

Skagit Valley and Whidbey Clinic
Special Report: Selkirk Express 2016
PNR Regional Convention (Hosted by 7th Division)
Article and Photos by Rich Thom

The 7th Division of the PNR hosted a fine regional convention June 15th – 19th in Salmon Arm, British Columbia. Your reporter rode along with fellow SV&W clinic member Jack Tingstad, for the 5 hr – 50 minute drive from Coupeville—according to Google Maps, that is. Nine hours later (so much for Google Maps!) we settled into one of the overflow hotels in Salmon Arm, the Podollan Inn, adequate enough, but not within walking distance of the convention hotel, the lakefront Prestige Hotel. Hotels filled up quickly it seemed, and our hotel's desk clerk told us that no fewer than 275 were in town for the "Selkirk Express." That seemed high for a regional convention, and in a more-or-less out of the way place like Salmon Arm to boot, but it seemed to be true.

Selkirk X was the typical mix of extra-fare tours, clinics, contest, and layout tours. In addition on the Saturday and Sunday there was a train show at the city's sports center, free to NMRA conventioners. A modest show by US standards, there was nevertheless an impressive free-mo HO layout which almost completely filled one of the two stadium floors. There were layout tours on the program as well, but—disappointingly—ALL were only open on the Sunday afternoon, well after we (and most) convention attendees had to head off for home. After all, most attendees travelled 8 hours or more to get to Salmon Arm. What were the convention planners thinking? Even Vancouver folks we talked to had a five- or six-hour drive to get home. Also disappointing was the lack of any OpSig activity: no layouts were open for op sessions. Nevertheless a good time was had by all. Your reporter signed up for both full-day tours on the Thursday and Friday, described below.

Thursday Tour: South from Salmon Arm

Kettle Valley Railway (www.kettlevalleyrail.org)



The Kettle Valley Railway is always worth a visit. Open to the public during the summer season Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays, the conventioners had a special charter on the Thursday. Ninety booked the tour, about half the capacity of the KVR excursion train, so there was plenty of room. The star of the line is no. 3716 (above) built in 1912 by Montreal Locomotive Works. The RR also has a diesel, an Alco something-or-other (but who cares?).



The scenery on the KVR is pleasant but not spectacular—nothing to match our Colorado narrow gauge lines for example. But this is not to say that the original far-larger Kettle Valley was boring; far from it, some of the line was spectacular with staggering engineering feats. The restored 10 miles, on the hill above Summerland, are tamer. Unlike many tourist lines that seem to start at a “bottom of a hill” and then climb, the KVR does just the opposite; it begins at a station at the top end of the piece of preserved line, and the train runs first downhill, with the loco running tender first, and of course drifting the whole time. The pleasant views (above and below) are mostly pastures, orchards and vineyards, as well as up-market Summerland homes.





At Trout Creek bridge, the lower end of the restored line, after a stop on the high (238 ft) bridge to ooh and aah, the loco runs around to get on the proper end of the train. This is the only—only—decent shot possible of the loco and train, and to a dedicated steam photographer, is disappointing indeed. There is no room to get a broader view, with an annoying bit of chain link fence (center foreground) in the way as well. Oh well, the sun was far too high anyway!



On the return leg, the loco is at least smokebox-first and has to work—a little. The 2.2% grade is no challenge at all for this 2-8-0, which used to haul 50 car trains at 50 mph over this up-and-down RR, but there is some

soft chuffing to please enthusiasts. There are also jerks who have chosen to wear their brightest red caps for the occasion. Memo to Jerks: When you ride a tourist railroad, leave your stupid red caps, orange safety vests (are you in danger here—seriously??), and—ladies—your fave bright pink pants at home. Please.



Just about the best one can do: a pitiful photograph. The jerk in the red cap reacted as intended to obscenities mouthed at him, but unspoken. The steam sounds, muted as they were, were nice and any trip behind a real steam loco beats a day working at home in the garden any time.

Central Okanagan Railway Company

Two other attractions were included on the way back to Salmon Arm from Summerland, the first the Central Okanagan Railway Company (www.centralokrailway.ca) as they call themselves, located on the second floor of the Peachland Museum (www.peachlandhistory.ca), in (where else?) Peachland BC. The museum itself consists of a unique 8-sided church built in 1910, the Peachland Baptist Church, an attraction in itself, and the railway club has managed to attach itself and thrive there. They have modeled in HO-scale the Kettle Valley Railway as it was between 1955-65. It's a club of 12 to 20 model railroaders that meets every Wednesday evening. (Visitors are welcome, their website says.)



Above—Downtown Penticton on the Central Okanagan Rwy Co



One of the fine scenes on the Central Okanagan Railway Company layout in Peachland. The layout is fully scenicked, with buildings, streets, stations and yards lighted too. Curiously, the track is not ballasted. One member told me this was a group decision for maximum operational reliability: museum layouts need a very low failure rate compared to private layouts and clubs.



Car floats, barges and tugboats are plentiful on the railroad, busy during the fruit season in the Okanagan Valley.

The railroad is a bit cramped positioned as it is amongst several other historical displays of china, period artifacts, and female manikins (full size!) in various suggestive dresses of the Golden Age (every layout could perhaps consider including one of these!), but the builders have done a good job of modeling the KVR in a modest space. Worth a visit if in the region.

North Okanagan Model Railway Association (NOMRA) (No Known Website)

Located in the historic O'Keefe Ranch in Vernon, BC, this club is an old one, established in 1976. Originally in a member's garage, the club found a permanent location in 1980 on the second floor of the Greenbow Building, one of several historic structures on the O'Keefe Ranch. The O'Keefe Ranch is a local tourist attraction owned and operated by the city of Vernon, and the club has a great symbiotic relationship. The club is charged a nominal annual fee for the space and in return maintains a historical operating display. During the O'Keefe Ranch's season—May to October—the layout is automated, with full sound, at the press of a button. Up to 30,000 people visit annually.

The club HO layout, named the Shuswap and Okanagan Railway, measures 36 x 18 feet (main room) with a lumber mill addition along a hallway outside of this area. The layout was featured in the May 1996 issue of Railroad Model Craftsman.

But besides its role as a museum display, the club features operations; formal op sessions are held monthly on Saturdays. Currently, switch lists, a dispatcher, and telephones are used to operate realistically. The layout, since its initial "DC Days," has since upgraded to DCC, and more recently a full signaling system has been installed.

What a pity that this layout did not host an op session (or sessions!) for conventioners!



Four NOMRA Members Give an Introduction to the Layout



Another view of the NOMRA layout. In back of the crewman is the Dispatcher—a real dummy. The “real” dispatcher at op sessions is hopefully more alert.

The convention group was so large--90 in three different buses, which staggered their arrival times to attempt to avoid swamping the place--nevertheless swamped the place. As a result none of us was allowed into the layout space—another opportunity sadly missed.



A lumber mill is located on an extension outside the main layout room. Sorry, your reporter likes lumber mills. The mill is glassed in to protect it from the casual Ranch visitors, hence the reflection.

Friday Tour: East from Salmon Arm

Craigellachie—Last Spike

This famous spot marks the place where the Canadian Pacific Railway was completed, Canada's equivalent to Promontory Utah, although it dates from a decade and a half later (1885 vs. 1869). A monument (below),



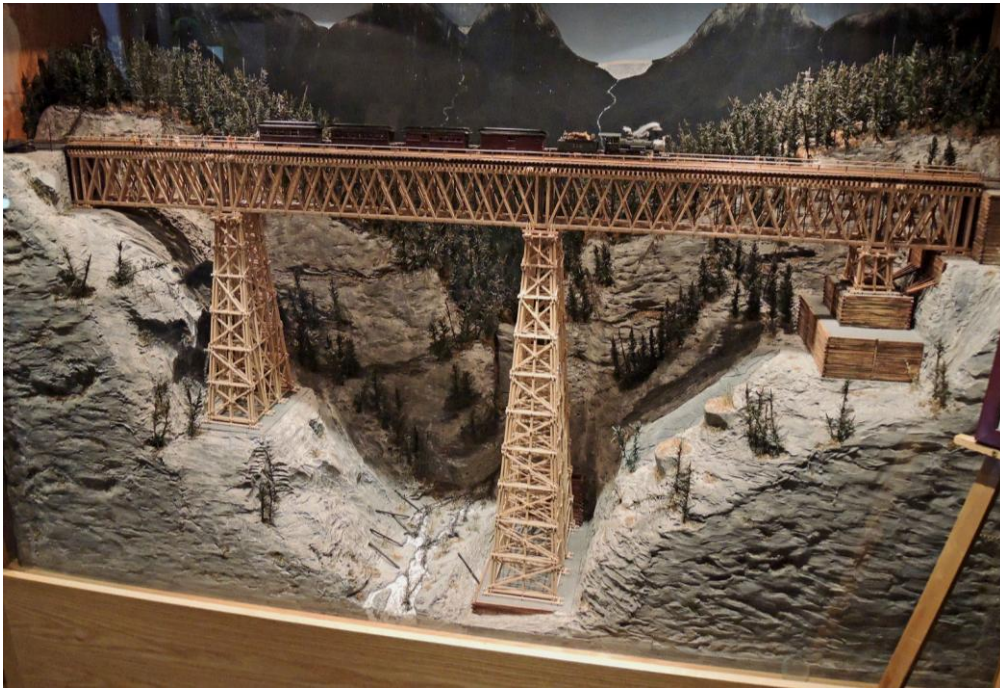
a large parking lot (tour buses stop here, disgorging hordes of Asian visitors who wander about wondering what all the fuss is about), a caboose, and the inevitable gift shop comprise the complex. The most exciting feature is the CP mainline up close and personal—single track, and heavy rail (136 pound, the experts said). With luck, as we had, you'll see a CP train roar by—in our case a unit grain train headed for Vancouver.

Revelstoke Railway Museum (www.railwaymuseum.com)

A fine museum well worth a visit, presenting the history of the CPR in the Columbia mountains. Exhibited indoors (below) is No. 5468, a P-2k class Mikado built by Montreal Locomotive Works in 1948, especially for use in this region. Also inside is Business Car No. 4 built 1929. Both are a trifle cramped (photography is impossible) typical of small museums, but happily they are protected from the weather and will survive.



There are several outdoor exhibits as well such as this CP plow.



Several museum dioramas are spectacular, such as this model of a bridge on the CPR.



On the mezzanine of the museum is the 30 x 10 foot (with some additional extensions) HO-scale Revelstoke Model Railway Club (above). Originally a sectional layout (30" x 60" sections) club, whose members intended to take to meets and conventions, the club's mission changed after losing several members, and subsequently being offered permanent space in the Revelstoke Museum. Another happy relationship between a club and a museum. Although museums do come and go, museum space is often far more secure long-term than private, leased space for a club layout.

The layout depicts key scenes between Clanwilliam Lake and Rogers Pass on the Revelstoke Division in 1952. Club members have built structures and scenes replicating as closely as possible actual locations on the division. A staging yard represents points east and west to originate and terminate traffic over the modelled division. The mainline run is 130 feet.



A Train Crosses a Model of the Twin Butte Bridge on the Revelstoke Model Railway Club Layout

Three Valley Gap Heritage Ghost Town (www.3valley.com)

Twelve miles west of Revelstoke a lakeside 200-room hotel comes into view, complete with an adjacent “ghost town” and a roundhouse. Yes, a roundhouse. This curious place in Three Valley Gap is the brainchild of Gordon and Ethel Bell; Gordon has passed and the operation is now run by members of their large family. The ghost town consists of 25 buildings moved here from all over British Columbia. There is also a collection of old automobiles, the earliest dating from 1902. Of most interest to the NMRA conventioners was the roundhouse.



This is the largest covered roundhouse in North America, with 24 stalls, built by Bell on this site to house his collection of rolling stock. It has a wood-covered turntable platform. The structure is most similar to the roundhouse of the B&O Railroad Museum in Baltimore, but much larger. (The diameter of this one is 300 feet.)

It must have cost millions to build. Perhaps most striking of all is that the building is mostly empty; I counted 12 pieces of rolling stock, in various states of repair. A few have been restored, but many are in original condition.



One of two steam locos in the collection, a 2-6-2. There is no interpretation or signage, nor a builder's plate, and your reporter has no idea of the loco's identity.



One of the nicest pieces is a business car, well-rested.



The other steam loco displayed in the museum. Again no signage.

Convention Contest (A Little Bragging Time!)

As usual, there was a contest in Salmon Arm and your two SV&W clinic delegates did all right. See winning entries below.



Jack Tingstad—Second Place Cars—Scratchbuilt Flat Car with Sulfur Vessels
(Photo taken at Feb 2016 SV&W Clinic)



Your Reporter—3rd Place Prototype Photos—B&W
Loco Servicing, Nancha, China



Your Reporter—1st Place Prototype Photos—Color
Last Run of Plow OY, Cumbres, CO

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