



THE SIDE TRACK

NEWS

from the Toy Train Operating Society Sacramento Valley Division

WINTER

2023

There are three stages of man: he believes in Santa Claus; he does not believe in Santa Claus; he is Santa Claus. - Bob Phillips

Jerry Azzaro, editor

President's Message by Ed Strisar, SVD President

On December 31 National TTOS will dissolve and reorganize into local TTOS units.

On November 11, at our monthly meeting, a motion was passed to merge SVD TTOS with Sac-Sierra TCA. Sac-Sierra dues are \$10 per year; TCA national dues are \$50 per year. The first year dues for those SVD TTOS members who wish to become new Sac-Sierra TCA members will be paid by Sac-Sierra. SVD TTOS members who have already paid their 2024 dues will be reimbursed.

On December 16, at our monthly meeting, a motion was made to hire an attorney to obtain counsel on our reorganization. This is being done

to investigate if there are any possible unknown effects of the merger. At this time there is no further information. Any developments will be announced via e-mail and/or newsletter,



Into the sunset?

Since we voted to merge with TCA, something came to light of importance not known at that time. There is a high possibility SVD would not receive funds from National if we join TCA. The earliest this could be resolved is a BOD meeting on January 21.

I am grateful for the many wonderful people I have met since joining SVD TTOS.

-Ed Strisar

Remembering the "Pine Shadow Railroad" Train Room

Story and photos by Rose Craighead

It's been said that all good times must come to an end. Sometimes we can control that end and other times we cannot. I would like to share the story of The "Pine Shadow Railroad" Train Room.

My husband Kit had O-gauge toy trains as a child. Around 1984 a co-worker gave Kit a post-war American Flyer set and that rekindled his love of toy trains. We soon joined TTOS-SVD and Kit was inspired during home layout tours and decided he needed a layout, not just a train room. Our middle bedroom fit his needs. First the closet doors came off, then the closet was removed, then a 5' X 3' window was added for viewing from the hallway. The layout was complete! Until the tree entered the house in January of 2008 :(

The train room was rebuilt, with some improvements such as insulation between rooms to reduce noise and the overhead layout around the room. The layout was complete! Until Kit passed away in March of 2016 :(

Skip ahead to 2023 and the Pine Shadow Railroad train room has been transformed back into a bedroom. Its been a long road of selling all the train items and getting construction completed. This new guest bedroom will be called the Train Room, decorated with train pictures on the walls and a train tunnel lamp bedside.

Although the era of crossing bells clanging and the smell of engine smoke has passed, the good memories remain forever.



First build-out (view from the hallway)



Storm damage - the double-topped pine tree



Looking into the train room with a tree in it

Editor's note: The story of Kit and Rose's disaster appeared on page 2 of the [Spring 2008 Side Track](#)
Over the years, Kit and Rose hosted several delightful SVD "layout tours" at their home.

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Rebuilding and insulating the train room to minimize sound



reconstruction of transformer area



The second build-out of the Pine Shadow Railroad



It's a bedroom again!



Lamp base with a train exiting a tunnel is a nice reminder





BIG RED FLAGS ALL OVER THIS ONE



-Jerry Azzaro

My friend Roger has been an eBay member for many years. He has made hundreds of purchases, but never learned how to sell. I have helped him out over the years by using my account to sell the items he likes to collect and trade: baseball gloves. Roger has been victimized by a clever eBay scam, as were probably hundreds of other eBay members.

This scammer's location is (supposedly) Israel 🚩, and all items are offered with free shipping 🚩. Roger placed a \$25 order with this seller in August, but never received it - although USPS tracking showed that it had been delivered. Roger assumed "porch theft" and reordered. The same thing happened again.

He grew suspicious and examined the tracking data closely. It showed that the item was delivered at 9:34 AM. Our postman (Roger lives nearby) is never in the neighborhood until late afternoon 🚩.

I know from recently having helped another friend set up an eBay seller account that eBay restricts new sellers to five items or \$100 per month maximum for the first several months while they establish a record, then the restrictions are gradually lifted over a period of several more months.

This seller joined eBay in April 2022, and by September 2023 had a feedback rating of only 32 🚩. However, when I looked at his items for sale there were now **871 listings** 🚩, each with multiple quantities available (e.g. 2 sold, 8 available) 🚩, and **FREE SHIPPING FROM ISRAEL** 🚩. Every item description contained the wording "Please allow additional shipping time for item to clear customs. 🚩"

It took me a while to figure out the false USPS tracking. When an item is sold on eBay, the seller can immediately purchase and print a prepaid shipping label through eBay for USPS, FedEx or UPS. As soon as this is done, the tracking number generated is assigned to the item and tracking can be viewed by the buyer.

HOWEVER, it is also possible to take an item to the post office, pay for the postage over-the-counter, and receive a receipt with a valid tracking number.

I believe that this seller - who was probably NOT in Israel - took some item - perhaps an empty box - to the post office and sent it to a random address in the destination Zip Code. There was probably no return address, or a fake one, and they paid in cash. Then they took that tracking number and applied it to the eBay item. (Remember, the tracking shows only which Zip Code it

was delivered to, not the street address.)

On October 28th, there were no items for sale and this notice appeared on the seller's account page :

"The seller is away until Sat, Nov 25, 2023. Expect a delay in delivery until they return."

The page also showed 243 items sold with no corresponding feedback - which means that Roger and at least 200 others will never receive the items they paid for.

The seller returned on November 25, but then on November 27th was gone again with the message that the seller "is away until December 27th".

They returned on December 27th, as promised. Two more items were sold, and then they went back into hiding "until January 27th".

So, to review:

- 1) The scammer - probably working with an accomplice - opens an eBay account, claiming to be located in a foreign country, and starts legitimately selling and shipping small items to establish a record.
- 2) When the selling restrictions are completely lifted, they list 800-900 items, each with multiple quantities available and all with FREE SHIPPING.
- 3) When an order is received, seller waits for some period of time and then takes a small item to the post office to mail, buying postage over-the-counter and obtaining a tracking number. The item is sent to a random address in the buyer's Zip code.
- 4) That tracking number is applied manually by the seller to the eBay item.
- 5) Sales keep pouring in because the seller is highly rated, the prices are good, there are no negatives (yet) and there is FREE SHIPPING.
- 6) Nobody complains to eBay because they know surface shipping overseas takes a long time, and after all the shipping was FREE.
- 7) After some period of time, when questions from buyers start coming in, the scammers closes their credit card account, folds up their tent and disappear.

My guess is that this seller stole about \$20,000, and is probably still operating under a different seller name now.

When this is discovered, eBay should reimburse all the buyers who were scammed.

Exploring The Feather River Canyon

Story and photos by Phil Fravesi

My fascination with the Feather River Canyon began many years ago while working as a mechanic for Pacific Bell at Tahoe City in 1980. I was also assigned the Portola/Quincy area which introduced me to Plumas County. I spent time camping and water skiing at Lake Almanor and driving the almost deserted roads of Plumas County in my 1958 Corvette. It didn't take long to discover the spectacular scenery and railroad engineering in the area. Naturally, the Keddie Wye comes to mind but if you look carefully and make stops along the way, there are many bridges and tunnels to see and photograph.

Emma and I made several trips to Belden Town to hike the Pacific Crest Trail which crosses Hwy 70 at that point. Hiking to the south to Bucks Lake requires crossing the UP tracks behind the cabins where we stayed. Once, a 100 car freight blocked the tracks from the tunnel portal to the east. After a long wait, we made a fast dash under a tank car. A crazy thing to do for sure. If you explore the Feather River Canyon, be aware it



is covered in poison ivy. We hiked and the following week-end, we headed to the Grand Canyon. While in Death Valley, I discovered my poison ivy. We stopped at the emergency room in Las Vegas hoping there was something new to treat it.

After 4 hours of staff examining me, they sent me on my way with calamine lotion.

CSRM hosted the Railfair in 1991 with equipment from around the country and the world. The UP Challenger was there and made an excursion run up the Feather River Canyon. As you can imagine, it attracted many foamers and shutterbugs. I set out with a bag full of 35mm cameras and lenses leaving Hwy 99 behind for Hwy 70 and the canyon. Early on, I crossed the track and saw a spot that looked perfect for my first stop. I was the first one there and set up my tripod and camera. Shortly after, I was surrounded by cameras as we all waited for the Challenger to come into view around a cut and suddenly there it was and then gone. Everyone gathered up their equipment and raced to their cars and the chase was on. People stopped at various spots along the way while others continued on pacing the locomotive where possible.

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There was one particular stretch of track where the road paralleled with the river in-between. The long line of cars slowed to keep pace with the loco and I happen to be directly in line with it. I pointed my Pentax auto advance toward the loco and just pushed the shutter button while I tried to watch the action. I heard a short siren blast and looked in the mirror. Yup, a CHP right behind me with his light on. As I signaled to pull over, I noticed the convertible in front on me with a guy sitting on the trunk lid with a large camcorder. When the officer had room, he passed me and pulled the convertible over. I carefully eased past watching to see if he wanted me too, which he did not. That was my lucky day so onward. With no one in sight, I stopped at Beldon Town and caught the loco exiting the tunnel and was on my way again. The next stop was a high point hundreds of feet above the tracks where they make a diagonal crossing of the river on a triple girder bridge. You could see the black smoke a mile away and the whistle echoed off the canyon walls. It was like stepping back in time. A thrilling day of chasing trains.

My second encounter with trains and the Canyon, was an excursion aboard the UP passenger train headed up by E9 951 built in 1955. We



departed the station at Oroville and had a leisure trip up the canyon turning north at the Keddie Wye to Westwood, an old logging community. When we returned, we went through the leg in the tunnel and stopped in Keddie. Along the route, we passed through many tunnels where we had to stand back from the open areas under the watchful eye of the staff. Compare this to the Combres and Toltec where they didn't mention standing back going through tunnels. Of course, there were "run-bys" along the way. The coach accommodations were luxurious by today's standards. We opted for coach instead of the vista dome, good choice. An hour into the trip, passengers from the vista dome were looking for empty seats in coach because it was too hot under the glass. That was one of those trips of a life time as those opportunities don't come along every day.

If you have not explored that part of California, it's worth your time. Take a picnic lunch along with your camera and your patience, as the traffic can be slow at times. Plan on stopping to get out as there are scenes not visible from behind the wheel. If you watch for it, there is a wide spot where you can park and walk across the road and stand directly over the portal west of the Keddie Wye.

Whither the Side Track?

-Editor's comments by Jerry Azzaro

If you visit the SVD website and open the hard-to-find “[The Attic](#)” section, you can see [a 1994 issue of The Side Track](#), edited by **George Ann Horner**, featuring articles written by her and **Jack Ahearn**, with a president’s message by **Don Rosa**.

By 2000, SVD membership was somewhere between 150 and 200. George Ann was editing and distributing the Side Track newsletter *and* serving as membership chair. She announced at the December 2000 meeting that she could no longer handle the massive duties, and asked for someone to take over the newsletter. I had some experience with this, so I raised my hand. My first issue was spring 2001. The one you are reading now is the 91st issue I have produced.

During the ensuing 23 years, distribution methods have changed from sending the printed newsletter to all members through postal mail, to bringing it to the meetings and mailing to those who did not attend, and finally to sending via email. All issues are archived and available at the TTOS website, thanks to **Rose Craighead**.

In 2015 it became clear that we could no longer continue to attend monthly meetings due to the long drive and traffic snarls. “Across six counties and two toll crossings”, as I have said. It was not uncommon to endure 3-hour return trips to San Francisco on a Saturday afternoon. The decision was made to rely on you, the members, to provide

input for the newsletter. With **Jack Ahearn**’s assistance, I conducted a “digital camera clinic” during the summer of 2015, with about 20 members attending. My hidden agenda was to get members to use their cameras at meetings and events, and to send the photos to me.

Jack Ahearn has continued to be a most valuable asset to SVD in general and to the Side Track in particular. If you look through the archived issues, you will see that Jack is a constant presence and probably makes up 75% of the total writing. I recall that at one time Jack actually took his camera and notebook and drove to interview members at their homes, like a real reporter!

When the end of TTOS National was announced in the fall of 2023, I immediately notified the SVD board members and the regular Side Track contributors that I would continue to provide a newsletter, because I believed that it provided cohesion and a sense of fellowship - both of which would be important to the club in uncertain times. I did not imagine the merging with another train club, but if members still want a newsletter, the Side Track will continue. Also, the club website is a valuable resource at small cost, I hope it will also be sustained.

The two essentials of the newsletter are contributions from members and the President’s Message. Without these, there can’t be a newsletter.

Down the track

Upcoming events of interest to SVD members (SVD events are in **BOLD**)

(Click the [underlined](#) links for more information)

January 20, 2024: SVD Meeting, St. Mark's Church, Sacramento*

January 27-28, 2024: [The Great Train Show](#), Cal Expo

February 4: Golden Gate Lionel Railroad Club, I.F.E.S. Hall, Mountain View

February 24-25: The Great Train Show, Santa Clara County Fairgrounds

May 22-28: O Scale West, S Scale and Narrow Gauge
Hyatt Regency, Santa Clara

***Meetings begin at 9:30 AM**

BRING YOUR SVD MEMBERSHIP CARD

Contact us:

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TTOS-SVD Mission Statement:

Our mission is to bring together persons interested in the hobby of collecting and operating toy trains. The focus of activities shall be on promoting the best interests of the hobby through fellowship, a sense of good will, camaraderie within the membership, and exposing the general public to the hobby, encouraging greater interest in it and increasing membership.