

Turntable Times

Volume XXX

Number 8

August 1998

From J to... A to...



Shay!



Top: Bill Mason, Bottom: Jim Wrinn

Turntable Times

Volume XXX August 1998 Number 8

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Cards and Flowers

If you know of a Chapter Member who is sick, lost a loved one or has a new birth in the family, please contact Elizabeth Leedy. Elizabeth is responsible for Chapter card and flowers and can be reached at 389-5274.

Meeting Notice

The Roanoke Chapter of the National Railway Historical Society will hold its next general meeting on Thursday, August 20, 1998 at 7:30 pm. The meeting will be at the First Presbyterian Church on the corner of McClanahan and Crystal Spring Avenue in Roanoke.

New Deadline for Turntable Times

The deadline for each issue of Turntable Times is now the 18th of the month instead of the 25th. Please make note if you haven't done so. The deadline for the next issue is Tuesday, August 18th. Please send articles, information and all exchange newsletters to: Kenney Kirkman, Editor, Turntable Times, 590 Murphy Road, Collinsville, Va. 24078-2128.

Cover Photos

Roanoke Chapter coaches have traveled behind lots of different locomotives over the years! This year they were back behind steam once again at Spencer Shops, June 13, 1998.

Mixed Freight - August

by Mr. Robin Shavers

Most of us whom have an interest in railroading are aware that safety is the top priority in the operation of trains. This safety issue includes the public as well as employees. Outside of pedestrian trespassers, motor vehicles at public grade crossings are without a doubt the most common place where the public and trains come in contact with each other on unpleasant terms. Railroads are constantly researching and implementing new ideas to reduce grade crossing incidents. To help combat the problem, Norfolk Southern plans to install video cameras aboard 50 of its locomotives by year's end. Information gained by viewing how motorists conduct themselves at grade crossings will help researchers arrive at fruitful ways and means for crossing safety.

Those of you whom read any of the more popular railfan magazines have seen advertisements announcing the new Railroaders Memorial Museum in Altoona, PA. I paid the museum a visit on Independence Day. I was impressed, VERY IMPRESSED. I've visited numerous railroad museums in my life and this place ranks as one of the best. It is not a typical railroad museum where there is a collection of locomotives, rolling stock and other remnants from ages past. The museum is set up to tell the story of the railroaders life in Altoona, PA. During its heyday, 17,000 people in Altoona were employed by The Pennsy. The museum covers all aspects of railroaders lives including race relations and cultural differences and harmonies. Train disasters and women's role's in the homes and the railroad are explained in numerous audio - visual displays. Last and not least is the variety of interactive displays that encourages participation by museum attendees. Ever thought about working for a railroad? There are a number of interactive

displays to test your metal. I could go on and on, but its best when you go for yourself. When you go, go when you have time to really enjoy and take in what the A.R.M.M. has to offer. One more thing, an interest or knowledge of railroad-ing is not required to enjoy the museum.

Over the years, many railroad enthusiast and model hobbyist have expressed dissatisfaction with the Spring and Autumn Railfares held at The Virginia Museum of Transportation. Adhering to the old saying that if you don't like the way someone else does something, do it yourself, a consortium of hobbyist have organized for Labor Day Weekend 98 a Techrail 98. The event will be held at The Armory on Reserve Avenue in Roanoke on the days of September 5th and 6th during the hours 10 am. til 4:00 pm. Dealers of model railroad equipment in all fields of the hobby will be present as well as individuals whom wish to reduce their personal collections. For more information, call 888-611-2156. (Editor's Note: as we go to press, we have been informed that this show will be postponed until next year due to technical difficulties.)

After TechRail, come on out to Burnt Chimneys, VA and ride the live steam trains of The Blue Ridge Railway as The Blue Ridge Live Steamers open their doors to the public during our annual Labor Day Weekend open house. The

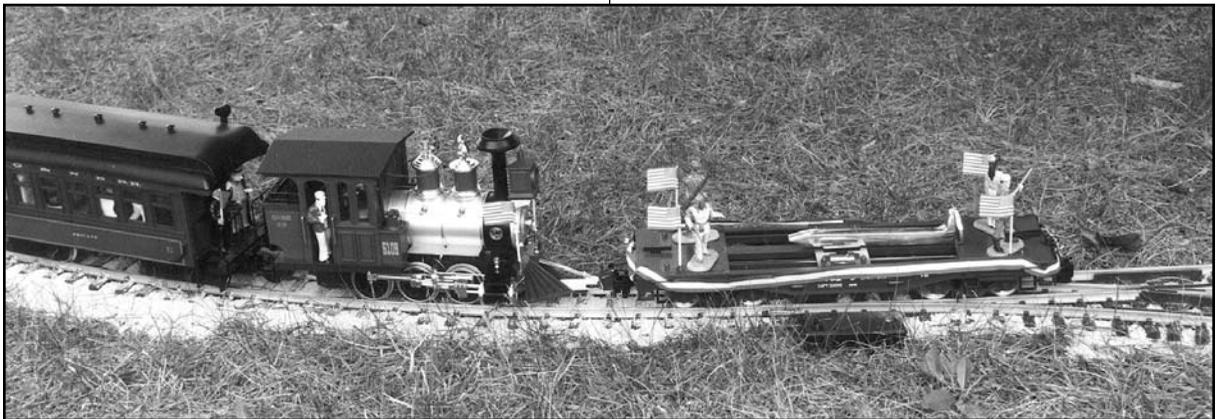
site will be open to the public between 10:00 am. and 4:00 pm., Saturday, September 5th and Sunday, September 6th. The B.R.L.S. site is located about 15 miles southeast of Roanoke off of route # 116 at the intersection of county roads 688 and 689. For more information, call 540-362-2208.

Small Rails - August

by Dave Meashey

The Roanoke Valley Model Engineers held their July meeting at the Pizza Den on July 14th. Not enough members were present to hold a proper election, so elections were pended until August, when the meeting will be at my house. Progress on finding a permanent home for the modules was discussed. As usual, things like this tend to be slow, but some of the negotiations are encouraging. The club is scheduled for four shows from September to the end of the calendar year, including being invited back to the NS East End Car Shops employee/family open house. It's going to be a hectic and interesting ride from September on through Christmas.

The Big Lick Big Train Operators held their June meeting on Sunday, June 21st at my house. It was Father's Day, it was the longest day of the year (Northern Hemisphere), it was G-Day (a





world wide celebration of garden railroading), and it was the first public operation and Golden Spike Day of the Tall Pines Division, Geneva & New Bern Railroad. If you have Internet access, some photographs from the event are at the following address: <http://members.aol.com.gardenrwy/gday.html> (on Page 2).

My little garden railroad performed well, and the gang enjoyed running their trains on it. It was a thrill to me to actually have a working garden railroad at last. At 18:00 hours we paused to remember special friends in the hobby who are now deceased. We ended the day with a cook-out and homemade ice cream for dessert.

Scalded to Celibacy by the Steam

by Dave Meashey

Safety First" was a byword on the railroads during the late steam era. If the message went unheeded, the results were sometimes dire. The following story comes from Scotty Hunter, a fellow member of my HO club and a former Virginian Railroad hostler.

Scotty tells of another hostler, who was preparing a big Virginian Mallet to go out on another run. These locomotives had two sand domes, and it was a hostler's duty to make sure each one was full before the locomotive left the

engine terminal. The safe way to fill the domes included descending to the boiler side walkway after filling the first sand dome, to walk to the next sand dome. Unfortunately, on this day the hostler "had the hurries", and decided to walk across the top of the boiler to the next sand dome. After all, he had done this hundreds of times before and had no problems.

But this day was not like the hundreds of other times. As the hapless hostler stepped over the gang of safety valves, one of them "lifted", and blew him clear off the locomotive (Yahoowieeeeeeeeeee!!). Now steam roasting may be good for peanuts and chestnuts, but it has no therapeutic value for delicate human reproductive organs. Our poor hostler was laid up for quite a while, and was unable to fulfill his duties as a husband to boot!

Southern #4501 + O. Winston Link = N&W Steam!

In late March, TVRM's ex-Southern #4501 traveled from Chatanooga to Harriman, TN (via NS ex-CNO&TP) to take part in a big budget, Universal Studios production entitled "The Rocket Boys." Spearheaded by TVRM member Art Miller and Rail Transportation Management Specialists, arrangements were made with TVA for operation of #4501 on their Kingston Steam Plant property near Harriman. The movie train included the locomotive, auxiliary water canteen, eleven Tennessee Southern hoppers and TVRM's Savannah & Atlanta caboose, all weathered and re-lettered to N&W by prop crews.

The movie train departed CT Tower on Sunday morning, March 29, piloted by two Norfolk Southern units and ran north to Emory Gap with-

out any problems. At Emory Gap the movie train was turned over to TVA and traveled over their line to the holding yard adjacent to the Kingston Steam Plant on the Clinch River. It was in the holding yard over the next two days that the trainset was painted and lettered "Norfolk and Western." (Editors note: No matter how inaccurately!)

The movie depicts the life of Homer Hickam, a first generation NASA engineer who was instrumental in the development of rocket propulsion. Universal's script called for childhood scenes of Hickam in the Blue Ridge Mountains, including segments with Norfolk & Western coal trains circa 1950.

The Universal Studios production team was familiar with O. Winston Link's railroad photography and used his steam books for reference and planning, eventually extending an invitation for a cameo appearance in the movie. Encouraged by director Joe Johnston, Mr. Link flew from New York to Tennessee and spent three hours in the cab of "N&W 4501" as a locomotive engineer. Although the controls were operated by TVRM general shop foreman George Walker, O. Winston Link will be seen on screen identified with the railroad which he single-handedly immortalized. "The Rocket Boys" including O.W.L. and Southern Railway #4501 is scheduled for release in November. (From Smoke and Cinders, Tennessee Valley Railroad Museum newsletter Number 2, 1998).

Rails To and In The Big Apple

by Ray Myers

Attending an Elderhostel at Fordham University in New York City during April provided a window of opportunity to spend six extra days sightseeing and enjoying my favorite past time - riding the rails. Train riding began in Winter Haven, FL when I settled into roomette

No. 11 (now called economy bedrooms) in viewliner EAGLE VIEW in the 11 car Silver Star behind P42 95 and 88. Coupled to the rear at dusk in Jacksonville were five ROADRAILER trailers of mail for Philadelphia. A GP9? numbered 100 painted and lettered in ACL purple and silver with gold striping is used to move the trailers around the terminal. Sleeping over the old SAL north of Savannah via Columbia, Hamlet and Raleigh wasn't bad.

The fun began soon after 8 AM the next morning just north of the NC/VA state line when we overtook the AUTO TRAIN that was limping along on one locomotive (P40 No. 832 had shut down). Since it was a much heavier train with 20 cars and 22 automobile carrying cars our No. 95 was put on AUTO TRAIN so it could maintain speed to the terminal in Lorton, Va. While this was taking place a freight train wreck just ahead of us blocked all rail traffic (18 cars derailed).

With locomotive No. 88 we sat for an hour after which it backed the train about 20 miles to a wye. No. 88 was uncoupled, turned on the Y after which it was coupled to the five roadrailers which were pulled back to Rocky Mount so they could be put on the highway to Philadelphia - THE MAIL MUST GO THROUGH. After four hours the locomotive returned to pull the train back to Rocky Mount. During those four hours there was no electricity so you can imagine how warm it became. At 4 PM buses arrived to begin a shuttle in both directions to and from Richmond. No. 92 departed Richmond at 9pm behind P42 No. 92 which had been on the southbound Silver Star. Instead of arriving in NYC at 4:13 PM, it was 5:30 AM the next morning. I do not know what happened to the AUTO TRAIN since the auto carriers could not be unloaded without special ramps.

This delay reminds me of the Roanoke Chapter trip in 1980 from Roanoke to Toronto which was

a train of about 24 cars with a diner, six pullmans with Mardi Gras on the rear. Early in the evening in Bison Yard in Buffalo th track was so rough that the buffer plates on 10-6 sleeper TUGALO RIVER locked with those on MARDI GRAS (I was the porter on the sleeping car). After mechanics with torches got the two cars apart we moved a few miles to the Canadian border where we sat until daylight. I was told that the delay was due to the fact that the tuscan red N&W GE unit was not paid for so it could not leave the country. An SD35 was then coupled ahead of the Southern FP7, however that did not work because Canadian law requires a cowcatcher which the SD35 did not have (the SD35 had foot boards). To solve this, the FP7 was put in the lead upon which we lost hot water as there were no hot water lines on the SD35. We arrived in Toronto some 12 hours late.

A comment about the Viewliner Sleepers. They sleep 32 passengers in their 13-3 configuration as compared to 22 passengers in the 10-6 sleepers like YADKIN RIVER and they still have room for a common shower and a mini pantry. The economy rooms sleep two with the toilet and wash basin available at all hours. The top bunk has it's own window plus there are TV's with several channels. To me they are an engineering masterpiece.

In an around New York. The subway system first opened in 1904, has 720 miles of track, 23 rail lines, 5866 cars, 469 stations, and 742 toll booths. Power is picked up from a third rail carrying 600 volts DC by over-riding shoes on the cars. Most trains have 10 cars, each having six pairs of sliding doors which are controlled by a conductor from one location. This is the conductors job plus safety. There is one person in the control cab. All cars are stainless steel except that one series of cars are painted tuscan red. The cars are graffiti free with most cars and

stations clean. In describing the New York City subway system one would have to say it has CHARACTER whereas the subway systems in San Francisco (1974) and Washington DC (1976) have CLASS.

New York's Pennsylvania Station opened in 1910 and was moved one block west in 1967 with Madison Square Garden erected in its place. Now it is moving one block further west to the city block square James A. Farley Post Office Building. With a \$315 million alteration, this will be the new station. All tracks have been under these buildings since the beginning, so track work should be minimal. The 21 tracks handle 786 weekday trains and 295,000 passengers on Amtrak, Long Island Railroad and New Jersey Transit. Grand Central Terminal is undergoing extensive changes. Opened in 1913, it has 48 tracks on two levels which includes a loop for turning trains under the city. It was the city terminal for New York Central and New York, New Haven and Hartford, and then Amtrak until 1991. Now it serves as a commuter station.

Cost comparisons. Riding round trip from NYC to New Haven, CT the costs are: Amtrak \$19.00, Metro North and Connecticut DOT (combined) is \$7.50. Both lines are over the same 72 miles of track except for where they diverge at the city's edge. Amtrak operates from Penn Station and the commuter line from Grand Central.

Some odds and ends: Tuscan Red GGI No. 4877 stands in the Lackawanna Hoboken, NJ Terminal (now New Jersey Transit where ferry boats go back and forth across the Hudson River from the World Trade Center. PATH trains (Port Authority Trans Hudson) trains still operate under the Hudson River from the World Trade Center to Newark and Hoboken. PCC streetcars (identical to the one in the Roanoke Museum) operate as subway cars in Newark. Coney Island looks like it did when I first went there in 1938 -

old and dirty. The Subway Museum in Brooklyn is in the former Court Street Station. The upper level contains artifacts and considerable information concerning subway construction, while the lower level has on display 20-25 subway cars dating back to the early years.

The BIG APPLE has been cleaned up as compared to when I was last there several years ago - even on the BOWERY where many unfortunates have spent their last days. Yes, most natives encountered acted with a good sense of CIVILITY.

The Nelson and Albemarle Railway, (and its tributaries)

by Butch Tweedy

(The following with the above title and author is from the Blue Ridge Dispatcher, newsletter of the Blue Ridge Chapter, NRHS, Lynchburg, Va.)

After completing my research on the Virginia Blue Ridge, I needed to find another line to investigate. But I wasn't sure which one I wanted to pursue first. I still have quite a list, and hope to get around to them all. After a month of pondering though, I decided on the Nelson and Albemarle system. No particular reason was sighted; except that it was not too far away, and I knew very little about it. Just the name, approximate location, and the fact that it was a short line were the only reasons. I always seem to enjoy researching the short lines. Mainly because very little is written or known about them, so the challenge makes it fun.

I began my search on Route 6 east near the border of the two counties. Knowing where part of the old roadbed was, Schuyler seemed like a good place to start. I began asking area residents about the old railroad, and was told many different stories. As I ventured on the leads I had received, I was surprised to find the old roadbed all over the place; and in every direction! There was no set pattern among the

many grades. Again I began asking questions, and eventually found myself in Scottsville, Rockfish, Alberene, Esmont, Warren, and Norwood. Each area had old rail beds, so it seemed the Nelson and Albemarle Railway was much bigger than I thought. Still, the lack of a set pattern made no sense. I was completely baffled! The next thing to do was get some help, so I turned to the local libraries; and with some assistance from the Internet, finally managed to start piecing the puzzle together. I returned to the area again, and asked ever more questions. After a few months of work, it finally made sense to me. All that was left was to write it down.

The first quarry of the Alberene Stone Company was open in 1884 at a place called Johnson's Mill Gap. As demand for the soapstone quickly grew, more quarries were opened to meet the demand, and the town was renamed, Alberene. The stone was first transported by oxen-bearing wagons plowing through rough and muddy terrain. As production increased, transportation fell further and further behind. It was clear that a railroad was badly needed. Construction of the Alberene Railroad began in August of 1897, and by April of 1898, steam powered trains were running the new grade from Alberene, to Esmont, to Warren; where it connected with the Chesapeake & Ohio mainline. The route was 11.3 miles long, and carried both passengers and freight traffic. In February of 1902, C&O bought the 6 miles of track from Warren to Esmont.

Also during the last ten years of the 19th century, another soapstone plant opened. This one was built in Schuyler and called the Virginia Soapstone Company. It began operations in 1893. This company enjoyed a prosperous beginning as well, and in 1899 decided to build one of two projected dams in the Rockfish river.

This way the plant could convert from steam to electric power, and also use the electricity to power the new railroad they began building the same year. The railroad was completed in 1900. The Virginia Soapstone Co. purchased used trolley cars from Lynchburg, and the line opened in January of 1901. The road was called Schuyler Railway. It was 4 miles long, and ran from Schuyler to Rockfish where it connected with the Southern.

During the same period, other companies had come to the area as well to seek their fortune in the mineral market. There was the Blue Ridge Slate Company which began operations in 1900. C&O built a spur from Scottsville to the plant which was west of Esmont. This railroad was operated by small steam engines. Also there was The Old Dominion Soapstone Corporation which was built in 1903. The facilities were located between Esmont and Schuyler. They constructed a private railroad 2 miles long. Another company moved into the area in 1904 and was named Phoenix Soapstone. It was built by the Tye River between Norwood and Arrington. At first there was a 6 mile narrow gauge railroad built from the plant to Arrington, where it connected with the Southern. The motive power for the line was a gasoline powered locomotive.

The two biggest companies however were Alberene Stone, and Virginia Soapstone. They wished to secure their future in the area, so began discussing a merger. The meetings were successful, and in 1904 an agreement was reached. The name, Alberene Stone Co. was dropped, and the two consolidated under the name Virginia Soapstone Company. Between the two of them they owned six steam powered switcher engines; of which, only three were used consistently.

Now a railroad was needed to connect the

two plants. In March of 1903 the Nelson and Albemarle Railway was chartered. The new railroad would begin at Alberene, run through Esmont, and end in Schuyler. It would be 13.3 miles long. In late 1903 work began on the new road, and was completed by mid 1904. The three remaining switchers owned by the soapstone plant were used on the new line; numbers 4, 7 and 8. There were a few problems at first, but soon everything was running smoothly.

With the success of the new railway, the Virginia Soapstone Co. began rebuilding the old electric trolley route in the Summer of 1905, with one that was much more rigid and with less grade. The line needed to accommodate the heavier steam locomotives of the N&A. The tracks were laid a little further to the south, and eventually connected with the old line before reaching Rockfish. This upgrade added an extra mile to the original route. The extended rail bed was completed in late 1905, and the steam powered switchers began running to Rockfish in January of 1906. The line had now grown to 18.3 miles.

During and after World War I, the N&A prospered. But due to the expanding needs for the soapstone, the old switcher engines were in need of replacement. Finally, in 1920, the railroad received its first new locomotive since its inception. It was a Vulcan tank engine, and was numbered 9. The railroad was quite satisfied with the new engine, so they began a buying spree. Number 10 was obtained in 1922, and number 11 in 1923. Number 12 arrived in 1924, and Number 14 in 1925. All of the new engines were Vulcans. Then in 1927, the last of the old steam engines were scrapped. The following year, the final Vulcan was purchased; number 15. These seven engines remained in service with the railroad until dieselization in the early Fifties.

The decade of the Twenties was very good to The Virginia Soapstone Co. The merger of 1904 had paid off. In 1929, the last of the smaller plants went bankrupt: Phoenix Soapstone. Just a few years earlier, in 1926, they had built a new 5.5 mile standard gauge rail line from their facilities, to the C&O mainline at Norwood. It was rather short lived. Not until the Great Depression set in, did the big company begin to slow down. And that wasn't immediate. The company began losing money in 1931, and did so until March of 1934, then all productive business shut down. After negotiating with the Federal Government for contracts, the Schuyler plant reopened a month later, soon changing its name to Alberene Stone Corporation of Virginia. Slowly the plant began to recover.

The hardships at Alberene Stone Corp., naturally had a direct effect on the N&A. In order to survive the decade, severe cuts were implemented by the management. First the work force was cut by one third, then the remaining employees took pay cuts. Service to Rockfish was quite limited, and all service to Alberene ended in 1934. The Alberene quarries had run dry years before, and there was very little traffic to and from that area. The 5.3 miles of track remained until 1936 when it was finally removed. The N&A was now 13 miles long.

Near the end of the Thirties, the tension building in Europe escalated the soapstone market even further. By 1940, Alberene Stone Corp. worked to fill contracts with our Allies throughout Europe. When the United States entered the war, the soapstone market was catapulted once again. The workers struggled to meet the demand. Everything was brought to a halt though, in 1944. A severe flood hit the area, and the Rockfish River washed out much of the rail bed. The plant in Schuyler was filled with water as well. Afterwards, the employees went to

work rebuilding the areas at the mill that were washed out. Soon the mill was up and running once more. But the rail line to the town of Rockfish was almost completely destroyed. The revenue gain from using the line to the town of Rockfish wasn't enough to justify rebuilding it. The passenger and mail routes were replaced by vehicles carrying them from Schuyler to Faber, where the Southern mainline was also located.

The N&A now ran from Schuyler to Esmont, for a total of 8 miles. The economic boom after World War II caused many new roads to be built in and around the area. As more and more people bought cars, passenger service began to dwindle. By the end of the Forties, railway passenger service for the N&A was nearing its end. On a cold winter day, February 4, 1951, the little short line made its final passenger trip. Engine number 9 pulled the last run with 56 people on board. The aging combine that had been used for many years, belonged to C&O. Shortly afterwards, it was returned to them. Although passenger service had disappeared, there was still quite a bit of freight to be hauled. Now the Vulcan tank engines which had served the railway so well, were old and worn out from the many years of use. New engines needed to be purchased, and in January of 1951, the N&A bought its first and only diesel locomotive. It was a 44 ton switcher, Number 1. In November of 1952, Number 2 was acquired, and number 3 was delivered in January of 1953. Number 2 was a 35 ton model, and number three was a 25 ton model. The latter two engines were owned by the Alberene Stone Corp. The last of the steam powered Vulcans were sold or scrapped by the end of 1954.

In 1956, the Alberene Stone Corp of Virginia became a subsidiary of Georgia Marble Corporation. Alberene's high profits during the Forties and Fifties was the attraction that caused

Georgia Marble to expand their business. In April of 1959, Georgia Marble Corporation bought out the remaining stock, and the company became the Albemarle Stone Division of Georgia Marble Corporation. By this time though, the N&A was in bad need of repair. All the years of service had worn out the rails, ties, ballast, and grading. The new company found it more profitable to ship by truck. They didn't wish to invest in rebuilding the aging railroad. Slowly, more and more shipments made trips by highway. As 1962 arrived, the company was transporting 90% of its output by truck. During the Summer of that year, the rail shipments were cut to one a week. There was little else to ship within the area; just occasional pulpwood, sand, and coal. Permission was requested to abandon the entire line. The closing of the railway was official on January 5, 1963. The three diesel switchers were moved to Esmont in March. There they were picked up by C&O and

relocated to other divisions of the Georgia Marble Corp. Numbers 1 and 3 were sent to Georgia, and number 2 was sent to Alabama. The track from Schuyler to Esmont was torn out first, during the Summer. In September of 1963, C&O removed the track from Esmont to Warren. The Nelson and Albemarle Railway lasted almost 60 years. But like many short lines that came before and after, time ran out. The Virginia Blue Ridge lasted nearly 70 years, from 1915 to 1984. This seems a rather long time, compared to many others. At least for now, there is still enough information available to consolidate a fairly accurate picture of these almost forgotten lines. I hope the information will continue to be available for future "Lost Road Hunters".

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