

# IRON HORSE QUARTERLY

Volume 7, Issue 2

April 2016

## *The Billy Jones Wildcat Railroad & W.E. "Bill" Mason Carousel*

### The Shop Corner

CJ Vargas  
Shop Assistant/ Track Foreman



*Testing begins on the new passenger car. Six car train goes up to the trestle. Photo courtesy of CJ Vargas.*

It is finally the time for steam season to commence! Please stop by the railroad and ride behind one of the steam engines until October. Over the winter we had various projects in full swing such as our sixth passenger car and tackling a surging issue with one of our diesels. The steam locomotives saw minimal work over the winter as there was not anything significant keeping them from remaining operational.

*Continued on page 2*

### Steam Returns at the BJWRR

*Spring is here so that means steam is in the air*

Francesca B. Alexander  
Chief Executive Officer

The Billy Jones Wildcat Railroad is a steam railroad. We strive to maintain that tradition about ourselves, but it doesn't always seem to be so easy. Steam engines require a lot of attention to detail, so maintenance upkeep is instrumental in operating the engines for as long as we do. When Spring rolls around, that is our cue to fire up. Historically, steam always returned on Easter weekend; this year, the official start was set to be April 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup>\* with Engine #2 taking on operations all weekend. However, we got a head start and had a full steam weekend during Easter weekend.

Engine #2 will continue to take the bulk of running days throughout the season, but our goal is to make sure #5 gets more running time in as well.

Training on engine #5 has been a slow and tedious process. The engine is much different than #2, and the pool of trainers is a small one. Our goal, however, is to get a few of our current engineers trained on #5 so we can alternate engines per weekends. It continues to be a slow process, but one that we are diligently working on.

Steam season this year will run until October, much like in the past. Come winter time, both engines go down for extensive maintenance.

During steam season however, we do like to sprinkle in some diesel days. We do this for a variety of reasons, the main one being for the chance to train and certify new BJWRR engineers. The other reason is during the drought, we save water by running the diesel engines.

Still, the return of steam is always an exciting time at the railroad, and this year is no different.

Look for our steam engines to operate Saturdays & Sundays from 10:30am to 4:30pm until the end of October. For more information on schedules visit [bjwrr.org](http://bjwrr.org). ♠

*\*We were rained out 4/9-10 so official start will be 4/16-17!*

### INSIDE THIS ISSUE

- 1 The Shop Corner / Steam Season
- 2 Shop Corner continued
- 3 Progress Through Change: Part II
- 4 Volunteer Spotlight
- 5 Calendar of Events/Contact

That said, the 2 spot will receive new bushings for the main rods within the next couple of months. The locomotive bears so much of the load during steam season and for that matter has operated under such a load since it was first operated in the park. When the locomotive was down from 1995-2005, the running gear remained in-tact. Since then we have been tackling little things, such as the running gear and pistons to get the locomotive back into a reliable state for the steam season.

The locomotive is at the point now where other than routine maintenance and other small things that come up; it is virtually our mainstay of motive power. One of the last "renovated" projects were the bushings, so it will be nice to have a new set of those in the rods. That should tighten the running gear up pretty good and should put valve motion within a couple degrees of perfectly square. The 5 spot saw no extensive work over the winter, but will receive a second mechanical oil pump for the engineer's side subsequent of issues last season with obtaining consistent and necessary amounts of oil to the engineers' side. Now there will be an oil reservoir on both sides to hopefully alleviate the inconsistent oil issue for the future.

The 2502 had a surging issue that I had been tracing and attempting to alleviate for almost an entire year. That was finally diagnosed and fixed over the winter by changing out a circuit board that controls the amount of hydraulic fluid flowing to the hydraulic motors as per the throttle setting. The engine now operates very smoothly but one of the future projects is to restore the dashboard to resemble the 3502's. A complete restoration of the circuitry and air lines in and around the dash will be required. Near the end of the 2015, 3502 cracked its exhaust manifold again from the amount of vibration. That has since been fixed by volunteers.

The sixth passenger car is coming along nicely. In mid-March, the frame was flipped upright onto its trucks and the brake linkage was connected and tested thoroughly. The car was again air tested and some adjustments were made to the brake linkages. Subsequent of the successful adjustments, we decided to take it out and around the track both directions to fully test any clearance questions as well as how easily 6 cars spots in the station. The framed coach performed very well, and work on the seats will now commence. The spotting of six cars in the station was not as tight as we had thought, but some training with engineers as

well as employees will be very necessary to ensure operations run as smoothly as possible. Many thanks to those involved and a special thanks to Phil Reader for the funding and support.



*Donor Phil Reader takes a ride out to test the new passenger car. Look forward to a piece from Phil in a future edition explaining why he chose this project and why it is so close to his heart.*

The track is in fair condition, considering the wet winter, the track held together very well. Engineer, Scott Kennedy and I took a day to resurface and align the little hump that was formed by the redwood tree past the redwood crossing. It was becoming significant enough that the couplers were differentiating by a few inches when going over the hump so it was time to address it. Old ballast was dug out and new smaller ballast was laid in the interest of packing things together in the substructure of the track. The track is now arrow straight and leveled through that section. Much more track work will be coming at the railroad in the future months as warmer temperatures arrive. ♠



*The crew of volunteers who have been working on the car inspect their work as the new car comes down the station track for the first time.*

## Progress Through Change

*Part II: Father & Daughter recount their experiences  
working for the BJWRR.*

Elizabeth Johnson  
Team Leader



In the last issue, I shared three substantial improvements that the railroad has made since my father's time as an employee. The next three are just as significant, allowing the railroad to broaden its appeal to a larger group of people. Up until July 4, 1991, the BJWRR's attractions included the train, the concession stand, and a horseshoe pit. As someone who grew up riding the carousel, it is difficult for me to imagine the BJWRR without the cheerful band organ music and multicolored horses. To me, the train and carousel seem to be made for each other—inseparable pieces of history and entertainment that coexist perfectly. But during my father's time as an employee between 1976 and 1985, there was no carousel, only a horseshoe pit in its place.

While the horseshoe pit offered enjoyment for older children and adults, the carousel attracts people of all ages. I distinctly remember one summer day working in the carousel when a family lined up to ride: a grandmother, her grown daughter, and a newborn baby girl. With a wide smile on her face and pride in her voice, the grandmother told me, "Today you have three generations riding the carousel." Both young and old can participate in riding the carousel, something that horseshoe pits cannot offer to the same extent. It is an extremely valuable attraction that widens the appeal of the railroad for people of different ages and interests.

This customer base has also come to look forward to the various special events that the railroad hosts each year. When my father was an employee, the railroad only hosted one special event a year. Each fall, the railroad dedicated a weekday when the train was open especially for handicapped children. The railroad then became involved in a Halloween event the Haunted Forest that was hosted by the

Los Gatos/Monte Sereno Police department. The Haunted Forest began around 1995 and ran for a few years. The railroad took over its own Halloween event in 2004 and has been hosting a Halloween event off and on throughout the years. Starting with the Halloween Train, the railroad began to develop a full repertoire of events that built up the railroad's community and culture by adding enjoyable seasonal events.

Customers can now celebrate the changes of the seasons by riding the Holiday Train, with its twinkling lights and traditional music, and the Pumpkin Train, with its spooky decorations, music, and its very own pumpkin patch. Similarly, the Flapjacks and Railroad Tracks Pancake Breakfast encourages customers to welcome the summer season along with its new daily operations, while the End of Summer Night Ride and Pasta Dinner bids farewell to those long summer days. In addition, Billy Jones Day and Carousel Day both allow the railroad to show appreciation for faithful and supportive customers. These fun events offer additional hours for employees and create a memorable experience for customers.

Over the years, customers have also enjoyed the BJWRR's concession stand, which has served up delicious food options since my father's time. But up until 2007, the lunch options were somewhat limited. Before the acquisition of a barbecue, both my father and I had to steam hot dogs in the steamer. This was one of my least favorite tasks in the concession stand, especially on busy days, when we had to constantly reopen the bag of frozen hot dogs, thaw them under water, and steam them while keeping track of which ones were ready to serve and which were not. I remember once opening up the steamer and burning my hand just with the scalding steam of the "steamin' demon." But in 2007, the BJWRR constructed a barbecue pit, purchased a barbecue, and started scheduling volunteers and employees to grill. This greatly increased the variety of food options, since we now sell freshly grilled hamburgers, cheeseburgers, hot dogs, and polish dogs from Los Gatos Meats. Additionally, the concession worker's job is easier, since we prepare the condiments and buns without having to worry about cooking. The new barbecue system is a win-win, leading to happier customers and employees while increasing revenue.

With these three improvements, the railroad has attracted a wider base of customers while enhancing the experience for them. In the next issue, we will explore more changes that made the railroad what it is today. ♠

## Volunteer Spotlight

Volunteer and Engineer Matt McCracken



Francesca B. Alexander  
Chief Executive Officer

The lifeline of the Billy Jones Wildcat Railroad is the staff of volunteers who donate their time. Our Tuesday crew comes in and always ensures that all engines, passenger cars, etc. are in working order for operations. Last year, we were lucky to add Matt McCracken to not only our volunteer pool but to our engineer pool as well.

Matt is the youngest person on the Tuesday crew, and brings a vibrant new energy to the shop. He is always willing to jump in and help, and has been a great asset to the BJWRR already. Matt began training on the diesel engine and after the allotted hours he became a certified BJWRR engineer. The steam engines are on the horizon for Matt, as well as completing work on the new passenger car. I had a chance to ask Matt a few questions about his time at the railroad.

**IHQ:** How did you learn about the Billy Jones Wildcat Railroad?

**MM:** I have been coming to the railroad since I was about two or three years old. I have always loved trains, so my parents must have found out about it when we moved to the bay area.

**IHQ:** What made you want to get involved?

**MM:** I originally wanted to come here when I was in high school to fulfill my community service requirement. I had chosen it because it would have been more interesting to me than some of the generic places to work, such as a food bank.

However, it wouldn't have worked out because most of the volunteers work is on Tuesdays during the day when I would have to be in school. But now that I'm in college and have control over my schedule, I thought I'd try again, and here I am.

**IHQ:** What are some of your hobbies outside of the railroad?

**MM:** A hobby of mine is tinkering with things. I like to take stuff apart to see how it works and then put it back together. One example, we had an automatic card shuffler that stopped working. My parents were just going to throw it away, so I opened it up to see what was going on. I actually found the problem, fixed it, and reassembled the shuffler.

**IHQ:** How has your experience at the railroad been so far?

**MM:** It has been an absolute blast coming to the railroad, quickly becoming the highlight of my week. Everyone is fun to be around, and I have learned so much. I don't have the technical skills that they have, but they are happy to show me how to do something or what a tool is used for.

**IHQ:** What do you hope to accomplish at BJWRR?

**MM:** My main goal is to continue serving the public by maintaining and operating the railroad. I also want to continue to further my knowledge and skills about trains and construction in general.

Matt is currently a student at DeAnza college, studying computer science. He plans to transfer to San Jose State or Cal Poly. Matt works as a part time sales associate for Central Computers in Sunnyvale, and has been there for a little over two years. ♠

### NEW RETAIL ITEMS!!

available at the BJWRR ticket booth during normal hours of operation!

#### TRAIN & CABOOSE



#### SUNGLASSES



We have fun new items at the BJWRR Shop!  
Wooden Train & Caboose set with the railroad's name makes

For a great gift to anyone who loves trains!  
Summer is coming, so protect your eyes with the cool blue BJWRR sunglasses.

Never lose your keys with the BJWRR lanyard.  
Looks for these items and more at the BJWRR ticket booth.

## CALENDAR OF EVENTS

### **APRIL 9<sup>TH</sup> - - STEAM OPERATIONS RESUME**

Steam operations return April 9<sup>th</sup>. Engines #2 and #5 will handle the bulk of weekend operations. Due to the rain, steam operation will resume April 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup>.

### **MAY 30<sup>TH</sup> - - MEMORIAL DAY**

The train and carousel will be open Monday, May 30 from 10:30am to 4:30pm in observance of Memorial Day. Honor those who have given their lives in service of this country and spend a warm day with your friends and family at the park.

### **JUNE 6<sup>TH</sup> - - START OF SUMMER SCHEDULE**

From June 6 through August 16<sup>th</sup>, the train and carousel will be open daily from 10:30am until 4:30pm, weather permitting. Steam locomotives typically open Saturdays and Sundays with the diesels running during the week.

### **JUNE 11<sup>TH</sup> - - "FLAPJACKS AND RAILROAD TRACKS" PANCAKE BREAKFAST**

Kick off summer with a fun-filled morning breakfast at the railroad featuring pancakes, sausages and much more. Breakfast starts at 8:00am and the train and carousel will be open early as well.

Billy Jones Wildcat Railroad  
P.O. Box 234  
Los Gatos, CA 95031-0234

ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED

## **The Billy Jones Wildcat Railroad & W.E. "Bill" Mason Carousel, Inc.**

General inquiries and correspondence to the Billy Jones Wildcat Railroad & W.E. "Bill" Mason Carousel, this newsletter, or its Board of Directors should be addressed to:

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Los Gatos, CA 95031-0234

(408) 395-RIDE office      EMAIL: [info@bjwrr.org](mailto:info@bjwrr.org)

Persons interested in volunteering in the machine shop may also call (408) 395-7433 or by visiting [bjwrr.org](http://bjwrr.org)

Visit our website at [www.bjwrr.org](http://www.bjwrr.org) for further updates and information.

The Billy Jones Wildcat Railroad is a non-profit 501(c)(3) organization working with the cooperation of the Town of Los Gatos and the Santa Clara County Parks Office. Contributions are tax deductible.

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