

Whistle Stop



Watauga Valley Railroad Historical Society & Museum
P. O. Box 432, Johnson City, TN. 37605-0432
(423) 753-5797
www.wataugavalleynrhs.org



Preserving Our Region's Railroad Heritage

Volume 44 No. 3

March 2024



On February 15th CSX unveiled its 10th locomotive in its Heritage Series. The locomotive, a GE ES44AC-H model, pays tribute to the Richmond, Fredericksburg & Potomac (RF&P) Railroad and is numbered 1836 in honor of that road's founding year.

February 26th General Membership Meeting

Our next General Membership meeting will be held on Monday, February 26th, 2024 at 6:30 pm at the Chuckey Depot / Railroad Museum, 110 South Second St., Jonesborough, TN (at the railroad crossing). Our program will be on the history of the *Chattanooga Choo Choo*, that city's famous ex-Southern Railway terminal that is now a hotel. Come out, bring a friend, and enjoy a great night of railroading with your fellow railfans.

Member Notes

Please keep the following in your thoughts and prayers: Gary Price, Lois Tilley, Dona Lewis and Fred Phofl. If you know of a member that needs a card, thoughts for various concerns, or to request that one of our members or family be reported for various concerns in the *Whistle Stop*, email a request to wataugavalley.membership@gmail.com.

WELCOME ABOARD! Please welcome our newest member: Kyle Lael, Marion, NC. YouTube user id "SouthernRailFan."

Note to Members: There will be an email sent out in a few days to poll members on the date they joined the Club. This will provide the Officer/Director nominating committee with knowledge to pick candidates. The email will be coming from wataugavalley.membership@gmail.com.

If anyone's address, phone number or email address has changed in the last years' time, please contact Les Billings at wataugavalley.membership@gmail.com for correction. This will ensure that no one misses mailings, phone calls or emails. Also, if this info changes at any time please send us the correction. Thank You.

2024 WVRHS&M MEMBERSHIP DUES

If you have not paid your 2024 dues, please do so as your membership expired on December 31st, 2023. Dues are as follows: Individual Membership \$20.00, Family Membership \$5.00 per family member. Checks should be made out to WVRHS&M and mailed to P.O. Box 432, Johnson City, TN 37605-0432.

Spring 2024 Rail Excursion



On Saturday, May 4th, 2024 the Watauga Valley Railroad Historical Society and Museum will once again sponsor a train excursion on the Great Smoky Mountains Railroad. This is a wonderful opportunity to celebrate and enjoy the beauty of the spring season while riding the rails in vintage passenger railroad cars.

The one-day excursion will cover most of the operating trackage of the Great Smoky Mountains Railroad. The track follows the route of the former Southern Railway's Murphy Branch Line, established in 1891, with its five percent grade and many bridges.

Our scenic rail excursion takes us from the historic depot in Bryson City, NC, through the beautiful countryside of Western North Carolina, into the breath-taking Nantahala Gorge surrounded by the majestic Smoky Mountains, and back to Bryson City. Much of the route hugs the banks of the Little Tennessee and Nantahala Rivers. It crosses Fontana Lake on a trestle spanning 780 feet 100 feet above the lake.

To learn more about the trip and order tickets, go to:
<https://www.wataugavalleyrrhsm.org/excursions.php>

Mechanical Department Report

by Art Devoe

The Watauga Valley Mechanical Department is looking for volunteers on Tuesdays to help maintain our passenger cars. If your spouse wants you out of the house during this long winter, please email wataugavalley@gmail.com.



[Left] An NS crew is at work replacing ties at the switch leading into the Coach Yard. [Below right] Les Billings found our cars back home after service elsewhere.



ROLLING STOCK

“Moultrie” diner (WATX 400) and **“St Augustine” coach (WATX 500)**: in service at the North Carolina Transportation Museum in Spencer, NC.

“Powhatan Arrow” coach (WATX 539): in the Spring St. Coach Yard receiving several upgrades.

“Crescent Harbor” sleeper / lounge (WATX 2351): in the Spring St. Coach Yard for generator/engine repairs.

“Clinchfield 100” office car (WATX 100): in the shop at the Spring St. Coach Yard. In the photo below we see the 100 being turned in preparation for its return from VMT in Roanoke.



Train Trivia: What was the name popularly associated with the train driven by Casey Jones? A.) “Afternoon Flyer”; B.) “Memphis Express”; C.) “The Cannonball Express”; D.) “Gulf Coast Limited”. Answer on page 5.

Chuckey Depot / Museum



A new artifact display will be coming March 1st to the Chuckey Depot / Museum. Make plans to come and see items representing two popular regional rail lines: the Louisville & Nashville Railroad and Tennessee Central Railway.



In the News ...

NS Replaced More Rail in 2023 since 1990

[trains.com, February 7] Norfolk Southern replaced 556 miles of rail last year, the highest tally since 1990, the railroad. NS's capital production gangs broke productivity records by laying 35 more track miles of rail than in 2022, while using the same number of rail installation teams.

"The Norfolk Southern Engineering Department truly came together as one team in 2023 to achieve these outstanding results that enhanced our infrastructure system wide," Ed Boyle, vice president of engineering, said in a statement today (Feb. 7, 2024). "These record accomplishments were made possible through extensive planning, coordination, communication, and teamwork."

Over the past year, the railroad's capital production gangs achieved the following results:

- 619 total track miles of rail work was completed, 49 miles more than in 2022.
- The R3 Dual Rail Gang laid 310 track miles, the highest amount on record.
- The R4 and R5 Super Single Rail Gangs completed 181 track miles.
- The R1, R2, R8, and R12 Curve Rail Gangs completed 127 track miles.

"Our Engineering team worked collaboratively with the Network Operations Center and Transportation in a true Team of Teams effort to safely deliver a very successful year," said Paul Duncan, Chief Operating Officer. "We look forward to achieving even greater results in the coming year."

The capital production gang teams include:

- The R3 Dual Rail Gang is the largest production gang and the only rail laying team in the industry that installs both rails simultaneously. This operation lays over 300 track miles of rail per year.
- The two Super Single Rail Gangs, R4 & R5, handle shorter rail replacement jobs that cannot be efficiently performed by R3. They replace 180 track miles of rail annually.
- The four Single Side Rail Gangs replace over 100 track miles of targeted curve rail annually.
- The six Super, two Yard, and three Regional Timber and Surfacing (T&S) gangs replace a total of 2.25 million cross ties annually. The 11 T&S gangs install crossties and surface the track system wide. The six Super gangs focus on the mainline and sidings and the five smaller teams work yard tracks and industry tracks.
- The two Surfacing Gangs, S2 & S6, and surfacing teams embedded in the rail gangs maintain track stability by tamping/surfacing nearly 2,000 miles annually.

Asheville Train Show

The annual Asheville Train Show will be held this weekend at the Western North Carolina Agricultural Center in Fletcher, NC (across from the airport) offering over 4 or more working layouts and 180 vendor tables. Repair advice and testing will be available! Layouts of all scales, Z, N, HO, S, O and G, will be running, including an O scale layout with live steam. Hours are Friday, February 23rd, from noon to 6 p.m. and Saturday, February 24th, from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Last year's admission ticket cost \$8.00.

NS Cutting 7% of Management and Staff Positions

[*trains.com*, January 25] Norfolk Southern told employees that it will eliminate 7% of its management and staff positions as a cost-cutting move.

The railroad is set to publicly announce the cutbacks during its fourth-quarter earnings call on Friday [January 27th] morning. NS is offering voluntary severance packages to eligible employees, according to people familiar with the matter. Roughly 300 positions will be eliminated.

Norfolk Southern's earnings have taken a hit from inflation, a soft freight market, and costs related to cleanup of the Feb. 3, 2023, derailment and hazardous materials spill in East Palestine, Ohio.

The railroad is maintaining its commitment to not furloughing train crews during downturns, however, as part of its strategy to provide more consistent, reliable, and resilient service over the long term, according to people familiar with the matter.

New Pistons for #1309

[From Western Maryland Scenic Railway's web site] In the past year, our primary engine, steam locomotive #1309, underwent running gear repairs that were intended to prolong the life of its 75-year-old pistons. The pistons were not part of the original restoration process. However, while it was operating in December, it was discovered that the piston heads and rods needed to be fully replaced to keep the 1309 running. Although this was already in the works, the timeframe has become sooner than expected. [Donations are being solicited at <https://wmsr.com/donate>.]

Holston Mountain Scanner

We are happy to announce that the radio scanner on Holston Mountain is up and running again. This radio picks up dispatchers and trains on NORFOLK SOUTHERN's A-line from Morristown, TN to Radford, VA and on CSXT (ex-Clinchfield), where we have heard CSXT dispatchers talking to trains from Elkhorn City, KY to Spartanburg, SC. If you want to hear all kinds of railroad action, you can access the radio scanner on at your computer at home at no cost. To listen, go to www.broadcastify.com/listen/feed/35435, click on the Listen arrow (to the left of the scanner description), and you're on line. Thanks to Bob Mushet for his work in bringing the scanner back on line; hope you enjoy.

Train Trivia answer. C. "*The Cannonball Express*". The "*Cannonball*" was never an official designation, it was just a nickname for a fast train, particularly the one that ran from New Orleans to Chicago. Some sources cite the "*Cannonball*" actually referred to Casey's locomotive, 4-6-0 #382. The "*Express*" was added by folk lore. [various sources]

Display in the Block By Les Billings

The Highline

In this month's "Display in the Block" I would like to do a piece on what I think means more to me than any other part of any railroad. These were some of the last activities that I had with my grandfather who passed away in February of 1971. More on this later. This would be what is



Northern End off of Greenwood Dr.

termed as the *Highline* section of the Clinchfield/CSX trackage (9.5 Miles) that runs from Johnson City to Unicoi, MP 118.3 to MP 127. This section of track was built to bypass downtown Johnson City. This would eliminate trains blocking crossings and prevent crossing accidents. It also reduced grades and lessened the number of curves and their sharpness. At this time in history, the Clinchfield ran about 12 trains a day, some

with up to 140 cars.

Construction began in September of 1969 and was officially opened in October of 1970. Just a little over a year in construction. This feat seems impossible to me. To me, this was some dedication get to this project completed. I am not sure this could or would be done today with all the advances in construction. Projects today



are drawn out way too long in my opinion. The project started at the northern end,

North end of J.C. Siding - North end



Johnson City Yard Portion

near Greenwood Drive near where the former Wrights supermarket was located. The project ended and tied back to the existing line in Unicoi near the Whistle Stop Deli. This route would take the track around the southern side of ETSU. This would prove to be

a very unpopular route, a big stink, that would lead to many heated discussions and lawsuits. This was a situation that I only found out about many years after completion. The university officials just knew that this would ruin the school. I believe these folks had forgotten that George L. Carter, the Clinchfield's founder, had donated the land the college now sits on. As far as I know, the university was never hurt by this route and many students do not pay any attention to the trains running by. The cartoon on the right kindly illustrates what happened. This was in the Johnson City Press February 9th, 1970 issue. The railroad finally won all the litigations, and the route was completed.



Interesting Cartoon



On the south end of Johnson City around Rolling Hills Drive, a yard was built along with an office. Also, a 3-mile siding was built at around MP 119.5, near the University Parkway and extending to around MP 122.7.

The deep meaning of the Highline stems from two reasons. First, the beginning of the project was only about a ¼ mile from my house. Our route of travel every day took us by the construction site and was a short walk from home. I was nine at this time and was very interested to see all the

Trackage behind my Grandparents property. - Mid Highline

machinery at work. As I recall, the construction company used Terex machinery. What was interesting about the machines were their color, light green. Caterpillar yellow was always the norm. Second, my grandparents also lived near the construction site. The back of their property was adjacent to the right of way is a wooded area. For several years before the construction began, my grandfather and I would take walks in the woods, and we could see evidence of the work that had stopped in the early 1900's. We saw a non-finished fill and a cut near the back of ETSU that was only open at one end. A few years passed and the work began and our walks to the woods became walks to watch them work on the project. My grandfather passed away in February 1971. So, as you can see, this was some of the last times with him.



Washington/Cater Co, Line



Near Highridge Rd in Washington Co.

of the last times with him.

In closing, I always look at this section of track a little differently as I watch trains pass by. These times will never be forgotten.



Buckeye Rd in Unicoi Co. – Highline south end

Whistle Stop

Published Monthly by the Watauga Valley Railroad Historical Society & Museum
P.O. Box 432, Johnson City, TN 37605-0432
whistlestop.editor@gmail.com

Opinions or viewpoints are those of the writer and may not necessarily reflect those of the organization members, officers or directors. Items of interest are welcome and will be credited to the author; however, because of space constraints, all submissions are subject to editing. Permission to reprint *Whistle Stop* articles with the exception of photographs is granted if proper credit is given. Reuse of photographs must receive permission by the editor and the photographer.

Follow us on
facebook

Watauga Valley RHS & Museum
P.O. Box 432
Johnson City, TN 37605-0432

TIME-SENSITIVE MATERIAL