

The Selby family get right on track in Snowdonia

What's the attraction?

It was tipping down with rain (again) and our kids aged six, five and 18 months, were turning the house into a bomb site. So, we needed something fun that would appeal to all, child-friendly with a good cafe (good coffee is very important), and ideally something that didn't involve filling the car with bats, balls and swimming costumes. And most importantly, it didn't have to be too expensive. So, a day out at the Welsh Highland Railway in Porthmadog seemed spot on.

What's on offer?

An introduction to the Welsh Highland Railway (Porthmadog) by a very friendly (but not fat controller) followed by a gentle ride through the Snowdonia countryside in a delightfully restored carriage. Then a thorough exploration of the engine sheds, a ride on the miniature railway before the return trip to the station and lunch in the cafe.

How did you get there?

We're fortunate enough to live right in the heart of Snowdonia, so from Trawsfynydd we travelled north on the A487 to Porthmadog then followed the brown tourist signs for the Welsh Highland Railway. There's a private car-park on the right for railway visitors with nice wide pavements for pram users. Or leave the car at home - Porthmadog's on the Cambrian Coast Line from Shrewsbury, Machynlleth, Barmouth & Pwllheli, train times at 08457 48 49 50 or thecambrianline.co.uk. The station is near bus-stops, and both the long distance X32 and National Express services stop in the town.

How long did you stay?

Most of the day. We arrived before 10am and got home about 3pm. We could have stayed longer but our youngest was worn out.

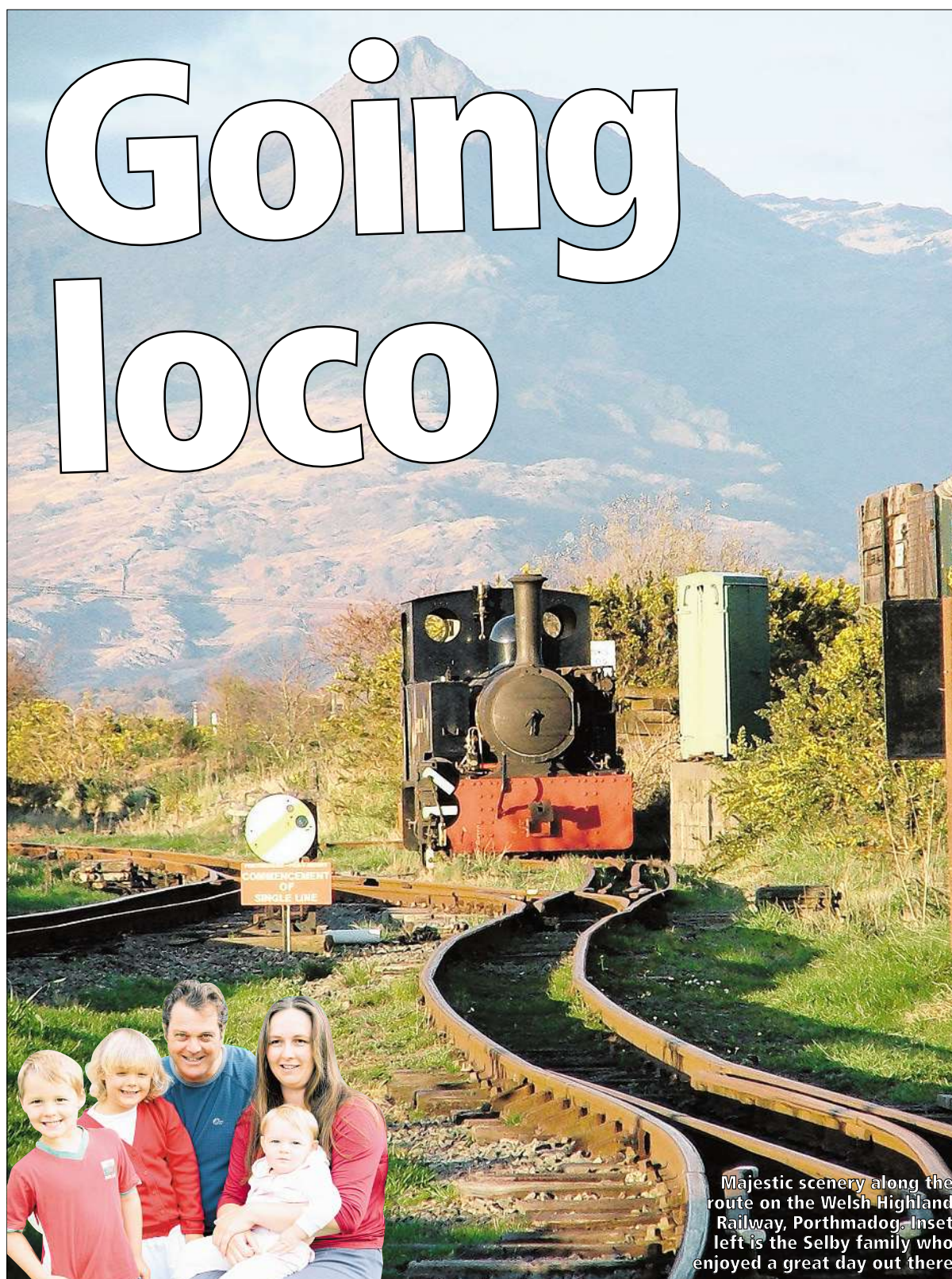
Did you take a brolly?

Nope, we went in full wet weather gear - waterproofs all round - monsoon season in Wales having just started.

What did you do there?

We arrived early so we started our day with a coffee and a soft drink for the kids. The cafe is very cosy with high-chairs and family size tables. It was refreshing not to feel as though I was in somebody's way all the time. The greeting was warm and welcoming and the coffee was excellent. At 10.30am we boarded the train with plenty of space for roaming children, damp parents and steaming dogs.

There's also plenty of room for



Majestic scenery along the route on the Welsh Highland Railway, Porthmadog. Inset left is the Selby family who enjoyed a great day out there

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prams and baby carriers, which is a welcome change from a lot of so-called child-friendly venues. We were greeted by a friendly controller with a brief explanation of the journey, before heading off into the Snowdonia countryside.

The scenery is beautiful and there's certainly a lot to see at this sedate pace as the track runs past mountains and meadows from the station at Porthmadog, past Gelert's Farm Halt, Pen y Mount and on to Traeth Mawr. Even on a very wet day with the windows

steamed up the kids were happy to press their noses against the glass to get a look outside.

On the way back to the station we stopped at the engine sheds. Here the kids were allowed to climb all over a number of engines. There were brasses to rub, a miniature railway in a glass case, a variety of carriages and a noisy engine outside for the boys to play on.

Then a ride on the miniature railway to race the train back to the station (guaranteed to wear the kids out).

How much did it cost you?

A family ticket is £15. But that was an all day ticket so it's a bargain for a family day out. Otherwise return tickets adults £5.50, seniors £4.50, child £3, under fives free.

How about food and drink?

The cafe at the station serves excellent food. My husband and I had paninis, two of the kids had sandwiches and the third had a cooked child's meal. I couldn't fault the portions, choice of menu or cost and the whole dining experience was relaxed, which is a novelty.

Are there any shops?

The shop was great. The kids were delighted with the huge range of knick-knacks on show. There was a toy train running around the roof of the shop, which fascinated the baby while the older kids quickly discovered the toy box and spent 10 minutes chasing each other around with a selection of pre-loved toys. There was also a good range of model railway bits and pieces, a must for railway enthusiasts.

Is it ok for kids?

I must say it's the most child-friendly place I've ever been and we've been to a lot. It's a great day out for the kids, they all fell asleep on the way home, which to me is the seal of approval. In my opinion, on a child-friendly scale, the Welsh Highland Railway (Porthmadog) is on a par with Greenwood Park.

Can people with disabilities get around?

Yes. Stations and platforms are all level, and there's a ramp down into the museum. The train has a compartment with double doors (which is also useful for pushchairs). There's a ramp to help get wheelchairs into the train - ask the

HOW DID IT RATE?

Rating *****

- * don't bother
- ** poor value for money
- *** okay, worth the trip
- **** good, will go again
- ***** great, lets go now

guard. And with lots of burly steam engine drivers around, there's no shortage of helping hands. WHR(P) also has wheelchairs for loan.

What were the best bits?

For me - being able to relax and let the kids get on with it, it's so tiring having to rein them in all the time. Here I was able to let them climb all over the trains, hang out the window, play with the toys and splash in the puddles - and that's the best bits for them too.

Opening times?

Daily until November 2. Trains at 10.30am, 11.30am 1pm, 2pm, 3pm and 4pm. No need to book in advance, just turn up. Shop and tea room are open 9.30am to 5.30pm when trains are running. Welsh Highland railway (Porthmadog) Tremadog Road, Porthmadog, 01766 513402, e-mail info@whr.co.uk or whr.co.uk

● Jamie and Nicola Selby from Trawsfynydd took their kids Jack (5), Amber (6) and Tara (18 months) to The Welsh Highland Railway (Porthmadog)