

August 2019 Reflection

My Trip up Snowdon

On our recent holiday in Wales we took a trip up Snowdon, in a carriage pulled by one of those small steam engines, the Snowdon Lily, the type so beloved by the Rev W Awdry. This narrow-gauge, rack and pinion rail trip of 4.7 miles gave a regular clickety-clack, which added to the chuffing of the steam engine - quite intense as we were pulled up the steep gradients of the mountain.

As I watched the walkers, almost lost in the vastness of the mountains, I realised that there are many of a certain age, like me, who come to the point in life of losing steam and need the help of others to achieve that which is out of their reach. How I appreciated all those volunteers who made it possible for me to go to the summit of Snowdon. How I appreciated being able to experience the exhilaration of the unfolding vistas as the train climbed higher. How I appreciated the joy of people walking and waving as we shared in the experience of Snowdon, remembering how good it was when I too walked up Snowdon as a youngster. There is that heart stopping moment, when all seems right and good.

And yet – isn't there always the 'and yet' - the other side of the story? What about all those carbon-emissions from that much-loved little steam engine? The joy it gives the many hundreds of volunteers, and all those who support the resurgence of this thriving voluntary industry, cannot last into another generation without questioning itself, surely.

Having travelled to school on a steam train until I was fifteen, when steam engines were replaced by what seemed so commonplace, the diesel engine, there is always a sense of nostalgia now, when I ride on a steam train. However, life changes, and it is clear that now we must all shift our expectations of what we do in order to look after the planet we live on.

George Orwell wrote the following words about the coal industry in the 1930s in *The Road to Wigan Pier*.

... all of us really owe the comparative decency of our lives to poor drudges underground, blackened to the eyes, with their throats full of coal dust, driving their shovels forward with arms and belly muscles of steel.

These words highlight the inhumane exploitation of both people and planet, which amongst other things fueled the age of the railway. The areas and types of exploitation may have changed but exploitation still remains. Where does the coal come from to fuel the little steam train that gave me such pleasure? The cycle of exploitation continues somewhere in the world, of both people and planet.

The appreciation I felt at the time, of my wonderful trip up Snowdon, still remains, but hopefully in the ongoing research, new discoveries and new developments will replace the power of nostalgia for steam and create an appreciation of new, cleaner and efficient ways of going up Snowdon, beyond the steam or diesel pulled train. New scientific and technological ways of transport and movement will bring about a new revolution, which heralds a time when people and planet can flourish, and exploitation come to an end.