

The Rockton-Rion Flyer

News and Information from the South Carolina Railroad Museum
Volume 44 Number 2 Fall/Winter 2016

2016 BREAKS RIDERSHIP RECORDS!



Passengers gather to see the G Scale Thomas the Tank Engine train operate during the Pumpkin Patch Event.

FLYER NEWS FLASH:

Over 10,000 passengers were carried in 2016, the most in 9 years! All but one Santa Claus Express Trains were completely **SOLD OUT**. The Twilight Trains sold out in less than 6 hours! Pumpkin Patch Trains were also very well patronized this year. Henry visited Japan and enjoyed riding the JR system and the Shinkansen high speed train.

UPCOMING EVENTS: Our annual Valentine Dinner Trains will operate on February 10th and 11th. Contact Kelvin or Rodger to help. These trains always sell out and your assistance is appreciated!

HOT TOPIC: Friday work sessions are being held for track work and other maintenance items. Contact Charles Weber for details.

ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP MEETING: The 2017 Annual Membership Meeting is Saturday, January 21th at 10 A.M. in the Stribling Rion office building. All members are encouraged to attend.

NEWSLETTER SUBMISSIONS:

Please send articles and pictures to:
SCRM, P.O. Box 7246, Columbia, SC 29202
email: libreez@carolina.rr.com.
Vince LiBrizzi, Editor

Maintenance Update

By Charles Weber and Vince LiBrizzi

The maintenance crew has worked diligently on several projects this past year. These include finishing the storage siding in Rion, repairing and maintaining the track equipment and locomotives and rolling stock, and rebuilding the South Main in Rion. Currently, we are working on site improvements for the property in Rion, clearing brush and debris around the Stribling building, near the Brooks building and along the North Main. We are also upgrading a portion of the right-of-way near Ruff to keep our operations safe and reliable. With four more passenger cars needing repairs and rebuilding, there will be more emphasis on maintenance and repair of our equipment.

If you're not on the email list that is sent out weekly recapping our progress and describing our future sessions, please contact Charles to be added. Many people have contributed countless hours to these tasks. Without their efforts, the RR&W could not function. Thanks to all the hard-working members for their continuing efforts to improve the museum throughout 2016. Contact Charles Weber at cwebersr@bellsouth.net or (803) 317-7187 for more information, to get placed on the email list or to join our work sessions.

Financial Report

By Henry Nechemias

2016 was a solid year with higher revenues despite increased expenses. Repairs to the right-of-way, site improvements, the acquisition of three bi-level passenger cars and one stainless steel Budd car have contributed to higher costs. However, the revenue from charter trips, events such as Pumpkin Patch and Santa Claus Express has kept the Museum financially secure. For future improvements, we have a line of credit at our bank. We must spend to grow in 2017!



Santa and Mrs. Claus pose with passengers at Rockton.

Santa Trains Bring over 3,200 Riders

By Vince LiBrizzi

The Rockton Rion & Western hosted several sold out Santa Claus Express trains for three Saturdays in December. The daytime Santa Express train carried over 320 passengers and consisted of the *Lake Rion* Diner First Class car, two newly-acquired bi-level passenger cars, and two Canadian passenger cars. SW8 No. 2015 hauled the 400-ton train westbound, while RS4-TC-1A No. 1276 did the honors eastbound and was decorated with white lights for the event. In total, over 3,200 passengers were carried during the event. The three Twilight Santa trains sold out in less than 6 hours on the WhistleTix website! That's the best turnout for our Santa Trains in many years! On all three days, passengers were rewarded with Carolina blue skies and dry weather while meeting and greeting Santa Claus and Mrs. Claus on board.

Twilight Santa Trains featured passengers riding in the *Lake Rion* and one of the new bi-level cars decorated for the holidays. All aboard met Santa and Mrs. Claus, enjoyed a reading of a Christmas story, and dined on hot cocoa and cookies onboard. With a limited capacity of 80 passengers per trip, plans are already being made for more Twilight Trains and increased capacity due to the amazing demand in 2017.



Interior of newly-acquired Bi-level coach shows 2-level seating.

New Passenger Cars Expand Capacity

By Kelvin Woods

The museum now has four modern coaches to increase capacity and improve the comfort and convenience for our passengers. These cars may ultimately replace the aging Canadian cars which have served the railroad well for many years. The cars arrived via Norfolk Southern recently and two of the former Army Bi-level cars have already been pressed into service to meet the demand of the Pumpkin Patch trains and Santa Claus Express trains due to their high capacity and light weight.

These cars are equipped for 480V HEP (Head End Power) and will require a power source to provide lighting, HVAC, PA system, and door operation. This is being researched and will be part of the needed improvements in 2017 for the railroad. The interiors of these cars are in very good shape and the seats are comfortable. The cars are lightweight compared to our other cars and ride very smoothly on the railroad.

The fourth car, an experimental Budd stainless steel car that recently saw service for the FRA as an inspection car, is in the process of being rebuilt into a lounge car to supplement the *Lake Rion* and add capacity to our special event trains. Look for these cars to be on many trains in 2017.



The Nozomi Shinkansen (Bullet Train) arrives on time.

Riding the Rails in Japan

By Henry Nechemias

I recently spent 17 days in Japan, and rode many different trains. Everyone rides trains, and they are everywhere! 45 of the 50 busiest stations are in Japan, mostly in the Tokyo area, since almost 30% of the population (35 out of 127 million) lives here. Surprisingly, most of the track is 3'6" narrow gauge. The exceptions are the Shinkansen (Bullet Train) and some of the tram systems, which are standard gauge like in the U.S. (4' 8 1/2").

We purchased a JR (Japan Rails) rail pass to ride on most of the JR system. JR was privatized into six separate companies that all work together as JR rail. The highlight for me was a single car, diesel powered train that ran through small towns and villages. This one hour trip, with me at the front window, was a trip set up by my wife on my birthday!

Since so many people ride (7 billion in 2015), private companies can make a profit and few lines are subsidized. Very little freight moves by rail which is the opposite of the U.S. And everyone expects passenger trains to run on time, which they do. The Shinkansen has an 8-minute turnaround. Passengers detrain, the cleaners board and emerge bowing to the new passengers who have three minutes to board. The doors close and the train glides silently out of the station. Talk about efficiency!

**South Carolina Railroad Museum
PO Box 7246
Columbia, SC 29202-7246**

Return Service Requested



RS4-TC-1A No. 1276 is lit up for the Santa Claus Express Trains

2016 Record Year for Ridership

By Vince LiBrizzi

The RR&W carried over 10,200 passengers in 2016, more than any year since 2008, and a big improvement over the 8,900 passengers carried in 2015. All events were well patronized, with many trains completely sold out. We had unprecedented demand in the Santa Trains and especially the Twilight Santa Trains, which sold out so fast many people were unable to purchase tickets! Part of this may be to our increased exposure on Facebook, where over 6,500 people have “liked” our page, and regular advertising of our events. We have plans to run more event trains and increase our capacity for 2017. Here’s to carrying over 11,000 passengers next year!