



Coast Mail

News from the San Luis Obispo
Railroad Museum

Issue Number 76 – Summer 2021 San Luis Obispo, California www.slormm.com

*The Museum plans to open Saturdays from 10 to 4 starting June 5.
See our website for updates and pandemic precautions.*



Long southbound trains of empty intermodal cars returned to the Coast Line in February. This one is leaving the horseshoe curve north of Cal Poly. Photo copyright Jake O'Halloran, used with permission

When they got there, the tables were bare

But it was better than no freight trains at all.

This spring Union Pacific again ran long trains of empty intermodal cars (“bare tables”) southward on the Coast Line. This had been a regular pattern for several years, but stopped last year. These movements are part of a cycle involving imports arriving on the West Coast, loaded containers hauled to the Midwest and East, and mostly empty containers coming back to the West Coast. Some westbounds carry agricultural products, such as soybeans for export to Asia. But different West Coast ports have different roles in handling containers, hence the southward movement that’s not matched by northward loads. One train of multilevel vehicles carriers, which follow a similar pattern, also reappeared. (There’s more bare-table coverage on page 3.)

Beet gondola restoration

We resumed work on the former Southern Pacific sugar beet gondola in late March. Many years of weathering require many days of preparation and painting.



Painting contractor Greg Jackson (on ladder) and curator Brad LaRose start the effort with protective items, paint mixing, and brushwork.

A very unusual visitor

On March 1 a train of Amtrak *Cascades* Talgo-type cars came through southbound, headed for possible re-use or salvage. The low-slung cars had been used between Seattle, Portland, and Eugene. Instead of four-wheel assemblies with axles at each end, each pair of cars shares two independently mounted wheels. The design helps to take curves faster and more comfortably.

Swooping green bands on raised fins were to visually align with a specific type of taller locomotives (below).



Our Mission

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

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

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, and engineer hats.

At www.slorrm.com click on Company Store.

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TIMETABLE

Online auction & pick-up bar-b-que – June 26

Reward your taste buds. Snag a super-long-neck oilcan or other fabulous item or experience like a miniature train ride. And support the Museum. Details at slorrm.com.

Below, guests ride the Bitter Creek Western R.R. near Arroyo Grande. BCWRR website photo



Board of Directors meetings are scheduled for June 8, July 13, and August 10, at 6:00 p.m. at 1940 Santa Barbara Ave., S.L.O.

Thank you to board member Schroeder

The Spring *Coast Mail* welcomed two new members of the Museum's Board of Directors. We also thank departing member Feride Schroeder, a busy Cuesta College instructor who remains involved.

Parlor Car Chats Online

This looks interesting. Watch recorded adventures on your own schedule: slorrm.com/parlor-car-chats.html



Become a member

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

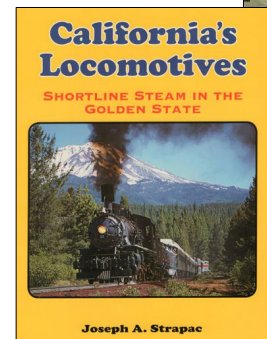
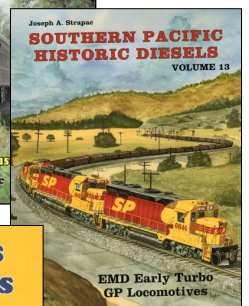
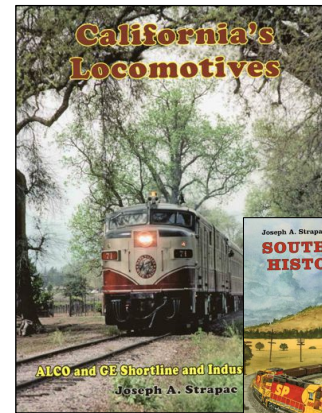
Individual members pay \$36 per year, a family \$60, and a sustaining member \$100. Junior memberships (ages 12-18) for the model railroaders are available (see our Model Railroad Superintendent for details).

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 and access to Members Only features of the website, including full current issues of *Coast Mail*.

Book bargains available

A fine book on Alco and GE shortline and industrial locomotives and several other books by Joseph Strapac, all new, are available at amazing prices in the Museum Store.



More Coast Mail online

Slot machine at San Luis Obispo, making more history, and recreating a past point of view.

Pumpkin patch in San Luis Obispo

No vines here, only three Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railway (BNSF) locomotives, sitting in the “helper pocket” opposite the San Luis Obispo depot in February. Their long string of empty intermodal cars waits out of view to the south. This train, like the one on page 1, had come from the north. It was waiting for a rested, qualified crew.

Locomotives of one railroad (BNSF) may appear on the tracks of another (Union Pacific) due to a run-through arrangement, where locos stay with a string of cars from origin to destination. Other arrangements that see locomotives off home rails are trackage rights and haulage rights, and a detour or a railroad repaying borrowed horsepower -hours.

BNSF resulted from a merger of Burlington Northern (BN), which had locomotives painted green, black, and white, and Santa Fe, which used blue and yellow or silver and red. The orange of the locomotives shown recalls BN component Great Northern.



Fog characteristic of spring and summer rolled in to tone down the bright orange of these BNSF Railway locomotives on February 15. BNSF is the only top-tier North American railroad that's privately held (by Warren Buffet's Berkshire Hathaway) rather than publicly traded on stock exchanges.

A beautiful day in the neighborhood

In January the Museum learned that a new book on tourist railroads and railroad museums is being prepared. Seeing an opportunity to be known by a wide readership, volunteers set out to find or create suitable images, at the request of the author. Museum member and professional videographer Jack Hutchinson took the one below in February. Properly operated drones allow such views to be enjoyed without trespassing. The Plymouth switcher, former Southern Pacific caboose, and Pullman café-lounge car *La Cuesta* had been shifted south on the display track, in anticipation of a flat car for Pacific Motor Trucking trailers arriving.



Boxcar restoration

Museum volunteers have been working hard to restore the 98-year-old Southern Pacific boxcar. While it has a steel frame and side bracing, the sheathing is wood planks. Curator Brad LaRose is leading a months-long, donation-funded effort to make the car suitable for an exhibit on Southern Pacific workers.

Below, Dan Manion applies special primer to one of the four trucks (wheel assemblies) that rolled off who knows how many miles. Brad LaRose photo



Railroad inspiration

Last Fall your editor entered three photos in *Trains* magazine's annual contest, with the theme of "gray area." The theme could be interpreted literally or figuratively. It looked like an opportunity to share aspects of the Museum with a national readership, even if the probability of being published was low. Results will be known in a few months.

What might others see in a local rail-themed image? A photo similar to one submitted, and another quite different photo, were sent to San Luis Obispo High School English teacher Jane Hawley, with an invitation for students to provide poems, essays, or short stories inspired by one of the photos. Here are some of the results. We'll have more in the Fall edition.

Full Moon Ride

Stopped under the tracks
 We wait and watch
 Her rise
 From her milky rest
 I admire her
 For rising time and time again
 For those who ride below
 She offers all her luminescence
 To guide Hermes' children
 Wanderlust and ticket stubs
 Man may have built the path
 But she guides it
 And we
 The children of a cruel summer
 Resorting to the old train tracks
 For an exchange of purpose
 Some day again
 She will push the masses
 Through the forests and cities and plain
 But for now
 She has you and I
 Traveling within
 The limits of our sedentary existence.

by Lily Daane

The full moon shines through a Stenner Canyon trestle tower.



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

Untitled

Under a peaceful sky,
 A train rumbles by.
 Past the coast, through the mountains and hills
 Into San Luis Obispo full of sweet, small-town thrills.

From Los Angeles, in the front of the train
 A college student snores.
 Coming home from his first semester,
 Aged three years in three months.

Under a peaceful sky,
 A train rumbles by.

In the middle of the train,
 An elderly woman on her monthly ride.
 She misses when her days were full,
 And patiently awaits another passenger to engage with her.

Past the coast, through the mountains and hills
 Into San Luis Obispo full of sweet, small-town thrills.

A sleepy mom smiles over her daughter and three friends,
 8 years have come and gone.
 She wonders if at 18 her sweet baby will care more about
 Tanning in the Santa Barbara sand than going to the zoo.

Horns blare.
 Trains stop.
 Passengers come and go,
 Their seats they swap.

A new set of stories,
 A new sunny day,
 But the tracks stay the same,
 California scenery on full display.

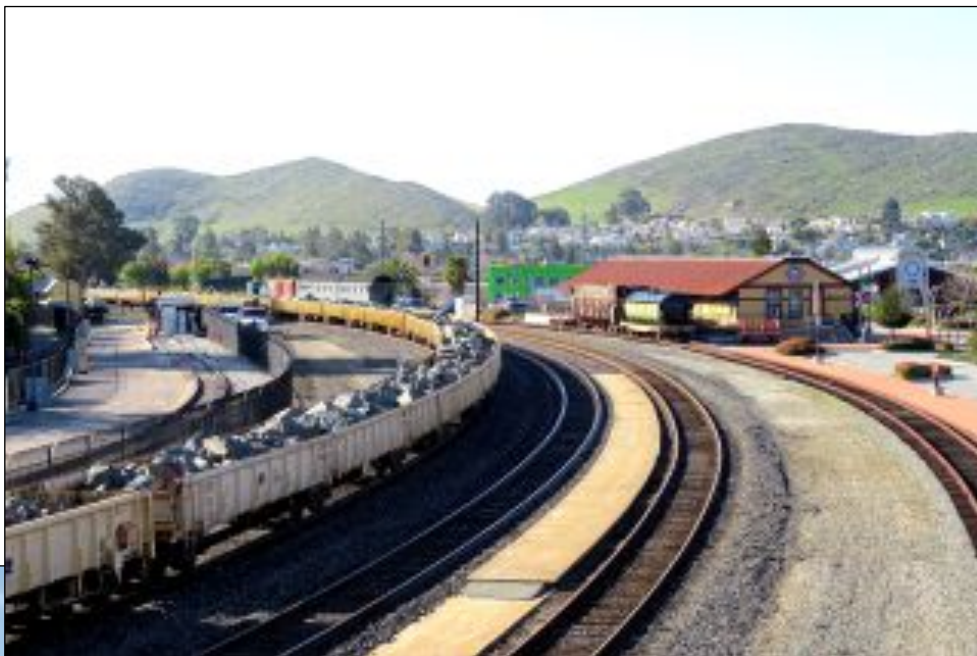
Under a peaceful sky
 A train rumbles by
 Past the coast, through the mountains and hills
 Out of San Luis Obispo full of sweet, small-town thrills.

By Allison Dierks

So much rip-rap

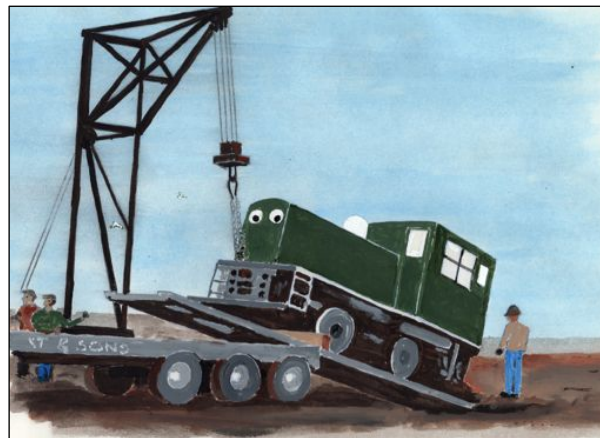
At least twice in March the Slot Machine train came to San Luis Obispo. That's a trade name for the articulated cars (11 sections to a set) that are designed to carry rocks. The largest rocks are used to support banks along creeks and the ocean, and to protect against erosion. An un-loader similar to a backhoe can travel the full length of the train. In the photo below, it's at the near end of the first articulated set behind the locomotives.

These boulders were destined to Vandenberg Air Force Base or points farther south.



Danny never hauled this many

Danny the Diesel Locomotive Hauls Rocks, a sequel to *Danny the Diesel Locomotive*, will be available online by Fall as a dual English-Spanish book for young visitors. And a future book in the series may include the day that Danny looked over to see more big rocks than he ever imagined would be in one train (seen between locomotive and caboose below).



After leaving Camp Roberts, the 20-ton switcher went to a construction company and to a quarry before being brought to San Luis Obispo.



Making more history

Unlike real estate, more history is made every day.

The photo at left of a rig set up to take core samples was taken looking over the rock train's continuous jumble of boulders (previous page). The San Diego – Los Angeles – San Luis Obispo (LOSSAN) passenger rail coordinating agency is preparing plans for a new layover facility that would occupy the site of Southern Pacific's roundhouse and outdoor locomotive servicing area (right of the tracks in this view). Replacing the existing single, stub-end layover track opposite the depot, the new facility would have several tracks and maintenance buildings. It could accommodate a second morning departure from San Luis Obispo and more services in the future.

Core samples will reveal the subsurface conditions that site preparation and design of roadbed and structures must take into account.

The preliminary site plan shows the proposed facility extending from the eastern end of High Street to the vicinity of Francis Avenue.

Image below by HDR engineers for LOSSAN



Bucket truck on Terrace Hill

But why? Isn't the view good enough just standing on the top, with your own actual legs? Not if you are Brian Lawler, who provided the 1930 and 2013 panoramic photos displayed in the Freighthouse. The 1930 photo was taken when the top of the hill was higher. To re-create that point of view in April, Brian used a truck with an extendable boom.

The view at right is from the older Meadow Park neighborhood. Once upon a time your editor could see from his back window the locomotive servicing area, much of the rail yard, the south end of the Freighthouse, and even a stretch of track at Cal Poly north of Highland Drive. Buildings and trees have obstructed most of those scenes. Time rolls on.

