



Quarterly Newsletter of the Truckee Donner Railroad Society

Snowshed

Keeping Truckee's Railroad History Alive!

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Event Calendar

Truckee River Railroad Run Day, Truckee River Regional Park	Sept 2, 11:00-2:00
Truckee River Railroad Run Day, Truckee River Regional Park	Sept 16, 11:00-2:00
Trestle Tour – Boca and Loyaltan Railroad	Sept 23, 8:30 AM
Truckee River Railroad Run Day, Truckee River Regional Park	Sept 30, 11:00-2:00
Trestle Tour – Verdi Lumber Co. Railroad	Oct 7, 9:00 AM

President's Letter

Jerry Blackwill

This is a busy summer. Our Truckee River Railroad gave over 500 rides to kids, parents, and interested adults recently. Bob Bell and his crew of volunteers have been having a lot of fun giving train rides.

Dan Cobb's committee of model railroaders has been growing in size and preliminary plans for a "pop-up" layout are coming together. The layout is designed to be moved and assembled at various locations depending on scheduled events. The model railroad's era will be 1927, just after Southern Pacific acquired and converted the Lake Tahoe Railway and Transportation Company track to standard gauge.

I'm pleased to announce that Bill Ramsey is now on our board. Bill brings a wealth of experience building model railroads and he's a great help on the Truckee River Railroad.

Our annual meeting was held on Saturday, August 19th, in the Truckee River Regional Park. Board members for the next year were elected, and Bob Bell, Dan Cobb, and Tom Smith were recognized for their contributions. Participants enjoyed a train ride and a picnic lunch of hamburgers, fruit, and cake.

We always need more volunteers. The railroad museum has been closed on a number of weekends because we didn't have enough docents for staffing. 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

Dog Valley Standard Gauge

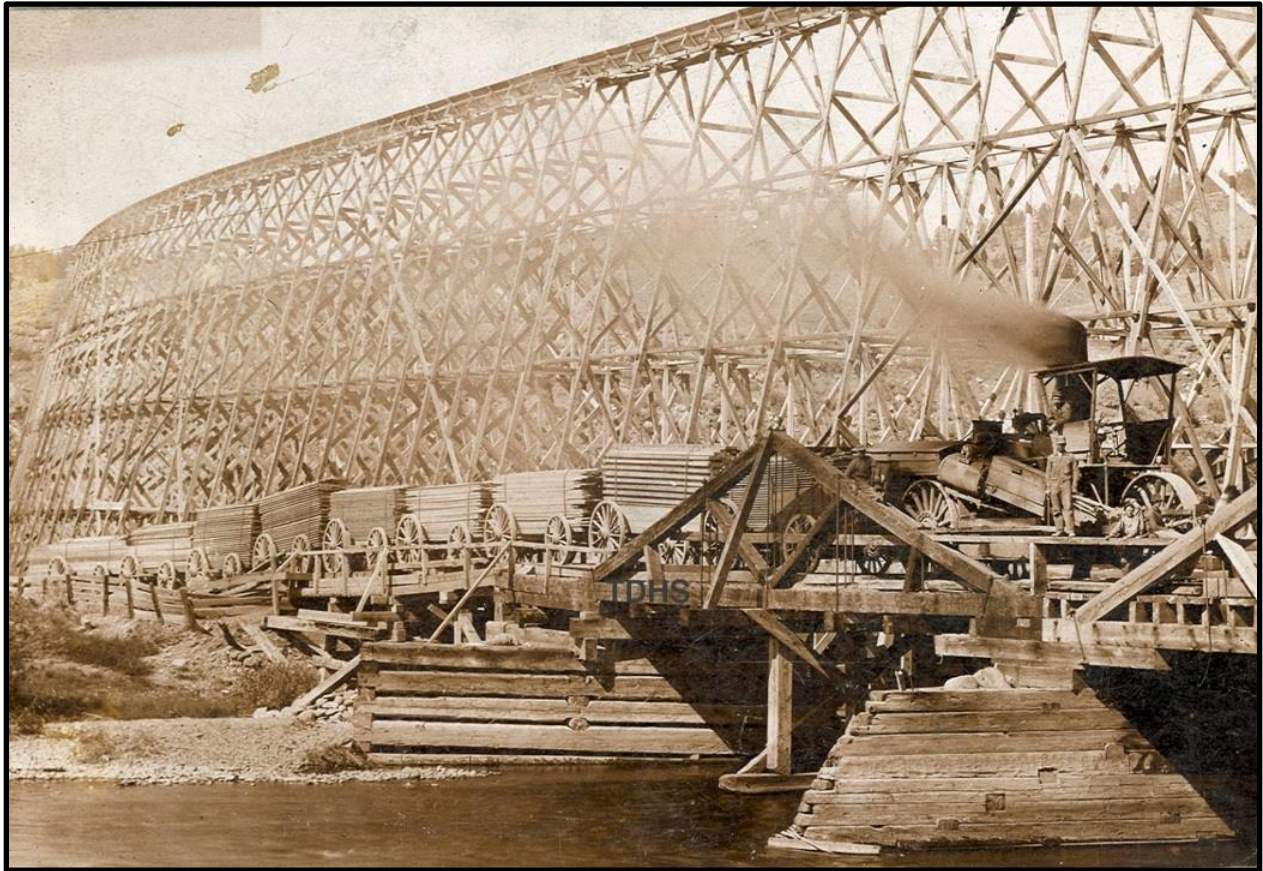
The Verdi Lumber Co. Railroad

Dan Cobb

Dog Valley is a quiet and unpopulated place today, but as with so many other remote places in our area, it was much busier in the late 1800s. The valley was used for summer grazing, there was a steady stream of traffic on the Henness Pass Road, and there was even a hotel at one point at the Dog Valley First Summit. Miners scoured the area for gold and silver, but no major deposits were found. Lumbering in the area began as early as 1860, with at least three sawmills operating in Dog Valley and sending their lumber on a long overland journey by horse-drawn wagon to Reno and then on to Virginia City to support the mines of the Comstock Lode. A town called Crystal Peak was organized on the west bank of the Truckee River in 1864 and boasted a brewery, a blacksmith shop, a druggist, five stores, four hotels, and several saloons.

Construction of the Transcontinental Railroad in 1867-68 increased the demand for timbers and building lumber, and the largest of the logging operations, the Crystal Peak Company, built a V-flume down Dog Creek and across the Truckee River on a 60' high trestle. The company changed hands at least twice during the

building of the flume, and for several years it was part of the Truckee Lumber Company, one of the largest producers in the area.



Crystal Peak flume crossing the Truckee River on a trestle, circa 1890. In the foreground is a Doan steam wagon, probably transporting lumber from the Lewis Mill on Smithneck Creek, 17 miles away.

In 1868, the Central Pacific Railroad, citing the high cost of bridging the river twice to serve the town, established its depot and yard on the east side of the river, effectively stranding Crystal Peak. Legend has it that Charles Crocker named the new town by pulling a slip of paper from a hat that his wife had stuffed with names of famous Italian composers. The name selected was “Verdi”, and so it has been ever since, although the Italian pronunciation was dropped in favor of the Nevadan “ver-dye”. The good citizens of Crystal Peak moved their houses and businesses across the river and rebuilt their town at Verdi.

The man who established Verdi as a major player in the lumber industry was Oliver Lonkey. Lonkey was a French Canadian who came to the Sierras in the 1860s as a laborer and built one of the first lumber mills and flumes in the Carson Range above Franktown in Washoe Valley. He operated two mills in Truckee in the 1880s, moved to Verdi in 1888 and later bought out the existing mill and box factory. Lonkey incorporated the operation as Verdi Lumber Company in 1900 and started construction of a standard gauge logging railroad up Dog Creek into Dog Valley.



Oliver Lonkey

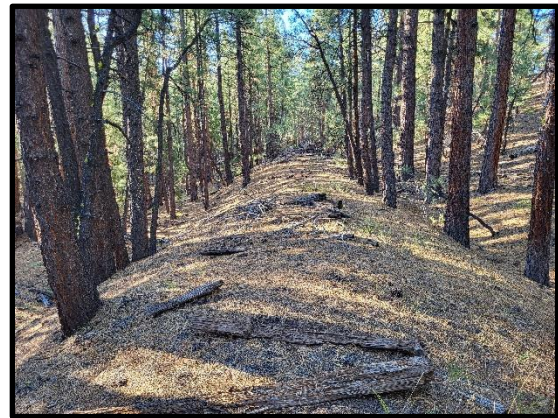
The Verdi Lumber Railroad was an engineering challenge due to the steepness of the terrain. The route up Dog Creek required one pair of switchbacks just to reach the valley, and another pair to reach the prime timber on a forested ridge north of the valley. A grade from the ridge down into Long Valley required five additional switchbacks. Logging camps were established with colorful and imaginative names such as “Lakeview”, “Port Arthur”, “Camp Pixley”, and “Lazy Station”. Shay geared locomotives were used to negotiate the steep grades and tight curves, making two trips daily from Verdi into the forest. By 1905, Lonkey’s loggers had cut all the timber in Dog Valley and had moved down the drainages to the north and east.

Oliver Lonkey died in 1906 at the age of seventy-four. The following spring, storms washed out the railroad bridge over the Truckee River, severing the railroad’s connection to the Verdi mill. Later that year, a fire burned much of the town, and a flash flood that summer washed out portions of the railroad and drowned the superintendent’s daughter at one of the logging camps north of Dog Valley.

In 1908, A. L. Revert purchased the struggling Verdi Lumber Company with profits from his retail lumber operation in Tonopah, and resumed expansion. By 1912, the company had cut all of the timber on its owned lands and purchased the first long-term timber contract from the Tahoe National Forest. By 1919, the railroad had crossed the Dog Valley Second Summit with yet another set of switchbacks and pushed into Sardine Valley. Later expansion took the logging operation and railroad as far west as Bear Valley and Lemon Canyon on the outskirts of Sierraville. In 1926, the constant threat of fire finally caught up with Verdi Lumber, burning the sawmill, storage yard, and roundhouse. A smaller sawmill was built on the site, but financial difficulties and exhaustion of the company’s timber reserves brought the operation to a final halt the following year. The rails were removed and the sawmill was dismantled.

Due to its remote location, many of the old logging grades in and around Dog Valley are virtually undisturbed and can easily be followed today. The railroad’s often-tight finances are evident in the lack of ballasting and in construction of several of the ravine crossings. Where other companies built elaborate trestles, Verdi Lumber appears to have filled the ravines with logs, run stringers and ties across the top, and called it good. The Railroad Society will be running a trestle tour into Dog Valley in early October; details and schedule updates are at <https://tdrrs.org/tours>.

Sources: David F. Myrick, “Railroads of Nevada and Eastern California”, Vol I, and U. S. Forest Service, “History of Tahoe National Forest: 1840-1940”, downloaded online.



Verdi Lumber Railroad Grade near Dog Valley



Remains of a Verdi Lumber “trestle” across a ravine near Dog Valley

Switch Stands on the Truckee River Railroad

Tom Smith

As you ride around our Truckee River Railroad (TRR) in the regional park, you'll notice a recent addition. Two historic switch stands with bright red targets have been installed, one near the station and one near the car barns where the riding cars are stored. While the switch stands are not connected to the switches on the riding railroad, they are mechanically functional.

Five volunteers, Tom Nixon, Tom's son-in-law Ed Baumbach, Tom's grandson Collin Baumbach, Greg Zirbel, and Tom Smith poured cement footings and installed the switch stands.

The switch stands provide a visual enhancement to the TRR, but also serve as a conversation starter to teach kids and visitors about how railroad switches work and how track status was communicated in the days before electronic signaling.



Pouring concrete footings: Tom Nixon (right) and Greg Zirbel.



Thanks to our volunteer crew: clockwise from top left: Tom Nixon, Ed Baumbach, Tom Smith, and Greg Zirbel

Model Railroad Update

Dan Cobb

Our "Truckee 1927" model railroad project is progressing. We decided early on that we would build it in phases, starting with a 10' x 23' modular layout that can be assembled in a few hours, and disassembled and stored in a compact space when not in use. Our goal is to set it up initially next spring in a building in the Truckee River Regional Park near our riding railroad.

The Phase I layout will feature the town of Truckee and the railyard as it appeared in 1927. Hobart Mills and Tahoe City will not yet be modeled, but Hobart Southern and Tahoe Branch trains will arrive in Truckee, take on passengers and freight, and return to their remote staging areas in the back of the layout.



Truckee's Granite Roundhouse Under Construction

So far, we've built and laid track for two of the central Truckee modules, and will soon be building several more. Bill Ramsey has made good progress on the granite roundhouse that will be a centerpiece of the layout. Jay Jacobs and David Cutting have completed design for the 1901 depot and the Southern Pacific hotel. Jay is laser-cutting parts for the two buildings at the Truckee Airport community makerspace, which, appropriately enough, is known as the "Truckee Roundhouse". We also plan to scratch-build a period model of the SP freight depot, which still stands today at 10115 Donner Pass Road, a couple of buildings west of the depot.

There are multiple ways for members to get involved with this project. 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. If you have unneeded HO scale trains and other model railroad equipment to donate, they might find a home on the layout, or could be sold to help fund the project. Our biggest hurdle is finding and funding a permanent location for the model; help in solving that challenge would be a game-changer. If you 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.

Fall Trestle Tours

Dan Cobb and Jay Jacobs have scheduled two trestle tours this fall.

The first one, on September 23rd, will follow the route of the 1901 Boca and Loyalton Railroad grade from its junction with the Central Pacific below the current-day Boca Dam to Loyalton in Sierra Valley. This will be primarily a driving tour, with short walks to explore old grade and a fallen trestle, followed by a visit to the Milton Gottardi Museum in Loyalton.

The second tour is a combination driving/hiking exploration of the Verdi Lumber Company railroad (1900-1927) in Dog Valley. This adventure requires a high-clearance 4WD or AWD vehicle and will involve about 3 miles of hiking on old railroad grades.



Boca & Loyalton log train, circa 1910

If you'd like to join, email us at tours@tdrrs.org to reserve a place. Bring a lunch, layered clothing, hiking shoes, and a spirit of adventure. More information is at <https://www.tdrrs.org/tours>

Volunteer Opportunities

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 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 the 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>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>Bill Ramsey</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>
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The Truckee Donner Railroad Society is a 501(c)(3) non-profit, tax-exempt organization. EIN 91-1917864.