



Coast Mail

News from the San Luis Obispo
Railroad Museum

Issue Number 77 – Fall 2021 San Luis Obispo, California www.slorm.com

Open Saturdays from 10:00 to 4:00, and other times for groups by arrangement. 1940 Santa Barbara Avenue



Model railroad progress

by Andrew Merriam, Model Railroad Superintendent

The summer afternoon sun lights Southern Pacific's 1943 Spanish Revival depot in San Luis Obispo. It is 1953, and the Daylight passenger train has arrived on its way to Santa Barbara and Los Angeles. One of the most famous passenger trains in the west, it is also a main attraction at the Central Coast Model Railroad (CCMR). We aim to replicate the railroads serving California's Central Coast and demonstrate in miniature the effects they had on our communities nearly 70 years ago.

We've built track indoors

Did you think first of models? No, this is full size. The new indoor track will bring together our handcar and velocipede, previously on display, and the motor car or "speeder" that had been stored offsite. Come see this historical progression of vehicles used by telegraph, signal, and track maintainers. Learn about track tools and components, from ties to bolts.



Following eight years of effort in the 1500 sq. ft. south end of the 1894 SP Freight House, the public can more fully appreciate the results. The HO scale (1/87th size) layout includes parts of the three-foot gauge Pacific Coast Railway, and the standard-gauge Southern Pacific RR and the Santa Maria Valley RR. The layout is designed to appeal to five groups: public seeking to understand how local railroads shaped our history; preteens who want to see long, colorful, and fast trains moving; modelers who prefer doing museum-quality work, extending their personal skills; docents who explain the history and modeling effort and maintain the layout; and

train operators who run the trains in a prototypical fashion with timetables and train orders, signals, and switching.

The 20 scenes depicting local history are based, where possible, on actual plans and photographs. Eventually, we will have QR pads or small screens explaining specific scenes. The layout can be divided into four operating divisions, which allows running five to six trains simultaneously. The colorful, fast, and interactive component is supported by the separate O-gauge train table, sponsored by The Bank of the Sierra, in the main exhibit space.

Continues on page 5 (online)

Central Coast Railroad Festival returns

Don't miss our October 2 event, with new exhibits, presentations, food, and entertainment. We've been busy the last 18 months even though we were closed.

Our Mission

Promote California Central Coast railroad heritage through community participation, education, and historic preservation.

Contact

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The museum is a 501(c)(3) non-profit, educational organization, staffed entirely by volunteers.

DOCUMENTS AVAILABLE

Anyone may access the Museum's *Bylaws, Collections Policy, Development & Operations Plan, Code of Conduct*, and other documents at slorrm.com. Or request a paper copy via the contact information above.

Museum Store

To raise funds, the Museum offers several items for sale on-site and online: T-shirts, hats, belt buckles, mugs, enameled pins, embroidered patches, books, and engineer hats.

At www.slorrm.com click on Company Store.

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TIMETABLE

Board of Directors meetings are scheduled for September 14, October 12, and November 9, at 6 p.m.

Model railroading presentations resume September 25 (electronics), and the fourth Saturday of the month thereafter.

Parlor Car Chats anytime
slorrm.com/parlor-car-chats.html



Termites eating our boxcar!

So we hired Key Pest Control to fumigate in June (below), using funds donated by Bill Walther.



You can't see them, but they're there

They are ultraviolet light sanitizers and high-performance filters in the Freighthouse heating, cooling, and ventilation ducts (above). With a grant from the Ludwick Foundation and work by Andrew Merriam and Gary See, they were installed in the spring. They will help prevent airborne germs and dust from circulating, a boon to those with allergies and those who clean our display cases and artifacts. Also, new seals for the rolling doors will help reduce the burden on the HVAC system.

Become a member

Membership provides opportunities for anyone interested in today's railroads, railroad history, train travel, or model railroading.

Individual members pay \$36 per year, a family \$60, and a sustaining member \$100. Junior memberships (ages 12-18) for the model railroaders are available (contact our Model Railroad Superintendent for details).

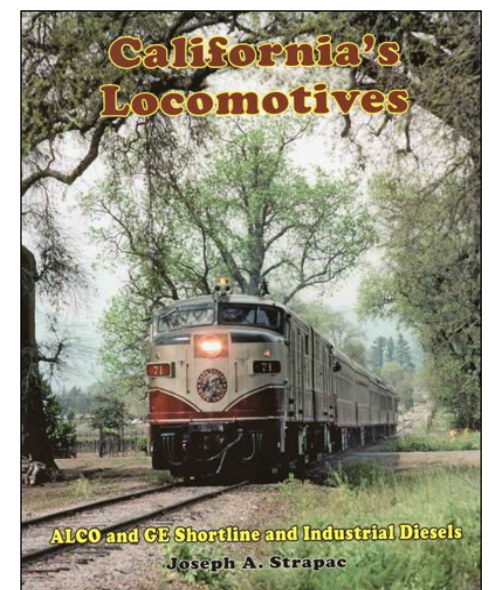
Application forms can be downloaded from the Museum's website and mailed with payment, or you can join online by clicking [Membership](#) and using PayPal. (Mailing and web addresses are in left-hand column.)

Membership benefits include free admission to the Museum.



Book bargains available

When you visit the Museum, look at this fine book (below) on Alco and GE shortline and industrial locomotives by Joseph Strapac. It and several other books, all new, are available at very affordable prices.



More Coast Mail online

Feedlot railroad revisited; virtual travel; time travel; celebrating a new depot; guest writers; solar train?

A heroic quest

The Museum has begun restoring two Pacific Motor Trucking highway trailers from the first generation of intermodal freight service [*Coast Mail* Spring 2019 and Winter 2020]. What we needed was an appropriate flat car to display them on, as shown by the photo simulation at right.

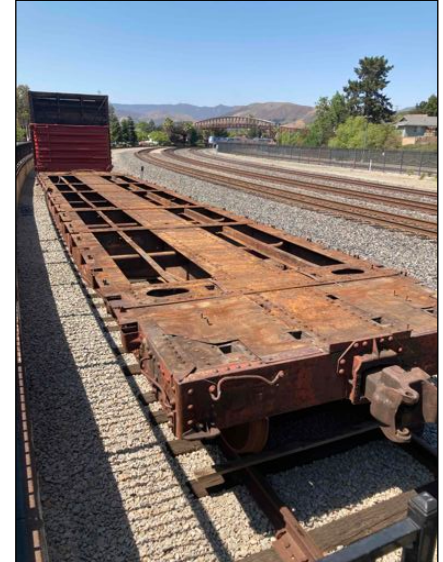
There were tales of such a car, recumbent in the mists and boggy ground, in the clutches of a mass of brambles, in California's distant North Coast. Time to sally forth, in the company of great beasts, and retrieve yon car.



Jack Hutchinson image



Knight-Curator LaRose chopped away the brambles.



Gaping mouths meant no harm, only help to arise.

A long-necked lifter swung the car from a highway trailer onto railroad wheel assemblies set up before at the Museum.

The sturdy frame needs a new plank deck. Photos by Gary See



Besides Brad LaRose, volunteers Howard Amborn and Gary See took part in July's five-day trip. At this end, they were joined by Dan Manion, Ted VanKlaveren, and Bob Wilson. BNG Trucking was the hauler, with Bragg Crane Company doing the lifting. The acquisition was possible thanks to the cooperation of Peggy Satterlee of the Fort Seward Ranch and many generous donors.

Longest squeegee handle?

Early on a foggy July morning, four recent or pending Cal Poly engineering graduates cleaned the Museum's solar panels using your editor's "world's farthest-reaching squeegee." Russell Caletena, Yash Desai, Fernando Estevez, and Paul Romano proposed tracking power production before and after. The team would use the data to encourage others with such systems to boost efficiency at their locations. Results from our region would be more meaningful than national averages, which include areas having rain throughout the year.



Degrees in electrical, mechanical, or computer engineering, as held by these young men, are not needed to help keep our panels clean.

If you like to get up early and play with soapy water, have we got a job for you! Seriously, it goes faster with two people.



San Luis Obispo Railroad Museum's lounge car La Cuesta was built in the Roaring Twenties. The Hearst publishing empire was at its peak, Art Nouveau design was ascendant, and "flappers" were challenging the norms of style and behavior. Captains of industry often had their own rail cars of similar design. The nonprofit historical museum is restoring La Cuesta to its former glory.



La Cuesta is open for viewing Saturdays from 10 am to 4 pm, and as a venue for meetings and parties by arrangement. For details contact media@slorrm.com.

Model railroad progress

(continued from page 1)

About one-fourth of the modelers excel at constructing, weathering, and setting up structures and scenes. We also have monthly operating sessions for CCMR members. We aim to recreate the conditions of a railroad in the 1950s, including scheduled Coast Route passenger trains and switching of freight to local industries.

The most asked question is "When will you be done?" We expect to complete the track and backdrops by the end of 2021. The basic scenery, plus wiring and operation of the railroad yard switches, should be finished by the end of 2022. Structures such as the Paso Robles Almond Exchange, the Templeton Feed & Grain, and the San Luis Obispo roundhouse will take longer. Eventually, we plan to have a Centralized Traffic Control (CTC) signaling dispatch panel, connected to a telephone at each depot or yard, as railroads did in the early 1950s.

Development and operation of CCMR are possible with the effort and dues of members, donations from the community, and scene sponsorship where individuals and firms have a specific scene named for them in recognition of a significant donation.

CCMR has about 20 members, and always welcomes new ones.

For information on membership, hours of activity, and operation contact Andrew at agmerriam@charter.net

All CCMR photos are by Andrew Merriam

Below, young visitors admire details of the Avila scene.



About 2010, looking toward the end of the Freight House that would become the model railroad.



Model of the Freight House as it looked in the early 1950s.



Above, a cab-forward locomotive arrives at Surf station.

Below, a Pacific Coast Railway train of the 1930s crosses the bridge over San Luis Obispo Creek in Avila. .



Betteravia feedlot railroad revisited

The Fall 2017 *Coast Mail* described the 42-inch-gauge rail system that distributed feed and carried prospective buyers through a livestock feedlot in Betteravia. Thanks to an article in *The Hotbox*, the newsletter of the Society for Preservation of Carter Railroad Resources (SPCRR), we can share more details and images of that quirky operation.

Don Marenzi, current SPCRR General Manager and Curator, visited the operation in 1972. (Even though he and your editor were Cal Poly students at the same time, our paths never crossed.) He was able to take photos and talk with workers, and later interviewed the owner, H. Stanley Brown.

It's a small world in several ways. The locomotives used at Betteravia were the same Plymouth brand as our Museum's No. 2038 (unrelated to automobiles of the same name). But the Betteravia locos were even smaller, resembling equipment that the same company made for the close clearances of mine galleries.

Don learned that some of the rail used at Betteravia came from the narrow-gauge Pacific Coast Railway, the first railroad on the Central Coast, and some from "a coal mine near San Miguel." That could only have been the one served by Stone Canyon Railroad (Coal Fields Railway) covered in our Winter 2014-15 *Coast Mail*.

And, as with our Museum's display track, track at the SPCRR-operated Railroad Museum at Ardenwood Historic Farm (Fremont, California) is built from salvaged rail. The Ardenwood operation is on land managed by the East Bay Regional Park District. In both cases volunteers pried up and hauled the rails, we from a standard-gauge branch to Camp San Luis Obispo, and they from the Betteravia Feedlot Railroad.

Don's full article and more information are available on the SPCRR website: www.spcrr.org.

Right above, a unit to pull the feed trailer coupled to one that powered the mechanized unloading device. Right, the feed loader. Below, a wye track among the cattle pens. Fibrous material left from sugar beet processing was distributed to the troughs running along the pens.

Three photos by Don Marenzi.



More railroad inspiration

The Summer *Coast Mail* featured writing by San Luis Obispo High School students, prompted by two photographs. This page and the next have more work by sophomores, juniors, and seniors in Jane Hawley's creative writing classes from the 2020-21 school year.

Untitled

Early dawn
 A yellow train station
 With a rusty red roof
 Lonely tree in the distance
 Trains sit outside the station
 Waiting to be filled
 With people or supplies
 Tracks that lead to new beginnings
 With fresh starts and happy faces
 So much potential just waiting for a train ticket

by Sadie LaChapelle

Untitled

A chill ran through me as Penny and I reached the bridge. The moonlight reflected off of her soft curls, leading me to an illuminated face. Her soft eyes looked upward. The sky lingered in the dawn, not quite night, but day had long passed. The only sound was the gravel below our feet. The bridge itself was large and rusted. Strong beams connecting to a bigger body. It reminded me of the dragons I used to read about in storybooks as a child. Their big bodies on top of bigger piles of gold and jewels, their rust colored scales. Smoke pouring out of their noses while they lazily drift off into sleep. A rustling brought me back to the world around me. The trees below moved in a sad kind of limp way with each push of the wind. Penny was a little bit ahead of me now. I could still make out her bright sneakers in the ever-growing darkness.

by Carmen Silver

A full moon through Stenner Canyon trestle's tower.



A train at San Luis Obispo sets the signal by La Cuesta to green, while mist turns all beyond to gray.

The Tracks of a Mind

“Have you your ticket?”
 There is something that pains me this hot minute:
 I can't think of naught but the fleeting opportunities,
 Nor can I contemplate but self-serving scrutinies.

“Have you your ticket?”
 It seems like there is nothing more wicked:
 Than the lacking of bliss in the blissful,
 Can there be peace that is more than brittle?

“Have you your ticket?”
 I hope I can finally pay a visit,
 Through the transit that ties together
 That which will weather any weather.

“Have you your ticket?”
 Looking out through the window at the dank thicket.
 Place, Place, Place
 Race, Fate, Face

“I shan't repeat myself!”
 Nor should I bid too soon a farewell!
 I have my Place
 I will find my Fate
 I wear my Face.
 That which belongs to any Race.

“Sir, I might have you forced to advance.”
 No one shall ever dare to announce!
 For I have my ticket to this globe
 We live on the cape of good hope!

“Have you your ticket?”
 “I do have my mournful ticket!”
 Thus all the passengers through hushed eyes stare.
 Yet all of a sudden I can't find it within myself to care.
 That is how life does compare:
 Through dull ears and depressed minds.

by Ahmed Qandhawi

Untitled

The bouncing train car shook my cup of stale coffee, the bitter taste still in my mouth, as we pulled into the San Luis train station. It was 9 a.m. and the fog coming up from the hills had covered the town in a humid blanket creating a mesmerizing scene. I attempted to keep my eyes from closing, which took much effort. I had made it this long without rest and my stop wasn't too far from here. I was determined to take in each passing town. My journal was open on the second page, the first filled with observations I had made since I boarded the train.

Each hour or so, over the intercom would come an inaudible message from the conductor. In all my travels, I've never fully understood what they were saying but it provided a certain comfort for me. It had been a solid five minutes before the passengers who'd reached their destination started to leave. The woman in the seat next to me waved gently as she departed and I smiled back. Though we didn't speak but once, we just seemed to understand each other.

I knew it would be a while before we started moving again, so I took my time when observing the station. The cars in the parking lot were filled with people excited to see their loved ones again. A little girl grasping at her stuffed bear sat at a bench next to the museum. Her smile widened drastically seeing a man I safely assumed was her father. She jumped up off the bench into his arms, dropping her bear on the cement below.

At each stop were people just like this young girl, waiting excitedly for a loved one to return home to them.

by Stella McSween

Untitled

"Let's go!" shouted Rudy. He trudged up the hill, backpack weighing on his shoulders.

"My shoes keep slipping." Dale was practically crawling up the hill.

"Three more weeks till freedom."

"Three more weeks," Dale repeated. They reached the railroad tower. The sun had set, the last lights of day fading quickly. They climbed the tower slowly, the metal cold against their fingers.

Rudy reached a level edge of the tower twenty feet off the ground and carefully turned around to face the open sky. Dale took a seat next to him as Rudy took off his backpack and unzipped the main pocket.

"Silver Bullet for you," Rudy said as he passed Dale a warm beer. "And Silver Bullet for me," he grinned.

"Cheers," Dale said, clinking his can against Rudy's.

The boys sat in silence as the crickets sang. Dale took a deep breath. "Three more weeks."

"Three more weeks," Rudy repeated. He took a long breath before sipping his beer and then tipping it back. He crushed the can against the railroad tower and tossed it into the night air. After a few seconds he heard a clink and assumed the can had landed on the pile the boys had started months ago.

"You realize we've been friends for fifteen years?" Dale asked.

"Yeah. Damn . . . you're right," Rudy said. He went for another beer. "It's been a good run. Weird it's almost over."

"I'm ready to graduate . . . except I'm not. Hey Dale?"

"Yeah?"

"I-- I hope you know," he paused.

"I know, man," Dale said and reached out to grip Rudy's shoulder. "Hey, we still got three weeks," he said, gesturing with his beer can to the imaginary clock they both felt ticking, counting down the seconds until their lives changed course.

by Sophia Silacci

Untitled

The moon was bright overhead as I looked up through the underside of the bridge. The night was cool, and I wrapped my blanket around my shoulders tighter. These are the moments that I'm glad that I live alone, homeless. Who else gets to experience such peaceful moments not disturbed by anyone or anything. The sky is a deep navy blue getting darker by the minute.

My stomach rumbled, ruining the peaceful moment, and brought me back to reality. I dug through my pack for the last of my food. I found an apple and granola bar. I wolfed them down, not bothering to save some for later. Afterwards I counted my remaining money guiltily. I have barely enough to last me for the next few days. Panic welled up within me... I would have to find some work soon. *That's for me to worry about tomorrow, I tell myself. Tonight, just enjoy the sky and the peace. Relax, Rachel and enjoy this moment.*

I did. I put my money away carefully and lay down on the grass. I placed my bag containing my change of clothes under my head as a pillow. I snuggled under my blanket again and watched the sky turn black and the stars get bright. Before I knew it I was fast asleep.

by Marisa Lea

Cloudy, with a chance of vortices

The train had just pulled in from the north station and everybody was getting off when all of a sudden a vortex opened above and everybody got sucked into it and through to the other side. Through the portal there was a desert stretch and then all of the people suddenly saw a dinosaur. Had they gone back in time?

by Zoe Matteson (*your editor's 11-year old granddaughter; editor's title*)

Historical research like a well oiled machine

A framed print of the photo at right has been propped on the work surface in the Museum's archive room for a couple years. The photo paper and the cardboard backing contained no clues on the date or the special occasion that drew such a crowd to the San Luis Obispo depot, or the photographer.

This Spring curator Brad LaRose, usually focused on our full size equipment, was walking through the model railroad exhibit and saw open in a work location a December 1975 edition of the Southern Pacific Historical and Technical Society publication *Trainline*. And in the corner of one page was a small, grainy version of this image, which had been reproduced from the October 1943 Southern Pacific employee magazine, the *Bulletin*.

So now, thanks to a chance encounter with an issue of the *Trainline*, we know when, who, and why:

On September 5, 1943, photographer Chuck Rommel was upstairs in the 1894 depot. That's the back of the station's signboard at the bottom. He caught the crowd that had gathered for dedication of the new depot, significant because most construction materials had been going into barracks, factories, and training facilities as part of the war effort. Proximity of Camp San Luis Obispo must have helped to justify this building. The camp commanding officer was a featured guest, along with several railroad officials from the San Francisco headquarters. The event was timed to coincide with arrival of the *Daylight* passenger trains. On this day south-bound train No. 98 had a helper ahead of the streamlined road engine. It appears to be No. 3689, a 2-10-2.



SLORRM Archives No. P2540.9

Knee-length skirts, hats, flags, loudspeakers on the roof of an Army truck. The resolution of this image does not reveal the words at the top of the make-shift sign behind the speaker's platform. They are "The Friendly..." as in "...Southern Pacific." Apparent streaks in the sky are wrinkles, not lightning.



Gary See photo

Solar powered train?

No. Union Pacific's "Mobile Laboratory" car No. 210 paused in San Luis Obispo on June 19. The solar panels supply on-board equipment, not propulsion. Sunlight is not intense enough to directly power more than a light, demonstration trolley car. Acres of solar panels feeding overhead contact wires can power trains. And using solar-generated electricity to separate hydrogen from water can indirectly power trains that use hydrogen fuel cells, which in turn convert the chemical energy to electricity.

According to the website UtahRails.Net, Pullman Company built No. 210 in 1930 as sleeping car *Balsam Fir*. UP converted it to a dynamometer car in 1962, and to its present configuration with solar panels in 2013. Its size and weight nearly match the Museum's *La Cuesta*.



Above, the train operator's view on the way to Nice, from a YouTube video by Lorirocks777. Below, an image from RailfanDan's aerial drone video following a freight train through the Palouse River Canyon in eastern Washington state. Virtual travel is safe, and free with some ads.



Travel in time

The note cropped from the lower right corner of the photo at right identified the two boys looking out the cab window as Paul and Peter, sitting in the cab of a Southern Pacific steam locomotive in Los Angeles' Taylor Yard in the mid-1950s. When the print came to the Museum, we learned further that the family name was Slavik, and that Peter Slavik, the boy on the right, became an SP brakeman and conductor.

That in itself is not remarkable. Many little boys in the 1950s who liked trains went on to work for railroads. That could almost be expected if they had older relatives working for a railroad.

But Mr. Slavik didn't go to work for just any railroad. It was the Southern Pacific. He became a brakeman and then a conductor.

And it wasn't just any part of the Southern Pacific. It was the Lompoc Branch, which still operates through its namesake city on the way to a diatomaceous earth mine. And as brakeman and conductor, he rode the caboose, keeping track of freight car origins and destinations, and watching for problems en route. And the caboose he rode, on its last trip, was No. 1886, now at home on the Museum's display track.

Travel the world

Several issues ago your editor encouraged *Coast Mail* readers to share on these pages accounts and photos of their trips that involved train riding or train watching. No material has been offered. But most of us enjoy and learn from seeing places we've never been or are not likely to visit.

Health issues (including the pandemic), financial limits, work demands, and family-member care all can prevent travel. Your editor has found virtual travel a great resource, giving access to places, times, and points of view that otherwise would be impossible. Cab-view videos on YouTube are a personal favorite.

The image at left is a screen capture from a post by Lorirocks777, of a line in southern France. It shows the viaduct ahead about to be crossed, with an inset still photo of the graceful arched bridge. Fans of landscapes, cityscapes, civil works such as track arrangements, bridges, tunnels, and signals, will be intrigued. These are not travelogues. You will not stop to tour eateries or museums.

Some personal favorites are videos by RailCowGirl (Norway), Lorirocks777 (Switzerland), Dulevoz (countries of the former Yugoslavia), and Railway Emotions (Western Europe). Other providers have covered Australia, Japan, South Africa, Greece, and Corsica. The programs are recorded in all seasons, times of day, and kinds of weather.

While not showing cab views, the programs by RailfanDan are outstanding. They feature expertly done aerial drone footage, mostly in the Pacific Northwest.



SLORRM Archives No. P8220.12