

Whistle Stop

Watauga Valley Railroad Historical Society & Museum

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Preserving Our Region's Railroad Heritage

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Mike Tilley offers this vintage photo of Clinchfield No. 1 on excursion service in Erwin, date unknown. There appears to be two F7B units providing helper power.

April 28th General Membership Meeting

The Watauga Valley Railroad Historical Society and Museum will have our regular General Membership Meeting at 6:30 pm on Monday, April 28^h, 2025 at the Chuckey Depot, 110 Spring St., Jonesborough, TN. Our program this month will be on the Great Locomotive Chase. This program promises to be great fun; bring a friend out and enjoy a great evening of railroading.

Member Notes

Les Billings, Membership Chairperson

Concerns: Please keep the following members in your thoughts and prayers for various reasons: Jim Calhoun, Fred Pfohl, Lois Tilley, and Gary Price. If you know of a member or family who 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@gmail.com or wataugavalley.membership@gmail.com.

New members: Carl B. Storms - Morristown, TN; George and Amy Collins - Greeneville, TN; and Kyle Yates - Chuckey, TN. **Welcome on board!**

RECRUITING NEW MEMBERS

We would like to encourage all our members to make a special effort in recruiting potential members with folk you know or meet in everyday life. One of the best recruiting locations is the Chuckey Depot. (We have had new members lately that became members after visiting the Museum). While not everyone whom you come in contact with may be interested, most of the time you can tell who the good candidates may be. Give them a brochure/application and tell them about the activities and advantages of being a member: working excursions; volunteering at the Chuckey Depot Museum; mechanical/coach yard work; monthly newsletter; and, most importantly, their membership helps preserve Railroad History. Mention that it is not a requirement to come to the meetings but we would sure like to see them there. Folk do not have to live in our area as we have several out-of-state members. So, let's begin trying to get new members through this technique as we think we could have good success in doing so. Brochures will be available at the Membership Meeting.

ADDRESS CHANGES: If your address, phone number or email address has changed, please contact Les Billings at wataugavalley.membership@gmail.com for correction.

MEETING DATE CHANGE: Please note that the May meeting will be moved up one week to **May 19th** due to the Memorial Day holiday.

GSMR EXCURSIONS

Our May 3, 2025 Great Smoky Mountain Railroad Spring Excursion is almost sold out but tickets remain. The next GSMR trip will be held on Saturday, Sept 13th, with steam power.

DINNER ON THE DINER

The dates for our 2025 "*Dinner on the Diner*" are June 13-14, 2025. We expect a large number of diners joining us for a fine meal on our *Moultrie* dining car.

HIWASSEE LOOP EXCURSION

The Hiwassee Loop Excursion has been planned for Saturday October 11 that will offer a scenic ride through the famous Hiwassee Loop and delight riders in a 50-mile roundtrip journey through the stunning lower Hiwassee River Gorge. This 4.5-hour adventure will take passengers to the apex of the renowned Hiwassee Loop with the tracks intriguingly crossing over themselves as they spiral up the mountain. Notably, there are only six such loops in North America, with this one being the sole example east of the Mississippi River. Note that there is no layover on this trip; passengers will enjoy the entire duration on the train. The rails over which this train travels was formerly part of the Louisville and Nashville Railroad's Atlanta Division stretching between Etowah, Tennessee, and Marietta, Georgia. More information to follow in the next *Whistle Stop*.

Mechanical Report

All work sessions at the Spring Street Coach Yard, 210 Spring St., Jonesborough, TN are planned every Tuesday. Please show up at 9:00 am if you can help. We need volunteers!



WATX 400 and 500 parked at "station siding" in Jonesborough.

Powhatan Arrow coach (WATX 539), CLINCH-FIELD 100: at the NC Transportation Museum in Spencer, NC.

Moultrie diner (WATX 400): back at the Coach Yard receiving upgrades and being readied for the "Dinner on the Diner" event.

St. Augustine coach (WATX 500): and **Crescent Harbor sleeper/lounge (WATX 2351):** at the Coach Yard.

Chuckey Depot / Museum

Attendance at the Chuckey Depot is starting to climb each week as the weather is getting better. We are needing volunteers to host at the Chuckey Depot. If you would like to get trained for host duty, please email wataugavalley@gmail.com. Rick Chinouth will hold a 45-minute training class to prepare you for hosting. All of our hosts enjoy volunteering at the depot.

Orient Express

The upcoming release of the latest installment of the *Mission Impossible* movies recalls the fabulous scenes in its predecessor in which the "Orient Express" train played such a prominent role in the fantastic finale. What is so exceptional about the film sequences is that what appears to be an actual steam locomotive and rail cars are actually replicas built by the film crew (reportedly with help from the current Orient Express travel company). The "locomotive", a mockup shell built up from a new frame, was based on British Rail's *Britannia* Class 4-6-2. Power was provided by a remote-controlled diesel engine housed in the tender. The passenger car scenes were a mixture of constructed life-sized models, real car interiors, and computer-generated images. Filming was shot in Norway and the United Kingdom. Hollywood magic at its finest.

The "Orient Express" was a luxury rail service, not a named train, initiated by the Belgian Compagnie Internationale des Wagon-Lits in 1883. Over the years the service experienced many route changes with Paris to Istanbul being the original and the longest. The company ended service in 2009. Since then, private rail ventures have restored luxury rail service in various offerings under the Orient Express name.



Helene Disaster Recovery



Blue Ridge Rebuild Update- 4/6/25 By Thomas Pittman

The weather broke just enough yesterday for me to get some pics of the progress on the Poplar to Forbes section of the railroad. I've been a little less inclined to go all the way to Poplar lately due to the fantastic coverage by the YouTube channel "Designs in Orbit." However, I wanted to go get some up close/detail shots of some of the things in Poplar that doesn't get as much attention as the DIO videos give them. DIO is also able to get much deeper into the Gorge than I am. If you're very interested in this project and aren't watching those videos, you need to be!

Poplar Area- The roadbed grading throughout the area of Poplar Siding is mostly complete. I still hold to the observation that the grade is wide enough to rebuild the passing track. Much progress has been made on the Poplar bridge piers and crews are working to get the big spans ready to be re-set. A massive quarry has been opened at the south abutment of the bridge and I have some speculations about it's location and the work going on east of the tracks (more about that in photo captions). There still appears to be more roadbed work to be done between SE Poplar and Sams Branch.

Hunt Dale Area- The heavy roadbed work is completed from the area of Sams Branch up to the Hunt Dale Church. The track looks like a roller coaster but it's passible by hi-rail. The track is yet to be touched from downtown Hunt Dale to Relief, probably mostly due to the ongoing construction of the "Great Wall of Pigeon Roost." Over 300 H-beams have been driven into the ground next to the highway between the Coopers Branch Crossing and the Pigeon Roost Bridge. The highway will be shouldered by a retaining wall the entire distance between these 2 points. Once the wall is complete, contractors can begin filling in the scour/erosion on the roadbed. I'm speculating that this wall will have to be built north of Coopers Branch in places as well. The drilling crew was just south of Coopers Branch on Sunday.

Relief to Brush Creek- Crews have installed all but the 2 spans of panel track that will encompass the crossing at Relief. Contractors are loading rotator dump trucks here and working south towards Green Mountain. They're currently shoring up a big spot about a quarter mile north of the Big Rock Creek Bridge and have not made it south of that point. Crews are working north from the Forbes Crossing and Whitson Branch to meet the Relief crews somewhere in Green Mountain. These crews had made it to the straightaway leading into the SE of Green Mountain.

Brush Creek Tunnel- Dump trucks and hi-rail equipment have been passing through the tunnel all week. It looks like all but one really nasty tree has been felled above the tunnel. The removal of the vegetation above the tunnel has been the next big sign that I've been waiting on signaling that the tunnel will be daylighted. I've been told through the grapevine that no more rock can be removed from the outer tunnel wall at this point without risking a collapse. The "Big Tree" still remains just south of the tunnel.

For photos go to YouTube channel "Designs in Orbit."

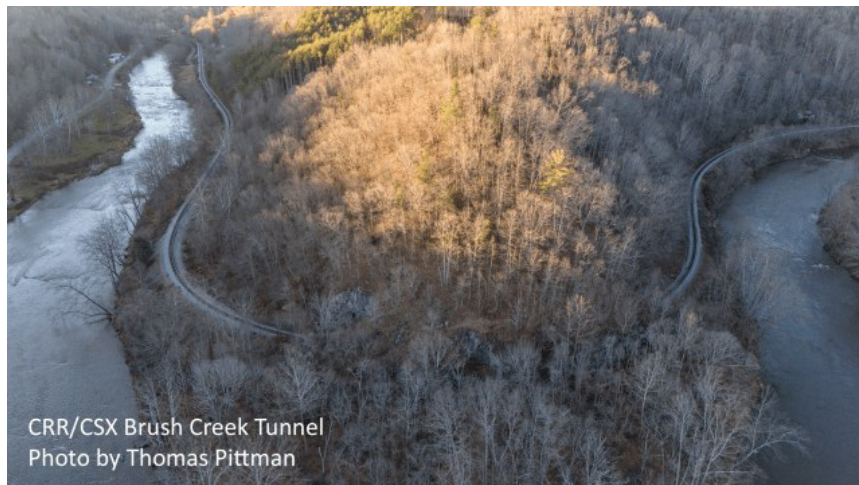


Photo source: clinchfiled.org article on Brush Creek Tunnel.

More on Hurricane Helene



The photos above show reconstruction of the CSX bridge at Poplar, NC over the Nolichucky River. [Photo at right: Howard Berry]



At left we see a past photo of SOUTHERN's "Skyline Limited" arriving at their Biltmore Village, NC station. At right is roughly the same location after Hurricane Helene flooding. Note that the building is now a retail store. [Photo at right: *The Epoch Times*]

Display in the Block

by Les Billings

In this month's installment of "Display in the Block" I am presenting some of my April/Spring shots taken over the last few years. Spring always brings out the new foliage and color that makes good backdrops for railfanning photos. These photos are from the Johnson City and Boones Creek area. Hope you enjoy.



The rare catch below was made on April 12 of this year. I saw a photo on Facebook that morning of this switcher sitting as second locomotive in line on a Kingsport local that I was hoping would head south so I could catch it on its way through Johnson City. Not hearing anything on the radio, the train got to Johnson City and surprised me as I heard the horn blowing and saw it go by my house. Sure enough, I had missed it after waiting half of the morning. Hoping, just hoping the Local would set off a few cars off in the Johnson City yard, I took off in that direction and lo and behold they had set the engine off; I jumped out and started snapping. The Local did pick up a few cars and it then headed towards Erwin. I got lucky.



Buffalo & Pittsburgh Railroad



This old switcher, #1514, had B&P (Buffalo and Pittsburgh, a Class II railroad operating in New York and Pennsylvania) on the side. It is an EMD SW1500, built in 3/1972, formally as Conrail #9547. It had the stacks covered and duct taped. The #1514 will be used as a replacement for East Tennessee Railway #214, which may be retired due to serious mechanical issues.

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TIME-SENSITIVE MATERIAL