

Steam Train on the Settle to Carlisle line

I've never really got photographing steam trains. A trip on one, just maybe, and I enjoy in my clueless way the sight, sound and whiff of one spotted chugging through the countryside. But the idea of joining one of the hunting packs in pursuit of the ultimate photo has always been such a turn off that I'd not taken a single photo of a steam train in 25 years of photography. So for this Masterclass, I decided to rise to the challenge. And it turned out a lot more fun than I was expecting. I might even try it again!

With my apologies to those enthusiasts who have spent years perfecting their photography of steam trains, here are some basic and humble offerings I gleaned after a few false starts on my first attempt.

- 📷 Find essential information about times etc on www.uksteam.info
- 📷 Search online for "Settle Carlisle steam trains" and look through the huge numbers of photos to get ideas for good vantage-points. There aren't a large number in Cumbria apart from the obvious one at Ais Gill bridge where the shot is now spoilt by a large phone mast alongside the track.
- 📷 Work out which way the light will be falling, the train will be travelling and the direction the wind will be blowing. You need the smoke blowing away from the train if you want to see the train clearly. You might just be lucky and get an atmospheric shot of the train 'emerging' through smoke otherwise.
- 📷 Check the train will be travelling uphill for your shot, or else you probably won't get any smoke. The gradient from Appleby up to Aisgill is consistently steep.
- 📷 Preferably go on a cold day – there will be more smoke and a better chance of it being white
- 📷 Use a shutter speed of at least 1/500th of a second.

In the event, I chose Birkett Common on the approach to Mallerstang. I arrived a good hour early with my O.S. map, thinking I was going to need to spend time locating the right spot, only to find 20 cars already parked nearby. I simply followed the little crocodile of men, heavily laden with tripods and equipment. I joined the group on their viewpoint above the line and soon recognised the implicit 'code of practice'. No-one stood forward of an imaginary line to block the view. Yet more photographers arrived, adding their tripods to the snaking row. Excitement escalated and when the smoke from the train was finally spotted in the far distance I shared the collective buzz, then obeyed the group's big 'shush' for the benefit of those using video. By the time the train steamed past I was so keyed up I had problems holding the camera steady.

That afternoon I was the lone female in this all male domain, and despite myself found my temporary membership of this genial group of buffs with its club-type atmosphere good fun. It did occur to me that any woman "in search of a man", could do worse than kit herself out with a camera and join the pack ...!





Hardly the best ever photo of a steam train (the *Scots Guardsman*) – but then it was my first I didn't use a tripod, though most people were. The ISO speed on my Nikon D300 was set to 320, with the shutter speed at 1/500th of a second. I used my 17-55 zoom lens, but would have used a longer lens if I just wanted the train rather than the wider landscape. I'd like to try this shot again in the winter.