

The South Carolina Railroad Museum Newsletter
Information and Happenings on the Rockton, Rion & Western Railroad
Volume 40 Number 2 Spring 2012

FULL STEAM AHEAD!



Steam Locomotive No. 126 smokes it up pulling three coaches on an October excursion bound for Rockton. *Photo by James Bogle.*

From the Editor:

We hope all of you had a great start to the New Year and are looking forward to the 2012 operating season. 2012 started on a high note with a sold-out Valentine Dinner Train and two well patronized Easter Bunny Eggspress days. Rodger Stroup has found rare pictures of locomotive No. 712 on the R&R and information on the Radar Train Operations in the 1960s. The Lake Rion car was painted and will soon be receiving a new air conditioning system for year-round operation.

HOT NEWS:

The first annual *Those Who Have Served* event will be held on May 26th with free train rides for members of our Armed Forces and their families at 10 AM and 1:30 PM. Columbia-based law firm Nexsen Pruet, LLC, is sponsoring the event.

WANT TO BUY SOME EQUIPMENT?

The museum will be auctioning off surplus equipment on the Rail Swap website to raise funding for current projects. Items include a Hi Rail, Switch Master car mover, and several Cummins Diesel engines. Visit www.railswap.org for more information.

MEMBERSHIP:

If you are receiving this newsletter and are not a member, we encourage you to join up: Family Membership is \$35; Single is \$25; and Senior is \$18. Please see our website or pick up an application at the Ticket Office or just send a check to our PO Box with your contact information. Remember, **members ride free** on all regular trains May-September on a space available basis.

We look forward to your contributions for the next newsletter. Please send your articles and pictures to libreez@carolina.rr.com, or SCRM, PO Box 7246, Columbia, SC 29202.

Vince LiBrizzi, Editor <>



The Bunny entertains passengers on the Eggspress.

Easter Bunny Eggspress is a Big Success

By Vince LiBrizzi

On March 31st and April 7th, the annual Easter Bunny Eggspress excursions ran on the Rockton, Rion, & Western. These eight trips were very well patronized, with 590 passengers on the first Saturday and 787 on the second. This is more than 400 passengers than last year, and was likely due to the clement weather and additional advertising for the trains. The cooler spring temperatures allowed the Lake Rion dining car to be utilized on all trips, boosting capacity and offering passengers First Class service.

The *Whistle Tix* on-line ticket ordering system was very helpful for train operation, allowing crews staff an approximate count for each trip and minimizing delays. Kudos to our train crew and especially to our hard working staff in the ticket office for handling all the ticket sales and making the trips run so smoothly and efficiently! <>



The Lake Rion is resplendent in its new coat of paint.

Lake Rion Car Focus of Repairs

By Rodger Stroup

Some of you may notice fresh paint on the Lake Rion First Class car the next time you visit the museum. This is due to the efforts of Gene Allen and Norm Brenner, who worked long hours to give the Lake Rion a badly needed coat of dark green paint. The quality of the paint job was evident when the Lake

Rion was coupled to the rest of the passenger consist during the Easter Bunny Eggspress.

Currently, we are in the process of replacing the car's air conditioning and heating system, which has been out of service since last year. With the success of February's sold-out Valentine Dinner Train, the museum is determined to have an air conditioned and heated first class car available for charters, dinner trains and regular excursions as soon as possible. The additional operating revenue from using the Lake Rion on more excursions and special trains will be very helpful to the museum's operating budget. This will offer our passengers a higher level of service and comfort that there clearly is a strong demand for. <>

No. 712 Hard at Work and Taking a Drink *By Rodger Stroup and Vince LiBrizzi*

We have found many photos of the Rockton & Rion and purchased over 1,000 images from Ben Roberts years ago. Despite all of the images there are only a few photos of steam locomotive No. 712 in operation. This is partly because she was only used when steam locomotives No. 19 and No. 31 were out of service. The R&R felt No. 712 was too heavy for the track. This 1903 Baldwin 2-8-0 Consolidation, originally built for the Atlantic Coast Line Railroad, was not in good shape when purchased by the R&R. Note evidence of this in the missing foot boards on the front of No. 712's pilot and rear of her tender and the leaky cylinder in the pictures. Even more unique is to find a photo of one of the locomotives taking on water at the still extant water tank just east of the Rion yard. So a photo of No. 712 at the water tank is indeed rare. To our knowledge, there is only one other picture of the locomotive and the

water tank in John Gilbert's book on South Carolina railroad stations, but it is hard to see.

The water tank is an important remnant of the Rockton & Rion, and its basic design shows the R&R way of using a simple tank for a basic function. Unfortunately, when the Rion Quarry was closed and the railroad stopped operating many of the buildings at Rion and Anderson were torn down while others deteriorated over time. The austere tank was spared this dismantling, but is showing signs of deterioration. While our water tank does not look as appealing as the one on the *Petticoat Junction* TV series, and it is an important artifact that we need to preserve. Hopefully, someday it will again be used for its intended purpose: to quench the thirst of hard working steam locomotives. <>



No. 712 taking on water at the tank in Rion.



No. 712 with loaded hopper cars near Rockton.

Radar Train Mystery Solved

By Rodger Stroup

For many years as our trains have passed the summit at milepost 2.2 our narrators have mentioned that in the field on the South side of the tracks during the Cold War there was a siding with a series of cars that belonged to the Strategic Air Command. Inquiries to the U. S. Air Force Archives and Museum failed to illicit any additional information. All we knew was that they had something to do with radar and radios. Then, one Saturday in late August museum member Bill Eccles was onboard and heard the limited facts we provided. After returning to Rockton, Bill talked with me and explained not only did he know what the train was but he had pictures taken on December 30, 1966.

The Radar Bomb Scoring train was used by the United States Air Force to track simulated bomb runs by B-52 and B-58 bombers. The train was located adjacent to the Rockton & Rion tracks on a siding at the summit of the railroad from October 1966

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until March 1967, according to an article I found in The News and Herald, October 6, 1966. Follow this link on YouTube:

RBS Express 1:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Pr6JAKt1jml&feature=related>

RBS Express 2:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qZtSdj-4AIM>



R&R freight passes RBS equipment on December 30, 1966.

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