levisham* then on to the southern terminus at *Pickering* so let's join a train there at the start of the return journey to *Grosmont*.

Our loco is the Class P3 0-6-0 2392 built in 1923 for the North Eastern Railway which, on this occasion was hauling a train of four *Gresley & Thompson* designed LNER teak coaches.

Most trains are worked from *Grosmont* with loco working chimney first and, although there is a turntable at *Pickering*, the return is usually tender first as was the case with 2392.

Soon after departing the driver whistles a warning for the level crossing to the railway's car park not far away, you can just hear the sounders as we pass. Another accommodation crossing is passed before the loco is eased approaching *New Bridge* where the driver must collect the token for the single line section to *Levisham*.



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7. Levisham station is one of those places where passengers must wonder why it was built as there is no sign of the village of the same name which is actually a mile and a half away up a very steep hill.

However, there is a passing loop here where up and down trains can cross and this isolated spot at the start of the steep gradients through Newtondale gives plenty of opportunities for recordings.

This recording was made high on the hillside, north east of the station and, as it begins, the BR Standard Class 4 4-6-0 75029 can be heard approaching from the north with a train from Grosmont.

Soon after the Standard has stopped in the platform, the ex LNWR Super D 0-8-0 49395, which was a visitor to the line at the time, can just be heard approaching with a train from Pickering.

Having the single line token to Goathland ready and waiting, 49395 is soon on its way and sounds good on the rising gradient away from the station.

As the Super D heads off into Newton Dale 75029 departs for Pickering accelerating quickly on the favourable gradient.

This was my last recording on that visit and was an excellent way to round off the day as, blessed with almost perfect conditions, hardly a breath of wind meant that the smoke from each loco made a wonderful sight hanging in the still air in the valley below and although it was invisible through the trees, as well as producing plenty of noise, the Super D also sent a couple of perfect smoke rings rising into the air above the trees as it headed for Goathland!

8. Now let's join a train as it starts the climb through Newtondale.

If I were asked which class of locomotive is my favourite I would immediately say, 'Black 5!', but if asked which was my favourite Black 5 I would find it difficult to pick just one. However, one of my long time favourites is resident on the NYMR.

This loco is a favourite of mine as, towards the end of steam it finished its working life (or so we thought) in the West Riding and I regularly travelled behind it, particularly between Bradford and Leeds. Of course there were other Black 5s about at the time but 45428 became special as I was fortunate to be given a short footplate ride from Bradford Exchange to Low Moor on one occasion!

Black 5s are also a favourite because they can usually be counted on to make plenty of noise, something that 45428 demonstrates in this recording which begins departing from Levisham and starts on the steep climb through Newtondale.

9. The climb through Newtondale, although it does have a short section at 1 in 49, is not as continuously steep as the climb from Grosmont to Goathland, but it is still difficult and in this recording, again of 45428 but this time heard from the lineside, we hear the Black 5 with a train of 7 coaches climbing through Newtondale at Gallock Hill a little less than 2 miles from Levisham.



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This is another isolated spot, excellent for sound recording and until the sound of the hard working Black 5 begins to echo from the valley sides, all that can be heard is birdsong.

10. As well as providing some excellent locations for sound recording, Newtondale also is a fine area for walking and, as access by road is not easy, the NYMR opened a small station in the valley in 1981.

Newtondale Halt is a request stop and in this recording we hear the Southern Railway Class S15 4-6-0 841 making a fine sound as it departs for Goathland and Grosmont.

11. At the start of these notes I said that Grosmont was the northern terminus of the NYMR but in more recent times, that has not been strictly true.

For some time the NYMR had been looking into the possibility of running trains beyond Grosmont to tap into the tourist honeypot of Whitby.

Although it proved possible to run occasional special trains, for many years the operation of a regular service seemed no more than a pipe dream. However, as they say, persistence pays and in spite of many difficulties steam hauled trains running to Whitby have become a part of the regular NYMR timetable.

In this recording, with the first NYMR train of the day to Whitby, BR Standard Class 4 2-6-0 76079 is heard from the lineside accelerating rapidly away from Sleights station.

12. At the start of the return journey, heard in this on-train recording, is the ex LNER K1 2-6-0 62005 departing from Whitby.

On this particular day the timetable had gone a little awry but our driver seems to be determined to try to regain some of the lateness judging by this vigorous start.

13. When they first began running to Whitby it proved impossible due to signaling constraints to run every train through from the NYMR, only the first and last trains ran off and on to the NYMR. Other trains through the day had to continue beyond Grosmont to Glaisdale further up the Esk Valley Line where there is a passing loop and, more importantly, a single line token instrument.

However, in 2007 the addition of an intermediate token instrument at Grosmont meant that all trains could run through from the NYMR. From a sound recording point of view this was a pity as it is only between Grosmont and Glaisdale that the steeper gradients begin. Fortunately, all is not lost as during special events trains are often run, not only through to Glaisdale but also to Battersby. Indeed, on Sundays outside the main holiday season when there are no ordinary service trains on the Esk Valley Line, the NYMR can have it all to themselves and operate a service of two trains running between Whitby and Battersby with the two trains crossing at Glaisdale.

This recording was made near Lease Rigg bridge only a little way beyond Grosmont and, as it begins, the ex LNER B1 4-6-0 61264 can be heard departing with the first train of the day for Battersby.

With its 5 coach train, 61264 slips a little on the damp rails but makes a fine sound on the 1 in 100 gradient as it passes.



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- Not far away is a bridge over the River Esk which has a speed restriction over it but, once clear, the B1 is soon working hard again on the gradient towards Egton Bridge and Glaisdale.
14. Recorded from a point on the hillside on the opposite side of the valley from the railway further up towards Egton Bridge is 62005, this time with a 4 coach train. As the recording begins the K1 can be heard approaching the river bridge and being eased for the speed restriction. Once the train is clear of the bridge the regulator is reopened and the K1 continues on the climb through Egton Bridge but no really hard work is required with this light train on the 1 in 100 gradient.
15. During the Autumn Steam Gala in 2007 a careful look at the timetable indicated that, with a bit of luck and if a suitable location somewhere near Grosmont could be found, there was a chance of making a single recording of two trains; one on the way to Battersby and another departing for Pickering. The best chance seemed to be around one o'clock when there was a 1256 to Battersby followed by a train on the hour to Pickering. The chosen spot was at Lease Rigg which is on the ridge that runs down toward the tunnel at Grosmont and divides the Esk & Murk Esk valleys. This spot had two disadvantages; the first was that it was exposed to the breeze which had sprung up and the second was that it was almost impossible to see what was happening down at Grosmont station as there were lots of trees in the way. The view the other way towards Goathland was excellent! As this recording begins the train for Battersby hauled by 61264 is just getting the 'Right Away' and is soon working hard on the 1 in 100 gradient. Timing was very important for this recording and, luckily, worked out just right as, with the sound of the B1 fading away as it accelerates after recovering from the speed restriction over the river bridge, the Pickering train, hauled by ex LMS Black 5 4-6-0 45212 gets the road and pulls out of the station into the tunnel. Once through the tunnel, 45212 with its heavy 7 coach train, which included 4 Pullman cars, is soon onto the 1 in 49 gradient and making a fine sound which we could hear almost all the way to Beck Hole. In addition to the B1 and Black 5, you may also just hear the sound of the ex NER Q6 0-8-0 63395 preparing a freight train.
16. For the last two recordings I am going to return to my favourite part of the railway, the climb from Grosmont to Goathland. It is not just my favourite for the obvious reason that the gradient is very steep but, in addition to the almost guaranteed noise, it is far from any road, something that is a rarity in the UK, and some long, undisturbed recordings may be made. Some of my best recordings have been made around Green End on the lower part of the climb and this first one gives the listener some idea of the difficulty of working trains on this steep climb.



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The loco in this recording is 76079 but, unusually, it has been turned on the turntable at Pickering, probably for working trains to Whitby.

Climbing the bank from Grosmont with a loco running tender first presents problems for the fireman for, as well as making sure that he provides his driver with sufficient steam, he must also ensure that, when the loco first starts on the 1 in 49 gradient there is sufficient water in the boiler to cover the firebox crown, something that isn't a problem if the loco is working chimney first. However, there is also the risk that with too much water in the boiler at this point the loco may start to prime and carry water through the regulator valve into the cylinders. The situation can be made worse if the safety valves lift as the drop in pressure can raise the water level and this is exactly what can be heard happening in this recording as 76079 climbs the 1 in 49 gradient from Esk Valley.

Once the loco begins to prime the driver has no option but to open the cylinder cocks and ease the engine. Speed falls quickly on the steep gradient but once the priming has stopped the driver can open the regulator wider once more and the loco makes a fine sound recovering on the gradient.

17. My particular favourite recording spot on the climb to Goathland is at the other side of the Murk Esk valley from where the last recording was made. Despite being perhaps half a mile from the line, given the right conditions, I have made some excellent recordings there.

On this particular September day in 2006 I had spent a fine sunny morning sitting in my favourite field below Dowson Garth Farm, enjoying the peace and quiet between trains when, early in the afternoon I couldn't help noticing that the weather seemed to be deteriorating and large black clouds were gathering to the south. In view of this change in the weather I decided that it would be wise to seek somewhere with some shelter and moved into the adjacent Spring Wood where I was able to find a suitable, hopefully waterproof tree to shelter under. And only just in time as, soon after, the heavens opened. The Super D, 49395, hauled the next train from Grosmont and as it approached, I began to hear thunder.

Now, while a recording of a steam hauled train in a thunderstorm was always something that I had hoped for but failed to get in the past, I was not too happy to be sheltering under a tree at the time, not a wise place to be with lightning about!

Still, I survived the experience and was very pleased with this recording of the Super D climbing the 1 in 49 gradient past Green End on its way to Goathland and Pickering.

