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# The ET TIMES

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE ET&WNC RAILROAD HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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## Some Light At The End Of The Tunnel?

We hope everyone has been doing OK since we last published. If you're feeling like it's been kind of an empty summer, you're not alone. While we've wanted to get out and do things, so many things have been closed or canceled. There are some glimmers of hope in the near future as you'll see in this issue.

The Southeastern Narrow Gauge and Short Line Museum is open on Fridays and Saturdays in Newton, NC and it's the home of both motor cars, boxcar 434 and other artifacts from the region including the only existing relics from

the Lawndale RR.

Avery County Museum is also open on a limited basis and the Doe River Gorge has activities through November 1st.

Keep your fingers crossed because Tweetsie is now selling advance tickets for Christmas at Tweetsie. Actually do more than cross your fingers...make a reservation and enjoy a unique holiday experience.

So, let's see what's happening around the ET&WNC historical community...

*Curtis Brookshire, Editor* 🚂



On a beautiful fall morning in Elizabethton, ET&WNC number 11 prepares to make the last narrow gauge revenue run on Monday, October 16, 1950. Photo by Vince Ryan from the Mike Metzfeld collection.

# News From Around the ET&WNC Preservation Community

## George L. Carter Railroad Museum at ETSU with focus on the ET&WNC RR HOn3 layout

*Fred J. Alsop III, Director of the museum, sends us this –*

The George L. Carter Railroad Museum on the campus of East Tennessee State University in Johnson City, TN reopened to the public for the first time since its COVID-19 mandated closure on March 14 with a Heritage Day Event celebrating “Western Rails” on Saturday, August 29, 2020.

The museum, like the rest of the ETSU campus, is being operated under strict COVID guidelines for the safety of our visitors and the museum staff volunteers. It is great to have the doors open, layouts running and members and guests inside our galleries once again. For much of the spring and summer, even our volunteers from the Mountain Empire Model Railroaders and the George L. Carter Chapter NRHS, had no access to the museum as the university was in total lockdown and all employees’ work was being done from home. Consequently, no real progress was made on our museum exhibits until permission was granted for a limited number of our volunteers to begin to regain access to the museum in July. Since then we were able to do some work on the exhibits and to maintain the four operating model train layouts.

We had been so very fortunate to be published for 6 consecutive years in the *HOn3 Annual*, published by White River Productions and by late August we had heard nothing from that outstanding model railroading narrow gauge magazine. But, to our delight, we got an email from Chris Lane, the Editor of the magazine, stating that he knew the Carter RR Museum had

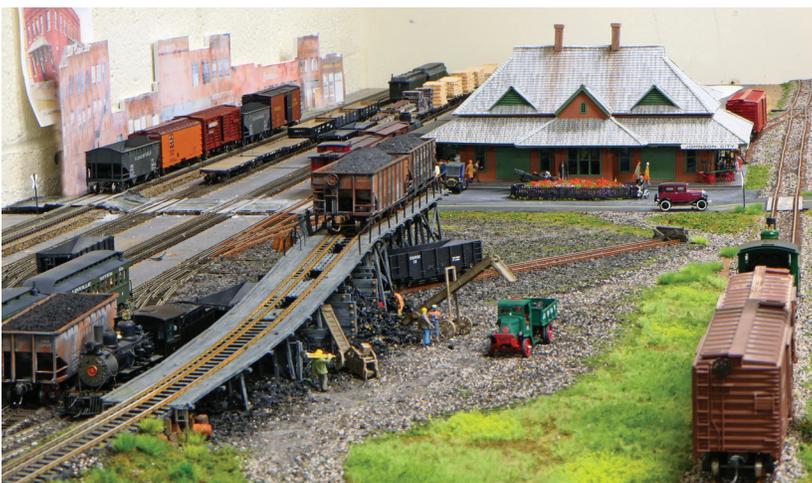
been closed for many months, but if we had an article we could submit on our ET&WNC Railroad HOn3 layout, the magazine would like to have it. We responded in the affirmative, but with this important question...“What is your deadline?” His reply was “Two weeks.”

I had been working on a model of the Johnson City Depot and immediately began putting finishing details on that large structure, the prototype of which was initially shared by two railroads...the ET&WNC and the ETV&G (later incorporated into the Southern Railway). Geoff Stunkard began an article that would feature the depot and the coal transfer trestle that was partially completed. In the short span of time we were given, I completed my work on the depot and the coal transfer trestle, constructed a street and parking area in front of the station and finished some necessary landscaping. Geoff completed a draft manuscript and, with the assistance of Logan Heaton, finished shooting the necessary photos of the completed structures on the layout. The photos and the article they illustrate were forwarded to White River Productions just days before our deadline. If published, this will be the seventh consecutive year that our little “Tweetsie” layout will have made the pages of this fine national/international magazine.

We are so excited to be doing our small part to keep alive the memory of this little narrow gauge railroad – “the railroad with a heart”. It is indeed rewarding to see the number of pieces of ET&WNC rolling stock, locomotive detail parts and articles that have appeared since we began our 1,300 square-foot ET&WNC layout about 9 years ago, and now available to modelers and fans of this little Appalachian railroad.

The next project on the “Tweetsie” layout will be the construction of the structures that make up the Johnson City engine facilities, including the engine house, carpenter shop, car shop, office, and sand and oil house.

The Carter Railroad Museum is now open once again on Saturdays from 10 am to 3 pm, and we invite you to come and visit us and to tour the entire museum in addition to seeing the progress on our “Tweetsie” layout. Stay safe and stay well. Information about events and layouts can be found on our website at [www.memrr.org](http://www.memrr.org) 🚂



The coal transfer trestle and the Johnson City Depot. Because of space limitations these two structures had to be placed much closer together on the layout than they actually were on the railroad. Photos by Geoff Stunkard.



The Johnson City Depot in position on the layout. A lot of work still needs to be done to complete the cityscape behind and around the building on this end of the layout.



A close-up view of a very busy railroad scene with the ramp to the coal transfer trestle in the foreground.

## Linville Depot & Caboose 505 at the Avery County Historical Museum

*Jerry Turbyfill sends us the latest from Newland, NC –*

Things are pretty much the same with Caboose 505 right now. There's a plan to have the caboose lettered by a sign painting crew. The Avery County Museum is now open but only by appointment. Call 828-733-7111 for more details. Find more information about the Museum by visiting their new website at [www.averymuseum.com](http://www.averymuseum.com) 🚩

## Southeastern Narrow Gauge and Shortline Museum

*Matt Bumgarner has this news from Newton, NC –*

The last few weeks have seen our museum re-open under NC Phase III COVID-19 guidelines. Fortunately, volunteers and visitors have started returning, though not yet at pre-pandemic levels.

Much work has been done in our Model Railroad Center. The gift shop was relocated and restocked with a lot of southeastern railroad items, the O-gauge Lionel layout has seen additional scenery work completed, and the On30 rendition of the W. M. Ritter Lumber Company logging camp is nearing completion. Also, the benchwork has now been completed on the HO/HOn3 layout that represents the Western North Carolina Railroad from Statesville to Hickory, with the Carolina & North-Western leading to Lenoir and the mountain forests beyond.

In our rolling stock pavilion, we have removed two layers of tin roofing from the Southern Railway wooden caboose, made major repairs to some interior framing around the cupola and gotten the interior down to its original wood sheathing. We also made some major historical finds related to the caboose that we will detail later.

Secondly, we had bolster bearings fabricated for ET&WNC 434 which will allow it to operate on proper trucks. With the addition of grab irons, stirrup steps, truss rods, brake rigging (all already in hand), the boxcar will be the only complete and operational piece of ET freight equipment in existence.

Finally, we now have all of ET&WNC Motorcar #1 under one roof after several years off site. We hope to re-energize the project in 2021. Please make plans to visit the museum, open on Fridays and Saturdays, very convenient to I-40, I-77, and Highways 70/321. Visit our website at [www.newtondepot.com](http://www.newtondepot.com) 🚩

## News from the Historical Society Modeling Committee

We have two announcements: Johnny Graybeal has O and HO scale decals back in stock in white and now in gold. White decals are \$10.00 and gold \$12.00 plus \$2.50 per order s&h. Contact Johnny at [johnnyg@boone.net](mailto:johnnyg@boone.net).

David Kmecik from Western Rails has 3D printed 4-wheel bobber caboose #205 in HO and On3/30 scales. Cost is \$30.00 for HO and \$60.00 for O scale. Wheels can be included with the order for an additional charge. He also offers a large assortment of ET&WNC rolling stock including the TOFC flat and trailer, gondolas, hoppers, the 4 Laconia coaches, two excursion car versions and more. Check their website at <http://westernrails.com> 🚩

*Note: Ken is off for this issue, so here's a story from Curtis Brookshire, your newsletter editor...*



October in the mountains of East Tennessee is a beautiful season with fall colors and cool crisp air. It also is tinged with sadness for us who love the ET&WNC as this year marks the 70th anniversary of the final revenue run of the narrow gauge. Number 11 had the honor of handling the last train, and this event was well documented by regular fans Vince Ryan and Jack Alexander and a newcomer who made his first and only trip to visit the ET – John Krause. John chased the train – with a local guide assisting – and provided some of the best known and most iconic photos of the train. Number 11 blasting out of the covered bridge, charging up State Line Hill, and a low shot of the engine with a perfect smoke plume were all John's shots. Jack Alexander wrote an article of the last trip that was featured in the January 1951 issue of *TRAINS* magazine, with Krause's covered bridge photo on the cover.

Twenty years ago a large group gathered at the Doe River Gorge camp to honor the 50th anniversary of the last run. We rode behind steam too. This is when a small steamer named "Rachel" ran at the Gorge. Present were many ET&WNC Railroad Historical Society members along with Keith Holley and Darrell Edwards, the last then-remaining members working on the ET Railway. Ken Riddle, Jack Q. Williams, George Allison and Cy Crumley's daughter Ruth Tupper, who wore her daddy's famous conductor cap, were among the honored guests. I and my wife of two days (yes, this was part of my honeymoon) rode along. Sadly, we lost Jack, George and Ruth not long after. The ET Railway has become just a switching operation in Johnson City and Keith and Darrell are now retired from the railroad.

While we've ridden in the gorge many times over the years, twenty-five years ago we were able to experience something really special – a train ride over the ET itself from Elizabethton to Johnson City and back. On October 14 and 15, 1995, the Watauga Chapter NRHS sponsored trips over the ET Railway.



Unless I'm mistaken, these trips were the first passenger trains over the line since the September 1950 troop train. The ET used both GP units 7735 and 7736 to pull the six-car train consisting of former ACL diner Moultrie, a former FEC coach and four ex-N&W Powhatan Arrow cars. We have a photo of what I called "the 1995 version of an ET mixed train" as the

*...See Editor's Story continued on page 4*

## Tweetsie Railroad Happenings

Chris Robbins sends this from Blowing Rock, NC –



After opening briefly in July, Tweetsie has been closed through the Ghost Train. Tickets are **ON SALE NOW** for Christmas at Tweetsie beginning November 13th. You must order tickets in advance. Sadly, in 2019 they had to turn people away who did not make their reservations. Check Tweetsie's website for complete details at [www.tweetsie.com](http://www.tweetsie.com) 🚩

## Doe River Gorge

Mark Milbourne reports from Hampton, TN –

It has been a very different year with the loss of summer camp programs and most of the traditional spring and fall retreat and guest groups. We were able to pivot in time to organize about 5 weeks of family camp programs in July and early August, but in spite of strong interest, these were only lightly attended.

The one relatively "normal" thing we were able to offer this year was the Saturday Day Quest program. This is for families, church groups and company picnics and offers all of the lake activities, plus the train ride and a few other items. Normally, due to being busy with camp, we take about every third Saturday off, but this year we added on the missing Saturdays plus two extra in early September, so we had a record number of Saturdays. So, many have ridden the train this year in spite of the pandemic.

Historically, DRG has offered one fall color weekend, lately known as Fall Family Fun Festival. But this year, anticipating the loss of fall retreat groups, it was expanded to 6 full weekends, now featuring a corn maze. So the Maze of Life corn maze/fall festival began September 25 and runs every Friday, Saturday and Sunday through Nov 1. On Friday and Saturday nights it transforms to Beware of the Bear which includes some surprises in the maze and then (a first ever public offering) a night-time train ride into the gorge. Rope lights on the coaches illuminate the tunnels and nearby rocks and vegetation; a 65000 lumen stadium light illuminates the cliff across from Pardee Point, also casting a shadow of the cross erected there.

The Christmas Train project has been on hold since the pandemic hit in March, but the fundraising committee met recently and is looking to resume their work. The initial goal was to operate for the 2021 Christmas season. This was already a somewhat ambitious goal so at this point it is probable it will slip to 2022. Work on the Crown steam locomotive lagged in late summer due to the pandemic, but picked up again in early fall and is now nearly ready for the state boiler man. We are also looking into what track upgrades will be necessary for it to operate safely in the gorge.

October 16 marks 70 years since the last regular ET&WNC train in the gorge. This year it is a Friday and the corn maze schedule means that regular trains will be operating and riders, as usual, will be hearing some ET&WNC history. The story of the ET continues to be told!

Visit our website at [www.doerivergorge.com](http://www.doerivergorge.com) 🚩

## Chuckey Depot Railroad Museum Request

The Chuckey Depot Railroad Museum in Jonesborough, TN is seeking individuals who would be willing to loan ET&WNC artifacts to our museum for a 6-month display, running from March 4, 2021 through the end of July. Our museum changes themed exhibits twice a year and is excited and honored to feature the ET&WNC Railroad in our upcoming exhibit.

The museum is a partnership of the Town of Jonesborough, the Heritage Alliance of NE TN/SW VA and the Watauga Valley Railroad Historical Society. Loaned artifacts are professionally secured, documented and kept safely under lock and key during their 6-month display period.

If you are interested in sharing your artifacts and their stories, contact Rick Chinouth (Chair of the Exhibit Subcommittee) at 423-612-7647 or [chinouthhome@yahoo.com](mailto:chinouthhome@yahoo.com) 🚩

### Editor's Story continued from page 3

crew switched out equipment in the yard before the ferry move to Elizabethton.

The excursions retraced the route used by the Army National Guard Special. Trips loaded at the former V&SW depot site in Elizabethton and backed through the streets of downtown to reach the ET main and head west to Johnson City. Passing through backyards near the Bemberg plants, up Milligan Hill, over the long bridge crossing Hwy 321, through the deep cut and past the Johnson City engine house and yard where the engines cut off and ran around the train to head back. It was a rainy day, but all had a great time. In fact, so great a time that in 1996 we did it again. Some fine memories were made those weekends and for most of us it was the only chance to actually ride on that part of the ET.

There's more to the story from my perspective because on Friday October 13th, 1995, the day the cars were delivered to the ET, I was accorded the privilege of a cab ride on the freight and was able to get some photos while the crew switched North American Rayon. These shots show the back side of the plant that most folks only saw from the highway. I hope to tell the story with photos in a future issue of *Every Time With No Complaint*.

Curtis Brookshire, Editor 🚩



Watauga Chapter NRHS sponsored an excursion on the ET Railway from Elizabethton to Johnson City and back – October 14, 1995. Photos courtesy Curtis Brookshire.