RAILTRAILS: GET OUT and WALK!

Back in 2011, before Plymouth College in South Devon, achieved Olympic fame through students Ruta Meilutyte (Gold) and Tom Daley (Bronze), Jonathan Shields, the Business Teacher was encouraging a small group of 17 year old student entrepreneurs to develop an idea which, in common with many of the best things in life, was ridiculously simple.

To help get people out of their comfortable cars and into the countryside the team, which started 30 strong but soon diminished to 6 or 8, decided to map and publish family-friendly walks which could be easily accessed from rural branch rail lines. The team had noticed that branch lines were becoming increasingly popular and as some members had been participants in Plymouth College’s successful Ten Tors teams, trails became a natural choice, in both senses!

But this was a Young Enterprise Competition so having nailed their idea they had to form a company, Platform Limited; raise money by selling shares; produce a product; sell it and make a profit. Feverish activity followed as they walked each trail, found (and no doubt sampled) each pub, mapped the routes and put it all onto computer in print-ready form. Their first book, the Plymouth and South East Cornwall Edition (9 walks), which arrived at Waterstones and on Amazon earlier this year, cleverly promoted by endorsements from Michael Palin and Chris Tarrant, has already gone to a second edition.

The second book, another 9 walks, but this time with a blue cover is the Truro and West Cornwall Edition and it is understood that a third is on the way offering routes out of Exeter. The team won successive rounds of the Young Enterprise Competition but that is far from the end of the story. Profits from the business are being reinvested in a Community Interest Company, Rail Trails CIC, having Katie
Davies-Gregory as Operations Manager and Harry Cobbold (# 1039 on the tree) as Managing Director, which is already actively renovating and refurbishing a very neglected Gunnislake Station in Cornwall. Others will probably follow.

The team has been nominated and short listed to represent England in the competition for the Best Youth-led UK Social Enterprise Award. Judging takes place in London later this year and we wish them well.