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Autor: Farr, Michael
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AND FINALLY... SWITZERLAND IN DERBYSHIRE?

Michael Farr



Entrance and cable car photos courtesy 'Heights of Abraham'.



Matlock sunshine. PHOTO: John Weaver



Next time you are in Derby for the AGM why not take a short rail trip through the stunning scenery of the Derwent Valley Mills World Heritage Site to Matlock Bath, where you will have the chance of a ride in a genuine cable car to the viewpoint at the Heights of Abraham?

Once a through route to Buxton and Manchester, the Matlock line is now operated as a branch after Ambergate, where it leaves the main Derby to Sheffield line. Here keen ramblers can leave the train to walk along the Cromford Canal which was built in the 1790s and follows the route of the Derwent. The railway was squeezed into the valley fifty years later. After Whatstandwell the railway crosses the river several times, as well as diving under the canal, and as you approach Cromford you can see Crich Stand in the distance. Since 1923 it has been a memorial to men of the Sherwood Forest Regiments. Also many members will know Crich as the site of the National Tramway Museum. The line's

present day terminus, at Matlock, is the point where steam trains of Peak Rail begin their journey along the first few miles of the former route to Buxton.

Unlike so many branch lines where station de-staffing meant vandalism and subsequent demolition, along the Matlock line many have been saved and refurbished ready for new uses. Cromford is notable for the French chateau style of its station and the coming of the railway changed the next stop along the line, Matlock Bath, to a popular excursion destination, marketed as "The Switzerland of England". This presumably explains the Swiss chalet style of the 1849 station buildings. The lower terminus of the cable car is just to the north of the station and this Swiss-style operation normally runs from mid-February to the end of October.

Tickets for a trip on the cable car, donated by the operator, were won by Neil Wheelwright at the 2010 AGM.