

Earl's Diary - Tuesday - March 4, 2014

Dear Loyal Readers;



Today I would like to invite you to relive my exciting train ride on the Verde Canyon Railroad. You will have to excuse me if I get a little carried away with the photographs. Around every bend in the tracks a new photo opportunity presented itself.

Some of the narration I am taking from *Rail* - the official magazine of the Verde Canyon Railroad. Many of the pictures show the magnificent scenery along the route.

First, here is a little introduction: This railroad is certainly directly connected to the history of the copper mines in Jerome. The Verde Canyon Railroad is a heritage railroad running between Clarkdale and Perkinsville, AZ. The passenger excursion line operates on 20 miles of tracks owned by the Arizona Central Railroad (AZCR), a short-line. The Verde Canyon Railroad has its depot, headquarters, and a railway museum in Clarkdale, about 25 miles southwest of Sedona. The railroad carries about 100,000 passengers per year.

The tracks on which the Verde Canyon Railroad runs were opened in 1912 as part of a north-south branch line linking a copper smelter at Clarkdale and the copper mines at Jerome to Santa Fe railroad tracks passing through Drake, AZ. The Santa Fe Railway owned and operated the 38-mile branch line from 1912 to 1988.

David L. Durbano bought the branch line in 1988. Passenger service between Clarkdale at milepost 38 and Perkinsville at milepost 18, resumed in 1990 under the name *Verde Canyon Railroad*. Milepost 0 of the railroad is at Drake, where the line meets the BNSF Railway system. The AZCR track to Drake is still used for hauling freight even though the excursion line stops at Perkinsville.



The train is so long I couldn't get a single shot of the whole train.



The caboose has been converted to a luxury car which will hold 6 passengers and has plush seats - for a premium price. I was invited by the attendant to come in for a look-see - just until his paying customers arrived.





The first class coach had comfortable padded seats which would accommodate 4 persons in each section. Since I was by myself I had the pleasure of having a table for 2 - with no one else at the other seat.

I opted for a first class ticket which was less than the caboose ticket, but a little more than a coach ticket. My ticket included a light lunch - chicken wings, salad, veggie plate, and brownie dessert.



All aboard! We're off on our leisurely 4 hour excursion into Verde Canyon. I was told the train length was 20 cars, which covered just over 1/4 mile. On the way out, our car was second from the caboose so we had a good look at the front of the train.

The Colorado Plateau is 130,000 square mile mesa that extends into Colorado, Utah, and New Mexico. The Mogollon Rim is 300 miles long but the red rocks for which Sedona is famous are only exposed for about 25 of these miles.



Shortly after leaving the station we passed through the old slag dump. Slag is part of the waste material from the smelter and was actually poured in a molten state. The rusted iron pipes and sheet iron originally formed a barrier to keep the molten waste from the tracks. The slag cooled into the very hard material shown in these pictures. The mountain of slag covers about 40 acres, averages 40 feet in depth and represents almost 40 years of operation.





The trestle for this bridge was actually constructed utilizing an old turntable from the Prescott roundhouse.

Just below this point, the Verde River emerges from its inner gorge and becomes entrenched below the tracks in a narrow steep-walled canyon.



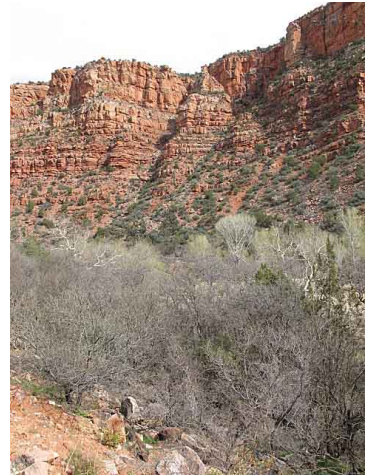
The caboose followed us all the way!



From the Clarkdale depot to Perkinsville, the train will ascend in elevation almost 500 feet.. As the train passes Sycamore siding, all roads past the parking lot located on top of the basalt ridge are private. There are four homes on the river opposite the track, a result of two homesteads and a mining claim that predate the establishment of the National Forest.

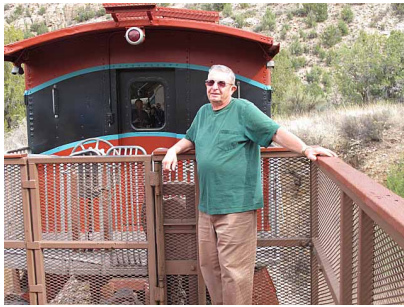


Passengers enjoying the open air observation car





Very few excursion trains provide passengers the thrill of passing through a tunnel. This manmade tunnel is 680 feet long and curved so the exit cannot be seen from the entrance. At some points the train comes within six inches of the tunnel walls, which was blasted through solid limestone and is supported by timbers only for about 30 feet at one end. In 1914 a crew of 25 Swedes completed the project in just six months.

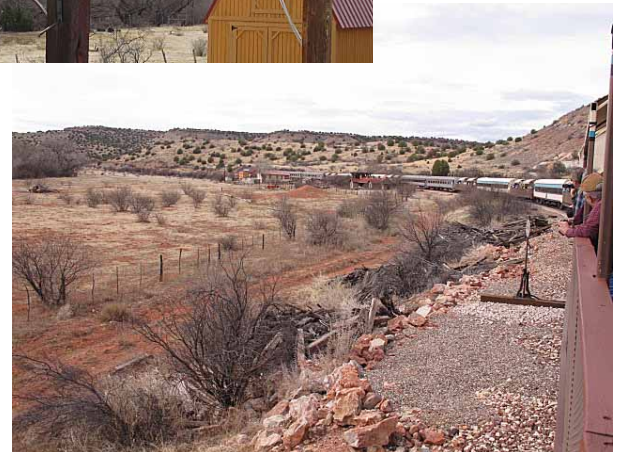


Just to prove I'm on the train!



The canyon walls drop away on both sides of the track as we emerge into the Perkinsville valley.

This large cave was excavated in the 1960s by geologists from the Arizona State Museum. There is evidence this cave was utilized by Native Americans as living quarters.



In 1912 the Railroad put a station on the Perkins ranch and called it Perkinsville.



The structures remaining in “downtown” Perkinsville were all built by the railroad. The first building on the left was the section house (bunkhouse). Just beyond is the base of the old water tower. The last steam engines came through this valley in 1952. Beyond the tower’s base is a house which was originally occupied by the Santa Fe station master.



Gone and forgotten?



What’s left of the old station



These whitish-colored tailings are the site of a limestone quarry and kilns for converting the limestone into slaked lime. The lime was transported to the Clarkdale copper smelter where it was used as flux in the smelting process.

At its peak, Perkinsville had 10 to 12 families in the immediate area. For a brief period, there was a small school, general store and post office. The smelter closed in the early 1950s eliminating the need for slaked lime and the railroad switched to diesel locomotives which made the water stop unnecessary. Soon after, Perkinsville became a ghost town.

In the 1960s, a few scenes from the classic Western film *How the West was Won* were shot here. George Peppard, Debbie Reynolds and Eli Wallach were featured in the depot.

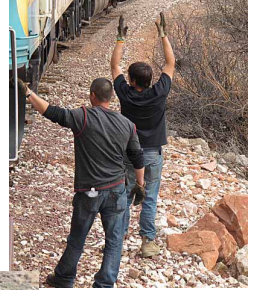
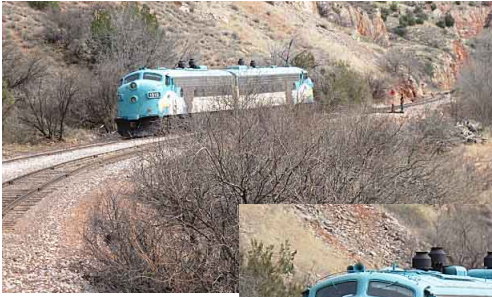
The railroad tracks go on another 18 miles beyond Perkinsville to Drake to meet the Santa Fe/ Burlington Northern line. This part of the railroad is still used for hauling freight by the Clarkdale Arizona Central Railroad.



At this time the engines of the train were disconnected and brought around on the siding to the rear of the train to be connected to the caboose for the return trip to Clarkdale.



The Perkinsville ranch on the Verde River remains in the Perkins family.



All hooked up with only a slight bump

Three toots of the horn and we are on our way back to Clarkdale. This time we are at the front of the train with those in the back taking pictures of us!



Obviously not my photos but shows the train in the canyon

What a wonderful trip. I can recommend the Verde Canyon Railroad if you are looking for a leisurely ride. The train speeds along at 10 miles an hour. Drinks and food are available while on the journey.

Thanks for coming along with me today. I hope you enjoyed the trip as much as I did.
Bye for now - - Earl

