

Whistle Stop



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

Volume 32 No. 10

October 2012



Over the past several issues we have been reprinting Gary Price's fascinating story of the MARION & RYE VALLEY RAILROAD. Sadly, that series comes to an end this month. The photo above shows M&RV Shay #2 (s/n 996) gently holding back a log train at one of the line's many switchbacks. A larger image would reveal two crewmen posing on the engine's running boards.

October 22nd Spencer Excursions Safety Training

In lieu of the regular membership meeting, the Watauga Valley Railroad Historical Society & Museum will conduct an Excursion Safety Meeting on Monday, October 22, 2012 at the Johnson City Public Library, 101 West Millard St., Johnson City, TN. It is very important that everyone who will work the train attend this meeting as we will go over very detailed information about the trips. Also, Amtrak requires everyone working on the train go over the safety rules. **EVEN IF YOU'RE NOT WORKING THE TRAIN, YOU ARE WELCOME TO SIT IN ON THE MEETING.**

I look forward to seeing everyone at this very important meeting. I know many of you live a couple of hours away and I plan on getting everyone out of the meeting ASAP so you can get home at a decent hour. If there is any problem with your attendance, please e-mail me so we can line you up for a make-up session this week. I appreciate your willingness to work the trips and look forward to seeing everyone. Tickets are still available at press time. If you know anyone that wants to purchase a ticket, please call (704) 636-2889 EXT 237.

Thanks
Mike Tilley, President

Member Notes

By Nancy Jewell

Congratulations to Bob Douglas on the twin births of his granddaughter, Sophia Grace Gilmer and grandson, Shane Robert Gilmer, on September 13, 2012, at the Bristol Regional Medical Center. We wish good health, love and joy to all in the coming years.

Please keep Charlotte Brown, Jane DeVoe, and Walter Byrd in your thoughts as they deal with health concerns. As always, let us know of any members, families, or friends to whom a call might be made or a card sent. The office phone number is [423-753-5797](tel:423-753-5797) or call Nancy Jewell at [423-282-0918](tel:423-282-0918). Help us keep in touch.

Spring Street Coach Yard Mechanical Report

By Bob Yaple

ROLLING STOCK in General: The two coaches have now been returned from their adventures with the Norfolk Southern Steam excursions. All cars have received their PC-1 Amtrak inspections. The goal we wanted to meet is a comprehensive punch list for all the cars.

MOULTRIE Diner: The dining room is now complete along with the lighting phase or a rewiring program. An extensive cleaning session on a recent Saturday by the membership cleaned up the aftermath of the re-construction. It was decided to hire a professional firm to do a long overdue cleaning of the galley. All systems are being checked out for the up coming excursion season.

CLINCHFIELD Coach: This car will leave for excursion service later and has not been thoroughly checked at this time.

POWHATAN ARROW Coach: The Saturday cleaning crew did their thing and the car is cleaned and ready for a quick turn around for excursion service. Systems are being checked and a failed generator starting battery has been replaced to date.

CRESCENT HARBOR Sleeper/Lounge: Interior detail work is ongoing. The car has been raised an additional $\frac{3}{4}$ inches by shimming the truck center bowls. (See photos below.) This brings it to the required Amtrak height for couplers and buffer plates. The pumping system is now complete so all bathrooms are operational.



All photos by Don Findley.

MEMBERSHIP DUES

Membership Dues statements will be showing up shortly. Remember that you will have four options in renewing this year – it's your decision. To help you decide, **a schedule of dues has been attached to the end of this newsletter.**

HIWASSEE GORGE EXCURSION A BIG SUCCESS

We would like to thank all members who worked the successful Hiwassee Gorge Excursions. The trips were a great success with a sell out of the entire train. Many had to be turned away due to lack of space on the train. Another excellent WATV excursion.

CHUCKEY DEPOT REPORT

The Chuckey Depot Project is still on track. Rebuilding the depot will occur in Spring 2013. (Work was delayed on account of the work crews tied up with the construction work in downtown Jonesborough.) In the meantime, the station is being stored in four trailers in Jonesborough. The station will be on 2nd street in Jonesborough along the railroad. Everyone is looking forward in having a railroad depot again in Jonesborough after 40 year absence. Anyone that has railroad items that you would like displayed in the new Jonesborough museum, please call the chapter office 423-753-5797.

RAILROAD HERITAGE ALLIANCE BOARD MEETING

The Railroad Heritage Alliance will have their Board Meeting at 4 pm (before the WATV Safety meeting), Monday, October 22, 2012 at the Johnson City Public Library, 101 West Millard St., Johnson City, TN. Everyone is welcome to come by and attend the meeting in the Jones Meeting Room.

WVRHS&M "Coalfields" Field Trip ***Saturday December 8, 2012***

Mark your calendars for an exciting and educational tour of the Appalachian Coal Fields! Experience for yourself this unique area where coal is mined and shipped by rail **AND LEAVE THE DRIVING TO US.** Planned for this tour are visits to regional towns, coal camps, mines and TRAINS ON BRANCH RUNS and the POCAHONTAS MAINLINE!!! The itinerary will include Buchanan County, VA; Pike County, KY; Mingo County, WV; McDowell County, WV; Mercer County, WV; Tazewell County, VA; Bluefield, VA; and Bluefield, WV.

The cost is \$50.00 per person. (Meal stops are planned but all meals will be on your own.) The trip duration is 12-14 hours. Boarding will be at the Parson's Table in Jonesborough, TN. Departure time is 7:00 am **sharp!**

For the full itinerary, go to the **Special Events** page on our web site at:

<http://www.wataugavalleyrrhsm.org/specialevents.php>

To make reservations, or for more information, call Nick White at (276) 685-2386 or email him at nickwhite_@hotmail.com. **SEATING IS LIMITED. DON'T DELAY!**

*** WARNING! THIS IS A VERY LONG TRIP WITH VERY CURVY, MOUNTAIN ROADS.
PLEASE CONTACT NICK WHITE FOR TRIP DETAILS! ***

**“The Switchback Scenic Route ~ A History of The Marion and Rye Valley Railway”
by: Gary P. Price**

AFTERWORD by Ben Blevins

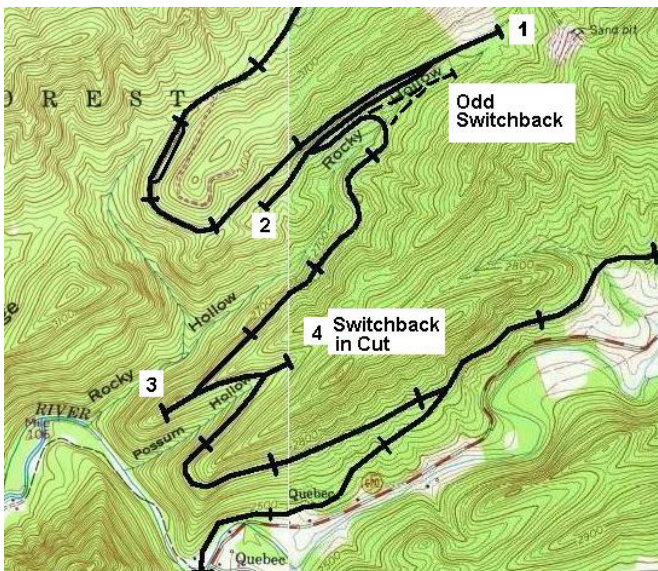
[Ben partnered with Gary in researching material for the book.]

There is very little remaining of the MARION & RYE VALLEY RAILWAY today. Less than 100 years after its abandonment, the right of way through the town of Marion is completely gone without a trace. Only those who know where it once ran can point it out. It was very difficult for us to find its original location, and old maps and photos were the only evidence that could be used to locate it.

The railroad diverged from the N&W mainline and turned to the south across a trestle at the point where Chilhowie Street crosses the NS main line today. From there, it went down the center of Broad Street and proceeded southeast through Marion and came out on Commerce Street. As it passed southeast, a grassy lot and Napa dealer mark the location of the old MARION & RYE VALLEY shop, which was set in the center of a wye track and shop tracks. Heading southward toward Interstate 81, the road to the east climbing the hill toward the Southwest Virginia Mental Health Institute is built on the old Hospital spur track which was used to deliver coal to the hospital. The old coal bunker, which was used by the hospital to feed it boiler room, survived until around the year 2000.

South of Interstate 81, the railroad closely followed the current route of Virginia Highway 16 through an area known as the “S Curve”, and on through Attoway to Currin Valley Road. At Currin Valley Road, the right of way turned west and went up the valley, and this is the first place where the old roadbed can be seen in back yards of homes on the south side of the road (or left), but it also can be easily overlooked. The road then crosses the right of way, which follows the creek. At that point, the railroad grade is a private driveway. At the end of Currin Valley Road, the road becomes a forest road. This forest road is the old MARION & RYE VALLEY right of way, and proceeds for a mile or so.

The roadbed follows this forest road until the road forks to the left across a creek. There is a cut visible to the north where the railroad negotiated this curve. Just beyond the curve, there is a parking area for automobiles, and the road up the mountain is closed to vehicle traffic. At this point, the roadbed proceeds up to the top of the mountain.



At the top of the mountain are the remains of a long and deep cut. The forest road circumvents this cut because it is a swamp and overgrown with brush and trees. Just past the cut, the right of way widens out for a quarter mile for so and is easily wide enough for two tracks. As it passes through another cut around the ridge heading east, it then heads into the Switchbacks.

There were four switchbacks on the south side of the mountain. It appears to have been built with five originally, but that odd number would have caused the train to be facing the wrong direction after transitioning the switchbacks. So, to avoid this, the railroad built the [continued on next page]

largest fill found on the right of way, and built it in a curve. Currently, this fill is being slowly eroded away from underneath by a creek running under it in a collapsed culvert. From there, it proceeded to the third switchback, which punched through a rock bluff and ran out onto a steep ridge. Finally, it headed back east toward the fourth switchback, which was cut deep into the side of where two ridges meet.

From this point, the railroad headed to the west, and then curved around a ridge, then proceeded east down the mountain and toward Rye Valley and on to Sugar Grove. There was a junction about a mile east of this curve with a logging railroad or spur line of which, unfortunately, little is known. The route shown on the map was taken directly from a USGS map dated 1911. Until the discovery of this map, the right of way for this spur was largely unknown.

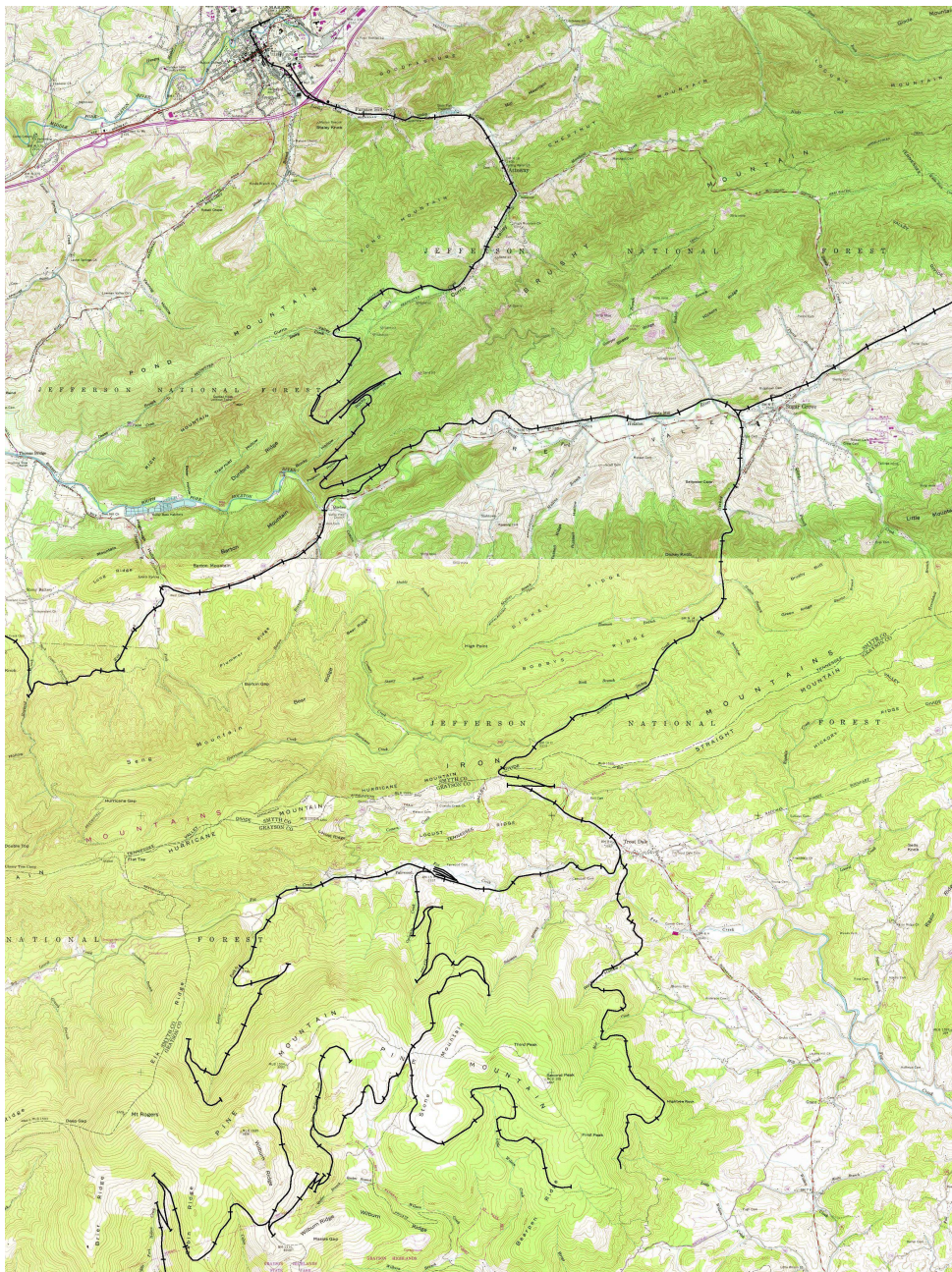
The right of way continues east and overlaps the Appalachian Trail for a half mile or so, then it goes onto private property as it heads east to what is now known as Teas, formerly Osborne as stated in old timetables. The railroad grade continues to head east to the location of the old Sugar Grove wye track. At the wye, the M&RV ended, and the VIRGINIA SOUTHERN picked up and went southward toward Troutdale, and eastward to Camp, Virginia. (The M&RV and VS were chartered separately, but operated as one railroad.)

From south of Sugar Grove to the top of Iron Mountain, Virginia Highway 16 runs on the former railroad right of way. The original road, VA Highway 88, can be seen paralleling and crossing over the current highway. This old alignment of the highway is visible through the trees in winter. (Originally, we thought the abandoned roadbed in the woods to be the abandoned railroad right of way, but a map from the Library of Richmond verified the correct alignment to be the current route of VA 16.)

About a half mile past the top of Iron Mountain, Route 16 leaves the roadbed, as the railroad switchbacked to the lower side of the mountain, and proceeded onward to Troutdale. Route 16 gets back on the railroad grade at the bottom of the mountain. At Troutdale, the railroad ran on the road that now goes to Fairwood. From the old band mill location at Fairwood, various logging spurs went up in the mountains, including Pine Mountain and Mount Rogers. The Pine Mountain route, which is partially still intact and used for a forest road, was the sight of the infamous wreck which claimed the life of Engineer R.K. Steffey [August 2012 Whistle Stop]. Finally, at the top of Pine Mountain, the line split off in two directions, one to the east and the other to the west. The east side went off to an area known as the Third Peak today, while the west track zigzagged down the mountain on its southern slope to several other logging spurs. Another track from Fairwood switchbacked up the north slope of Mount Rogers.

It is interesting to note that most of these tracks were for logging purposes only, and were temporary tracks built with round ties, and for the sole purpose of removing timber. After the logging operations were complete, the rails were removed and only the ties and a few spikes remained. Eventually, the temporary round ties rotted away for the most part. A few ties have been seen on some of the alignments on top of Pine Mountain in areas where they have stayed in moisture, oddly enough. They were mainly visible by a blanket of moss covering the remains of the ties in neat rows. These ties may have been made of American Chestnut limbs that weren't suitable for timber, as it is conjectured that the temporary round ties were made of unsuitable or otherwise unusable wood for timbering. The American Chestnut was said to have been very plentiful on Pine Mountain. Unfortunately, due to a blight, it is almost extinct today. [Continued on next page.]

September 10th, 2012 marked 100 years since the passing of engineer R.K. Steffey and the wreck of Locomotive #9. The line ceased operation over 80 years ago. Today, there are virtually no physical remnants of the railroad except for occasional traces of the roadbed and a spike here and there that erodes out of the old right of way from time to time. But something very important does remain - photographs and recorded personal accounts of those whose lives were touched by the coming of this railroad - and its later demise. We say very important because, without the people, the MARION & RYE VALLEY would have been a lifeless thing.



ABOVE. Today, the MARION AND RYE VALLEY right of way is barely visible. What nature hasn't reclaimed yet has been scarred by weather events over the last 80 years. Hurricane Hugo's rampage across the Appalachian Mountains on September 22, 1989 left a battered trail of fallen trees across the former roadbed. Just recently, plans are underway that propose a rails-to-trails project of much of the former right of way between Marion and Sugar Grove. Maybe, just maybe the MARION AND RYE VALLEY might once again be resurrected and become a valuable asset to the communities surrounding it. [Ben Blevins photo.]

When one climbs to the top of the switchbacks above Currin Valley in winter, and looks down the mountain and sees the grade as it passes through the ridge above Opossum Creek in the quiet of today, he or she can only imagine what it must have looked and sounded like to see and hear a Consolidation thundering up the side of that steep ridge with Mt. Rogers in the background behind it, on the Switchback Scenic Route.

LEFT. Map of the M&RV courtesy of Ben Blevins.



Photo Section



2012 AAPRCO CONVENTION TRAIN COMES THROUGH THE TRI-CITIES



[Left] The northbound “Limited” navigating the S curve at Telford, TN on 9/30. [Right] Amtrak GE P42DC #146 leading the convention train later that day over State Street in Bristol/ TN/VA. [Mike Tilley photos.]

The AAPRCO (American Association of Private Railroad Car Owners) “Chattanooga Limited” rolled through the Tri-Cities area in September to and from their 2012 annual convention. The train consisted of 29 private cars with 3 Amtrak locomotives. The “Limited” departed Washington, DC on Monday, 9/24 bound for Spencer, NC; then on to Asheville, NC on 9/25; and finally to Chattanooga on 9/26 for the convention. On its return trip it travelled to Roanoke on 9/30 and back to Washington, DC on 10/1. All NS routing for the round-trip. Many WATV members had the chance to come out trackside on September 30 to see the train pass through our area on its return to Washington. Below is a list of the beautiful cars in the “Chattanooga Limited” consist.

- | | | |
|------------------------|---|---|
| 1. City of Spokane | 11. Northern Sky | 21. Mount Vernon |
| 2. Royal Street | 12. Northern Dreams | 22. Santa Fe 56 |
| 3. Silver Quail | 13. It Suits Me | 23. Vista Canyon |
| 4. Cannon Ball | ex Bangor & Aroostook office car | 24. Federal |
| 5. Oliver Hazard Perry | 15. Scottish Thistle | 25. Wisconsin |
| 6. Birch Grove | 16. Pacific Sands | 26. Hollywood Beach |
| 7. Observatory | 17. Dover Harbor | 27. J. Pinckney Henderson |
| 8. NYC 3 | 18. Caritas | 28. Berlin |
| 9. Georgia 300 | 19. Sierra Hotel | 29. Dearing ex Chicago Great Western and CNW office car |
| 10. Pacific Sunset | 20. Puget Sound | |



RHA member Earl Hall caught the convention train in its movement through the NS Yard in Asheville. This photo gives a good perspective on the train’s length.

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Published Monthly by the Watauga Valley Railroad Historical Society & Museum
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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.

Fred Waskiewicz, Editor



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TIME VALUE MATERIAL

WVRHS&M Membership Dues Options

OPTION 1: WATAUGA VALLEY RAILROAD HISTORICAL SOCIETY & MUSEUM

Dues -

Individual Membership \$20.00

Family Membership \$ 5.00 per family member

Benefits - 12 issues of the Watauga Valley newsletter

Member of the Watauga Valley Railroad Historical Society & Museum

Participation of all functions of the WVRHS&M.

OPTION 2: WATAUGA VALLEY CHAPTER OF THE NATIONAL RAILWAY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Dues -

Individual Membership \$59.00

Family Membership \$ 5.00 per family members

Benefits - 12 Issues of the Watauga Valley newsletter

Member of the Watauga Valley Chapter and the National Railway Historical Society

Participation of all functions of WVRHS&M and the National Railway Historical Society

Four Issues of the NRHS Bulletin

OPTION 3: WATAUGA VALLEY RAILROAD HISTORICAL SOCIETY & MUSEUM and the RAILROAD HERITAGE ALLIANCE

Dues -

Individual Membership \$35.00

Family Membership \$ 5.00 per family members

Benefits - 12 Issues of the Watauga Valley newsletter

Member of the Watauga Valley Chapter and the RHA

Participation of all functions of WVRHS&M and the RHA

Issues of the RHA newsletter

OPTION 4: JOINING ALL THREE ORGANIZATIONS

Dues -

Individual Membership \$74.00

Family Membership \$ 5.00 per family members