

The **Darjeeling Himalayan Railway (DHR)** , is a 2 feet (610 mm) narrow gauge railway that runs between New Jalpaiguri / Siliguri and Darjeeling in the North East Indian state of West Bengal , India. The Darjeeling Himalayan Railway is the first, and still the most outstanding example of a hill passenger Railway. It was built between 1879 and 1881 and the railway line is about 87.48 kilometres (48 mi) long. Its elevation level varies from about 100 metres (328 feet) at New Jalpaiguri to about 2,200 metres (7,218 ft) at Darjeeling. **The DHR railway**, along with the **Nilgiri Mountain Railway** and the **Kalka-Shimla Railway**, is listed as a Mountain Railways of India World Heritage Site.

A broad gauge railway connected Calcutta(now Kolkata) the Capital of India during the British Raj and Siliguri in 1878. Siliguri, at the base of the Himalayas, was connected to Darjeeling by a cart road (the present day Hill Cart Road) on which "Tonga services" (Horse carriage services) were available. In 1962, the line was realigned at Siliguri and extended by nearly 4 miles (6 km) to New Jalpaiguri (NJP) to meet the new broad gauge line to Assam from there.

While Darjeeling was growing, Rowland Macdonald Stephenson was crusading his battle for railway extension in India. In 1849, he was able to extract favourable conditions including a guarantee of return on the capital. He promoted East Indian Railway Co. (EIR). In 1858, Eastern Bengal Railway (EBR), a private company got concession for construction and management of Railway lines commencing from the left bank of Hooghly towards the Eastern and Northern part of Bengal, including a line to Darjeeling, but the directors were not willing to invest money in extensions including the one to Darjeeling as that might not be profitable. However, NBR(Northern Bengal State Railway) had no plan to take the rails to the hills, mainly because the hills were considered a formidable sphere. Where EBR and NBR failed as corporate organizations, Franklin Prestage succeeded, as an individual entrepreneur.

Franklin Prestage, an agent of Eastern Bengal Railway Company approached the government with a proposal of laying a steam tramway from Siliguri to Darjeeling. The proposal was accepted in 1879 following the positive report of a committee formed by Sir Ashley Eden, the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal. Construction started the same year.

Gillanders Arbuthnot & Co. constructed the railway. The stretch from Siliguri to Kurseong was opened on 23 August 1880, while the official opening of the line up to Darjeeling was on 4 July 1881. Several engineering adjustments were made later in order to ease the gradient of the rails. Franklin Prestage settled for a 2 feet. rail gauge, to enable the line to traverse the tightly twisting route through the hills and formed the Darjeeling Steam Tramway Co. with capital fully subscribed in India. On September 15, 1881, title of the company was changed to Darjeeling Himalayan Railway Co. and this company remained effective until the line was taken over by the Indian Government on Oct.20, 1948. All through that time the line was managed by the agency of 'Gillanders Arbuthnot and Co.' which supervised from its Calcutta office the financial, legal and purchasing interests of DHR and of other small railways. A manager and engineer were stationed at Kurseong, while the mechanical superintendent was at Tindharia.

Despite natural calamities, such as an earthquake in 1898 and a major cyclone in 1899, the DHR continued to improve with new extension lines being built in response to growing passenger and freight traffic. However, the DHR started to face competition from bus services that started operating over the Hill Cart Road, offering a shorter journey time.

During **World War II**, the DHR played a vital role transporting military personnel and supplies to the numerous camps around Ghum and Darjeeling. **Ghum railway station** (7,407 feet) is the second highest railway station in the world to be reached by steam locomotive.

The railway line basically follows the Hill Cart Road which is partially the same as National Highway 55. The railway line is laid more or less on the same alignment as the Hill Cart road, which criss-crosses the line at several locations. The line between Sukna and Darjeeling is almost all along located

on the road-bench wither skirting or on the far edge of the road except at a few locations where the road and rail formations are on different level and follow a different alignment.

Out of a total of 87.48 km., 64 kms. Are on the same road bench. The actual climb starts from Sukna encountering steep gradients and curves all the way long. There are some peculiar features to be marked during the journey. The train passes through dense forest from Sukna and it chugs along the hill slopes and at places where a clear path is not available. The climb is through reverse and loops. There are 5 such reverses, 3 loops, the most famous being the **Batasia Loop** between Ghum and Darjeeling. The Ghoom (Ghum) Station is the highest point reached by the railway (7,407 feet), and from here there is a descent for four miles down a spur to Darjeeling Station (6,812 feet).

Apart from this, the section has 5 major, 498 minor bridges and 177 unmanned level crossings. There are 14 stations including New Jalpaiguri and Darjeeling with an average inter distance of 6 to 7 kms. Except between Siliguri and Sukna where the distance is over 10 km.

Usually, the track is simply on the road side. In case of landslides both track and road might be affected. As long parts of the road are flanked with buildings, the railway line often rather resembles urban tramway tracks than an overland line. To warn residents and car drivers about the approaching train, engines are equipped with very loud horns that even drown horns of Indian trucks and buses. Trains honk almost without pause.

One of the main difficulties faced by the DHR was the steepness of the climb. Features called **loops** and **Z-Reverses** were designed as an integral part of the system at different points along the route to achieve a comfortable gradient for the stretches in between them. When the train moves forwards, reverses and then moves forward again, climbing a slope each time while doing so, it gains height along the side of the hill.

After the independence of India, the DHR was absorbed into Indian Railways and became a part of the Northeast Frontier Railway zone in 1958. In 1962, the line was realigned at Siliguri and extended by nearly 4 miles (6 km) to New Jalpaiguri (NJP) to meet the new broad gauge line there. DHR remained closed for 18 months during the hostile period of Gorkhaland Movement in 1988–1989.

DHR was declared a World Heritage site by UNESCO in 1999, only the second railway to have this honour bestowed upon it, the first one being Simmering Railway of Austria in 1998.

Darjeeling Himalayan Railway Extensions Company was authorized to construct a line from Panchanai to Kishanganj in the plains and another line to Kalimpong in the Sivok Mountains. These two sections are known as Kishjanganj Branch and Teesta Valley Branch respectively. Though no more connected by rail, Kalimpong could be reached by railway line from 1915 to 1951. These line was abandoned, a large sections of it were washed away after severe flood damaged in 1951.

The railway line from Siliguri to the beautiful hill section of Darjeeling is considered an engineering feat and passes through very picturesque country. Since 1881, the original route has been retained in a remarkable condition. Only minimal interventions of an evolutionary nature, such as the reduction of loops, have been carried out. Most of the original steam locomotives are still in use. This route is very popular with tourists as it passes through some very picturesque mountain scenery and has been the subject of many romantic articles. The line has a series of zig zags and loops to gain height and runs straight up several village main streets.

Like Darjeeling Tea and the Ghurkha culture, the DHR has become not only an essential feature of the landscape but also an enduring part of the identity of Darjeeling....!

Railway Stations On the Darjeeling Himalayan Railways.

There are 13 railway stations between New Jalpaiguri to Darjeeling. The daily Kurseong-Darjeeling return service and the daily tourist trains from Darjeeling to Ghum (India's highest railway station) are handled by the vintage British-built B Class steam locomotive, DHR 778. Rest of the scheduled rail service is run by the help of modern diesel locomotives from Darjeeling to New Jalpaiguri.

Railway Stations	Distance From Siliguri JN.	Altitude
1. New Jalpaiguri	(-) 7.42 Kms.	480 ft.
2. Siliguri town	(-) 4.99 Kms.	500 ft.
3. Siliguri Junction	0.00 Km.	500 ft.
4. Sukna	10.06 Kms.	533 ft.
5. Rongtong	17.70 Kms.	1404 ft.
6. Tindharia	29.77 Kms.	2822 ft.
7. Gayabari	36.20 Kms.	3616 ft.
8. Mahanadi	42.08 Kms.	4120 ft.
9. Kurseong	49.48 Kms.	4864 ft.
10. Tung	56.92 Kms.	5656 ft.
11. Sonada	64.97 Kms.	6552 ft.
12. Ghum	74.03 Kms.	7407 ft.
13. Darjeeling	80.06 Kms.	6812 ft.