

# Swaledale power battle

## 'WHY MUST WE PAY TO PLEASE VISITORS?'

By Angus Goodfellow

"WE want electricity, but not at that price," is the attitude of hill farmers at the top end of Swaledale.

They have been asked to pay more than £1,000 each for putting supply cables underground in order to preserve the beauty of the Yorkshire Dales National Park in which they live.

When the farmers asked for an electricity supply to their scattered properties above Keld, the North Eastern Electricity Board quoted a charge of £168 to each would-be consumer. This would have been for overhead cables, as had been used when the supply was brought up the dale from Reeth to Keld about eight years ago.

The National Park Committee insisted, however, that the supply line above Keld would have to be put underground for about one and a half miles between Bridge End and Hoggarths Farm. This was to preserve the beauty of part of the dale particularly favoured by picknickers and other visitors.

### For townfolk

The additional cost of providing the supply in this way was estimated at about £15,000, which the Electricity Board had indicated would have to fall on the consumers. The farmers, however, found this additional cost prohibitive.

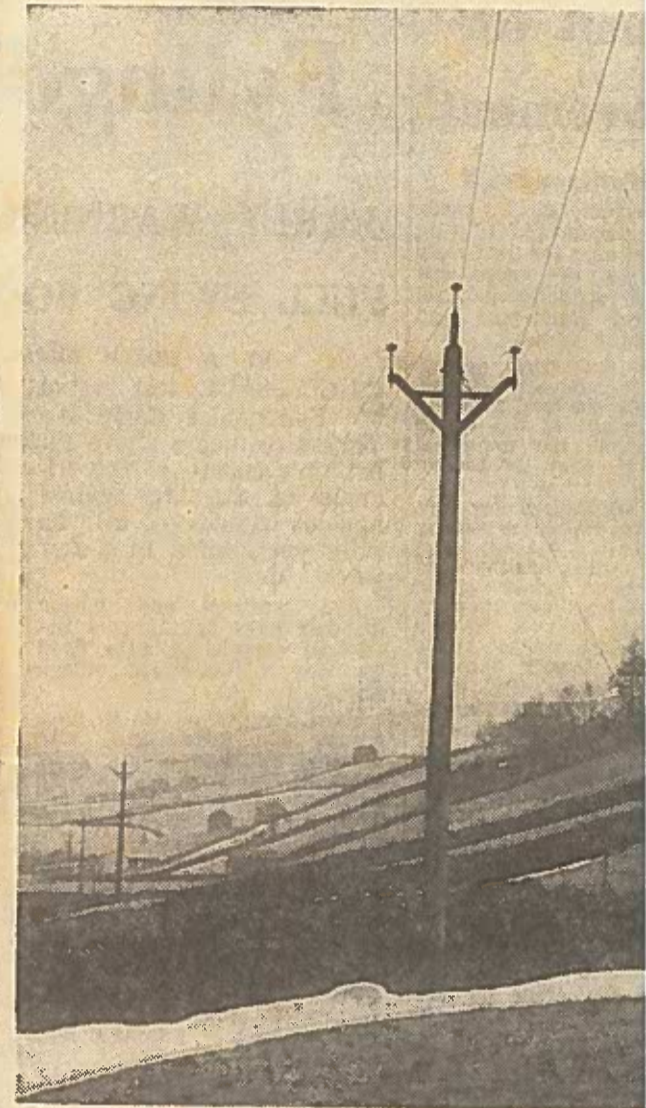
The matter has been taken up by the Reeth Rural Council, and through them by the local M.P., Mr. Tim Kitson, and efforts are being made to find a solution to the problem.

In the meantime, the 12 farmers concerned, and their families, have to continue living without electricity so that visitors from towns, who have it, can enjoy an unspoilt view.

For the majority this means lighting by candles, oil-lamps and bottled gas, although one property has its own small generator. The housewife has none of the modern aids such as washing machines, vacuum cleaners or electric irons.

At Hill Top Farm, for example, which is 1,500 feet up, Mrs. Shirley Alderson uses a box iron—a hollow shell in which a metal "heater" made red hot in the fire is placed. With a seven-month-old son, Steven, to care for, washing is a big item, and a washing machine and an electric iron are two things Mrs. Alderson would like.

Her sister-in-law, Miss Marina Alderson, said: "This is one of the oldest farms in the dale, and the Aldersons have lived here for generations. Let's hope that when



What these farmers hope to see soon.



The view which the pylons are supposed to spoil.



Miss Marina Alderson gets ready to use her old-fashioned iron.



Mrs. Shirley Alderson lights the gas lamp.



As there is no television Janet Metcalfe has to read



Mr. George Calvert, one of the farmers concerned.



Mr. Richard Metcalfe looks out across his land

Steven grows up there will be electricity."

At the neighbouring farm of Harker House, half-a-mile further on, Mrs. Margaret Metcalfe was busy with family baking in the coke-fired oven. She, too, missed the modern amenities offered by electricity. While they had bottled-gas lighting downstairs, they still went to bed by candlelight, just as the first occupants of the house had done more than 200 years ago.

The lack of television was another drawback to life without electricity. For a family living several miles from even the smallest village, winter evenings can be very long. The Metcalfe's son, Ronald, aged 17, has not been out of the house in the evening all winter.

Looking out over the fell side across which poles might one day bring him electricity, Mr. Richard Metcalfe said: "I would like electricity—I would not have agreed to pay £168 if I did not want. But £1,000 is out of the question. People cannot afford it on these farms."

"If they want to put the cables underground, let them pay for it. The National Park people have a lot to say, but they have no funds behind them."

Like most of his neighbours,

Mr. Metcalfe keeps sheep hillside pastures. A few, Calvert brothers at Harker keep some cattle, but production is not on scale in these parts, electricity is wanted more life in the home easier, help directly in farming.

Mr. George Calvert, gharths, said that electricity would enable the milking 12 cows to be carried out by one man instead of two, but it would be light household appliances.

He considers that insulating the portion of the dale which is underground, an alternative route could be found to the overland. He describes a stretch between his farm and Bridge End, which is a picnic spot, but said there were several places further up the dale where there was good scenery and where there were overhead cables.

It may prove that fine alternative route for a head cable will be the solution to the problem, which would mean that 12 happy hill farmers and their families will no longer be deprived of one of the advantages of modern living.