

Whistle Stop

Watauga Valley Railroad Historical Society & Museum

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www.wataugavalleyrrhsm.org



Preserving Our Region's Railroad Heritage

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Member "Avi Foto (please identify yourself!) posted this well-composed shot of NS train V41 shoving back into Bristol yard after a trip from Radford, VA . To view more terrific shots like this, visit our Facebook page.

August 25th General Membership Meeting

The Watauga Valley Railroad Historical Society and Museum will have our regular General Membership Meeting at 6:30 pm on Monday, August 25th, 2025 at the Chuckey Depot, 110 Spring Street, Jonesborough, TN. The Program will be on the Virginian Railroad. Come out, bring a friend, and enjoy a great night of railroading with your fellow railfans.

Member Notes

Les Billings, Membership Chairperson

CONCERNS: Please keep the following members in your thoughts and prayers for various reasons: Gary Price, Lois Tilley, Jack Maloney, Fred Phofl and Rich Szymkowski. If you wish for one of our members or family member to be reported for various concerns in the *Whistle Stop*, email a request to wataugavalley@gmail.com or wataugavalley.membership@gmail.com.

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

MEMBERSHIP BROCHURES: If you know someone that is interested in joining the Watauga Valley Railroad Museum, new brochures are available to hand out. Either go by the Chuckey Depot and pick one up or phone our office at (423) 753-5797.

SEPTEMBER GSMR EXCURSION TICKETS STILL ON SALE

Tickets for the GSMR steam train excursion, scheduled for September 6th, 2025, are still available. For complete trip information and to purchase tickets, go to the trip excursion page at <http://www.wataugavalleyrrhsm.org/excursions.php>.

“FALL FOLIAGE SPECIAL”

Tickets for the Saturday, October 11, 2025 Hiwassee Gorge Excursion have **SOLD OUT**.

JONSBOROUGH TRAIN SHOW

The Jonesborough Train Show has been scheduled for November 15th, 2025 and will be held at the Jonesborough Visitor Center at 117 Boone Street. Vendors wishing to participate should call (423) 753-5797 or email wataugavalley@gmail.com for more information. A **Vendor Registration Form** is attached to the end of this newsletter.

PROGRAMS NEEDED FOR 2025

The WVRHS&M Program Committee is still looking for General Membership programs. Let us know at the June meeting or email wataugavalley@gmail.com if you can present a program. We are looking for speakers who would talk on a railroad-related topic. As always we're looking for DVD and slide shows.



WVRHS&M on Facebook

If you haven't joined yet, you're missing out on a great railfanning opportunity. We have nearly 1100 folk who have friended us. Thanks to Gary Price for keeping our Facebook page interesting, up-to-date and relevant.

CLINCHFIELD MOTOR CAR

Terry Worley reported that the restoration of the Clinchfield Motor car is almost complete. We are planning on taking the car on the rails very soon. Watch for photos in the near future.

WHISTLE TRUCK

The Whistle Truck is now available for rent; call (423) 753-5797 if interested.

Mechanical Report



If you would like to help at the Jonesborough Coach Yard on Tuesdays between 9 am to 5 pm or Saturdays 9 am to 12 noon, please call the WVRHS&M office at (423) 753-5797 or email wataugavalley@gmail.com. You do not have to be specialized in any field; just come down and we'll have a job for you. As examples, at left we see Art Devoe and Avon Guinn washing down cars. At right is a sparkling Interior of WATX 500 after cleaning.



Rolling Stock

Moultrie diner (WATX 400), **Powhatan Arrow** coach (WATX 539), **St. Augustine** coach (WATX 500) and **CLINCHFIELD 100**: in service at the NC Transportation Museum in Spencer, NC.

Crescent Harbor sleeper/lounge (WATX 2351): at the Coach Yard receiving upgrades.

Seaboard 6219 coach: being prepared for its move to Jonesborough on NS in September.

Chuckey Depot / Museum

Plans are to have another Chuckey Depot/Museum Host Training session which last about 40 minutes later in the year. If you would like to host at the Chuckey Depot one day a month, please email wataugavalley@gmail.com stating you would like to get trained. When a date has been set for the training, we will call you to get everything confirmed. We had over 200 volunteer hours at the depot last month with record crowds.



N&W 611 Excursion Tickets Available

Tickets for the upcoming "Shenandoah Valley Limited" fall excursions behind Norfolk & Western No. 611 are now available for purchase, ranging from \$128 to \$318 per person. The J-class 4-8-4 is poised to return to the Buckingham Branch Railroad for the first time since 2023.

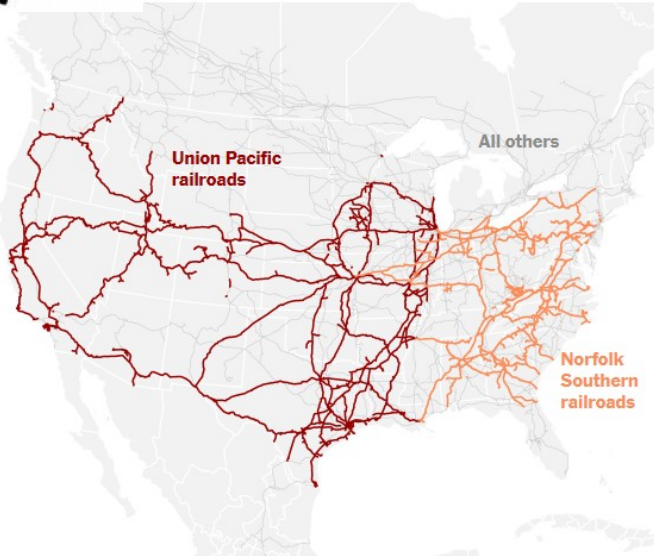
Beginning on September 26th, No. 611 will lead two trips each day - departing at 9 a.m., and 2:30 p.m. - from Goshen, VA, traveling through the George Washington and Jefferson National Forests. After the outbound journey and a brief pause in Staunton, VA, the train will reverse direction with Buckingham Branch diesels heading the return trip. The excursions will run for five consecutive weekends, from Friday to Sunday, until October 26th.

Visit <https://www.virginiascenicrailway.com/rides/shenandoah-valley-limited/> for more information and to purchase tickets.

In the News



UP to Buy NS in \$85 Billion Railroad Deal



Source: U.S. Dept. of Transportation - By Karl Russell

[Edited from a *New York Times* article by Peter Eavis, July 29, 2025] Union Pacific, a freight rail giant, announced on [July 29] that it had reached an agreement to acquire Norfolk Southern, another large railroad, in a deal worth \$85 billion. The merger would create the United States' first coast-to-coast rail network and span some 50,000 miles across 43 states. But the deal would put around two-fifths of rail freight in the hands of one company, raising fears that it would reduce competition in a crucial industry. Union Pacific is offering cash and stock to buy Norfolk Southern for \$72 billion. Adding Norfolk Southern's debt takes the company's

enterprise value to over \$85 billion.

The combined company will be called Union Pacific and have over 50,000 employees, four-fifths of them belonging to unions. On [July 29], rail unions expressed concern that the merger might undermine safety on the combined railroad and threaten job security. "This proposed merger may look impressive on paper, but we've seen how consolidation often plays out in the real world," Mike Baldwin, president of the Brotherhood of Railroad Signalmen, a rail union, said in a statement.

The merger announcement comes two and a half years after a Norfolk Southern train carrying hazardous materials derailed in East Palestine, Ohio, upending life in the town for months. Mr. George said the remaining financial liabilities stemming from the accident would become the responsibility of the merged company.

The Surface Transportation Board, a federal rail regulator, will have to review Union Pacific and Norfolk Southern's merger proposal to assess its impact on competition in an industry already dominated by a small number of companies. Lawmakers are already expressing skepticism about the deal. In a letter sent on Tuesday to the transportation board, Senators Tammy Baldwin, Democrat of Wisconsin, and Roger Marshall, Republican of Kansas, said they were concerned that the deal would "increase costs, create more unreliable service for U.S. shippers and reduce overall competition in a market where the number of carriers has diminished since 1950."

Because Union Pacific and Norfolk Southern do not operate in each other's regions, the tie-up would not reduce choice between railroads in those areas. Still, the companies together accounted for 43 percent of all rail freight movements last year, according to an analysis of regulatory carload data by Jason Miller, a professor of supply chain management at Michigan State University.

Helene Disaster Recovery

THOMAS PITTMAN CSX (CLINCHFIELD) REPORT

There is no longer a control point at Chestoa. Signals have also been removed. I still haven't gotten any official confirmation on what/where it'll be, but the 3 signals between Love Hill and Poplar will be reduced and respaced to 2.

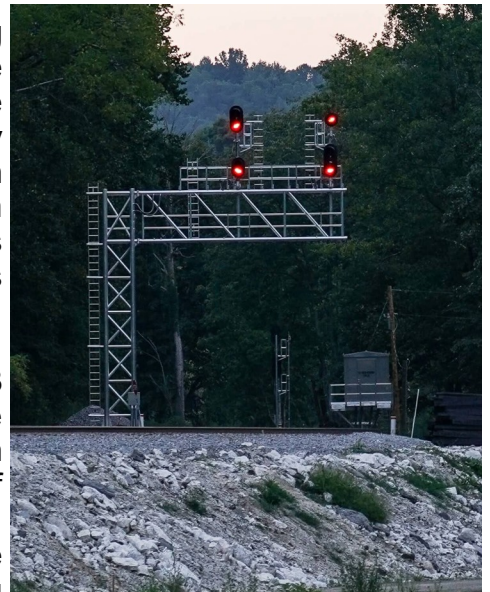


Peterson Intermediate. 8/14/25: This signal was almost knocked completely over by flood waters. It was replaced with this new setup.

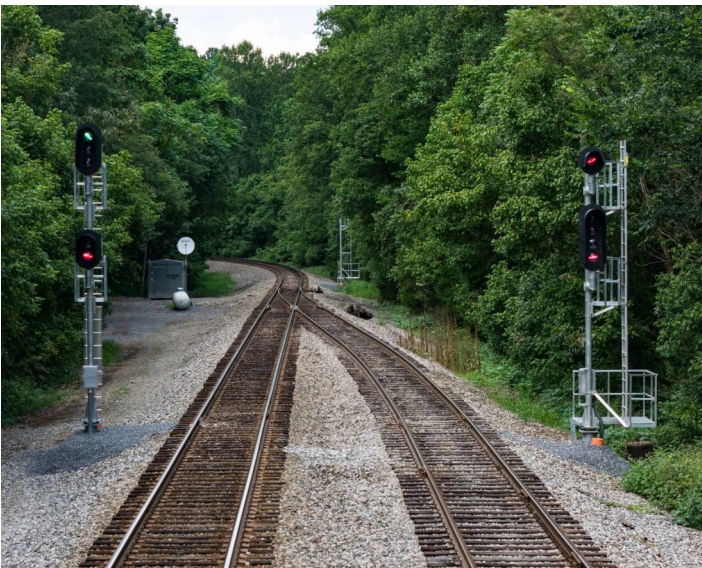
Nolichucky River Bridge. 8/14/25: [left] A passing afternoon shower leaves a rainbow in its wake over the Nolichucky at Unaka Springs. Note the smooth concrete covering of the piers in the river. The pier on the far side of the river still sports it's original "block" look.

The signal gang appears to have most of their heavy work complete as far as putting up hardware outside of the Gorge and Poplar. I can't speak for what all they have done in those limits. Everything is up south of Poplar, both signal and crossing gate wise. Stuff still may need to be wired in here and there. Not pictured is the NAS SE Toe River, which has had a red light burnt out in its bottom head for the past few months that has been recently fixed.

As far as RoW work goes, "Designs in Orbit" reports less than 3 miles to go getting track completed through the Gorge. They've went as far north as they can go at Poplar without getting track in the way of



access roads, etc. I imagine they're laying track in from the Erwin side as the RoW is ready for it and working their way south.



The flood wall at Pigeon Roost is mostly complete from Cooper's Branch to Pigeon Roost Bridge with some cap work here and there left on the top of the wall. Panels are being placed into the short wall north of Cooper's Branch, so it shouldn't be too long before it's finished as well.

Crews were working at Green Mountain today buttoning up culverts and possibly doing the same at Toecane. The work track at Spruce Pine has a lot of tie plates staged for what will probably be a

lot of tie work once crews get freed up elsewhere on the rebuild.



Poplar RoW Realignment. 8/14/25
The quarry here has been ordered to stop working, but crews are still chipping away at the mountainside to reduce the curvature coming off the bridge at Poplar.

At right is ongoing work at Hunt Dale.



CSX Makes Steady Progress Rebuilding Blue Ridge Subdivision

[CSXT, August 15, 2025] CSX is making significant strides in rebuilding its Blue Ridge Subdivision, a critical 60-mile stretch of railroad in North Carolina and Tennessee that was devastated by Hurricane Helene. After months of dedicated effort, CSX teams and their vendor partners have advanced to the track-laying phase along the scenic gorge.

“It has taken roughly 10 months to get the roadbed ready for the track panel installation,” said Kevin Haddix, CSX Director of Track. This milestone marks a major step forward in the restoration process, which has required meticulous planning and execution to ensure safety and efficiency.

The CSX team is working diligently toward a fall reopening of its Blue Ridge subdivision. “It’s important to CSX to get this line back open to restore fluidity on our surrounding lines,” Haddix explained. “There’s a lot of people around this area that are anxious to see a train run.”

The reopening of the Blue Ridge will be a significant achievement for CSX, reflecting the company’s resilience, as well as its commitment to operational excellence and serving the communities along its network.

Display in the Block

by Les Billings

It's hard to believe that the Summer is getting away from us and September is almost here. Cooler weather and a better time to Railfan. On a side trip in Bristol, I traveled to the depot to see if could catch at least one train. As it turned out, I was able to catch two. 15T traveling west and a local returning from the west. I was able to get a few shots at Bristol and chased 15T to Piney Flats to end the day.

We also want to encourage others to submit their photos to the Whistle Stop. Please email them to: whistlestop.editor@gmail.com or railfan0404191@gmail.com. Would love to publish.



[Left] Arriving at the depot in Bristol I saw 15T rolling up. I jumped out of the car and then he stopped. I was afraid he was leaving but he was going to have to wait on a east bound local to get in and clear the main. As you can see, it had garbage bound for Alabama on the head in. As I waited I was smelling a foul odor and it first I did not think of what it was carrying.

[Right] I walked up and down the old loading area getting several shots at different locations, I finally got out to State Street, shooting back down east as I stood between the main and siding. What is strange is the main and siding have a bend just beyond the yard office and approaching Mary Street bridge. I guess this gets them closer to the location for boarding in the old days.





[Left] After waiting a while, I head a horn blowing in the distance and sure enough NS V20 came around Signal - "Ford". With a few cars in tow, it made it's way past NS T15 in the passing track and out of the way to allow movement of the west bound.

[Right] After T15 left Bristol, I jumped in my car and headed back towards Johnson City but not before I stopped in Piney Flats to get shots of 15T going through. This shot shows him passing by CP- "Curtis" heading towards a waiting NS 278 in the siding.



[Left] After passing by me, I turned to get a shot of him heading towards a waiting NS 278 in the background. Notice the High Tension Power lines crossing over the track. There is a power substation off to the right. So after this shot, I headed back home towards Johnson City only to find him going through downtown. Nothing like chasing trains and railfanning. Good day to all.

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TIME-SENSITIVE MATERIAL

WATAUGA VALLEY RAILROAD HS&M

— TRAIN SHOW —

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 15TH, 2025

8:00AM—5:00PM

- To be held in the Jonesborough Visitors Center 117 Boone St. Jonesborough, TN
- Visit Beautiful Jonesborough, TN (Oldest Town in Tenn.)
- Show set up 10am to 6p m Friday, November 14th, 2025
- Free parking
- Reserve your tables early, the vendors tables will fill up fast.
- Hotel information please call the Visitors Center 423-753-1010
- Additional Information concerning set up will be emailed to you.
- Sorry no refunds on vendor tables.



TRAIN SHOW VENDORS

Please complete this form to register as a vendor for Train Show, November 15, 2025

Name _____

Address: _____

City _____ State _____ Zip Code _____

Phone _____ Email: _____

_____ Number of Tables Requested @ \$30 each 8 ft tables Total enclosed \$ _____