



# BLUE RIDGE DISPATCHER

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Chapter President Rick Johnson will be presenting the September program at the monthly meeting of the Blue Ridge Chapter, NRHS. Entitled "Everything Must Change" his show will consist of N&W slides taken around the area during the 1970s and 1980s. Above: The hot, humid, sultry, summer day of July 17, 1982 finds N&W "Skunk" GP38 #4104 leading an all-EMD consist of power, with mixed freight in tow, westbound through Prospect, Va.

A terrific program is in store, so plan to be in attendance!

**Wednesday, September 13, 2017.**  
**Charley's Restaurant. 707 Graves Mill Rd. Lynchburg, VA.**  
Dinner: 6p -7p. Business: 7p - 7:30p. Program: 7:30p.



OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF THE BLUE RIDGE CHAPTER  
NATIONAL RAILWAY HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
Lynchburg, Virginia



## Please look for the August meeting minutes in next month's BRD.

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### Challenging trip brings railroad turntable to Roanoke - ROANOKE, Va. (WDBJ7) Aug. 29.

The Virginia Museum of Transportation hauled some vintage equipment to Roanoke Monday, only to have it get stuck just a few blocks from its destination. It wasn't a steam engine or rail car, but a turntable the museum plans to use in a new maintenance facility in the Norwich neighborhood. The oversized load made it most of the way from Beckley, West Virginia without a problem, but on the final approach a hydraulic line ruptured. Bev Fitzpatrick is the executive director of the Virginia Museum of Transportation.

"We're real excited that it's gotten almost home," he said "and hopefully by the end of the night it will be where it needs to be."

The maintenance facility is part of the transportation museum's plan for the old Belt Line that runs through Wasena Park. The rail line was donated by Norfolk Southern, and the museum eventually plans to run short excursions there.



### Amtrak Roanoke Service Commences October 31. Tickets now available for purchase.

WASHINGTON, DC. September 7 – The Amtrak Northeast Regional will serve the city of Roanoke, Va. (RNK), beginning Oct. 31. Tickets are now available to purchase for travel to and from the city in the Roanoke Valley nestled in Virginia's Blue Ridge Mountains.



The train will stop in downtown Roanoke at a newly-constructed passenger platform with a canopy located at 55 Norfolk Ave., SW. Public parking facilities are available adjacent to the Roanoke station stop.

The Northeast Regional will extend from Lynchburg and provide a same-seat trip to and from Roanoke to points north. The train will stop in Lynchburg, Charlottesville, Culpeper, Manassas, Burke Centre, Alexandria, Washington, D.C., Baltimore, Philadelphia, New York City, and other cities along the Northeast Corridor.

Customers will experience a comfortable and enjoyable way to travel on a national network serving more 500 destinations, and benefits such as no middle seat, and the ability to move about the train. The Northeast Regional features Coach and Business Class offering outlets for mobile devices, and complimentary Wi-Fi. The Café Car offers sandwiches, salads, snacks and hot and cold beverages, including a variety of wine, beer and soda.

Amtrak, the Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation, and the city of Roanoke partnered to bring intercity passenger rail service back to the city for the first time in four decades, when Amtrak's Hilltopper was discontinued on September 30, 1979. An image of the Hilltopper taken by your Editor is seen here just a few days before its discontinuance.

Departure from Roanoke Mon. - Fri. will be at 6:19 a.m. and at 8:40 a.m. on weekends. Times at Lynchburg and elsewhere on the route remain unchanged.



## Amherst Depot celebrates its Grand Opening

**Amherst, VA** - Amherst County and the Chamber of Commerce opened the county's first Visitor Center at the historic, former Southern Ry. depot, 238 Richmond Hwy in Amherst on Saturday, August 26th.

"We are thrilled to be partnering with the county to establish a visitor center and our office in the newly renovated and beautifully transformed depot," stated Vanessa Angus, director of Amherst County Chamber of Commerce and Tourism. "Amherst County's scenic beauty, peaceful lifestyle, recreational opportunities, events and attractions will no longer be missed by passersby. The Amherst County Visitor Center will serve as a beacon to visitors and an introduction to all that Amherst County has to offer."

The Amherst Depot was built in 1913 and saw train passengers until the 1960's. Its service for freight transport and mail exchange ended in 1977. In 1985, the depot passed to the private ownership of Marshall Mays, owner of Mays Farmers Service Co. in Amherst. The depot was moved approximately one quarter mile from its original location on Depot Street to the current address on Richmond Hwy in 2008. After many trials and tribulations, the depot is restored and alive once again with activity and a renewed purpose to serve visitors and area residents.

The Visitor Center will display graphics of Amherst County's attractions and events, brochures and historical items. Staff will be on hand to assist visitors with information, itineraries and directions. The Amherst depot also provides office space for the Chamber of Commerce and the Economic Development Authority.

Your Editor was on hand for the big event representing the Chapter, which had contributed funds towards the structure's renovation. A few images from the day are below. One feature of the renovated station is a C&O signal rescued by Chapter friend William Callahan of Amherst County. The signal once stood at Galt's Mill.





ROANOKE, Va. (WDBJ7) August 17 . by [Joe Dashiell](#) |

Five Norfolk Southern passenger cars that were used in local excursions have been sold. The cars were auctioned Thursday morning along with more than 60 diesel locomotives. The excursion coaches went to the three buyers, including a scenic railroad in New York State, a tour company in Alaska and the North Carolina Transportation Museum.

The winning bids were higher than expected, averaging around \$200,000 for a single rail car.

**Annual Christmas Banquet Announcement** - On Saturday December 2, 2017, the members and guests of the Blue Ridge Chapter will hold our annual Christmas Banquet. We have new caterers this year and new offerings on the buffet. As in year's past we will start our social hour at 6:00 pm. that includes steamed shrimp, sodas, iced tea and coffee. Fruit punch and munchies will also be available. At 7:00 pm. our home-style buffet dinner with a freshly prepared salad will start. Finishing up with a variety of pies for dessert. After dinner we will have a short railroad presentation to round out the evening.

Firm reservations are required. We would like for you to sign up starting with the September BRC regular meeting. Payments will be accepted starting at the September BRC meeting. Cost is \$20.00 per member or guest. Friends of the BRC, NRHS are most welcome. Please contact me if you have any questions. Your participation is strongly encouraged and will be appreciated. If we don't have twenty five or more attend this banquet it will most likely be our last catered Christmas Banquet. It will be held in the former Southern Railway Depot in Altavista, Va. currently the Altavista Area Chamber of Commerce, Washington Street, Altavista, Va. 24517.

Hope to see many of you there. It's always a fun evening and a way to thank our significant others for all they do for us.

Regards,  
Norris

**Lynchburg Rail Day 2017 a success!** Thanks to the hard work of many dedicated Blue Ridge Chapter members and the support of many vendors and railroad oriented interest groups the 39th annual Lynchburg Rail Day was a definite success. Included below are a few pictures taken that day by your Editor.



## Train Ride to Totality A trip report by Garland Harper

Determined to avenge himself for missing the event of Saturday, March 7, 1970, your Editor boarded Amtrak train #19 at Lynchburg Sunday evening, August 20, headed for Greenville, SC, and, ultimately, to Clemson, SC, to witness first hand the “Great American” solar eclipse of 2017. Back in 1970 your Editor was a junior in high school. On March 7 of that year an eclipse tracked across Mexico, the Gulf of Mexico, across Florida and up the eastern seaboard and on into Maritime Canada. (This eclipse, by the way, is the one referred to in Carly Simon’s hit tune “You’re So Vain”.) Virginia Beach was in the path of totality. Your Editor really wanted to be there to see it, but, regrettably, he had to take his SAT tests that day. His grandparents lived in Newport News at the time and he was highly tempted to sign up to take his tests at a high school somewhere in Tidewater, but being only 16 and still without a driver’s license he signed up to take his tests at E. C. Glass in Lynchburg and saw only 95% +.

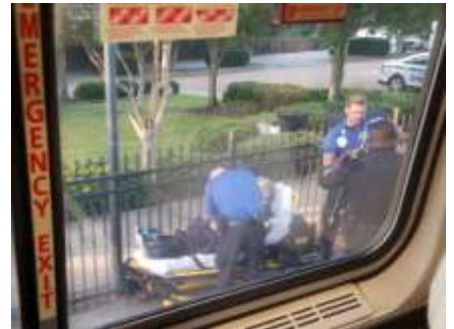
He booked his trip way back in January, well before the eclipse became such a national sensation. At the time only a handful of people were detrainning at Greenville, and even fewer were booked on the connecting busses that take riders from Greenville to Clemson. (Clemson normally is an Amtrak stop, but a huge highway construction project adjacent to the station has isolated it from the railroad, hence, the bus connection.) By the time Eclipse Day, August 21 rolled around #19 was sold out with about 230 detrainning at Greenville. The bus connection maxes out at 50, and it was full, too.

#19 was running about two hours late that evening. For most of the summer #19 was running on an altered schedule due to rehab work going on at Penn Station in New York. An on-time departure for #19 should have been 11:38 p.m. We left, however, at 1:30 a.m. That would not be a problem at all. That meant less of a wait time in Clemson for the celestial event to begin.

We made up about 30 minutes of the lost time going south. As day was breaking your Editor thought about getting some morning sustenance. He walked through the diner, but it was already filled with people, and thinking there would not be enough time to enjoy a full breakfast he continued on into the lounge car and settled for a cup of coffee and a pastry. It’s too bad he did not partake of breakfast. The diner that morning on #19, AMTK 8532, which began life in 1956 as a CB&Q coach, apparently was making its last revenue run. It was mentioned on a Facebook railroad group that the 8532 deadheaded out of New Orleans the next morning headed for Amtrak’s Beech Grove shops in Indiana.

Spartanburg, SC, was the last scheduled stop prior to Greenville. The train sat there for an unusually long time. An ambulance and police car were seen pulling into the parking lot and it was learned that a passenger on the trains was having a medical issue. An older woman had been found unconscious in one of the coaches and was taken off. The thirty minutes that we had made up was lost again. NS train 173 roared past us while we sat in Spartanburg. Once again, no problem. The start of the eclipse was hours away.

About 80% of the train’s capacity detrainned at Greenville. The two busses for Clemson were waiting, filled up quickly and whisked all of us away in short order. About 45 minutes later the stop was made on Tiger Boulevard at the location of the railroad station. Your Editor walked up to the station and snapped a few shots of the building and the highway construction and then began the mile walk up College Avenue from the station to the campus of Clemson University to join the festivities happening there.





Your Editor on the bus to Clemson.



Clemson station cut off from railroad access.

As mentioned earlier your Editor had mapped out the path of the eclipse across the country well in advance and discovered that Clemson, SC, was almost dead center in the path of totality, (2 minutes, 37 seconds of totality!) Thus it would be the perfect Amtrak destination. And, of course, it would be a certainty that Clemson University would be hosting some sort of eclipse event, and host an event they did, indeed! The university's web site was filled with advice and information about the Eclipse. Most appealing was the statement that they would be handing out 50,000 pairs of viewing glasses! Your Editor was convinced this was the place to go.

Your Editor was not the only member of his family to make the trek down south. Other family members had converged in Atlanta Sunday night to celebrate your Editor's brother's mother-in-law's 80<sup>th</sup> birthday. Your Editor's mother, his sister and his sister's husband had driven to Atlanta from Lynchburg. The #1 son and his sweetie had flown to ATL from Washington and rented a car. They all planned to be in place somewhere to view the Eclipse on Monday.

The mother, sister and sister's husband planned to hop off Interstate 85 at Anderson, SC, to view the Eclipse, then come to Clemson to pick up your Editor. It was your Editor's plan to get a ride back to Lynchburg with them rather than wait for nearly half a day in Clemson for the train back. The #1 son and sweetie drove to Clemson in their rental to witness the event.

Your Editor hooked up with #1 son and sweetie on College Ave. and we all made our way to the Clemson campus. The morning was bright and cloudless, and there were many people milling about on either side of the school's library, where many information booths and media people were camped out. We obtained our free viewing glasses and found a place to camp out for the next few hours just above the campus amphitheater.

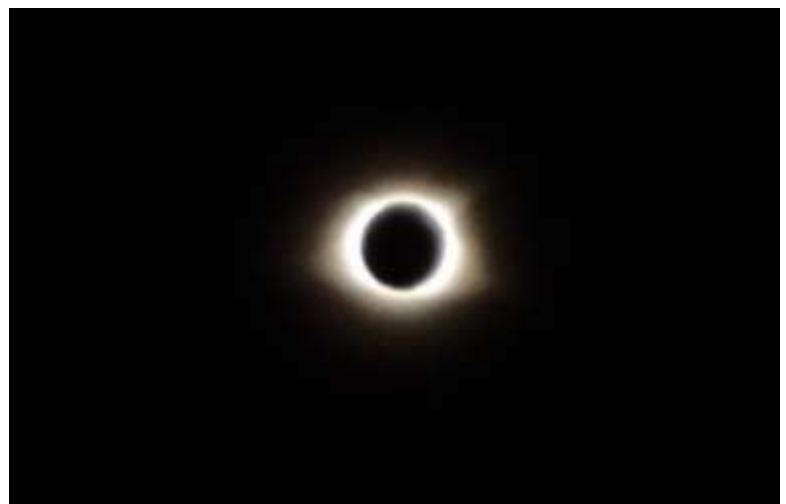


The crowd grew larger and larger as the time of the Eclipse drew near (totality was to begin at 2:37 p.m.). Clouds began to form as the afternoon wore on and the sun, as its disc was slowly being covered by the moon, was playing hide and seek from time to time much to everyone's consternation. What a huge disappointment it would be for the gathered hoard for the sun to be obscured by a cloud during totality.

At last the moment we had been waiting for arrived. The one cloud that had been covering the sun just seemed to disappear as more and more of the sun's disc was covered. Your Editor is guessing that the change in temperature may have had something to do with that. Indeed, things remained bright right up to totality, but one could feel that the sun's heat was greatly reduced as the eclipse marched toward totality. A huge cacophony of shouts and cheers went up from the assembled throng as the sun completely disappeared and the noise the crowd made was constant all during the time of darkness. The few photos your Editor took do not do the spectacle justice. It was a breathtaking event.



As soon as sunlight returned the crowd began to disperse. Your Editor and #1 son and his sweetie walked back to the parking deck where his rental was and we headed for the meeting spot to rendezvous with mother, sister and sister's husband for the ride back to Lynchburg. The meeting was made and we went our separate ways. Your Editor regrets to report that the mother, sister and sister's husband got "hosed" at eclipse time. The Walmart parking lot they had chosen for a viewing site was cloud-covered at totality time. So sad.



The ride back to Lynchburg was a challenge, to say the least. I-85 was stop and go for miles. At Spartanburg we got off the interstate and tried our luck on US 29. It wasn't much better, but we paralleled the NS mainline in many places. At King's Mountain, NC, a train went roaring past us in the same direction. NS 154, perhaps. We returned to I-85 at Gastonia and after getting north of Charlotte the road cleared up a bit and we were able to make time. A six-hour trip took ten hours, but it was worth it. Departed Clemson at 4pm on Monday. Arrived Lynchburg at 2am on Tuesday.

Can't wait for April 8, 2024. Bloomington, Indiana, here we come!





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