

Whistle Stop

Watauga Valley Railroad Historical Society & Museum

P. O. Box 432, Johnson City, TN. 37605-0432

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Preserving Our Region's Railroad Heritage

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In the spirit of the current Arctic Blast we're experiencing, the following contribution to our Facebook page by Aaron Bryant is reprinted here. Aaron writes in his post: "NS 821 leaves the Pocahontas Main in Devon, West Virginia, at Control Point Ought One, and diverges onto the Buchanan Branch, with empty coal hoppers destined for Buchanan #1 Mine. The engineer HAS NOT FORGOTTEN to turn the ditch lights on, but has momentarily turned them off due to a crew in a high-rail truck just ahead." Thanks for sharing, Aaron.

January 27th General Membership Meeting

The Watauga Valley Railroad Historical Society and Museum will have our regular meeting at 6:30 pm on Monday, January 27, 2025 at the Chuckey Depot, 110 Spring St., Jonesborough, TN. Our program this month will be on the Georgetown Loop in Colorado. Bring a friend out for a relaxing evening with your fellow members.

Member Notes

Please keep the following members in your thoughts and prayers: Mike Jackson, Jim Sutterlin, Gary Price, Fred Pholf, Lois Tilley and Art Devoe.

Welcome Aboard! Steven Patterson – Arvada, CO

If anyone knows of a member that 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.

Note to Members: If anyone's address, phone number or email address has changed, please contact Les Billings at wataugavalley.membership@gmail.com for correction. This will make it better so no one misses mailings, phone calls or emails. Thank You.

LATE DUES NOTICE FOR 2025

If you have not paid your dues as of press time, your membership expired December 31, 2024. Please submit your dues ASAP so our membership chairman will not have to send you a LATE NOTICE and to keep receiving your issue of the "*Whistle Stop*".

Membership Dues for 2025 are:

Dues: Individual Membership \$ 20.00

Family Membership \$ 5.00 per family member

Benefits: 12 issues of the "*Whistle Stop*", Watauga Valley's newsletter.
Membership in the Watauga Valley Railroad Historical Society & Museum.
Participation in all Museum functions and events.

Dues should be sent to Watauga Valley Railroad Historical Society & Museum, P. O. Box 432, Johnson City, TN 37605. For questions email wataugavalley@gmail.com.

PROGRAMS NEEDED FOR 2025

WVRHS&M program directors Howard Orfield and Brad McCroskey are looking for General Membership programs for 2025.

If you have an interest in showing a program, please call (423) 753-5797 or let us know at the next General Membership Meeting. We are looking for speakers and someone who would come and present a railroad related program. And, as always, we're looking for DVD and slide programs.

2025 WVRHS&M Appointees

Art Devoe, Mechanical Officer
Don Findley, Asst Mechanical Officer
Gary Price, Historian
Fred Waskiewicz, Newsletter Editor
Les Billings, Asst Newsletter Editor
Jeff Forrester, Webmaster
Cline Knowles, Circulation Whistle Stop
Les Billings, Membership Comm. Chairman

Mike Tilley, Trip Director
Frank Gricus, Grant Director
Frank Gricus, Depot Camera Director
Robert Mushet, Broadcastify Director
Mike Tilley, Chuckey Depot Advisory Board
Rick Chinouth, Chuckey Depot Advisory Board &
Sub-Committee Chairman
Jim Sutherlin, Nominating Comm. Chairman

Quote of the month: "One thing about trains... it doesn't matter where they're going. What matters is deciding to get on". (The conductor from *The Polar Express* movie.)

Mechanical Report

The Watauga Valley Mechanical Team is looking for more volunteers. As most of you know, the team is composed of volunteers with all kinds of different experiences. We now have five operating passenger cars and it takes a lot of manpower to keep the equipment up and running. We need volunteers to help with all kinds of projects, even those who do not have any particular experience. The Mechanical Team is all volunteers and most of them are retired and as well as those still working. The team is a great bunch of guys enjoying working together to keep our equipment up and running on the rails. If you're interested, please email us at wataugavalley@gmail.com or call the Watauga Valley office at (423) 753-5797 and leave a message that you are interested in volunteering at the Jonesborough Coach Yard. Work days are Tuesdays 9am to 5pm. If you're tired of lying around the house during the winter months, please call and let us know and we will get you scheduled.



MOULTRIE DINING CAR (WATX 400) and **ST. AUGUSTINE COACH (WATX 500)**: have been in excursion service at the North Carolina Transportation Museum over the past couple of months. Both cars will return to our coach yard soon! At left we see the "Moultrie" all dolled up for the 1989 edition of the CSX Santa Train.

POWHATAN ARROW COACH (WATX 539) and **CLINCHFIELD OFFICE CAR (WATX 100)**: have been in excursion service at the North Carolina Transportation Museum during the past couple of months. Both cars will remain at North Carolina Transportation Museum for repairs.

CRESCENT HARBOR LOUNGE/SLEEPER (WATX 2351): is at the Spring Street Coach Yard receiving upgrades.

Chuckey Depot / Museum

A new exhibit, titled "American Freight Cars: Past and Present", will open on Saturday, March 8th. The Museum will open at 10am as usual, and we'll offer refreshments all day. We will not have any featured speakers and event schedule for this exhibit opening.

We will have another training session for hosts in February. If you're interested in hosting, please email wataugavalley@gmail.com or call the office at 423-753-5797 for more information.

2025 Rail Excursions

The Watauga Valley Excursion Committee is working on several excursions for the 2025 season. The dates and destination of trips planned thus far are as follows:

- May 3 Great Smoky Mountain Railroad diesel trip
- Sept 1 Great Smoky Mountain Railroad steam locomotive trip

Creeper Trail Damage

Editor's note. I really dropped the ball on this news item. While this news is months old, I only recently came across it, but am going ahead and publishing because of its relevance to all area railfans and outdoor enthusiasts. I've copied only a portion of a larger article, which can be found in its entirety at <https://tinyurl.com/5fe2w33k>.



[By Susan Cameron, *Cardinal News*, October 17, 2024] Nearly a mile up a washed-out, now-closed two-lane section of U.S. 58 between Damascus and Konnarock rest the remains of a steel trestle that was part of the beloved Virginia Creeper Trail.

Battered by flooding and high winds from Hurricane Helene, the rust-colored structure known as No. 18 was knocked off its foundation and came to rest against the Whitetop Laurel Creek bank. It's covered by brush, limbs and trees; a closer look

reveals that portions of the No. 19 trestle were carried downstream by a wall of water and washed into the steel structure.

The two trestles are among 32 that dotted the section of the Virginia Creeper Trail between Damascus and its end at Whitetop Station near the North Carolina line. Eighteen of the structures were destroyed by the remnants of the storm on Sept. 27, according to Ed Wright, area ranger of the Mount Rogers National Recreation Area, which includes the trail.

Thirteen trestles are standing but presumed damaged, while one has reopened, according to the latest information released Monday. There is hope that the next trestle, No. 17 in Damascus, can open soon after some repair.

It has taken two and a half weeks to assess some trestles because parts of the trail still aren't accessible. That is particularly true in the areas of the closed section of 58 and Taylors Valley, a hard-hit community near Damascus, Wright said.

"More than half of our 32 trestles will require full replacement or a rebuild essentially," Wright said. "And there are several sections of trail itself that are altogether missing, and we don't know exactly how long ... but parts of the trail are just missing. It's been taken by the creek."

The trail's repair in that area will be hindered by the state of that section of 58, the same road used by shuttles to transport bike riders to Whitetop. The road starts as two damaged lanes, devolves into one lane and then a big gulch. It will be difficult to get materials normally transported on large vehicles in and out for repair of both the road and the trail, according to an official with the Virginia Department of Transportation.

It's too early to know how much it will cost to repair the trail so it can reopen, but trail, town and county officials and state and federal lawmakers say they are determined to rebuild it.

How long it will take to get that section back in shape to fully reopen also isn't known. Some locals fear it could take years to rebuild. Others are more optimistic.

Most Damascus residents make their living from the tourism created by the trail, which allows hiking, biking and horseback riding. The first half of the trail from Abingdon to Damascus is now open.

The hope is the second half can be reopened in about a year with sections opened as they are repaired, said Lisa Quigley, executive director of the Virginia Creeper Trail Conservancy.

All but six of the 32 trestles managed by the Forest Service are wooden structures originally inherited from the railroad in the 1970s. The remaining six are made of steel truss with wooden decks.

Although the wooden trestles add to the trail's "aesthetic," they are old and more vulnerable to the elements, Wright said.

Rush, who is a builder, said the old trestles were built to hold heavy trains, but the new ones do not need to be and can be done more quickly and at less cost. He pointed out that many of the trestles were more than 100 years old.



A small pile of debris is all that remains of the No. 27 trestle on the Virginia Creeper Trail in Taylors Valley, which was destroyed during flooding caused by the remnants of Hurricane Helene. Photo by Ben Earp/Ben Earp Photography.

The No. 18 trestle on the Virginia Creeper Trail. Photo by Ben Earp/Ben Earp Photography.



In the News ...



Update on Damaged NS S-Line (TN-NC)

[*Trains Magazine*] Norfolk Southern estimates its former Southern Railway line from Newport, TN, to Asheville, NC, and east to Grovestone, NC, will reopen by the end of March 2025, a revision of its initial estimate.

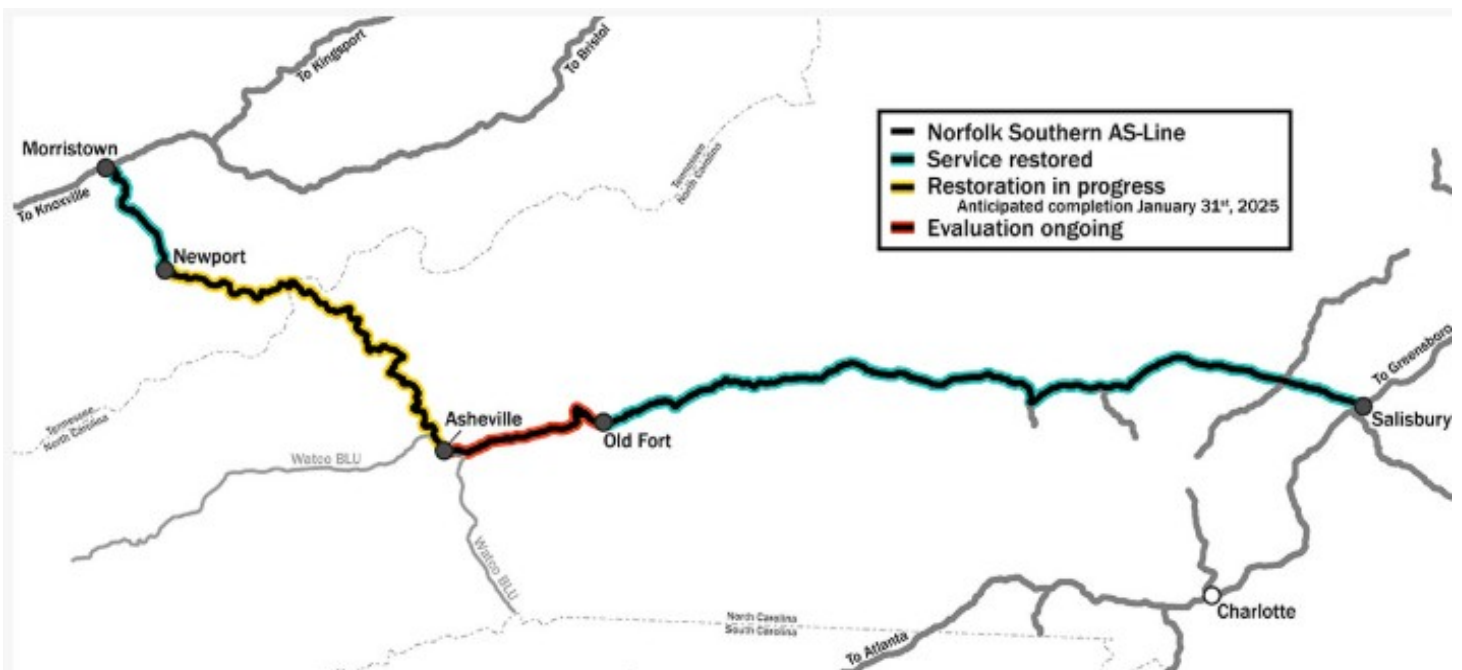
In October, shortly after the line was severely damaged by Hurricane Helene, the railroad estimated service could be restored by the end of January.

The new date includes work on 12 miles of the AS Line east of Asheville, from milepost S 138.2 to Grovestone, NC, at S 126.5. In its earlier estimate, the railroad had given no indication when rail service would be restored east of Asheville, as railroad engineers were still assessing all 29 miles to Old Fort, NC. Today's [Dec. 17, 2024] update says NS is still inspecting the 16 miles between Grovestone and Old Fort, at milepost S 109.7 — the segment including the Old Fort Loops. It has not made an estimate when that portion might reopen.

The isolated segment including the loops was badly damaged by landslides, wiping away any semblance of the previous roadbed, according to local reports. Limited accessibility in the mountains near Old Fort has exacerbated the issue, compared to low-lying areas in and west of Asheville Yard on the French Broad River.

Reopening the line east to Grovestone will restore access to a couple of rail-served customers, including an asphalt contractor in Black Mountain, NC. NS also acknowledged the importance of reopening the remainder of the line, for local communities and for Watco's Blue Ridge Southern short line, for which NS provides the only connection. Norfolk Southern says it's also pursuing additional transload facilities.

"We know how critical having that rail connection is to so many of the industries that operate in this region, and we cannot thank our customers enough for their continued patience and support as we work to restore service," Stefan Loeb, NS vice president business development and first and final markets, said in a press release





Rebuilding CSX in the Nolichucky Gorge

[WJHL, Johnson City] A recently granted state permit will allow CSX Transportation to “borrow” rock from several spots along the Nolichucky River bed — with restrictions — as it rebuilds track in the Nolichucky Gorge that flooding from Hurricane Helene destroyed.

A section of CSX’s Aquatic Resources Alteration Permit (ARAP) application also notes that the company hopes to restore rail service in September 2025 after a project it has estimated will cost more than \$200 million.

CSX, which has been criticized for mining river rock below the ordinary high-water mark since it began reconstruction efforts in early October, received a Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation (TDEC) permit last week for the work inside Tennessee. That permit allows CSX to “borrow” material (rock) from three different areas along the river within the Tennessee portion of the rugged gorge, but only above that high-water elevation.



Amtrak’s Next-generation High-speed Trains



[Amtrak.com] Amtrak is contracting with Alstom to produce 28 next-generation high-speed trains that will replace the current fleet of Amtrak’s premium Acela service. Building on Amtrak’s expertise as the only high-speed rail operator in the U.S. and Alstom’s record of delivering world class, proven, high-speed trainsets — Amtrak and Alstom have partnered to introduce the NextGen Acela.

The contract is part of a \$2.45 billion investment in the heavily traveled Northeast Corridor (NEC) as part of a multifaceted modernization program to renew and expand Acela service. With 95% of the trainset components being made in America, our new trainsets have generated over 1,300 new jobs in over 90 cities across the United States.

With the introduction of the new fleet, Amtrak is reimagining the future of rail and setting the stage for the next generation of train travel in America and on the NEC. Elevating the travel experience, the NextGen Acela offers enhancements in comfort, technology, innovation and safety on Amtrak’s most environmentally sustainable fleet of trains to date. Designed with the customer in mind, it has nearly 25% more seats with plenty of legroom, personal outlets and USB ports, complimentary WiFi, sophisticated onboard information systems and spacious restrooms with contactless features.

The NextGen Acela trainsets will operate at top speeds of 160 mph vs. today’s fleet, which operates at top speeds of 150 mph. The NextGen Acela fleet is scheduled to enter service on the NEC in Spring 2025.



Display in the Block

For the past few years, I have made a Calendar of my photos from the past year. I wanted to share my photos that I picked out for this year. I try to pick out my best shots that were taken in the month that they will be displayed. The following were the ones that I selected for each month.





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TIME-SENSITIVE MATERIAL