



FALL 2021 | VOLUME 1 | ISSUE 1

Big News and Fun Stuff from One of America's Oldest Railroads

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# RAILBIKES ON THE NOYO



An entirely new journey along the Noyo River, extending the Railbike line by 12.5 miles. Read more about this unique experience on Page 6.

Photo by Brendan McGuigan



## Navigating COVID-19 as a Railroad

This has been a year unlike any other, both here at The Skunk and in the world at large. Our incredible staff has been working tirelessly to ensure the safety of our guests, workers, and community throughout the Covid-19 pandemic. We have implemented safety protocols across the board, deep cleaning surfaces and spaces, switching over to mask usage on all of our trips and back-of-house operations, limiting travel among our workers, and being some of the first in line to ensure our team received vaccines. Although this

time is not yet over, along with the rest of the world we are eagerly anticipating a return to normalcy and are thrilled to welcome guests back on to our rides. As a common carrier we are under Federal Railroad Administration & Transportation Security Administration regulations, and as such are currently looking forward to relaxing restrictions in late January, 2022. Whatever the timeline we are proud of our crew members who have done everything to ensure guests have a space in which to experience the glory of the redwoods.

## Visitor Survey

Every year we perform a visitor survey to determine the impact we have on our local community. Our 2020 survey once again demonstrated that the Skunk Train is an integral part of the Mendocino County community and one of the strongest economic drivers in the region. Of our riders, 70% were visiting the Skunk Train for the first time – and 32% were visiting Mendocino County for the first time. 42% planned their trip to the area specifically to ride the Skunk Train, and 80% stayed overnight.

The average stay was 2.7 nights, generating a whopping 73,000 room nights. Our average rider spent \$800 on their trip, excluding tickets, generating over \$27 million for the local economy. Not bad for a 136-year-old Skunk!



skunktrain.com

## What's In A Name?

The nickname "Skunk" originated in 1925, when motorcars were introduced. The combination of fumes created a very pungent odor. Old timers living along the line said these motorcars were like skunks: "You could smell them before you could see them."



## BIG PICTURE

Reinvigorating  
a Town

Taking ownership of a large portion of the historic coastal Mill Site, the Skunk Train will work with experts to develop a world-class destination, breathing new life into this unique stretch of coastline.



**A visionary reimagining of the defunct Fort Bragg Mill Site to meet the needs of a new millennium**

Concept imagery from the broadly approved Mill Site Land Use Plan, developed by Hornberger+Worstell

After years of planning and hard work with an incredible team of experts, the Skunk Train is excited to unveil its land use plan for the Fort Bragg Mill Site. This is a once-in-a-generation project, completely reimagining one of the California Coast's most striking stretches of oceanfront land. The vision and scope of the new Mill Site is staggering, incorporating tiered housing, an oceanfront hotel, sprawling open space preserves, the central Railroad Square, an oceanfront rail expansion, a flagship restaurant, commercial space, and an educational historic park.

Since the day the Mill Site

closed, its future has been an open question for the residents of the Mendocino Coast. Numerous plans are proposed.

The most successful of these plans to date is certainly the City-led Coastal Trail. It first opened in a limited capacity in 2015, since then seeing further expansion, including the construction of the **Noyo Center for Marine Science's** Crow's Nest.

We at the Skunk have also been involved in the planning – taking stewardship of some of our legacy property and reimagining it as a cornerstone of the Fort Bragg economy in the post-Mill era. Working



with **Hornberger + Worstell**, we developed a Master Plan to preserve and develop hundreds of acres that we will purchase from **Georgia-Pacific**.

This plan is the culmination of years of community and government collaboration, expert input, and a genuine love

and appreciation of Fort Bragg and this historic site. Our broadly-approved plan reflects local citizens' community plan, and is sweeping in scope. It envisions new residential properties at all levels of density, a restoration of part of the coastal spur of the rail line, expanded public

parking, a hostel, live/work units, storefront commercial space, a massive open space preservation, a restoration of our dry shed, an oceanfront hotel and condos, a Pomo education center, and more. We have purchased 77 acres from Georgia-Pacific, and are finalizing the purchase of the balance of the site.

We are excited to continue sharing our vision and our progress as we work with the community and local government. We will ensure this space adds meaningfully to the economic prosperity and lifestyle of the Mendocino Coast.

(continued on page 3)

## A Storied Legacy

For over a century the Fort Bragg Mill Site stood as the absolute geographic landmark and economic driver for the City of Fort Bragg. In many ways, it was the origin of Fort Bragg. After the short-lived military fort was abandoned, the majority of the land sat unused. When our founder, C.R. Johnson, started his lumber operations on the Mendocino Coast, the primary mill was located at Newport, just south of Westport.

The Union Lumber Company's blossoming timber operations soon outstripped Mill Creek's capacity. C.R. Johnson turned his gaze south, where the sprawling site of the army base offered plenty of flat land for growth and deep coastal waters for log-carrying ships. On November 16, 1885, Mill #1 commenced operations capable of producing more than 80,000 board feet per 12-hour shift. Mill No. 1 remained in use for nearly 111 years. At its peak it produced more than 500,000 board feet per shift before finally closing its doors on June 21, 1996.

Thus began the decline of the Mill Site, then owned by Georgia-Pacific. The mill was finally shuttered for good in 2002.

Throughout its long history the Mill Site contributed massively to Fort Bragg. C.R. Johnson laid out the original plan for the city after opening the mill, and became its first mayor in 1889.

We look forward to shepherding this incredible stretch of coastline as it enters its next chapter.

## Who Owns the Skunk Train?

**Mendocino Railway** operates **The Skunk**, and also operates **Sacramento**, California's **River Fox** (riverfoxtrain.com). Mendocino Railway is a subsidiary of Northern California's **Sierra Railroad Company**, which purchased and reopened The Skunk in

2003 after the closure of the GP mill. It also provides freight railroad services through **Sierra Northern Railway** (sierranorthern.com) and renewable zero-emission energy and fuels through **Sierra Energy** (sierraenergy.com).



## Model Railroad Barn

Discover History In Motion!

Located just west of the Fort Bragg depot, the Model Railroad Barn showcases the history of rail in Mendocino County, highlighting the 1900-1940 period, presented in G-Scale over 1,800 feet of working track. Admission is free with a Skunk Train ticket.





Two Phases of Development

Phase One of the proposed development will create 500 units, as well as extensive open space to retain the beauty of the area. Phase Two adds a beautiful southern park and a connection point to the Noyo Headlands Coastal Trail.

BIG PICTURE

The future begins with rethinking our depot area – an expansion into a newly-revitalized Railroad Square, with green walking space and structures, a large indoor space to host farmer’s markets and other events, our depot, and the model rail museum. We have also retained the Dry Shed – a 70,000 square foot building – the only remaining original building on the site.

We are also restoring train service to Glass Beach for passengers and will be adding an iconic train station there with a view of the ocean, built in the style of a historic lighthouse.

Housing takes place in multiple areas of the plan, all modern and comfortable, ranging from medium density to small-unit high density, helping to alleviate some of the housing pressure the coast is currently experiencing.

The southern portion of the plan envisions a beautiful modern hotel, with condos attached. This will offer economic opportunities for our local community, as well as helping to cement Fort Bragg as a scenic destination for visitors.

The western portion of the property will be devoted to public parks and open space, building on the success of the existing Coastal Trail.

In the north we hope to work with the **Sherwood Band of Pomo Indians** to provide a space for cultural education. We hope this can help give visitors an experience that can shed light on some of the historic injustices this site represents, and we will defer to the tribe on how this can best be achieved – here we are making space, but come to it with an open mind, not wishing to put our own values on the final product.

Although this project is still in its relatively early phases, we see the Mill Site as the most important project of this century for the Mendocino Coast! We look forward to working with local leaders to help ensure it adds to all of our economic prosperity and lifestyle.



An ambitious redevelopment to reimagine one of the most-stunning stretches of the California coastline.

LOCAL SPECIAL

Mendocino County residents can use code **MendoFall21** for deeply discounted trips!

Pudding Creek Express	\$41.95	\$32
Wolf Tree Turn	\$49.95	\$30
Pudding Creek Railbikes	\$250.00	\$100
Railbikes on the Noyo	\$495.00	\$150
Fort Bragg Pumpkin Express	\$47.95	\$30
Fort Bragg Christmas Train	\$49.95	\$32
Willits Pumpkin Express	\$52.95	\$35
Willits Christmas Train	\$52.95	\$35

ID must be presented at time of ride to prove residency.  
No early pickup of tickets.

Now Hiring!

Team Skunk is hiring for all positions!

Executive / Administration, Mechanical, General Labor – Track Maintenance Worker, Retail, Construction, Train Crew – Brakeman / Conductor!

Join a team of dedicated, passionate, hard-working people to help this 136-year-old institution continue to thrive!

Call 707.964.6371 For More Info!



UPDATES

**Tunnel No. 1 Reopening Plan** With the tunnel settled after its collapse, primary survey work can now begin, with the goal of reopening the full Redwood Route within the next year.

TUNNEL NO. 1 UPDATE

THE LIGHT AT THE END OF THE TUNNEL

Plans are in progress to reconstruct Tunnel No. 1 for the next century, restoring access to the full Redwood Route

More than any other single issue, we receive regular correspondence inquiring as to the status of our Tunnel No. 1 – the artery that connects the short western side of our line from Fort Bragg to The Glen with the majority of our rail, terminating in Willits.

Tunnel No. 1 is a 1,112 foot bore, completed in 1893 by the California Western Railroad and was a critical step toward connecting the mill town of Fort Bragg to the extensive redwood holdings east of the tunnel in the Noyo River Basin. It was built by skilled Chinese laborers, without whose hard work the Skunk Train as we know it simply would not exist.

In 2013 Tunnel No. 1 suffered a massive cave-in sometime between April 12 and 13. Although there had been other cave-ins, this was on a scale not

seen before. Forty feet of the tunnel collapsed down, with thousands of tons of rock sealing off a huge portion of the bore. With large-scale community involvement and an incredible partnership with the Save the Redwoods League, the Skunk Train worked with an outside

“The steel rails that connect Fort Bragg to Willits will once again do so as we commence work in Q1 of 2022.”

contractor to repair the damage. Work on the tunnel by an outside contractor led to the collapse of the tunnel and their insurance company declined coverage.

An El Nino event in 2015-2016 meant a huge amount of water fell on the tunnel in a short period of time, and the consequences of the shoddy workmanship became apparent with a second collapse. This was more extensive –

affecting nearly 200 feet of the tunnel, and destabilizing the area.

For six years we have undertaken the work of shoring up the tunnel collapse to prevent further sliding, and have invested over a million dollars in stabilization efforts securing and terracing the hillside

and making it ready for the restoration of the tunnel.

We are now at the point where enough settling has occurred that these engineers can begin drafting a formal plan. We hope to have the tunnel reopened in late 2022. The tunnel was nearly completely rebuilt in 1976 when freight train crews brought an excess height boxcar through the Tunnel creating a massive cave in whereby we had to exhume most



A wooden pedestrian bridge currently crosses Pudding Creek from The Glen to the closed Tunnel No. 1 before continuing on to a scenic trail through stands of ancient redwoods.

of it and rebuild it. The work we plan to do will further modernize it ensuring that it will not only survive the next El Nino event or earthquake, but that it will be in a good position to remain open for the coming decades and century.

Tunnel No. 1 is located only three miles from the Western terminus of our line, and its closure limits not only our ability to run through service for scenic trains, but also our ability to undertake new operations on the line. We

are looking at a resumption of freight service, talking to local businesses about being able to use the trains as a low-carbon way to transport their goods to and from Fort Bragg. In the future it may even be possible to connect at Willits with other lines, relinking Fort Bragg to the greater web of railways throughout the United States.

This tunnel is a critical part of our history and our future, and we are excited to do the necessary work

to ensure that it reopens. We know many of you have a deep connection to our fully-connected journey, and we want to assure you that we feel equally passionate about the issue. We know it has been a long time coming – unfortunately these things take time. We are finally at a point where we can see the light at the end of the tunnel – and we will share, in these pages and in other public forums, our progress as this important moment draws nearer.



The Historic Redwood Route

Spanning 40 miles, the full Redwood Route passes through ancient redwood groves, alongside two stunning rivers, and over more than thirty trestle bridges. Our current excursions run from Fort Bragg to The Glen (Pudding Creek Express and Pudding Creek Railbikes), from Willits to Headwaters (Wolf Tree Turn), and from the east side of Tunnel #1 to Camp Noyo (Railbikes on the Noyo).



Restoring  
Natural Habitat

Working paw-in-hand with Trout Unlimited, the Skunk is doing his part to ensure that vital salmon habitat is restored and maintained for the next generation.

ECOLOGY

ECOLOGICAL STEWARDSHIP

SKUNK SAVES SALMON!

Working Paw in  
Fin with Trout  
Unlimited to restore  
vital waterways to  
Mendocino County

Environmental stewardship has always been a part of the Skunk Train’s mission. Our founder, C.R. Johnson, was a visionary conservationist, who set aside massive stands of old growth redwoods in the middle of his holdings to preserve them for generations to come. That forward-looking attitude helped make the Skunk the incredible destination it is – without untouched redwoods along our line the trip would not be the once-in-a-lifetime visit it is.

So we are always looking for ways to continue this legacy of preservation and restoration, and are excited to announce two major restoration projects along the Noyo River and our line.

These projects would not have been possible without the amazing partnership of Trout Unlimited, the Mendocino Land Trust, the California Fish Passage Forum, the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, NOAA Fisheries, the California Department of Fish and Wildlife, the Nature Conservancy, the Salmonid Restoration Project, Michael Love and Associates, Granite Construction, and AECOM. Together the project costs \$3.5 million, and we are grateful to the many funders Trout Unlimited brought to make it a reality.

The first site is located at the Upper Noyo – just east of Burbeck, and the first place the railroad tracks cross the Noyo River after salmon spawn at the headwaters. Originally the Upper Noyo location had an open flow streambed at its base, but in the 1990s this was replaced with a large (and we do mean large) culvert. This was to the long-term detriment of the fish habitat, and it was our desire to restore that flow to encourage fish spawning and travel. We exhumed old infrastructure in its entirety, and the soil atop it, before replacing it with modern, fish-friendly infrastructure and restoring the soil. The result is a free-flowing waterway that salmon and other fish can once again utilize.



The newly-restored streambed and state-of-the-art culvert system allows for fish to return to the waterways to spawn and live

The second site, Gulch C, is in and surrounding Shake City. The existing infrastructure here was historic and beautiful, but once again was not conducive to fish habitat. The exterior was a typical concrete construction, and the interior was redwood. Here we also replaced the infrastructure to restore the natural streambed. At the personal direction of Mike Hart, Gulch C has been permanently renamed ‘*Pinoli Gulch*’ in recognition of the years of work that Mendocino Railway CEO Robert Pinoli has invested in this project!

Both of these projects have been incredibly gratifying to all of us here at the Skunk. We love our history, and love the beauty that comes along with many of our older infrastructure pieces (our wooden trestle bridges are some of the most popular spots along our route). With this history comes a need to recognize when pieces have outlived their usefulness. These two culverts represent just such a situation – engineered originally with the best of intentions, but as our understanding of habitat has evolved, so too have our needs.

The potential impact of these modernizations cannot be over-emphasized, and we are incredibly grateful to Trout Unlimited to lending their expertise throughout the process. The Noyo River houses one of the most stable California coho populations in the state – but even that is in danger, ranked as a moderate to high extinction risk. Coho salmon are vanishing shockingly quickly across the state, and without recovery projects on key watersheds throughout the state, the species will vanish. Together, these restoration projects reopen spawning access to nearly two miles of critical waterway – both for California coho and steelhead. We couldn’t be happier.

The project has attracted national attention as well – just this March, Trout Unlimited called out this specific project while testifying before the House Natural Resources Committee (on which sits our very own Congressman Jared Huffman).



SNAPSHOT

**Railbikes on the Noyo** This incredible 25-mile roundtrip journey takes you through some of the most scenic stands of redwoods along the Redwood Route, culminating in a picnic at fabulous Camp Noyo before returning to Tunnel No. 1



A brand-new excursion from the Skunk Train, redefining the railbike experience with a half-day luxury experience

A REVOLUTIONARY NEW JOURNEY

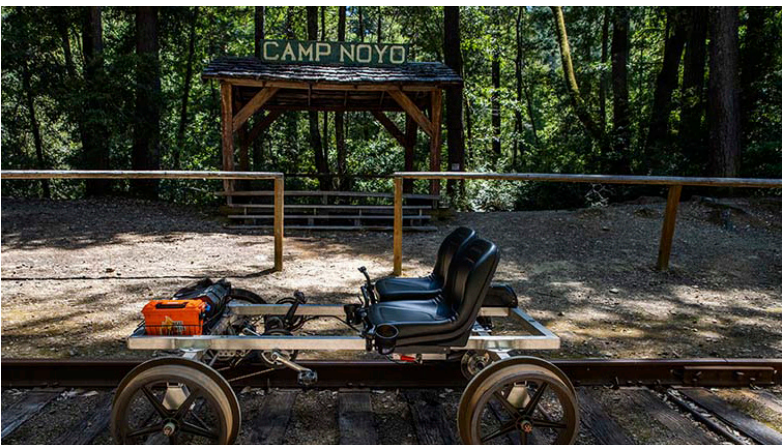
RAILBIKES ON THE NOYO

Railbike lovers take note! The Skunk continues to innovate with this exciting new half-day ride through some stunning redwood groves along our line – getting you back into the **Noyo Canyon** for the first time in a long time!

Building on the success of our highly popular Pudding Creek Railbikes experience departing from the **Fort Bragg Depot**, we’re thrilled to announce an entirely new experience. This very special trip has required the reopening of this section of the railroad for just a handful of riders, and we’re excited to unveil our new Noyo Experience. This trip departs from the far side of Tunnel No. 1, opening up miles of open track to our railbikes.

You’ll arrive at our property on **Sherwood Road**, just a few minutes from the main depot. From there a short hike on a beautiful new trail takes you through the redwoods to the Noyo River.

From there you’ll ride 25 miles roundtrip – an extensive ride that takes you past some of the most



The railbikes stop at Camp Noyo for relaxation, exploration, and a light picnic

Majestic views with an old timey nostalgia... definitely be bringing more friends and family this way!

- Liz W.



AT A GLANCE

- DEPARTURE POINT: **Sherwood Rd. Fort Bragg**
- TURNAROUND: **Camp Noyo**
- LENGTH: **25 Miles Roundtrip**
- DURATION: **Four Hours**
- RIDERS PER BIKE: **Two**
- PRICE: **\$495 Per Bike**
- INCLUDED: **Bike Rental Group Guide Picnic Beverage**

A Tale of Two Stops

Although we are offering a number of exciting new rides for your enjoyment, the core of the Skunk has been, and will always be, our train trips. Currently we’re offering two trips: the 7-mile roundtrip Pudding Creek Express out of Fort Bragg, and the 16-mile roundtrip Wolf Tree Turn out of Willits. These trips take you to two of the historic stops along the Redwood Route, and are great fun for the whole family.



Surveyor's camp at Crowley

The Glen

The Pudding Creek Express disembarkment is at **The Glen**, 3.5 miles in from the coast. This was the junction point that spurred off to the town of **Glen Blair** – also known as **Glenela**. The **Glen Blair Lumber Company** founded this site, producing some of the finest redwood timber in the world, until the **Union Lumber Company** acquired it in 1891. Until Tunnel #1 was completed, Glen Blair was the end of the line – and flourished until the 1920s, when it was abandoned and eventually overgrown by redwoods.

Newly developed, The Glen features a large platform deck for easy disembarkment a scenic hiking loop trail through the redwoods, and a longer trail leading back to the Fort Bragg depot. This stunning locale is where **Little Valley Creek** meets **Pudding Creek**, and is the perfect setting for a stop.

Headwaters

The Wolf Tree Turn trip ends at the historic station of **Crowley**, now **Headwaters**, which we’ve developed into a comfortable place to hike around or enjoy a picnic.

Historically this was a minor logging camp – but not without its quirks. The Frenchman who owned the camp reputedly had a deep love of tennis, and he actually had special clay brought in to construct his own court on the site. The lumber camp here lasted in a dormant state well into the modern era, with the foreman’s house, a mess hall, and five worker bunkhouses remaining intact until recently.



## 136 Years of History

With over a century of history to draw from, we have deep archives of incredible photographs of bygone eras – we'll try to share some of our favorites in every issue.

## HISTORY



A historic bridge on Stage Road, with an early car that reminds us of our very own Railbikes; date unknown



Skunk employee, 1960s



Our gas-powered, self-propelled M-100 railcar (a 'Skunk') in the 1960s



## Year-Round Events

AUG. 20TH & 21ST

SEPT. 10TH & 11TH

### Cinema in the Redwoods

AUG. 6TH, 13TH, & 14TH

SEPT. 10TH, 11TH, 17TH, & 18TH

### Music in the Redwoods

WEEKENDS THROUGHOUT OCTOBER

### The Pumpkin Express

SELECT DATES IN DECEMBER

### Magical Christmas Train



## Skunk Train Season Passes

### A Year of Memories for One Low Price

Can't get enough of the Skunk? Have a die-hard train lover in your life? We've got the solution! Our new Annual Pass gives you the opportunity to enjoy the Skunk Train all year long! One price gets you access to **all four of our major trips**: The Pudding Creek Express, Wolf Tree Turn, Pumpkin Express, and the Magical Christmas Train. Plus a 15% discount on any other special event trains throughout the year, and a 10% discount on all retail merchandise.

Priced at just **\$149.95** for an adult pass, **\$89.95** for a child pass, or **\$29.95** for an infant or pet pass, it's an affordable way to make sure you never miss out on a little bit of train time right when you need it.

From Mild to Wild on the Mendocino Coast

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## In the Next Issue

In our next issue learn the story behind our iconic Art Car, our plans to re-roof the Roundhouse to return it to service, more about our exciting new hiking trail from The Glen to Fort Bragg, the new Sierra Railroad Locomotives (now the lowest-emission fleet in the state, and coming soon to the Skunk), and much more!

Be sure to subscribe to receive the most up-to-date information about everything we have coming, from expansions, new projects, maintainance and the return of old equipment, events, historical tidbits, and interviews with staff old and new.

## Subscribe

Receive the Little Stinker quarterly in your mailbox and stay up to date on everything Skunk related!

Call 707.964.6371 or write [littlestinker@skunktrain.com](mailto:littlestinker@skunktrain.com)





# SKUNK TRAIN

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