

No problem. Sleep in the station. It's the height of luxury (so long as you're in Dent). **Simon Hacker** checks into Britain's quirkier holiday homes

The last time I slept by a railway, some ruthless crook stole my left shoe. Trackside dossing has clearly gone up in the world since then – literally, if you alight at Dent station.

At 1,150ft above sea level, this once defunct node on the old Settle-Carlisle line is the loftiest mainline rail stop in England – and doesn't it know it? The station's paintwork is a proud burst of cream and maroon, the mood stoutly Victorian. In a polite "up yours" to Dr Beeching, coal fireplaces, cast-iron radiators and churchy windows politely intermingle with slick mod cons such as solar-powered underfloor heating and a wet room with a hydrant-strength shower.

As the original signs announce, 1877 is omnipresent. The main bedroom is really the ticket office, the kitchen is the ladies' waiting room and the living room is the general waiting room. (You can peep through the ticket hatch into the main bedroom, if you enjoy that sort of holiday.) The ceilings are a long way up, but it's all five-star snug.

Two more twin bedrooms are neatly shunted into the corners, the better one up a spiral staircase, at the top of which you can stare down the track and watch a train approach over the Dent Head viaduct. Even if you weren't suckled on the collective creativity of Frank Hornby and the Rev W Awdry, the growing vibration will tickle your inner child. You'll find a stationmaster's cap by the front door, and as the train arrives, you can strut out, check your figurative stopwatch and tut at straggling passengers.

Social contact beyond that is on the buffers. Mobiles are mute and the landline is 999 only. On the solitary scale, we're talking one call to the Samaritans short of lighthouse-keeping. So, as the sun dips, it's just you and the vast, darkening bowl of Dentdale stretching towards Cumbria. Dent itself is four wiggly miles away, while Cowgill, the nearest civilisation and closest pint, courtesy of the Sportsman's Inn, is a short stagger down Dent Fell.

Fear not, though: staying in has its pluses, such as piling the fire high and improving your knowledge of the Dent Brewery's beers. If you like relevant reading, large quantities abound, though it's perhaps best to avoid the tales of the work-worn navvies who froze to death heaving this line for 25p a day. The story of the Settle-Carlisle line is a ripping yarn of engineering triumph by virtue of that Great British quality of sheer bloody-mindedness. It's almost sobering.

Come sunrise, you might choose to join the early trains' rambblers. Dent station is the springboard for some of Britain's breeziest walks, and proper SAS trekking terrain awaits, dotted with disused coal shafts and hard-looking sheep. Not to mention the navy-swallowing bogs. That said, the footpaths are well signposted and the dale-wide views to Whenside swiftly numb any calf strain.

Yorkshire's Western Dales have a ragged charm that makes the Lake District next door seem neo-suburban: picture Ambleside with the coaches airbrushed out. The drawback is that restaurants are equally invisible. Luckily, Dent Stores is excellent for provisions, while the Sun Inn, just along Dent's cobbled street, serves honest grub. Regular farmers' markets are close by in Sedburgh (Wednesdays) and Hawes (Saturdays) – don't miss the Swaledale cheese. And if you ride a train home, any absence of tan will be more than compensated for by your shiny green halo.

■ Dent Station (07824 665266, [www.dentstation.co.uk](http://www.dentstation.co.uk)) sleeps six and has two bathrooms. At least five trains stop at the station every day, so it's accessible from across the country. A week's rental starts at £700, with shorter stays negotiable

# Missed the last train?



Hacker dresses the part at Dent station; far left, the Water Tower; Trellisick; left, Aldeburgh's Martello tower

## Five more strange sleepovers

### THE BUSH HOUSEBOAT

**Opposite Kew Gardens, Middlesex**  
Sleeping with the fishes was never meant to be this comfy. This 80ft vessel started life as a Regent's Canal barge, carrying coal in the 1930s, but, after a £40,000 refit, it has scrubbed up a treat. It sleeps up to five, and pine floors, central heating, a rooftop terrace and mains plumbing torpedo any fears of chemical-toilet misery. *From £600 per week; call Angie Loader on 020 8892 7241 or visit [www.bushhouseboat.co.uk](http://www.bushhouseboat.co.uk)*

### WATER TOWER

**Trellisick, Cornwall**  
Nestling among Trellisick's famous hydrangeas, this cosy lovebirds' eyrie, sleeping two, was built in 1865 as a dove-cote, but converted soon afterwards into a giant water tank for the main house. Hence the dodgy layout: the bathroom's at ground level, the sitting room's above the bedroom, the living room up again. Perfection, even if your thighs disagree. *From £389 per week,*

*through the National Trust, 0870 458 4422, [www.nationaltrustcottages.co.uk](http://www.nationaltrustcottages.co.uk)*

### LADYBOWER APARTMENTS

**Peak District**  
If you grew up in the Midlands, you've probably drunk water that came through this former pump house, a filtering plant for the Ladybower reservoir and fly-by point for the Dambusters' training crews. The Bridge suite, upstairs, is the one to pick. Sleeping six, it has a contemporary edge and floor-to-ceiling views across the Hope Valley. The kitchen is fully kitted out, though the Yorkshire Bridge Inn is moments away. *From £375 per week. Call John Illingworth on 01433 651361 or visit [www.ladybowerapartments.com](http://www.ladybowerapartments.com)*

### BURNHAM HIGH LIGHTHOUSE

**Burnham-on-Sea, Somerset**  
Lighthouses verge on old hat, given the number to choose from. Here's a rarity, though: an 1830 classic where you sleep up in the round bit, rather than down in a boring outhouse. A scone's throw from the teashops of Weston-super-Mare, Burnham-on-Sea has six miles of proper sand

and the shortest, sweetest pier in Britain. The lighthouse sleeps six, in three ensuite bedrooms, but best of all is the view – from the lantern room, 110ft up, you can see for 22 miles. *From £799 per week; call Patrick O'Hagan on 07970 983245 or visit [www.countrycottagesonline.com](http://www.countrycottagesonline.com)*

### MARTELLO TOWER

**Aldeburgh, Suffolk**  
Britain's fear of Napoleon led to a chain of forts from Seaford, in East Sussex, all the way round this outpost in Aldeburgh, the only one you can kip in. You want a salt tang? The sea's almost at the front door – and getting closer every day – though the 10ft-thick walls and wood-burner make it toasty. It sleeps four, but beware inquisitive tourists surround you. *From £838 per week (£435 for four nights), through the Landmark Trust, 01628 825925, [www.landmarktrust.org.uk](http://www.landmarktrust.org.uk)*

### SOMETHING COMPLETELY DIFFERENT

For accommodation that's out of the ordinary, visit [timesonline.co.uk/wheretostay](http://timesonline.co.uk/wheretostay)