

# Whistle Stop



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

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WVRHS&M has once again been given a rare opportunity to offer two steam train excursions this coming June through Southwest Virginia and East Tennessee. As area residents do not have the opportunity for rail travel, this will be a chance for young and old to experience a train ride behind a vintage steam locomotive, ex-SOUTHERN RAILWAY 2-8-2 #4501 (photo at left). For more information, see page 4.

## *April 27<sup>th</sup> General Membership Meeting*

The next General Membership Meeting of the Watauga Valley Railroad Historical Society & Museum will be held on April 27<sup>th</sup>, starting at 6:30 p.m., and located at the Johnson City Public Library, 101 West Millard St., Johnson City, TN. This month's program, "Elkhorn City, Gateway to The Breaks of the Big Sandy", features the C&O and CLINCHFIELD railroads from 1971

until the present. Its scenic setting includes the C&O (CSX) Big Sandy Sub-division from Regina, KY to Haysi, VA, and the former CLINCHFIELD RAILROAD's (now CSX) Kingsport Sub-division to Erwin, TN. The presenter of the program will be Mr. Everett Young, from Pikeville, KY. Mr. Young is employed by the Kentucky Power Company and is known for his photography of the CLINCHFIELD. This presentation is in response to a request to us by the Johnson City Public Library to have someone talk about the local railroads, their evolution and what a huge factor they were in shaping both the city and the entire region. Attendance is expected to be larger than usual; both meeting rooms will be open to the general public. Come out, bring a friend and enjoy this special event.

## *Member Notes*

*By Nancy Jewel*


Our sympathy is extended to Jeanne Cope in the death of her husband, Jack Cope, on April 1, 2015, in Johnson City. Jack worked with the mechanical crew in Jonesborough and enjoyed the excursions.


Please keep the following folk in your thoughts as they deal with various concerns: Carrie Denny, Sidney Blankenbeckler, Gary Price, Bob May, Jim Calhoun and Bob Yapple. As always, let us know of any member, friend or family to whom a card might be sent or a phone call made. The office phone number is (423) 753-5797 or call Nancy Jewell at (423) 282-0918.

### **MEETING DATE CHANGES FOR MAY AND JUNE**


As the regularly scheduled May meeting will fall on Memorial Day and the Johnson City Public Library will be closed, May's meeting date will be moved up one week to **Monday, May 18<sup>th</sup>**. Richard Barker will present on SOUTHERN RAILWAY passenger trains. In June the Library will have activities every Monday night so the June meeting will be moved to **Tuesday, June 23<sup>rd</sup>**.


## ***WVRHS&M EXCURSION NEWS***

 **HIWASSEE GORGE TRIP WENT OFF WITH A BANG.** Sold out train! Great bunch of passengers and beautiful weather proved to make the Hiwassee Gorge excursion trip a great one. April 11<sup>th</sup> was an excellent day to ride a train down by the river and through the mountains. Everyone had a wonderful time and saw some good East Tennessee springtime scenery. Thanks to all the Watauga Valley volunteers that served on the excursion.

 **CHERRY BLOSSOM SPECIAL WAS A GREAT SUCCESS.** The joint WVRHS&M and NCTM Washington "*Cherry Blossom Special*" was a big success as well – a sold out train with over 100 passengers. Good weather and excellent tours in Washington. More trips are planned for the future to other destinations.

 **JUNE 2015 #4501 STEAM EXCURSIONS.** See page 4.

 **SUMMER GREAT SMOKY MOUNTAIN EXCURSION ANNOUNCED.** The Watauga Valley RHS&M announced recently that its Summer Excursion will be on the GREAT SMOKY MOUNTAIN RAILROAD in Bryson City, NC on Saturday, August 15<sup>th</sup>, 2015. Tickets will go on sale soon; a sign up sheet for car host duty will be available at the May membership meeting.

 **FALL AMTRAK EXCURSION ANNOUNCED.** Our Fall AMTRAK excursion will be operated on October 31<sup>st</sup>, 2015 from Spencer, NC to Charlottesville, VA and Sunday, November 1<sup>st</sup>, operating from Spencer to Asheville, NC via Old Fort Loops. These two trips have always proved to be very popular. Sign up forms for car host duty will be available soon.

## *Spring Street Coach Yard Mechanical Report*

*By Bob Yaple*

### GENERAL

Looks like spring is knocking on our door and we can finally get some work done. The weather has been good to the Watauga Valley Mechanical Team lately and there have been a lot of good working days at the yard over the last several weeks as a result. If you would like to help out at the Jonesborough Coach Yard on Tuesdays between 9 am to 5 pm or Saturdays from 9 am to 12 noon, please call the WVRHS&M Office at (423) 753-5797

### ROLLING STOCK



**WATV 539 "Powhatan Arrow" coach.** Is back in Jonesborough getting its new floor, carpet and new upholstery. The car's interior has already been painted. The 539 is scheduled to leave in about 30 days.



**WATV 500 "St Augustine" coach.** Made its "Cherry Blossom Special" trip to Washington recently; the car did excellent on the trip with no problems.



**WATV 400 "Moultrie" diner.** WVRHS&M members have been performing cleaning chores in the kitchen area. Jim Calhoun has been working on the refrigeration.



**WATV 2351 "Crescent Harbor" sleeper / lounge.** Made its "Cherry Blossom Special" trip to Washington recently; the car did excellent on the trip with no problems.



**WATV 100 "Clinchfield" office car.** WVRHS&M is presently looking for trucks to Amtrak certification.

### *APRIL/ MAY ISSUE OF WHISTLE STOP*

You might have noticed that this month's copy of the Whistle Stop serves as both the April and May issues. That's due to vacation travel by your editor. We will resume monthly publication in June.

### *PROGRAMS NEEDED FOR 2015*

The WVRHS&M Program Committee is looking for General Membership Meeting programs for 2015. Please notify us at the April meeting if you can offer a program. We are looking for speakers who would come and present a railroad-related program. And, as always, we're looking for DVD and slide programs.



## *In the News*

### *STEAM TRAIN COMING TO TRI-CITIES / SOUTHWEST VIRGINIA*

Scenery, history and nostalgia are just around the bend in two spring steam train excursions offered by Norfolk Southern Corp. partnering with Watauga Valley Railroad Historical Society & Museum and Tennessee Valley Railroad Museum. On Saturday, June 27<sup>th</sup>, 2015, an excursion train will operate from Bristol, VA to Bulls Gap, TN and return. On Sunday, June 28<sup>th</sup>, 2015, an excursion train will operate from Bristol to Radford, VA and return. Motive power for the two excursions will be steam locomotive SOUTHERN RAILWAY #4501 (with assistance from modern NORFOLK SOUTHERN diesels as needed.) This rare opportunity is being offered to communities along NS lines for display and periodic excursions. For many passengers, these excursions will be a once-in-a-lifetime experience, not only to ride behind a steam locomotive, but also to see the hills and mountains from the unique perspective of the railroad while hearing the whistle echo in the hills and hollows of the beautiful Appalachian Region.

Saturday's trip to Bulls Gap begins at the Bristol, VA train station at 9 am. There will be a station stop at NORFOLK SOUTHERN's Elm Street station in Johnson City, TN at 10 am. After leaving Johnson City, the train will pass through historic Jonesborough, the oldest town in Tennessee. It will pass Washington College Academy, founded by Samuel Doak in 1780, the oldest school "west of the Alleghenies and south of River Ohio". Next on the route is Limestone, birthplace of Davy Crockett, then Greeneville, the home of Andrew Johnson, 17<sup>th</sup> president of the United States. After descending into the lowlands, the train will arrive in Bulls Gap at 12 noon. In Bulls Gap, passengers will have time to visit the small town with a chance to visit the Archie Campbell Birthplace along with the railroad museum and hotel. The train will depart Bulls Gap at 2 pm, arriving at Johnson City at 4 pm, then Bristol at 5 pm.

Sunday's trip to Radford will also begin in Bristol VA and bring out the glories of the season through the rolling Southwest Virginia hills while celebrating the grand return of NORFOLK SOUTHERN's 21<sup>st</sup> Century Steam Program. The train's route will take you through historic Abingdon, home of the world famous Barter Theatre and the Martha Washington Inn. Nearby is the famous route of the Virginia Creeper. The excursion will wind through the Virginia highlands, passing Emory & Henry College, Marion and Wytheville, then will travel down Pulaski Mountain through a tunnel into the town of Pulaski. The train will then steam into the New River Valley and on to Radford, VA, where passengers will be able to enjoy the town with its many restaurants, shops and museums.

The train will include climate-controlled heated and air-conditioned cars along with rest rooms. Ticket cost for Coach Class seating is \$80 per seat. Coach Class seating is provided in temperature-controlled modern cars with fixed back seats. Ticket cost for Deluxe Coach is \$95 per seat. Deluxe Coach seating is provided in climate-controlled vintage cars with reclining back seats. There is no charge for children under 3 years of age if not occupying a seat. The Radford ticket does not include a meal - only the train trip. The Bulls Gap ticket does include a box lunch along with the train trip. Tickets can be purchased by calling the WVRHS&M office at (423) 894-8028 (hours 10am-4pm Monday-Friday) or visit <http://www.wataugavalleynrhs.org>.

Tickets are expected to go fast for this event. **Please order ASAP.**

## 👉 *WVRHS&M DONATES CABOOSE TO JONESBOROUGH*

Watauga Valley RHS&M will be donating our ex-SOUTHERN RAILWAY caboose X450 to the Town of Jonesborough, TN to be placed beside the Jonesborough Railroad Museum. At press time the footers for the depot are being poured at the NORFOLK SOUTHERN crossing at 2<sup>nd</sup> Ave. Plans in the coming weeks are to lay down the rail that the caboose will be sitting on and move it sometime in May. WVRHS&M and the Town of Jonesborough are looking forward to having the caboose and depot on display in the “Oldest Town in the State of Tennessee”.

## 👉 *611 UPDATE*



**Fire and steam: first time in 20 years!** [Posted by Fire Up 611! Team, March 31, 2015] Ex-N&W Class J 611 has a fire in her belly for the first time in 20 years. On March 31, the Fire Up 611! Mechanical Crew, led by Scott Lindsay of Steam Operations Corporation, pulled the Class J 611 out of the roundhouse to conduct a test fire.

For a video, check out <http://tinyurl.com/pkuxyld>. Photo from FireUp611!

Painting Begins! 611's tender receives the application of paint. The paint application has begun on 611. The paint crew, led by Chris McBride, began applying professional grade

Axalta coating to 611's tender last week [end of March]. The paint crew worked in the evenings, doubling the restoration effort to two shifts per day. Ken Miller designed the replacement stenciling for the famous NORFOLK AND WESTERN lettering on the side of the tender, and assisted with the application

Axalta donated the paint to VMT for 611's new finish. The same colors and product was previously used by the NORFOLK SOUTHERN Birmingham shop over 20 years ago. Axalta shipped 30 gallons of black, 8 gallons of Tuscan red, 4 gallons of gold, as well as product required for mixing. Additionally, 24 gallons of clear will be applied as a top coat, giving the locomotive a glossy appearance. Willetts Railcar Services prepared the tender surfaces, and constructed a large booth.

## ***BREAKING NEWS: 611 HOMECOMING***

**Just announced!** The 611 is going home again, coming back from its second restoration to headline NORFOLK SOUTHERN's 21<sup>st</sup> Century Steam excursions in 2015. For more information, including 611's 2015 excursion schedule, go to <http://tinyurl.com/lb6rq7c>. And see the next page for information on two exciting events at NCTM celebrating its restoration completion.

## *Class J No. 611 Farewell Celebrations Planned*

Two exciting events celebrating the completion of 611's restoration are scheduled at the North Carolina Transportation Museum in Spencer, NC, including first time photo ops and THROTTLE TIME inside the Class J No. 611!

### **No. 611 Send Off Celebration, May 23, 2015**

On May 23<sup>rd</sup>, NCTM will host the "611 Send Off" party with cake, a chance to see inside the locomotive cab, and viewing its move on and off the turntable. A very limited number of lucky people will be able to purchase 30 minutes of throttle time on the locomotive at a cost of \$611 per slot on a first-come, first-served basis. Only 10 spots will be available for throttle time, starting at 8 am and going to 11 am. The engine will be available for viewing from 11 am to 4 pm and will be displayed on the turntable on the hour. Throttle time will resume at 4 pm and conclude at 6 pm. Tickets for "At the Throttle 611" went on sale Tuesday, April 21<sup>st</sup> at 9 am and will be sold online only (no exceptions). Find out more by calling (704) 636-2889 ext. 224. Or [CLICK HERE!](#)

### **Fired Up Photo Charter, May 28, 2015**

On May 28<sup>th</sup>, NCTM will hold a once-in-a-lifetime photo charter using 611 and coordinated by Trains Magazine Editor Jim Wrinn, a 29-year volunteer with NCTM. The locomotive will be posed on the turntable and with other steam power from the museum collection. It will pull a Tuscan red passenger train with the museum's heavyweight N&W combine and canteen as well as a short freight, replicating the late 1950s local freight service that Class J locomotives saw before their retirement. A night photo session, barbecue luncheon featuring Fire Up 611! Chairman Preston Claytor, and other surprises are in store at a cost of \$250 per person. Tickets went on sale Monday, April 20<sup>th</sup> at 9 am. Call (704) 636-2889 ext. 224 for more information. Or [CLICK HERE!](#)


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Your editor admits to a bias towards steam engines. And at times it seems as though this newsletter is published by NORFOLK SOUTHERN's PR Department. Thus, in an effort to provide some balance, Mike Pierry, Jr.'s photo below of CSX GE ES44AC #823 leading a coal train south of Erwin, TN on a bright, winter's day is offered as a small token of balanced coverage.







 **NC Museum Steam Engine Going Home to West Virginia** [From an article by Richard Stradling, 3/27/2015, "The News & Observer", Raleigh, NC. Used with permission. Photo via NCTM.]

A steam locomotive that has spent the last 37 years at the N.C. Transportation Museum in Spencer will be going home to West Virginia this spring. The engine, known as the BUFFALO CREEK & GAULEY 2-8-0 No. 4, will be trucked in pieces to Cass, W.Va., where the DURBIN AND GREENBRIER VALLEY RAILROAD will get it back in running condition and use it on excursions through the mountains.

The railroad bought the locomotive for \$150,000 from the N.C. Transportation Museum Foundation, which acquired it for the museum in 1978. Not only will the engine get the full overhaul it needs, said Kelly Alexander, the foundation's chief operating officer, but it will return to the state where it operated for decades. "It's going back home," Alexander said. "It's going back to where it needs to be."

The sale of the old No. 4 engine is part of a wider movement among railroad museums to repatriate equipment to its origins, said Robert Van Camp, a board member of the D&GV who lives in Winston-Salem. In years following the death of steam railroads, museums and tourist railroads grabbed what they could and incorporated them into their collections, often repainting them with the colors and logos of local railroads. When a group of SOUTHERN RAILWAY retirees restored the No. 4 engine at Spencer in 1986, they lettered and numbered it as a replica of a SOU engine, 2-8-0 No. 604, which had been based at Spencer.

The engine was the first piece of railroad rolling stock to be restored at Spencer, according to the museum, which now has more than 100 engines and rail cars as well as the largest preserved roundhouse in the country. "We appreciate the role that No. 4 played in the development of the North Carolina Transportation Museum," the foundation's president, Steve Mersch, said in a statement. "We owe a debt of gratitude to this powerful locomotive, and we want to see it run again in its authentic garb and in its home state."

The locomotive pulled passenger cars on a 3-mile trip around the museum grounds until November 2001, when it was brought into the roundhouse for a major overhaul that all steam engines need every once in a while, Alexander said. That work was begun, but the museum and the foundation then agreed to use the money elsewhere, and the restoration stopped.

In May, the engine will be shipped, probably in four truckloads, from Spencer to Cass, where the D&GV recently took over operation of the CASS SCENIC RAILROAD, which has 10 operating steam locomotives and a repair shop. Van Camp says that it will take about a year and \$400,000 to get the No. 4 operating again and that the railroad hopes to have it ready for the engine's 90th birthday, in 2016.

Buying the No. 4 wasn't like acquiring an old steam engine that has sat on a siding somewhere for decades. The engine has been well-documented and cared for, Van Camp said.

"We know the scope of the project and what it's going to take to finish it, thanks to all the work that the North Carolina Transportation Museum did on the engine," he said.

Built in 1926 by the Baldwin Locomotive Works in Philadelphia for the NATIONAL RAILWAY in Mexico, it was sold to the BC&G instead. Of local interest is that the No. 4 was once operated by the SOUTHWEST VIRGINIA SCENIC RAILROAD in Hiltons, VA prior to coming to NCTM.

## *Upcoming Events in 2015*



**APRIL 21 – MAY 3: Lincoln Funeral Train.** See

<http://www.the2015lincolnfuneraltrain.com/>



**MAY 15 - 17: Cass Railfan Weekend,** Cass, WV. Includes rare mileage trips between Spruce and Cheat Bridge. For details -

<http://www.cassrailroad.com/> and <http://mtn-rail.com/>



**JUNE 14 - 20: NRHS National Convention,** Rutland, VT. For details -

[http://www.nrhs.com/2015\\_Convention](http://www.nrhs.com/2015_Convention). Check for convention updates at <http://www.NRHS.com> or [www.facebook.com/RailPreservation](http://www.facebook.com/RailPreservation).



**JUNE 18 - 21: Norfolk & Western Historical Society Annual Convention,** Marion, OH. <http://www.nwhs.org/convention/2015marion/>



**JUNE 27 – 28: 21<sup>st</sup> Century Steam.** Bristol to Bulls Gap, TN and Bristol – Radford, VA. See page 4.



**AUGUST 15. Great Smoky Mountains Railroad excursion.** Bryson City, NC.



**OCTOBER 31 – NOVEMBER 1. Fall AMTRAK excursions.**



### *AMTRAK TRAIN DAYS*



AMTRAK has announced plans for its 2015 edition of AMTRAK Train Days. Originating in Chicago, where its official kickoff occurs on May 8<sup>th</sup>, the celebration will continue in multiple locations across the country from May through November, featuring events and activities that celebrate the importance, benefits and value of passenger train travel.

Events at Chicago will include a VIP Train, Excursion Train, “Hard Hat” Tour of Chicago Union Station, Control Center Tour and more. To learn more about AMTRAK Train Days and the details on all planned events and activities that will be rolling into a station near you this year, visit <https://amtraktraindays.com/>.

## *For Your Reading & Viewing Pleasure*



Although several years old, this article from NORFOLK SOUTHERN’s business magazine provides a good background on our upcoming 21<sup>st</sup> Century Steam Excursions: <http://tinyurl.com/ojfe4ao>



Kati Phelps passes along this video clip from the archives of GSMR’s 2-8-0 #1702 in action, produced by WFMY News 2 in Greensboro, NC. The only complaint is this incessant need by folk to add music. Why? To view, see <http://tinyurl.com/lqeosef>



# Photo Gallery



This good-looking Watauga Valley crew served as car hosts on our April 11<sup>th</sup> “Hiwassee Gorge Special”. From left to right: Gloria Sims; Edna Carter; Norma Head; Jack Maloney; Megan Kegley; Bob Head; Kati Phelps; Tom Phelps; and Mike Tilley. A few other shots from this beautiful trip are offered below.



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Fred Waskiewicz, Editor



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