



Quarterly Newsletter of the Truckee Donner Railroad Society

Snowshed

Keeping Truckee's Railroad History Alive!

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Event Calendar

Trestle Tour – Hobart Estate	June 10
Truckee River Railroad Run Day, Truckee River Regional Park	June 17, 11:00-2:00
Evening at the Museum: <i>The Chilling History of Truckee Ice</i> , at the Truckee Tahoe Airport meeting room, 10356 Truckee Airport Road. Presented by Ed Larson and Dave DePuy.	June 20, 5:00-6:30
July TDRRS Board Meeting	July 5, 10:00

President's Letter

Jerry Blackwill

Things are beginning to move ahead. We're finishing up the biggest winter since the passenger train "City of San Francisco" was stranded by an avalanche in 1952. The UC Berkely Snow Lab recorded 65 feet of snow falling in that year and the latest for this year is over 62 feet.

Thankfully, the snow melted away in time to prepare the Truckee River Railroad for our scheduled opening day on May 27th. We gave over 250 rides and a good time was had by all. The Truckee Railroad Museum in the caboose is also clear of snow now and we're operating it on Saturdays and Sundays (availability of docents permitting). Chip Huck has been working on the rotary snowplow and crane displays in the pocket park. We hope to have new interpretive signs in the pocket park by this fall. Dan Cobb is planning to conduct a trestle tour of the Sierra Nevada Wood & Lumber / Hobart Estates railroad remains on June 10th, weather permitting. Dan has also organized a committee of railroad modelers interested in building a historical model of Truckee railroads in the early 1900s. It's still in the planning and feasibility analysis stage, but we have a number of model railroaders interested and it looks promising.

Lastly, we will miss the huge help that Ed Larson has given the Society as director, managing the museum, and helping run the Truckee River Railroad. Ed is planning to move out of Truckee this summer.

As always, we need more volunteers. It would greatly help if you could see your way clear to give us even a single three-hour shift at the museum or help with the Truckee River Railroad. If you can help, please send me a note at info@tdrrs.org.

Jerry Blackwill

Are Truckee's Trains Safe?

Judy DePuy

It is fair to say that Truckee exists because of the path of the Transcontinental Railroad. We were a major stop for the steam engines to get water and fuel and to add "helper" engines to get trains over the mountains. Trains still pass through Truckee every day and are critical to the U.S. economy. They are used to haul produce, automobiles, containers, truck trailers and much more. They also bring fuel and needed chemicals for industry.

Trains have historically been very safe on a per-pound-moved basis but recent events have raised concerns on the issue of trains and their safety. Truckee alone has 15 to 25 Union Pacific freight trains and two Amtrak trains coming through town every day. Train derailments and the leaking of toxic materials is not new but what Union Pacific is doing, and the now protective measures in place for the trains coming in and out of the mountains, helps ensure the safety of our community.

Accidents Happen

Ever since the railroad opened, train wrecks and derailments were not uncommon. The earliest reported accident was in 1869 when the steam train's boiler blew inside a tunnel killing several people. Train accidents

were common as brakemen had to work on the top of the cars, knock icicles off the roofs of the snowsheds and deal with the smoke and fires within the tunnels which led to asphyxiation.



Train wreck at Norden, Nov. 1945 (photo from Truckee-Donner Historical Society image collection)

In July 1980, a Southern Pacific railroad car leaking phosphoric acid (used in making fertilizers) arrived in Truckee forcing the evacuation of about 1,500 Truckee residents. The leakage was caused by an improperly sealed lid on the train car. A mother and two children, four train crew members, an ambulance driver, and 10 others were sent to Truckee Forest Hospital complaining of headaches, dizziness, nausea and shortness of breath. The question was how long had the train been leaking before it arrived in Truckee and why wasn't it stopped in Norden on the Sierra Summit when one crew member got sick.

Only a year later in 1981, four engines and eleven box cars ran off the tracks in downtown Truckee from a broken axle on a locomotive. The derailment was at the Highway 267 crossing. Luckily the train contained only fruits and vegetables so no evacuations were needed.

Train Risks, Old and New

Today's trains have changed. Heavy steam trains have been replaced with diesel electric trains which are much quieter... and snow makes the trains even quieter which requires more vigilance. Trains have also gotten longer with up to ten engines and 110 empty cars going over Donner Pass. These trains can be approximately 10,000 feet long. Train traffic has increased and has put more wear and tear on the tracks and infrastructure.

Hazardous materials and toxic chemicals have to be transported all around the state. Transporting them via a train is considered the safest mode of transportation but is not a perfect solution. Since 2021, 334 trains have derailed in California with four that had a hazardous materials spill (according to the California Governor's Office of Emergency Services). Note that industry officials say trains are the safest way to transport many dangerous but critical substances since they have a much lower accident rate than trucks.

Improvements to Train Safety

Only the two Amtrak passenger trains stop in Truckee. All other trains slow down but generally continue up to a maximum speed of 30 MPH through town. Even at this slow speed it will take a train up to one mile to stop. Each freight train has one engineer and a conductor who are supported remotely by a team that communicates with the train through a dispatcher. Most everything else is automated.

Over Donner Pass there are approximately fifty sensors on the Sierra which measure the temperature of the wheels and bearings on the trains to make sure they are at an acceptable heat level. These thermal detectors, which run along the track in both directions, will let the train dispatcher know if there are any hot spots. An overheated bearing is what caused the recent Ohio toxic derailment.



Union Pacific Hi-Rail Maintenance Truck
(photo credit Greg Zirbel)

Floriston has a different sensor that looks for railroad cars that may be too tall or are leaning. This is important here since the trains need to go through an enclosed trestle bridge that crosses the Truckee River and passes through the tunnels and snowsheds over Donner Pass.

As a supplement to the automation, Truckee is the base for the track maintenance crews of the Sierra. They can be seen in white pick-up trucks which run on the rails. Every time a train comes by the crews stop their work and conduct a visual inspection of the train. They look for smoke, which could be a locked brake, or any other abnormalities. This extra step is a huge added benefit to the community.

Union Pacific also has a rail detection car which looks for damage, or if the rail is bad, along the tracks. According to Union Pacific, they spend up to \$1.9 Billion annually maintaining their infrastructure.

Snow in the Sierra brings out the flanger, to remove snow between the rails; the spreader, to push snow to the side; and the rotary snow plow, when there is no place to put the snow. The rotary snow plow is awesome in action as it shoots the snow approximately 100 feet from the rails. The goal of each of these specialty trains is to make sure that the train does not derail due to too much snow and the 'too much snow' is what we have seen lately.

Truckee is Still a Railroad Town

Union Pacific has its issues and accidents have happened but Truckee is prepared. The town has well-trained fire, police, disaster recovery teams and an educational program of train safety (Operation Lifesaver) in place. But we don't want an accident so everything Union Pacific can do to make Truckee a safe railroad town is well appreciated.

“Truckee 1927” Model Railroad

Dan Cobb

As I reported in our November issue, the Railroad Society's latest project is to build a model railroad depicting Truckee and surrounding areas in the early 1900s, at the height of Truckee's railroad heyday. The goal is for the model to educate locals and visitors about Truckee's rich railroading past, as well as to add a fun family-friendly stop on the "Truckee Museum Tour".

We've convened a small committee of railroad modelers to work out the details and begin work on a modular, "pop-up" version that can be set up and opened to the public from time to time at various venues around town as we're building the permanent model.

The committee has met three times as of this publication, and has made a number of key decisions. First, the model will be done in HO scale, or 1:87. For those of you not into model railroading, that means an average-size person will be about 7/8" tall, a 2-8-0 steam engine with tender is about 8" long, and the iconic granite roundhouse in Truckee will be about 2 feet in diameter. Second, we settled on 1927 as the historical setting for the model. SP had just acquired and standard-gauged the "Tahoe Branch" and passenger traffic to the lake was at its peak. While the earlier narrow gauge Lake Tahoe Railway & Transportation Company line would have been fun to model, standard gauge allows us to use a much wider range of affordable era-accurate models and

allows an interchange with the Southern Pacific mainline in Truckee. In 1927 Hobart Mills was still a bustling mill town, narrow gauge logging trains still plied the forests north of town, and powerful cab forward steam engines hauled luxury passenger trains, PFE “fruit blocks”, and mixed freight over Donner Pass.

We’ve also made good progress on a track plan and are starting work on some of the iconic structures of the era, including Truckee’s granite roundhouse and the SP depot.

You can help! We need additional railroad modelers to design and build modular benchwork, track, structures, and scenery. We need a workspace or “shop” where we can work together to build and integrate the modules. Our biggest hurdle is finding and funding a permanent location for the model; help in solving that challenge would be a game-changer. If can assist in any of these areas or would just like to be kept in the loop on our progress, drop us a line at model_railroad@tdrrs.org.

Truckee River Railroad 2023 Schedule

The Truckee River Railroad riding train survived our epic winter with minimal damage, and is back for a full schedule of train rides in the Regional Park. We kicked off the 2023 schedule with a successful run on May 27th, with about a dozen Railroad Society volunteers helping with ticketing, loading and operating the train, and keeping everyone safe. Here’s the rest of the schedule for this season:

June 17 11:00am - 2:00pm
July 1 11:00am - 2:00pm
July 15 11:00am - 2:00pm

July 29 11:00am - 2:00pm
August 12 11:00am - 2:00pm
August 19 11:00am - 2:00pm

Sept. 2 11:00am - 2:00pm
Sept. 16 11:00am - 2:00pm
Sept. 30 11:00am - 2:00pm

Hobart Estate Trestle Tour

Dan Cobb and Jay Jacobs will be leading the first Trestle Tour of the 2023 season on June 10th. This will be a combined driving/walking tour, and will include a hike to several collapsed trestles that we haven’t included in a public tour in years. The tour starts at 8:30 in the parking lot near our rotary plow and crane display at the corner of Roundhouse Way and the Donner Pass Road Extension in the new Railyard development at the east end of town.

If you’d like to join, email us at tours@tdrrs.org. Bring a lunch, layered clothing, hiking shoes, and a spirit of adventure. We’ll be driving on dirt roads, so AWD or high-clearance vehicle is advised, but we won’t do anything really “off-road”. We should be back to civilization by 3 PM.

More information is at <https://www.tdrrs.org/tours>



Hobart Estate narrow-gauge trestle, north of Truckee. P/C Daniel Cobb

Volunteer Opportunities

The Railroad Society could use your help in the following areas:

Riding Train – Issue tickets, load the train, run the crossing gates, operate the trains as engineer or conductor, and help keep our riders safe. Training is provided and new volunteers are always welcome.

Museum Docent – Learn and share your knowledge of Truckee’s history and local railroading in the Truckee Railroad Museum (caboose) or the Museum of Truckee History. Three-hour shifts; training is provided.

Newsletter Editor or Contributor – Flex your publishing skills by editing and publishing our quarterly newsletter, the *Snowshed*. The newsletter is now in Microsoft Word, so no special software or skills are required. If writing is more up your alley, you can contribute articles on local railroad history or other topics of interest.

Cosmetic Restoration of Railroad Equipment – We’ll hire professionals to do hazardous materials abatement and retore our wrecking crane to its full mid-century glory, but we can use some help with detailing and ongoing maintenance of the crane and rotary snow plow.

Model Railroad – We need additional railroad modelers and builders to construct modular benchwork, install track and wiring, design and build structures and create scenery. Join our committee and build “Truckee 1927”!

To volunteer, drop us a line at info@tdrrs.org. To join or donate, see <https://tdrrs.org/membership>.

<p style="text-align: center;">Board of Directors</p> <p>Jerry Blackwill — President</p> <p>Bob Bell — Executive Vice President and Treasurer</p> <p>Ed Larson — Vice President, Museum Operations</p> <p>Dan Cobb — Vice President, Strategic Planning and Historian</p> <p>Ed Czerwinski — Secretary</p> <p>Nelson Van Gundy —Historian Emeritus</p> <p>Chip Huck — Rolling Stock Restoration & Preservation</p> <p>Judy DePuy — Publicity</p> <p>Tom Smith — Truckee River Railroad</p> <p>Jay Jacobs — Webmaster</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Our History</p> <p>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.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Our Mission</p> <p>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 display of exhibits in our Truckee museums.</p>
<p>The Truckee Donner Railroad Society is a 501(c)(3) non-profit, tax-exempt organization. EIN 91-1917864.</p>	