

POTOMAC DIVISION EXCURSION TO THE BURNT TREE INDUSTRIAL RAILROAD

September 16, 2023

By Ernie Little, MMR, Superintendent



Ernie Little, Ken Wilson, George Meyrick, Andy Butler, BTIR Owner Chris Artale, Bob Rodriguez, and Jerry Stanley stand behind Locomotive 252

On Saturday, September 16, 2023, members of the division visited the Burnt Tree Industrial Railroad (BTIR) in Aroda, Virginia. This excursion was an operations session on the BTIR where those attending were provided an opportunity to operate locomotives on freight and passenger trains or just ride as a passenger on one of the passenger trains. You can view a video taken the day of the visit by one of the BTIR regulars at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cuOIUpJzG88>.

This model railroad is in Madison County, Virginia and is owned by Chris Artale who started its construction in 2020 when he hired a contractor to clear the right-of-way and rough grade the area where the track would be laid on his over 100 acres of property. The layout is carved out of a wooded area which provides beautiful natural scenery to complement the track as seen in the satellite view below.



Aerial view of the BTIR

It is a 1/8 scale 7.5"-gauge railroad consisting of approximately 2,800 feet of track of which the main line is 0.44 miles (3.5 scale miles) in length. It has a working yard area, where trains consist are made up to form freight and passenger trains, several seaboard containers in which the locomotives and cars are stored to protect them from the weather, a wooden tunnel constructed on a curve, and several sidings for industries. Most of the switches on the main line are spring switches which automatically throw in the needed direction when going through them. Chris told those in attendance that signaling, and structures are in the future for the railroad.



A passenger train headed by Locomotive 252 on a siding.

The locomotives that operate on the layout are powered by electric (with electric batteries), gasoline, or steam. The roster of the railroad has a variety of freight cars and passenger cars, which are flat cars with seats mounted to them. The photo shows Locomotive 252 which is electrically driven by power supplied by batteries with its consist of cars. The batteries will allow the locomotive to operate all day and are charged inside one of the equipment containers that is equipped with an automatic battery charger which conditions and charges that batteries. The Engineer sits in a seat that is mounted to a car that is connected to the rear of the locomotive and operates the train with a control box that is tethered to the locomotive. It was used to power one of the passenger trains that were on schedule for the day.



Locomotive 12 in the BTIR yard awaiting departure.

Locomotive 12 is another electric locomotive that is primarily used as a yard engine and the Engineer sits in the seat on the car connected to it. For the session this locomotive was used as the Yard engine and had an attendee designed as the Engineer. When used for an operations session the Engineer is teamed with a conductor and a yardmaster to make up the trains that will be running on the layout.



Cotton Belt Locomotive 411 in the BTIR yard awaiting departure.

Cotton Belt locomotive 411 was another locomotive seen on the railroad as part of a passenger train during the event.



Owner Chris Artale

The day started with a short safety briefing offered by the owner Chris where he covered the safety rules and some general information about the layout

A train ride starts on the main track around the yard area and proceeds along a fence line to a small crossing. It then enters the treed area, two passing sidings, to a loop that leads through a 40-foot wooden tunnel and leaves the loop proceeding back to the yard area.

Shortly after the safety briefing the first train of the day entered the layout with Engineer Ernie Little operating locomotive 252 with passengers on board. During the ride, those on the train learned about “surfing” which is when the load on one of the cars is not centered properly causing one of the trucks to derail on the track. After a mid-course correction, the rest of the ride went off with no issues.



Ernie Little operating Locomotive 252 on the Main.



Bob Rodriguez operating Locomotive 252 on the Main.

Next out was Bob Rodriguez operating the same locomotive. During the run an unexpected situation developed where a passenger was “thrown” off his train for not having a ticket. At least that is the story that was told when the train arrived back at the yard but in reality, a small mishap occurred involving a passenger rolling out of his seat and onto the track right-of-way sustaining a minor injury. Something about being thrown off the train for not having a ticket is what I heard.

Locomotive 252 stayed busy the remainder of the day with other members as Engineers, one of which was George Meyrick



Locomotive 272's control box.

Perhaps you may be wondering how the Engineer controls the locomotives. In the case of Locomotive 252 there is a tether cable between the riding position and the locomotive. You can turn the power, headlights, auxiliary fan, bell, and horn using the switches on the control head shown here. The rheostat in the lower right corner is the throttle and allows adjustment from zero to full speed. Other locomotives have similar devices and some have a remote control.



George Meyrick operating a passenger train.

The division members also did their share of supervising Chris Artale as he performed operational tasks. In the photo to the right, you can see Jerry Stanley, Ken Wilson, George Meyrick, Bob Rodriguez, and Andy Butler supervising the movement of one of the locomotives in the yard that needed to go to the shop for maintenance.



Potomac Division members supervising a train movement.



Locomotive being loaded for trip to the shop.

Here you can see the locomotive being loaded into a pickup to go to the shop. This area is where other operators bring their equipment and unload it onto the layout. Some other items of interest are provided in the photos below.

This photo shows the entrance to the 40-foot tunnel that is located at the distant end of the layout on a curve. It is constructed of wood walls and roof with shingles.



The 40-foot tunnel on the back loop.



The tracks to the car maintenance area.

Here you can see the tracks leading up to the car storage container.



Here is a view looking from the yard area toward the main line. The track on the left and right sides are the mainline.

The yard area looking toward the Main.

Here are pictures of the yard area.



Freight Cars in the Yard.



The yard area.



The yard area looking toward the Main.

And last, but maybe the most important, is the rail fanning /crew lounge area. Here you can see Jerry Stanley taking a break between trains.



Taking a break.

Overall, the visit was great and between the division and others, family and friends of Chris, there were about forty persons in attendance. Lunch consisted of pizza from a local pizza shop and bottled water. Many thanks to the owner and Chief Executive Officer Chris Artale and his crew for allowing the division to operate on the layout. In the words of Chris, "I am glad you guys enjoyed your visit. I certainly enjoyed having each of you here to share the railroad with. You guys did a great job running the railroad and I appreciate having the extra engineers and crew available since we had so many guests come to ride trains. You guys are not guests BTW, you're part of the family."