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Main content

Article Preview :

John McGregor, The West Highland Railway: Plans, Politics and People, Edinburgh, John Donald (2005), 274 pp., 30.00 [pounds sterling].

This is a meticulously researched book detailing the origins of the West Highland line. For those unfamiliar with this railway, it runs through the west of Scotland, passing through sparsely populated areas of mountain, moor and loch. It originally terminated at Fort William (from 1894), though later (1901) an expensive extension was built to the coast terminating at Mallaig, now a small port connecting to the southern tip of the Isle of Skye. Although much has been written about the railway previously, this is the first book I have read in which its complex origins have been examined in such detail.

One of the more puzzling aspects of the West Highland Railway is its indirect route, especially when crossing the high, unpopulated Rannoch Moor following the line's split at Tyndrum (the other branch continuing to the important port of Oban). The author explains, with greater clarity than anyone previous, how this convoluted route resulted from the moves and counter-moves of the railway's promoters and opponents. Also discussed is the strained...

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The West Highland Railway was a railway company that constructed a railway line from Craigendoran (on the River Clyde west of Glasgow, Scotland) to Fort William and Mallaig. The line was built through remote and difficult terrain in two stages: the section from Craigendoran to Fort William opened in 1894, with a short extension to Banavie on the Caledonian Canal opening in 1895. John McGregor recently retired as a lecturer at the Open University. He is a trustee of the Glenfinnan Station Museum and a member of the

Friends of the West Highland Line. In 1994 he wrote 100 Years of the West Highland Railway for Scot Rail, and in 2005 produced The West Highland Railway: Plans, Politics and People for Birlinn. He lives near Edinburgh. Country of Publication. "The West Highland Railway 120 Years" by John McGregor is published to coincide with the 120th anniversary of the opening of the West Highland Railway between Glasgow to Fort William. The large format suits the subject matter well and the result is a book you can delve into for a series of fascinating insights into the story of the railway. The author is an acknowledged expert on this line, and in 2013 we had the pleasure of reviewing his books West Highland Line and West Highland Extension in Amberley's "Great Railway Journeys Through Time" series. The current book di The West Highland Way starts in Milngavie, near Glasgow, and then winds its way north for 96 miles (154 km) to Fort William in the Highlands. It follows old cattle drover routes and 18th Century military roads along the eastern shores of Loch Lomond, across sprawling Rannoch Moor, and up the zig-zag ascent of the Devil's Staircase footpath in Glen Coe before reaching its final destination in Lochaber. More than 100,000 people walk part of the trail each year, about 36,000 of whom complete the whole route. The journey often takes up to a week. Walkers break the trail into sections and stay With the great age of railway building almost over, the West Highland was from the outset a 'social line', though corporate empire building and speculation played a part. Subsequently extended to Mallaig, with state assistance, the West Highland route has been voted top railway journey – and the most scenic – in the world. From the north shore of the Firth of Clyde, the line passes the Gare Loch, Loch Long and Loch Lomond before crossing desolate but beautiful Rannoch Moor. In this profusely illustrated book, Dr John McGregor takes a look at this famous line, from its construction to the present day – the men who built it; its early years and varied fortunes thereafter; changing traffic patterns; advertising and tourism; maintenance and mishaps; and the return of heritage steam.