

Snowshed

May, 2022

Volume 15 Number 1



News & Events:

Truckee Railroad Museum (the caboose) is open Saturday and Sunday, 10 to 4.

Museum of Truckee History is open Friday, Saturday, and Sunday from 10 to 4.

The Truckee River Railroad (ride-on train) starts May 28th, 11 to 2.

Trestle Tour of the northern lumber railroads: June 25th 9:00-3:00.

See our Facebook page for details & updates.

Contents:

President's Letter, 1
by Jerry Blackwill

Truckee River Railroad Run Dates Set! 1

Boca and Loyalton Railroad, 2
by Dan Cobb

Trestle Tours! 4

Presidents Letter

By Jerry Blackwill

I'm excited about our upcoming season. The pandemic is much reduced and we feel we can breathe again. You can see our Truckee River railroad schedule in this newsletter and we're planning special trestle tours for members this summer.

One big event in our area is the Great Western Steam Event at the Nevada State Railroad Museum in Carson City. While it's not a Truckee Donner Railroad Society event, historical train buffs will get a lot of enjoyment from it. Go to <https://greatwesternsteamup.com/> for more information.

If you haven't had a chance to renew your membership yet, you can renew on our website at <https://www.truckeedonnerrailroadsociety.com/involvement/involvement.html>. The page has been enhanced to let you select the membership level at which you'd like to renew: Brakeman (couple) \$25, Fireman (family of 4 or business) \$65, Engineer (sustaining) \$100, or Lifetime \$500, and click the yellow bar to pay with PayPal or credit card. Thanks to our webmaster, Jay Jacobs for making this possible.

Jerry Blackwill
President

Truckee River Railroad Run Dates Set!

The operating schedule for the Truckee River Railroad ride-on train at the Truckee River Regional Park has been set. Trains will run in the park on 10 Saturdays this summer: May 28, June 11, July 2, 16, and 30, August 6 and 20, September 3 and 24, and October 8. Operating hours are 11:00 to 2:00. As

always, rides are free but donations are greatly appreciated. We can always use more volunteer engineers, conductors, station masters, crossing guards, etc. It only requires a few hours on a Saturday, and your time is repaid many times over in the smiles on the faces of the children (of all ages). To volunteer, contact Bob Bell at kids_train@truckeedonnerrailroadsociety.com.



The Boca and Loyalton Railroad

By Dan Cobb

With a population of just 3,236 as of the 2020 census, Sierra County is the second-least populous county in California. Loyalton is the county's only incorporated city, and there is one traffic light in the entire county – a flashing red at the intersection of highways 49 and 89 in Sierraville.

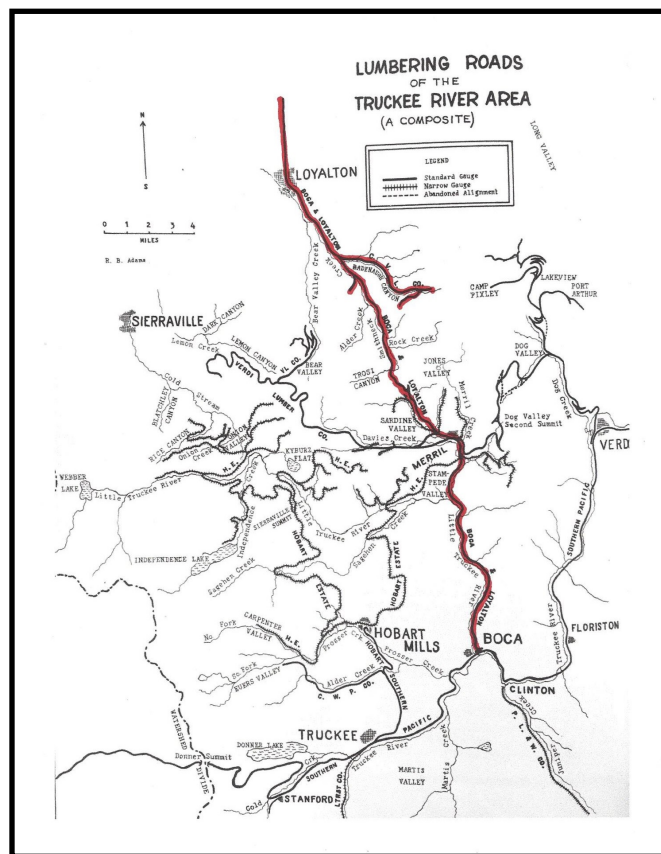
Sierra County wasn't always such a quiet, unpopulated place. In 1849-1852, following the discovery of gold at Sutter's Bar, more than 16,000 would-be miners poured into the county. Some homesteaded ranches in the broad, fertile Sierra Valley, producing hay, cattle, and dairy products for the miners and later for markets in Truckee, Reno, and Virginia City.

The lumber industry also grew in the area, and the first sawmill was established near Loyalton in 1868. Soon over a dozen sawmills were in operation, and production far exceeded local demand. Due to Sierra Valley's remoteness, getting lumber and other local products to distant markets was a challenge. By the 1880s, huge steam-powered tractors were used to haul milled lumber to the nearest rail hub, over Beckwourth Pass to the Nevada-California-Oregon (N-C-O) Railway in the vicinity of present-day Hallelujah Junction.

In 1885, the California Land and Timber Company established the narrow-gauge Sierra Valley and Mohawk Railroad, aiming to establish a rail link with the N-C-O. The railroad went bankrupt two years later after laying 14 miles of track from the N-C-O nearly to Beckwith (today's Beckwourth). In 1894, Henry Bowen acquired the railroad, completed track past Beckwith, and began operations as the Sierra Valleys Railroad (SV) in 1895.

The SV railroad provided valuable, if inconsistent, service for the north side of Sierra Valley, but was of little benefit to the growing communities of Loyalton and Sierraville on the south side of the valley. In addition, since the SV and N-C-O were narrow gauge, loads had to be unloaded and reloaded at Reno to be taken on to Virginia City and points east and west on the Central Pacific.

By 1895, Loyalton was home to several lumber mills and box factories. Steam traction engines were used to haul logs to the mills, and a combination of steam tractors and horse-drawn wagons hauled the lumber 16 miles over Folk's Summit to the Central Pacific at Verdi, or more than 20 miles to Truckee. In 1900 the Lewis brothers, operators of a large lumber mill and box factory south of Loyalton, started



Boca & Loyalton Railroad Map (pc TDRS)

Boca and Loyalton Railroad (continued from Page 2)

work on a standard gauge railroad running up Smithneck Canyon, over a low pass, and down the Little Truckee River to Boca, 4 miles downriver from Truckee on the CP. Track-laying was completed the following year, and the Boca and Loyalton Railroad began operation.



Boca & Loyalton logging train, early 1900s.

Completion of the railroad to Loyalton triggered rapid development in the area, especially in the lumber business. Timber lands in the vicinity were quickly snapped up and at least five new sawmills and a new box factory were built within the first year. The B&L continued its march north, laying track across Sierra Valley to Beckwith at the same time that it was establishing its business between Loyalton and Boca. The arrival of standard gauge service on the north side of Sierra Valley caused an expansion of lumbering business in that area as it had in Loyalton, and no doubt diverted substantial business away from the narrow gauge Sierra Valleys Railroad.

The next five years saw gradual expansion of the railroad north and west of Beckwith, as well as the laying of temporary spurs into the forest between Boca and Loyalton to cut timber stands there. A line north to Clover Valley required a crossing of the SV narrow gauge, and the two railroads fought a protracted battle from 1903 to 1907 over crossing rights and fees. The physical crossing was built and torn up at least three times, and each side won its share of court injunctions and reversals. Mother Nature brought additional challenges, with snow, ice, and flooding frequently interrupting service for several days or even weeks at a time. Mechanical breakdowns and accidents were also frequent.

By 1907, most of the prime timber stands along the railroad had been reduced to stumps, and the lumber business in Loyalton was in decline. Fortunately or unfortunately, depending on one's perspective, that was when the Western Pacific began construction of its section of the WP/DRGW transcontinental line across the north side of Sierra Valley and down the Feather River canyon. In anticipation, the backers of WP had acquired controlling interests in both the B&L and SV railroads, so there



B&L train wreck, circa 1905. Loyalton Museum Collection

were no competitors or complaints when WP repurposed the SV grade over Beckwourth Pass and into Sierra Valley, and took over the B&L tracks along the Middle Fork Feather River through Portola.

Boca and Loyalton Railroad (continued from Page 3)

The B&L became main conduit for construction equipment and supplies needed for track-building down the canyon, and according to some sources, ran at a profit for the first time in its history.

The completion of construction and start of operations by WP in 1909 was the beginning of the end for the B&L. The new transcontinental route took over much of what business remained in Sierra Valley and B&L's traffic and finances declined rapidly. The railroad ran at a loss from 1911 onward, defaulted on its bond obligations, and went into receivership in 1915. Operations between the Loyalton and Boca ceased and the road's assets were sold to WP at foreclosure in 1916.

The rails between Boca and Loyalton were torn up in 1917, and large stretches of the grade were later submerged under Boca and Stampede reservoirs. North of Stampede, the grade along Davies Creek and the east side of Sardine Valley is relatively easy to find, and a few deteriorating ties and other remnants remain to this day. From that point, it parallels Smithneck Road all the way to Loyalton. Part of the grade along Smithneck Creek was burned over in 1994 by the Cottonwood Fire, making it easier to find but less pleasant to hike. About two miles of the old grade between Loyalton Rotary Park and Alder Creek have been developed as a multiuse trail, signed as the "Loyalton/Boca Railroad Trail".

Sources: David Myrick "Railroads of Nevada and Eastern California" Vols 1 and 3, Truckee-Donner Historical Society "Tracking the Railroad from Boca to Loyalton".

Trestle Tours!

We're bringing back our ever-popular trestle tours this summer, with the first tour planned for Saturday, June 25th. Trestle tours are guided, self driven tours of historic railroad lines of the area. You'll see old railroad grade, ties, rail, logging camp sites, and remnants of 100-year-old trestles. At each stop, the significance of the railroad its history is discussed. At some stops, there are short hikes along old grade. The June 25th tour, led by Dan Cobb, will take us north of Truckee along the routes of the Hobart Estates, Boca & Loyalton, and Verdi Lumber railroads.

We will meet at the railroad museum (caboose) at 9 AM, and finish about 3 PM. Bring lunch and wear layers. High-clearance vehicles with 4WD or AWD are recommended. Additional details on our website and on our Facebook page. The tour is free, but donations are much appreciated.



Remnants of a trestle in the forest north of Truckee (pc TDRS)

Truckee Donner Railroad Society

Board of Directors:

Jerry Blackwill — President

Bob Bell — Executive Vice President and Treasurer

Ed Larson — Vice President, Museum Operations

Dan Cobb — Vice President, Strategic Planning

Ed Czerwinski — Secretary

Nelson Van Gundy — Historian Emeritus

Chip Huck — Rolling Stock Restoration & Preservation

Judy DePuy — Publicity

Tom Smith — Truckee River Railroad

Our History: Railroads of the Truckee area played a significant role in founding and developing the town of Truckee. From the blasting of black powder in the granite over Donner Lake, to the hissing of the first steam engines coming into town, to the whistles of lumberjacks in the mountains, to the crack of ice being loaded in the reefers, to the tourists flocking to enjoy the beauty of the area, Truckee's story is very much the story of its railroads.

Our Mission: Our mission is to preserve, interpret, and educate the public about railroading life and history in the Truckee region including its contribution to Truckee and the nation. We will accomplish this through the acquisition, preservation, and restoration of relevant equipment and artifacts and the development and display of exhibits in one or more museum facilities in Truckee.

Volunteer!

You can help TDRS and serve the community by volunteering for one of our projects or ongoing operations:

- ♦ Snowplow & Crane Restoration
- ♦ Truckee River Railroad Operations
- ♦ Museum Docent

Contact our volunteer manager volunteer_manager@truckeedonnerrailroadsociety.com.

Donate!

You can also help by donating at our website, truckeedonnerrailroadsociety.com, at the bottom of the home page.

www.truckeedonnerrailroadsociety.com
501(c) 3 non-profit organization

Truckee Donner Railroad Society
P.O. Box 3838
Truckee, CA 96160