

Whistle Stop



Watauga Valley Railroad Historical Society & Museum
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Preserving Our Region's Railroad Heritage

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Family pose of the NS Heritage Diesels shot at NCTM in Spencer, NC. It is taking the greatest restraint on the part of your Editor not to become excessive and tedious with the superlatives when writing a caption for this wonderful, once-in-a-lifetime photograph. I believe I speak for railfans and supporters of rail transportation everywhere when I express our gratitude and appreciation to NORFOLK SOUTHERN for this costly – and some skeptics might say courageous – undertaking. I wish them the recognition and commercial success from it that they so richly deserve.

July 23rd Membership Meeting

The Watauga Valley Railroad Historical Society & Museum will have our regular meeting on Monday, July 23, 2012 at the Johnson City Public Library, 101 West Millard St., Johnson City, TN. Our program this month will feature recent excursions on NORFOLK SOUTHERN – Pulaski, VA to Bristol on July 7 and Bristol to Knoxville on July 8. Don Findley will present this program. There has been so much going on this month from the 30th Anniversary activities of NS at Spencer to our NS excursions. Come out and hear and see all the activities that WATV has been involved with for the month of July. Bring a friend for a relaxing evening with your fellow members.

Member Notes

By Nancy Jewell

Please keep Helen Calhoun, Bonnie Smither, and Lois Tilley in your thoughts as they deal with health concerns. As always, let us know of members, friends or family folks who might be remembered with a card or a phone call. The office phone number is 423.753.5797 or call Nancy Jewell at 423.282.0918.

Many schools will be in session in early August so please be alert for the walkers, young drivers and school busses on the roads.

21ST CENTURY EXCURSION ON THE BRISTOL LINE

If you were not part of the July 7 and 8 excursions, you missed two great trips. As most of you know, the #630 had bearing problems on the weekend before. This problem begged the question: to cancel the trips or operate with diesel power. After many phone calls, it was decided to operate the trips as planned using one of the NS heritage engines. NS SAVANNAH & ATLANTA EMD SD70ACe #1065 came to the rescue! Over 300 tickets were sold between Pulaski and Bristol on July 7 and the same for the Bristol to Knoxville trip on July 8. Over 2000 people were unfortunately turned away for the weekend on account of a quick sell out.

We had no major complaints because the #630 was missing from the consist; everyone was happy for the unique experience of a train ride. Overall, a fun and rewarding weekend even without steam power. The people that did not get to ride behind or see #630 on these trips had the opportunity to chase and take photos on July 13 when the engine made its deadhead move between Roanoke and Knoxville via Bristol with 2 diesels, tool car and 4 gondolas. Looks like #630 is repaired and back in full service. She operated beautifully from Roanoke to Knoxville and on the Knoxville to Alcoa employee trips on July 14 and 15.

Spring Street Coach Yard Mechanical Report

By Bob Yapple

The ***Powhatan Arrow*** and ***Clinchfield*** coaches have been incorporated by Tennessee Valley Railroad Museum into the Norfolk Southern 21st Century Steam Program. Both cars will continue into the fall on trips throughout the South. Several WVRHS&M members got to enjoy the trips between Roanoke and Knoxville via Bristol July 7th and 8th (see page 7).

Moultrie diner carpet project. The underfloor has been repaired and the entire dining room cleaned and polished from end to end and to bottom. The window draperies are being cleaned and the blinds will be removed and cleaned. We are waiting for the selection of the carpet material.

Crescent Harbor sleeper / lounge. Detail work is ongoing. The B end truck has been re-shimmed to solve the "lean" problem. New shocks have been received and the side bearings are being re-shimmed. We are waiting for the new rubber seal material for the provision and vestibule doors.

VOLUNTEERS NEEDED AT COACH YARD! Please call the office at 423-753-5797 and leave a message if you'd like to help out. We will call you back.

Trip Report: NS Employee Steam Special

By: Gary P. Price

[Ed. Note: Gary's wonderful story of the Marion & Rye Valley will return next month.]

NORFOLK SOUTHERN Employee specials became rare events after the derailment of N&W J-class 611's consist of cars carrying 1000 NORFOLK SOUTHERN employees and guests on May 18, 1986 deep in the Dismal Swamp at Juniper, VA. So spirits were lifted high (at least mine were) when NORFOLK SOUTHERN announced that as part of the 21st Century Steam Program, a train would visit each division of NORFOLK SOUTHERN and offer - for free - employees and their families a unique opportunity to ride behind one of two coal-fired steam locomotives. The magic words here were "for free". There were only a limited number of tickets available, and I could only qualify for four. I really got excited when I read that the NICKEL PLATE #765 was to be a part of the program. I could just imagine the sight of the big ole Berkshire marching up Christiansburg mountain, and there I would be in car 539 just a grinnin' like a possum eating corn. I was not disappointed, though, when the website informed me that the SOUTHERN #630 would be the Virginia Division power for the trips. I knew it was a feisty little engine, and it had ties to the Watauga Valley area. The tickets posted several weeks prior on the company website at 12 a.m. on a Friday morning and all four trips "freed out" by 10 a.m. that morning. The response was so overwhelming that NS placed two more cars on the train. I received my conformation for my trips to depart Roanoke on Saturday, June 30 at 2:00 p.m. The trip would take us to the wye track at Walton, where the train would reverse direction and return to Roanoke. Estimated time: 2 hours.

After a few months of patiently waiting, the week of the trip finally arrived. My teenagers' band "Forsaken Hero" was playing a concert at the campgrounds in Roanoke on June 28, so Suzie and I decided to just stay all weekend and enjoy the Star City. On Friday night prior to departure, the Price family had decided to go to the movies at the Valley View Cinemas. However, the 7 o'clock showing of the movie we wanted to see was sold out. Emily had asked several times to go up to the Star on Mill Mountain, so I figured that this would be a good time to do that since the next showing wasn't til 9. The heat had been so bad that week across the entire state of Virginia, so a little trip to the Star was cool and refreshing. Off to the West, I noticed that the sky was looking like rain, so I said we better get on back to the movies before the rain started. That is where the Price family was when the rare East Coast "Derecho" hit the Roanoke Valley. They gathered us in the center of the theatre until everything had passed, and the power came and went, but stayed on after the storm had passed. The movie started one hour late, and most people had left, fearing damage to their homes. We stayed on and watched the movie. As we left and turned onto 581 South, we saw an eerie sight, Downtown Roanoke was dark. Emily said to me, "Oh Daddy, I can't see the Star." Everything was dark, and road signs had been shredded, tree branches everywhere. We were certain that our hotel was going to be without power as well. It was a welcomed relief when we exited 581 and saw the Days Inn sign shining bright against the darkness. People had already begun lining up to snag any available rooms due to the extensive power outage.

Why did I tell you the above story? Well, power outages affect railroad signals. We arose on Saturday morning and checked out of our room, (there were people waiting in line for it), and headed out to find an ATM that worked. It took us 45 minutes to achieve that goal, and the only thing serving food was a Subway restaurant. We arrived, and found a parking place. My good friend and artist, Andrew Fletcher, was there to greet me and gave me several items of his artwork to hand out on the WVC trips the following week. The train was not there, [continued on next page]

so we gathered in the lobby at the O. Winston Link museum, where it was nice and cool. A phone call from fellow WVC member Ben Blevins revealed the reason for the delay: no signals. Finally, the #630 appeared, and I must say, it looked great to see steam on the high iron of Roanoke once again. The Price family boarded coach number 2 behind the #630. This car was former SOUTHERN RAILWAY stainless steel car number 829. The crew turned the train on the downtown wye track and slowly started heading west. No signals operating between Roanoke and Salem meant that we had to run at a 10 mph speed restriction, stop at each signal and get permission to proceed. Once we reached the West End of Salem, the signals were functioning properly and we could maintain our mandated speed of 35 mph on to Walton.

The outside temperature that day was 103 degrees, and the air conditioning units were maxed out. Cars 1827 and 857 had already shut down, so the passengers were moved to empty seats in other cars. The 829 was cooling well ... until the train was halfway through Montgomery Tunnel, and the AC shut down. It did not take long for the 829 to turn into an 80 foot long, rolling microwave. Several passengers filtered into other cars that were still cool. Then the WATX 500 started running hot. I talked with Mike via cell about the problem, but no solution was found. The Roanoke Chapter volunteers did an excellent job of making sure we had plenty of cold water on hand, and they watched out for people who might start showing signs of heat exhaustion. Everyone that I talked to understood that these things just happen sometime, and we joked about it being NORFOLK SOUTHERN's weight loss plan. The train stopped at Christiansburg Station to load more bottled water and allow the fire department time to water the cars. The time also enabled the A/C misters to work properly, and the 829 began cooling again. At Salem, the 630 had a bearing beginning to get warm, so we paused a few minutes to allow it to cool before returning to Roanoke. A two hour trip turned into a 5 hour adventure, but I didn't mind it a bit. I could hear that whistle blow, and see the wisps of smoke, as steam returned to Virginia rails, and I was a part of it!

Savannah & Atlanta Déjà Vu



On June 11-12, 1983, the Watauga Valley Chapter of the NRHS hosted its first weekend of NORFOLK SOUTHERN Steam Excursions. Both trips traveled eastward on the NS Bristol line to Radford, VA. The power that day was the SAVANNAH AND ATLANTA 4-6-2 steam locomotive #750 and two SOUTHERN green and gold FP7s. I was 14 years old and a passenger at the time.

Fast forward to July 7, 2012. The Watauga Valley Railroad Historical Society & Museum once again takes to the rails as part of the newly formed NORFOLK SOUTHERN 21st Century Steam Program. And again, the trips grace the rails of the fan-favorite Bristol Line. Power was to be ex-SOUTHERN steam locomotive #630, and I was now a volunteer crew member. However, we were to learn that the #630 had developed axle trouble and would not be available. The decision was made to go ahead and run the trips diesel powered. NORFOLK SOUTHERN sent us brand new EMD SD70ACe #1065, the SAVANNAH AND ATLANTA Heritage Diesel.



29 years have passed since passengers rode over the Bristol Line behind the SAVANNAH AND ATLANTA #750, and we were honored to once again be led by another SAVANNAH AND ATLANTA locomotive. How's that for déjà vu?

--- Gary Price. (with thanks to Harold Smitter for pointing this out)



Photo Section



This collage completes the gallery of individual photos of NORFOLK SOUTHERN Heritage Diesels. Depicted below are SD70Ace's #1070 – #1074 and ES44AC #8025. [All Heritage photos used with NS permission.]



As noted earlier, a hot bearing side-lined the #630 for the scheduled 21st Century Steam Excursions. The power replacement was NS SD70Ace #1065. That neither dampened spirits nor prevented opportunities for taking some unique photographs. The consist included (front to rear after the engine): TVRM #857; TVRM #907; SAM #829; RPCX #1827; NS #29; NS #28; WATX #539; and WATX #500.

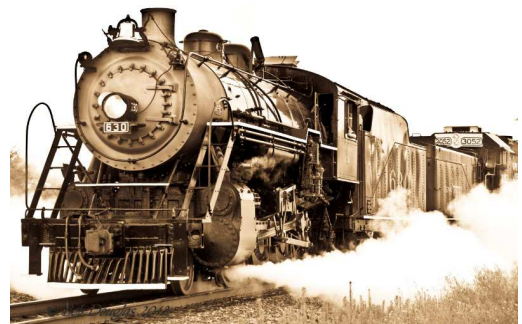


Here we see the July 8th excursion train (officially, NS train 958) as it passes westbound through Johnson City. [Photo courtesy Chris Starnes / RailPictures.net.]



The *Clinchfield* brings up the rear of the excursion train, sporting the 21st Century drum head on its gate. [Photo courtesy Mike Tilley.]

With its bearing problem corrected, the #630 returned to Knoxville on July 13th. Several photographers were lucky enough to catch the action along the way. From upper left below, clockwise: Nick White follows in the footsteps of O. Winston Link at Seven Mile Ford, VA. Ron Flanary / RailPictures.net records the action south of Bristol. (There's a bizarre story circulating on how he almost got shot by a local in doing do.) Bob Douglas creates a nostalgic period piece. Mike Tilley finds the #630 cruising by its former home as it rolls past the ex-ET&WNC station in Johnson City. [All photos used with permission.]



In the News

"Ghost Train Makes Its Way to Jonesborough Day Parade!"



The Watauga Valley RHS&M was proud to present the "Ghost Train" to the public in the Jonesborough Day Parade on June 30, 2012. The "Ghost Train" is a whistle machine donated to the Watauga Valley RHS&M by Lee Alley. The "Ghost Train" was well received by the public during the parade. Afterwards, the public had a chance to blow several whistles on the machine. Members working the "Ghost Train" during and after the parade included Nick White and Randy Moore (both pictured at left); Penny May; Walker May; and Mike Tilley.

In Case You Missed the Fun ...

If you were unable to make the festivities in Spencer or the excursions, the web is filled with pictures, photo albums, slide shows and video clips. One of particular interest was created by NORFOLK SOUTHERN, which includes interviews of the folk responsible for making the Heritage Diesels a reality. There's also a pointer to where you can buy commemorative souvenirs and an iPhone app for tracking these locomotives (a Droid version is in development). To view this slide show (with video integrated) go to <http://tinyurl.com/ns-heritage>.

It's so easy to get caught up in the excitement of the rail activities and equipment featured in these pages that we forget that, without the tireless dedication and hard work of volunteers, none of this would occur. Pictured at right are some of the crew who worked the Pulaski – Bristol trip. From left to right: Gary Price, Harold Smitter, Penny May, Frank Rohrer and Randy Moore. Not pictured were Don Findley, Bob Schubel, Mike Tilley and Nick White.



SPEAKING OF VOLUNTEERS ... SIGN UP FOR THE FALL EXCURSIONS

A call for volunteers and a sign up form for the November 3 and 4 fall excursions to Appomattox and Toccoa were published in last month's issue of the Whistle Stop. We are still in need of car hosts, supply and dining car personnel. Please fill out the form and return it ASAP so we can get an accurate head count. Either mail to WATV Excursion Workers, P. O. Box 432, Johnson City, TN 37605-0432 or bring to the July meeting. Don't miss out on these unique trips to two historical and beautiful destinations.

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Fred Waskiewicz, Editor



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