

### 3. The forgotten station



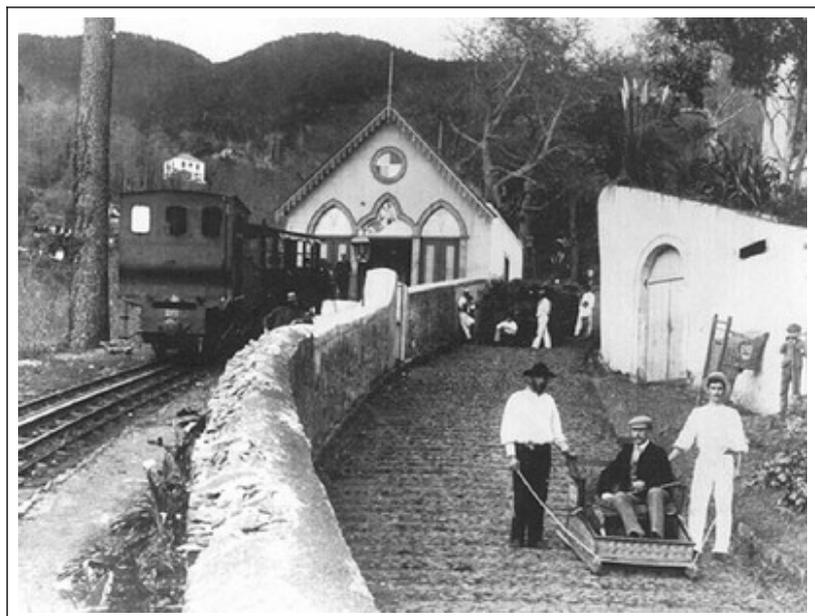
Of all the photographs found online and in documents one in particular was a complete mystery. The picture appears to show a construction, that seems to be directly in line with the track and with “carros de cesto” (basket cars) running by the side. My first thought was that the location must be somewhere on that part of the track where the line runs alongside the basket run. In fact there are only two very short runs of about 100metres each where this could have been taken. I could find no text, in any language, that

specifically mentioned this building or its location. There are actually two photographs of the building, one clearly taken some time after the other. The surprising thing was that none of the captions seemed to agree and there was no definitive text to accompany any of them. Of all those pictures that actually had captions most were of little help, others were complete nonsense. An example of this was one the “station at Livramento”. There was a stop at Livramento, but there was no station. In any case the basket car run is 250 metres from the railway track at that point so that one was disregarded. Another claimed that this was the station at Monte. At first I disregarded this because everybody recognises the abandoned building at Largo da Fonte as the “station at Monte”. In another text the writer said this was the station at Monte before it was rebuilt. Another said it was at Monte Palace and others say at Confeiteira. Clearly nobody knows for sure!

I spent many hours online using Google earth looking for clues to help identify the location of the site, and in particular that section of wall with the arched doorway, but with no luck.

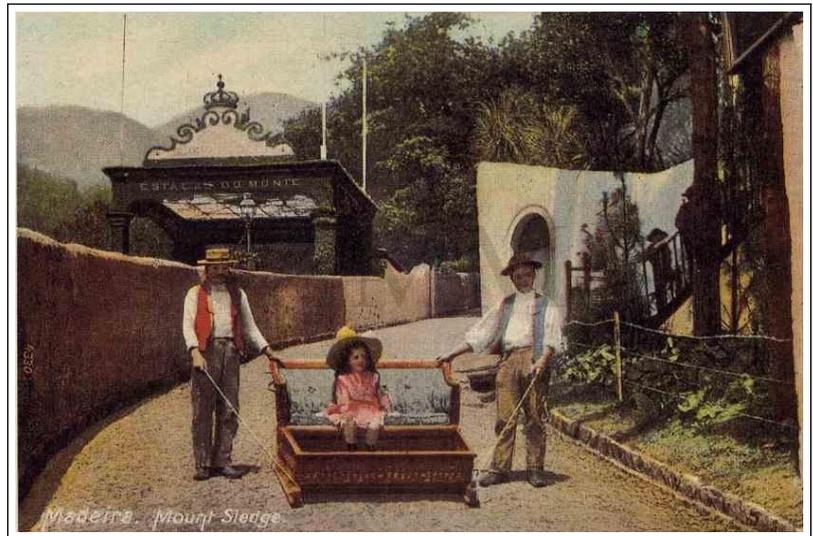
It soon became clear that another visit to the Island was the only way forward. Always great to visit Madeira for any, or no reason so no problems there.

After a short journey on a No. 20 bus, and armed with an album of all the relevant photographs, I set out to talk to the people who lived and worked in Monte.

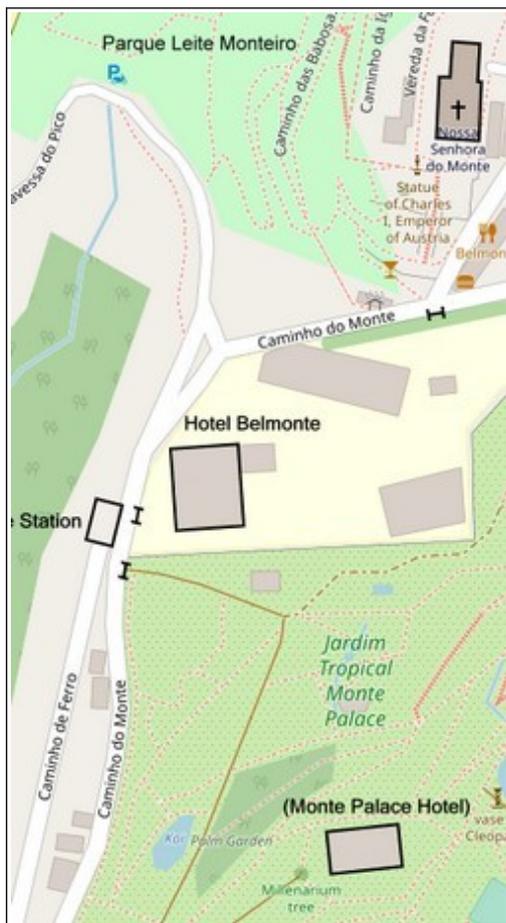


I understood the long tradition of basket car drivers (carreiros) at Monte passing-on their driving skills and memories to younger men, often their sons. I showed the photograph to one of the carreiros and he immediately indicated place to be just down the road from where we were standing.

The staff in Monte parish council office were very helpful and could confirm too that the picture was taken at in the same area. One lady said that the white house on the hill at the back of the photograph belonged to her grandfather. So now I knew, without doubt, the location of the building.



There are various photographs of the building showing it at different stages of construction and a postcard painting showing it as a grand cast iron affair bearing the name “Estacio do Monte”. At first I thought this one to be just an artists impression of how the station could look so doubted its value. Until now I was convinced that the building in the photographs was the 1894 terminus as it appears to be built directly in line with the track with no obvious way through.



As other stops down the line had no station buildings I was easily persuaded that this one was special. The postcard picture naming it as “Station of Monte” seemed to confirm this.

The two destinations for many visitors were the Hotel Belmonte, owned by the railway and the “Quinta do Prazer” later to become the Monte Palace Hotel. Just a short walk along Caminho do Monte was the church of Our Lady of the Mountain. The Leite Monteiro Park was of course very close, as was the Largo da Fonte. The station was ideally situated directly opposite the entrance to both the Grande Hotel Belmonte and the Quinta do Prazer. Hotel Belmonte also had direct access to the starting place for the basket cars.

This station would have provided the best access to everything a visitor to Monte would want so why would the company embark on such mammoth engineering project as the building of a viaduct just to build another station 250 metres further on?

But that’s exactly what they did ... so why, and when?

Largo da Fonte and The church “Ingreja de Nossa Senhora do Monte” must be the centre of the parish. After all it was the church that gave its name to the parish, not the other way round. The following line is from the Parish Council website say it all: *“The Church is a point of reference for the parish. Both for those who visit, or when observed from the city of Funchal”*. Largo da Fonte was clearly the only place for the end-of-line station.

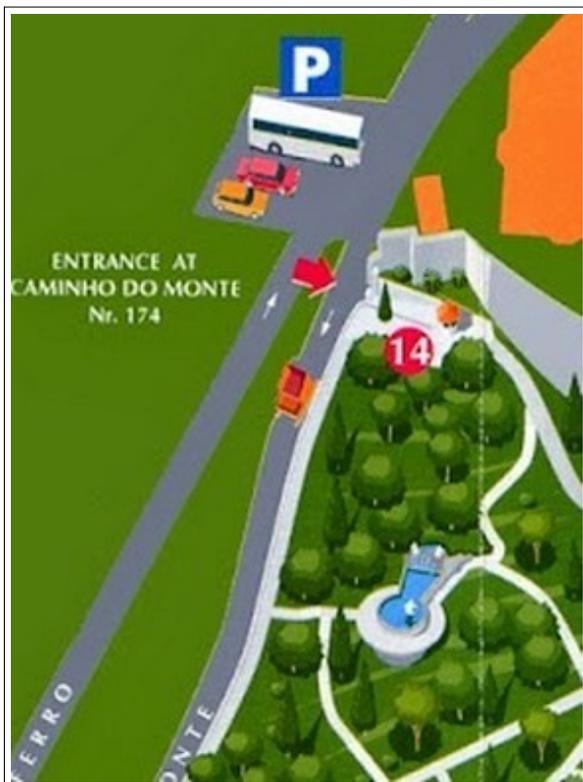
However, I still have a theory as to the purpose of the Belmonte Hotel Station.

We are expected to believe that in one year the track was laid, the viaduct constructed and the Monte station and ticket office were all built. This I cannot believe.

It is always reported that the line to Monte was carried out in two stages, the first stage to Levada de Santa Luzia and the second to Monte. I believe there were three, the last being the stage from the Belmonte Hotel, over the viaduct and into Largo da Fonte.

I’m sure the line did arrive at Monte in 1894, but not quite at the planned final destination. There was always the problem of building the viaduct and it seems likely that the rail company would not want this to delay the opening of the line. The obvious solution would have been to build a temporary station right next the Belmonte Hotel and Quinta do Prazer entrances. This would provide the extra time needed to build the viaduct and a new station at Largo da Fonte without delaying the opening of the line. This would also explain why the temporary station in the two photographs appear to block the line with no way past. As the station in the postcard painting it clearly is designed to allow a train to pass through this must have been how it looked after the viaduct and Monte station had been completed.

This section of the official plan of the Tropical Garden shows a visitor parking place at the site of the railway station.



It is my firm belief that this station was the first official Monte station and remained so until the decision was taken to extend the line to Terreiro da Luta. Only then was the bridge, and station at Largo da Fonte, constructed.

I’ve been able to find only one piece of evidence to support this theory, as yet uncorroborated, But it does state, very clearly, that the work to build the bridge, the Monte station and the Chalet Esplanada was started in 1911 as part of the line extension and completed in the following year.

**This was the main, and only, Monte station for 17 years and nobody remembers it!**

Re: <https://www.gnose.eu/2018/12/comboio-do-monte-cronologia-ilustrada.html>

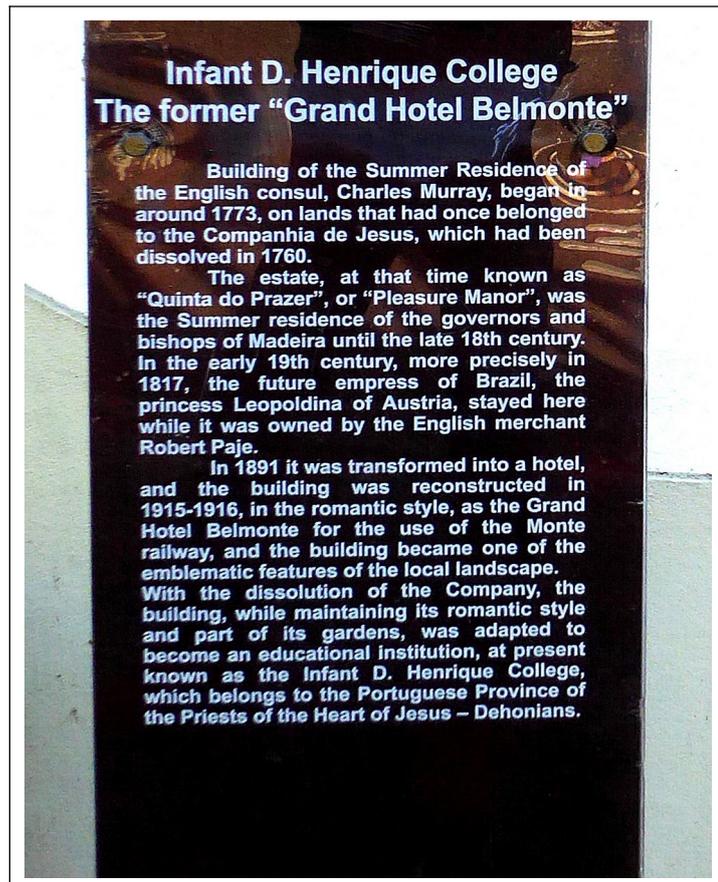
**Views of the Palace Hotel and the Tropical garden**





Front view of the Infant College that was formerly the Grand Hotel Belmonte. This photograph taken from the site of the old train stop.

The English text on the information board to the right-hand side of the main gate.





Grand Hotel Belmonte Hotel visitors leaving to catch the waiting train.

It is likely that this picture was taken after 1912 as the station is not visible. After the extension to Terreiro da Luta was completed the station building here would not have been needed.

This recent picture shows the gates looking exactly the same as they did when the railway was running except the lamps have now been replaced by flower pots and the gates have been re-painted.



The Grande Hotel Belmonte had a gate at the north of the estate would have provided direct access to the start of the basket run and also to the steps leading up to the the church “Ingreja de Nossa Senhora do Monte”.



The views on the left show the train just having left the Hotel Belmonte Station travelling toward the viaduct and then to Largo da Fonte.

After much repositioning of the camera I was able to take this picture to show how the location looked in 2019.



Since the earlier picture was taken the hotel has undergone reconstruction work and it would seem the exterior wall has been altered and an additional building added in the south-western corner of the estate.

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