



Volume 23  
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August, 2010

# BANTRAK Newsletter

## The Engineer's Cab

Alan Del Gaudio



Summer is cruising by. Escape the heat and work on/play with your trains!

This month, we'll have the meeting at my place on Sunday, August 15, 2-4 pm. We have the Bedford N-Scale Weekend 2 weeks later.

As far as club events after August, have big projects and shows. I'm excited about the new show at Turf Valley Country Club in Ellicott City. It's Thanksgiving weekend and setup would be Black Friday. The hotel is offering a special room rate of \$89, which is half-off.

At the last meeting we discussed a number of items. We are proceeding with donations to Smile Train and working on a train/toy set for donating to a hospital.

We also discussed the trailer upgrade situation and decided it would be best that we form a committee to evaluate everything, starting from rearranging our current scheme. The tasks range from sorting out what we need, marking totes and rearranging packing, and finding club members to provide homes for items not commonly used to investigating a new trailer. Skip Hayes has done a lot of the ground work already for a new trailer. Do we have interested parties in this committee?

Then there's the yard upgrade project. Our beta test is Bedford. If that works out as expected, we'll rebuild the rest of the yards. They will also need to have scenery enhanced.

This month and September are key months for having the raffle layout completed on schedule for the October show. Buildings have been farmed out (pun intended) for our agrarian theme. Please find some time to help out. The raffle layout is an important project for helping to fund club programs. Steve and I are heading this up.

John Darlington and Phil Peters are embarked upon the project to rebuild our "Ellicott City" corner. This should be very nice!

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### ***Next meeting...***

August 15, 2010  
2:00 pm

Alan Del Gaudio's House

### ***On the web...***

News, information, and  
forums are all at:

<http://www.bantrak.net/>

# The Alaska Railroad

## *First Class on a Second Class RR*

**John Darlington**



In June of this year, Elaine and I returned to the state of Alaska to complete our exploration of the 49th state. You may recall that a few years back I wrote an article with photos documenting our trip on the Alaska Railroad (ARR) from Skagway to the Canadian border. That was part of a cruise we took in 2007 of the Alaskan Inside Passage. That particular part of the railroad is called the White Pass and Yukon Route and is primarily a tourist road following the route to the old gold fields. While the WP&YR is under the control of the Alaska Railroad Corporation, it is not connected physically or operationally to what is commonly known as the Alaska Railroad.

Figuring that this may be our last trip to Alaska, I wanted to be sure to see as much of the ARR and its operations as I could and as it turned out, I was not disappointed.

### *A Little History*

The ARR's history began in 1903, and it was known back then as the *Alaska Central Railway* (ACR). Financed by private companies and individuals, primarily from Seattle, Washington, construction started in Seward, which is one of two ice free ports located on the southern coast between the Kenai Mountains and Prince William Sound. The other ice free port is Whittier which was the initial destination of the railroad construction. In 1909, after just 51 miles of construction, the ACR went into receivership. The ACR was reorganized that same year under the name of the *Alaska Northern Railroad Company* (ANRC) and construction commenced again for another 21 miles northward to Kern Creek. In 1914 the



*A track maintenance train*

ANRC too filed for bankruptcy and went into receivership. Around this same time, the U.S. Government was contemplating its own railroad route which was planned to go from Seward to Fairbanks, some 500 miles northward into the interior of Alaska. In 1912 President Taft authorized a survey of the route, and in 1914 the U.S. Congress agreed to fund the construction for an estimated \$35 million. The name again was changed to the *Alaska Railroad*.



*President Harding drives the golden spike.*

The ARR was finally completed in 1923 and President Harding traveled to Alaska on July 15, 1923 to commemorate the occasion by driving a golden spike at Nenana (south of Fairbanks). This turned out to be rather inauspicious, since the President lost a battle with food poisoning and died on the return trip to San Francisco.

Although completed, the ARR had great difficulty financially. Prior to buildup to WWII, the combined populations of Seward, Anchorage and Fairbanks totaled a mere 5,400 people which was not nearly enough to sustain profitable operations. As tensions rose in the late 30's over the international situation, the military began to build and expand in the interior of Alaska resulting in the ARR's first profitable year in 1938. During the war years, the ARR benefited greatly from the military expansion which resulted in significant upgrades in track, tunnels and rail fed port facilities. In 1944, the ARR began its transition from steam to diesel, a process that was completed in 1966 when the last steam engine was sold.

The post-war years saw additional upgrades and expansion projects funded by a \$100 million rehabilitation project authorized by Congress. Passenger service, which was one of the original goals of the ARR, was scaled back, making the railroad's primary function freight transport. On March 27, 1964 Alaska was

struck by a significant earthquake causing over \$30 million of damage to ARR facilities and track. Through a herculean effort, the ARR was able to restore freight traffic from Anchorage to Fairbanks on April 6th and passenger service on April 11th.

On January 14, 1983, President Reagan signed into law legislation authorizing the transfer of the Alaska Railroad to the State of Alaska, and on July 5, 1984, a quasi-public corporation was formed and the transfer of all ARR assets to the State was completed on January 5, 1985.

In the years since, the ARR has seen its profits and ridership increase dramatically (\$14.5 million and 512,000 respectively). The ARR's continued plan to upgrade its motive power saw a significant purchase of 16 SD70MACs in 2000 and 8 additional SD70MACs in 2004, bringing their total of locomotives to 60. The initiation of their *Gold Star* first class rail service in May 2006 between Fairbanks Denali and Anchorage resulted in still further increases in their passenger services. Primarily targeting tourists, this service features the use of specially constructed domed cars with self-

contained dining facilities. Additionally, cruise lines like Holland-America provide their own domes cars for their land/cruise customers as a regular part of this overall train service.



*Holland America dome car*



*Interior of dome car*

## Our Experience

The ARR is classified as a “second class” railroad, but to my way of thinking it is “first class” all the way!

It is primarily a single track railroad for most of its length, but there are a number of sidings along the route which allow for unimpeded passing. I had the opportunity to see both their main headquarters in Anchorage and the freight docks in Seward and it would appear that these facilities have been recently upgraded and expanded – no doubt to accommodate increased traffic



From my brief observations (see accompanying photos), the ARR appears to be a well-run railroad. Its locomotives and freight/passenger facilities seem to be in excellent condition, especially considering the harsh weather conditions their equipment is subjected to during 9 months of the year. Track maintenance, a priority for most railroads,

looks to be the number one concern of the ARR and I observed a number of maintenance facilities during our trip.

Our land tour included an eight hour trip from Denali National Park to Anchorage. Since we were part of a Holland-America Tour, we had the chance to experience the comfort and spectacular views from their specially constructed domed cars. Each car consists of a passenger compartment enclosed in a full length glass roof offering unimpeded sight lines to the dramatic countryside. Meals are provided by a full service dining room and kitchen running the full length of the bottom floor of each car. While the quality of the cuisine was not up to the standard of the old B&O dining cars, it was light years ahead of anything you can get on AMTRAK.

Elaine and I really enjoyed our experiences in Alaska and especially our trip on the ARR (Elaine is getting to be a real train fan). The people were cordial, the scenery was fantastic and the food was great. Top it off with a ride on a well maintained train and you have nothing else to ask for. If you ever get a chance to see Alaska, don't pass it up. ●

## Site of the Month: The The Wolsztyn Experience

Matthew Davis

Those of you who came to the June meeting will remember Arthur Boyd's presentation and slide show about his adventure driving steam engines in Poland.

For full information and photos, be sure to check out the official web site: <http://www.thewolsztynexperience.org/>



# NMRA Convention and Show

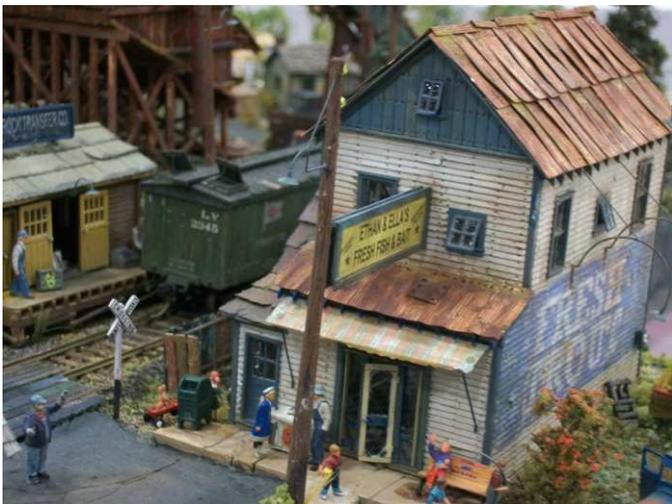
Photos by Alan Del Gaudio



*The "El"*



*Model Railroader's Salt Lake Route*



*Contest diorama*



*Engine shed module*



*Milwaukee's river walk*



*Contest diorama*

## ***The Engineer's Cab (continued)***

This year the NMRA show was interesting. I saw Arthur there though I missed catching up with Phil. I had a chance to attend several seminars and enjoyed the show. To me, the big hit in N-scale was the Chicago elevated train line by Imagine That Laser Art. They had it in both HO and N scale versions. There is a full range of buildings they offer in HO and they plan to make some of them in N scale. Lunde Studios is planning a new N scale kit. (Bob Lunde did the DPM and Magnusson building as well as the HO Bachmann City Scenes.) And Fox Valley had their Hiawatha in HO (4-4-2 + 6 cars) and plan to have the N scale version available by the end of the year. There have been pictures of this on the web, and the N scale version of the 4-4-2 looks every bit as nice (given it's preliminary stage) as the HO.

I figure much more will be covered in the N-Scale magazines.

A little soapbox: I'm bemused by some comments on model RR forums. There are two recurring themes:

1. Woe is us in N scale, for we are ignored by this bad company and that arrogant company because they only make 60% of their HO portfolio in N scale. They do not take us seriously.
2. I would not pay more than \$5 to \$10 for a building/train accessory/car because 20 years ago I bought things like these for \$3.62.

I'm not sure what the answer to #2 is except no manufacturer will bother to make anything more than a small detail part for \$5 and if the majority of N-scalers have this mindset, then we are fortunate indeed that the manufacturers continuously lambasted by the #1 types make even 60% of their HO line in N.

Well that's enough for now. I'll see you next week.

*Alan*

**BANTRAK** was founded in 1983 as the **Greater Baltimore N-Scale Associates**. Begun as a "round robin" group to share skills and experiences, we have expanded our focus to include participation in many diverse activities to promote model railroading in general and N-Scale model railroading in particular. Activities include participation in local, regional and national shows, meets and conventions. **BANTRAK membership includes membership in the national NTRAK organization.**

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### **BANTRAK Calendar**

**8/15** — Club meeting at Alan Del Gaudio's, 2pm

**8/27-29** — N-Scale Weekend, Bedford, PA

**9/19** — Club meeting, location TBA

**10/29-31** — GSMTS, Timonium, MD

**11/26-28** — Turf Valley Model Train Show, Ellicott City, MD

**December** — Festival of Trains, B&O Museum, Baltimore, MD

The **BANTRAK** Newsletter is the official publication of the Baltimore Area N-TRAK organization.

This is your newsletter! Please send articles, photos, and suggestions to [newsletter@bantrak.net](mailto:newsletter@bantrak.net).

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