

ALONG THESE LINES

Along These Lines, explores disused rail tracks and stations re-connecting people, places and moments in time. In the process, we uncover one of Britain's greatest natural heritages.

Along These Lines shows viewers a piece of their own local history they might never have known is there; a pleasure waiting to be explored.

Presenter, Hannah Shellswell walks, cycles and rides disused rail tracks, sometimes alone, sometimes in conversation.

Everyone has their own local history and we use the old railway lines to make it a human story, about the flesh-and-blood people living where rail-workers toiled and passengers watched a very different world go by.

While there are some landmarks and encounters we can plan for, a good deal of the series is devoted to people, events and railway relics our presenter comes across along the way.

Our journey takes us across contrasting landscapes to some of the most beautiful parts of the South and South East of England. From unique nature reserves and public footpaths to the abandoned and completely wild former tracks and stations. Part social history, part industrial archaeology, the series is a travel programme too, touching different counties and unearthing local characters and the area's industrial past; the personal stories and a way of life.

Viewers don't have to be the slightest bit interested in the history of railways to find pleasure in *Along These Lines*. The series is a treat for walkers, naturalists, any lover of the countryside, ornithologist, botanist, social historian, cyclist and horse-rider. Even the most committed armchair traveller will be amused and entertained, informed and perhaps inspired by the series. There's nothing to stop them, and viewers of all ages, getting out there and exploring local tracks for themselves – except trespassing notices, of course - all they need is an old map of their area.

The series captures the excitement of walking these tracks, in every sense, everyone can become an explorer. There are miles and miles of empty track lying around somewhere out there, waiting to be discovered along with many hundreds of relevant, heart-warming stories that resonate loudly down to our own times.

In the course of her journey, Hannah learns many things – local and anecdotal, historical and significant. But, essentially, it's the story of people; some well-known names crop up – like Dr. Richard Beeching, whose damning report axed so many lines and stations in the sixties (or did history blame the wrong man?) - as well as those less well-known names who simply have a story to tell.

- We hear locals recall their childhood experiences; they walk, ride or cycle part of the route as they talk, describing long-forgotten people and events. Perhaps pausing at the crossings where produce from the surrounding villages poured over every week-day throughout the year, remembering the passengers who walked across to catch the milk-run train to work.
- Former train-spotting schoolboys might describe their precarious pleasures – timing their run to the top of the bridge to catch the name and number of passing steam locomotives; the colourful characters fondly remembered; regular passengers, train drivers, station managers and navvies.

- We meet those who witnessed the closures as children and can recall the last days, and the passing of their childhood memories with the era of automation.
- We talk to the people who travelled the lines; their memories evoking the sense of occasion – special outings to see the sea or visit the countryside.
- We meet those who were involved in operating, manning, driving or closing the lines.
- A way of life unfolds, as we try to pick out the site of old signal boxes and the adjacent plots of well-cultivated land where the signalman, undervalued and underpaid, might once have spent an hour or two growing vegetables to help balance the household budget.
- We can marvel as our presenter points out the surviving embankments, cuttings, viaducts and bridges that underline the feats of engineering involved in building railways in the nineteenth century.

Every bend of every disused, overgrown railway line meant something to somebody. Almost every stretch has had some sort of human drama, even though the railway workers are no longer here to tell us about it.