



150th Anniversary Event to mark the opening of the northern section of the Far North Line



(Helmsdale – Wick/Thurso across the Flow Country)

This year, 2024, marks the 150th anniversary of the opening of the Sutherland and Caithness Railway. This now forms the northern part of the Far North Line from Helmsdale, across the dramatic Flow Country to Wick and Thurso. The 25 miles of track across the Flow is amongst the most remote in the UK and the derelict lineside cottages of surfacemen of past ages bear witness to lives lived – in service to the railway – in isolation with no road access and none of the services most households in the country take for granted today.



Andy Grant

The Flow itself is a place of rare habitats developed over thousands of years. The deep layers of peat beneath the blanket bog are a hugely important carbon store. Such peat bogs cover just 3% of the world, but hold nearly 30% of all the earth's carbon. Hence the renewed interest in the area as a contributor to combatting climate change with the application for UNESCO World Heritage Site status, currently being assessed.

To celebrate the anniversary and the survival of this remarkable route, the Far North Line Community Rail Partnership, in collaboration with the Friends of the Far North Line, the Highland Railway Society and RSPB Forsinard, are staging an event at Forsinard on Friday 21st June. Speakers will cover the history and the future prospects of both the line and the landscape. Following this a bus will take those interested to Thurso to travel the line back to Forsinard – and on to Inverness if required – on the last southbound train of the day.



Flow Country Partnership

Participants will receive a booklet which will include both a line guide to the route and an account of the history and operation of this lonely, scenic line.

Completing the Far North Line, by Keith Fenwick, published to mark the event, will be on sale.

Details and a booking form from Michael Willmot at hello@fnlcrp.co.uk

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Friday 21st June 2024 at RSPB Forsinard

(The 07.00 departure from Inverness arrives Forsinard, 10.21)

- 10.30 COFFEE
There will be a small exhibition of artefacts and photos curated by Timespan
- 10.55 Welcome by John Yellowlees (who will chair the meeting)
- 11.00 Musical salutation by the children of Helmsdale Primary School
- 11.10 History of the Line Keith Fenwick, Highland Railway Society
- 12.00 Life on the line in BR days and up to the present William Bruce
- 12.45 LUNCH
Buffet lunch and refreshments provided by Forsinard Lodge
- 13.30 Introduction to RSPB Forsinard
Milly Revill Hayward, Peatland Engagement and Communications Officer
- 14.15 Far North Line Future Prospects and Development
Frank Roach, Hitrans
Michael Willmot, FNLCRP
Ian Budd, FoFNL
Ryan Savage, ScotRail
- 15.15 Coach departs Forsinard (29 miles to Thurso station)
- 16.15 Arrive Thurso railway station
- 16.32 Depart Thurso on southbound train
- 17.11 Arrive / Depart Forsinard. Train arrives Inverness at 20.14

The cost of the event including refreshments and lunch will be £15 and for the coach/rail travel afternoon activity £20 (or £15 for senior citizen and other valid rail card holders). Booking essential. Booking forms available from Michael Willmot by email from hello@fnlcrp.co.uk or by phone 07864 081 094.

10% of the charge made for attendance will go towards the Helmsdale Primary School visit. After their musical salutation, the children will have a short talk about, and tour of the RSPB Reserve - part of FNLCRP's commitment to raising the next generation's awareness of the importance of caring for this fragile environment. This school visit is generously supported by ScotRail

The Far North Line CRP is grateful to the Friends of the Far North Line, the Highland Railway Society, Helmsdale Station CIC, Timespan and ScotRail for support, both financial and in-kind.