



Quarterly Newsletter of the Truckee Donner Railroad Society

# Snowshed

*Keeping Truckee's Railroad History Alive!*

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## Event Calendar

Trestle Tour: Donner Summit	August 24
Truckee River Railroad runs	August 30 - October 11
TDRRS Board of Directors Meeting	September 3
"Truckee 1927" Model Railroad at the Steve Randall Community Recreation Center	September 17 – November 19

# President's Letter

Dan Cobb

When you drive by the rotary snowplow and wrecking crane exhibit near the UP tracks in the Railyard development at the east end of town, you'll notice a new sign! The four-panel display describes our two historic railroad machines and local railroad history, and acknowledges the people and organizations that contributed money, materials, and time to our railroad display. See Jerry Blackwill's article in this issue for more details.

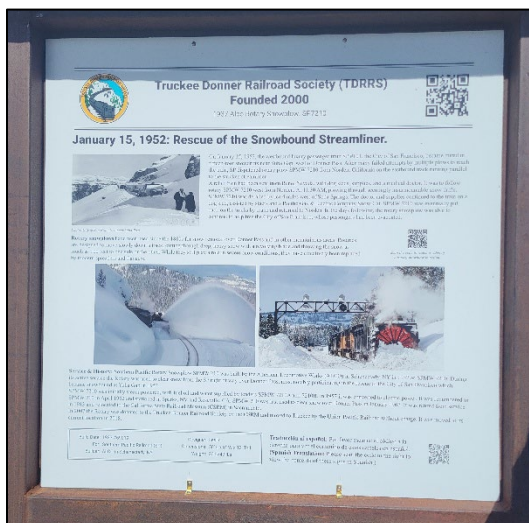
It's been a busy summer. In July we led a trestle tour on the route of the Boca & Loyaltan Railroad, where we met some lovely people from the Reno Gem and Mineral Society who were quite comfortable bouncing around on gravel roads and poking around in the dirt for interesting bits of history. Our riding train in Truckee River Regional Park continues to be very popular, and we set a new single-day record of 755 rides on August 2<sup>nd</sup>. We have several new volunteers this season, including Piper Terry, Chris Murray, Steve Lewis, and Mike and Roxanne Salvador, all of whom have been a great help.

Coming up, we have our walking tour of Donner Summit railroad history sites on August 24<sup>th</sup>, and will have our model railroad on exhibit at the Steve Randall Community Recreation Center from September 17<sup>th</sup> through November 19<sup>th</sup>. We're also planning a youth workshop at the Rec Center in October to introduce middle school kids to the great hobby of model railroading.

We welcome new members and need additional volunteers to help on the riding railroad, caboose museum, model railroad, and equipment restoration. Visit our volunteer page at <https://tdrrs.org/volunteer> and use one of the links there to tell us how you'd like to participate.

## Truckee's Railyard Pocket Park has an Interpretive Sign

Jerry Blackwill



The Railroad Society has officially completed the installation of its new interpretive sign, a project that highlights the rich history of the area and serves as a testament to the collaborative spirit of the community. The sign, which now stands in the Railyard Pocket Park, is the culmination of a dedicated effort by numerous individuals who brought their unique skills and passion to the project.

The journey began with Chip Huck, a local contractor with a keen eye for historical detail. Huck crafted the initial design for the sign, laying the groundwork for a visual narrative that would effectively communicate the significance of the rotary snowplow and the railroad wrecking crane. His initial photos, sketches, and concepts captured the essence of the equipment's past, providing a strong foundation upon which others would build. Following Huck's initial design, the project was taken to the next

level by Jerry Blackwill and Dan Cobb. These two collaborators brought their expertise to the table, refining the design and adding new layers of depth and clarity. Blackwill and Cobb meticulously reviewed the content and



Jerry Blackwill, Bill Ramsey, Dan Cobb, Mike Salvador, and Tom Smith with the new sign (p/c Greg Zirbel)

layout, ensuring that the final product was not only visually appealing but also accurate and easy to understand for visitors of all ages. Their improvements transformed the sign from a great idea into a polished and professional piece of public art.

Once the design was finalized and the interpretive signs were fabricated, the project entered its final phase: installation. This is where the community's collaborative spirit truly shone. A team of dedicated volunteers took on the task of attaching the signs to their sturdy frames. Blackwill, Cobb, Greg Zirbel, Bill Ramsey, Mike Salvador and Tom Smith all worked hard to ensure that the signs were securely and professionally mounted, a crucial step in preserving the project for years to come. The collective effort of these individuals highlights a shared commitment to enhancing public spaces and celebrating Truckee's history.

The new interpretive sign is more than just a plaque; it is a storytelling device that connects the present-day Railyard to its industrious past. It educates visitors about the Railyard's vital role in Truckee's development and serves as a point of pride for the community. The completion of this project is a beautiful example of how local talent and a passion for history can come together to create something meaningful and lasting for everyone to enjoy. The Truckee Railyard Pocket Park's new sign is now open for public viewing, and visitors are encouraged to take a moment to appreciate the history and the collaborative spirit that made this project a reality.

## Truckee River Railroad

Bob Bell

The Truckee River Railroad miniature riding train is having a strong season. We have completed 10 runs days with no weather cancellations and 4 more runs in September and October. So far we have hosted 4,450 rides requiring 360 volunteer hours to date. We are always looking for more help as we need a minimum of 6 volunteers to run one train and 8 or more to run two trains. Often our rider cue lines extend 50 or more waiting for the next train so please consider coming out and helping. Contact me at [bellbob@sbcglobal.net](mailto:bellbob@sbcglobal.net) or text 916/716-7897 to get on board with our operations.



Piper Terry at the controls of Union Pacific #747

## Trestle Tour: Boca & Loyalton Railroad

Steve Edelman

On Saturday, July 12th, we explored the Boca & Loyalton Railroad. Boca, Spanish for "river mouth," is the location where the Central Pacific transcontinental railroad crossed the mouth of the Little Truckee River in 1868. Because of its extremely cold winters and abundance of trees, investors developed sawmills, ice cutting companies, and a brewery at Boca. The first business established was the Boca Mill and Ice Company in 1868. Also in 1868, to support construction of the CP, the Boca Lumber Company logged the lower Little Truckee River watershed and used the river to float logs to its mill on the CP line at Boca. In 1872, a 2-mile-long railway was built up the Little Truckee River to transport ice cut from frozen ponds built for the purpose. The Boca Brewing Company was founded in 1875 and utilized the cold temperatures, natural spring water, ample supply of ice, and railroad access to produce and ship out California's first lager. The Boca Brewing Company's product was celebrated at the Paris World's Fair in 1883 and produced up to 30,000 barrels of beer per year before the brewery burned in 1893.

In 1886, the Lewis brothers opened a sawmill 17 miles north of Boca to access the nearest uncut timber. They started by hauling their lumber from the mill to the railroad using horses and wagons, then switched to steam traction engines in 1888. These huge machines weighed 29 tons and were basically steam locomotives on six foot diameter steel wheels (see photo). The steering was accomplished by a single front wheel and they hauled four to six trailers loaded with lumber behind them. As logging continued to move north in the 1890's, the Lewis' built a mill at the ranching town of Loyalton in the Sierra Valley, 9 miles north of the 1886 Lewis Mill. In 1900, the Lewis's incorporated the Boca & Loyalton Railroad to build a standard gauge railroad to the Loyalton mill and in the summer of 1901 completed the line from the CP (by then Southern Pacific) mainline at Boca to Loyalton. Loyalton became a lumber boomtown and there were many narrow and standard gauge spurs and branches from the B&L to serve the logging camps and mills along the route. In the following several years, the B&L was extended northwest across the Sierra Valley to haul beef cattle, dairy products, sheep, wool, and other agricultural products to the national rail network via the B&L. Also during this timeframe the Boca Mill and Ice Company's 2-mile ice spur came under Southern Pacific control.

In 1905, the B&L was sold to a subsidiary of the Western Pacific Railroad, which was planning its Feather River Route to compete with the SP's Donner Pass transcontinental route. During 1908-09, the WP shipped all of its construction materials for the portion of the WP that crosses Sierra Valley on the B&L. Once the WP was completed, the B&L section between Boca and Loyalton became redundant and was abandoned in 1917 and the



Steam traction engine on display at the Milton Gottardi Museum in Loyalton. These smoke-belching monsters were used to haul lumber prior to the building of the B&L in 1901.



## Volunteering and Membership

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

**Truckee River Railroad (ride-on 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 Volunteer** – Learn and share your knowledge of Truckee’s history and local railroading in the Truckee Railroad Museum (caboose) or the Museum of Truckee History. Volunteers work as individuals or pairs in three-hour shifts. Training is provided.

**Newsletter Contributor** –Contribute articles on local railroad history or other topics of interest for publication in our *Snowshed* newsletter.

**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 the rotary snowplow.

**Model Railroad** – We need additional railroad modelers and builders to design and build structures, create scenery, run trains, and talk with visitors about Truckee’s railroad history. Join our committee and build “Truckee 1927”!

To volunteer, drop us a line at [info@tdrrs.org](mailto:info@tdrrs.org). Memberships are open to anyone interested in preserving Truckee’s railroad history and supporting the ongoing activities of the society. To join, renew your membership, or make a donation to the society, visit our website at <https://tdrrs.org/membership> or scan the QR code.



<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Board of Directors</b></p> <p>Dan Cobb — President and Historian                  Bob Bell — Executive Vice President and Treasurer                  Jerry Blackwill — Vice President and Museum Manager                  Steve Edelman — Newsletter Editor                  Chip Huck — Rolling Stock Restoration &amp; Preservation                  Jay Jacobs — Webmaster                  Tom Smith — Truckee River Railroad                  Bill Ramsey – Secretary                  Durk Stelter</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Our History</b></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;"><b>Our Mission</b></p> <p>Our mission is to preserve and celebrate Truckee’s colorful railroad history and to educate residents and visitors about the important role of railroads in making Truckee what it is today. We strive to enrich the experience of residents and visitors through railroad-related entertainment and education.</p>
<p>The Truckee Donner Railroad Society is a 501(c)(3) non-profit, tax-exempt organization. EIN 91-1917864.</p>	