

THE CLICKETY & WHISTLE

Story By Simone Smith

What is it about trains? The clickety-clack sound as they travel across the rails? The horn blow alerting us to their presence? Or even the clanging sound and flashing lights of the crossing signals, which all seem to be firmly rooted in our consciousness?

Many people, if asked, have some sort of train story associated with a fond memory, whether it's from books like "Tootle the Train," watching TV shows like "Petticoat Junction" or "Thomas and Friends," seeing movies like "The Polar Express," marveling at a tiny train going around a Christmas tree during the holidays, traveling by train as a commuter, on vacation, as a relaxing way to reach your destination, or riding on a small train in a park, the list goes on.

The sights and sounds associated with trains can instantly spark feelings of excitement, adventure, and curiosity. What little child doesn't instantly perk up wanting to run to see as a train goes by, quick before they miss it, to point and wave. "Here comes the train!" "How many cars does this one have?" "Is it freight or passenger?" "I wonder who's on the train?" "Where are they going?" "What are they carrying?" "Bye, bye train."

Powerful, speedy, or slow and steady, trains are a way to get goods and passengers from here to there and have captured the imaginations of young and old alike. No matter if you're an avid or casual fan or just curious, the Central Coast Railroad Festival returns for it's 13th year to celebrate all things rail Oct. 6-8. Hosted by the San Luis Obispo Railroad Museum, the festival will take place at public and private locations throughout San

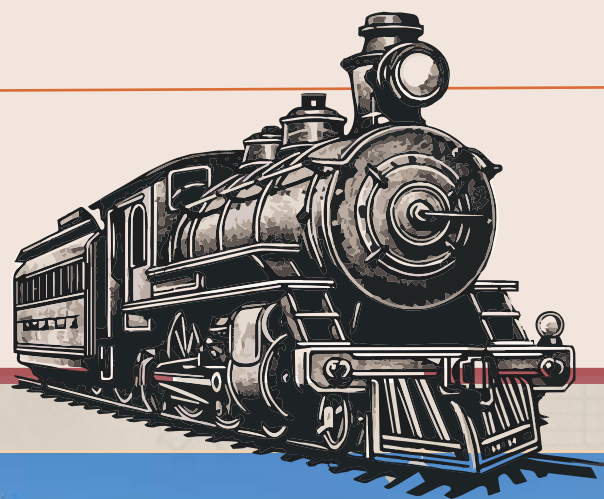
Luis Obispo and Northern Santa Barbara counties. From big trains to small, you're sure to find something of interest, including a rare chance to visit private Garden Railroads with owners ready to welcome you and share their passion.

For Mark Edwards, growing up in west Ohio, the passion for trains began when at the age of 5 or 6 when he received his first Lionel train for Christmas set up on a 4x8 sheet of plywood and from that point on there was no turning back. Over the years and as a teenager, Mark continued to experiment with various sizes and layouts of model trains, but it was when he visited the Kings Island theme park outside Cincinnati in his early 20s that he caught the bug for Garden Railways. He always loved being outdoors more than inside, so when he saw the larger trains going outside through a landscape of live small trees and plants, this was it; Garden Railroads would become his lifetime hobby.

Mark went on into a career with a focus on plants and animals and during his years living in San Diego, where he worked as Head of Animal Nutrition for the San Diego Zoo and Wild Animal Park, he discovered a very strong Garden Railroad group. Through his involvement in the club Mark was able to meet a wide range of enthusiasts who helped him learn about and hone many skills needed to create these miniature worlds through practice while helping to build temporary displays for the Annual Model Train Show at the Del Mar Fair. While in San Diego, Mark built his first small outside layout, which was packed up and stored for several years during his time living and working in Washington D.C. Returning to



CLACK BLOW



Photos by Simone Smith
and Mark Edwards



the West Coast and now a Cal Poly professor in the animal science department, Mark said a major consideration for buying their home was to have an outdoor area suitable to build his next Garden Railroad.

After nine years of work, the layout for the Cascade Peak and Buena Vista Railroad is now over a 2,300-square-foot area above a retaining wall in the residential backyard of Mark and Michelle Edwards just outside of Santa Margarita. The Edwards Garden Railroad currently includes 735 feet of 45mm gauge track upon which run the G scale “Main Street Trolley” encircled by a winding perimeter track where passenger and mine trains climb through “Horseshoe Curve,” around rock formations, through “Nature’s Wonderland” past cascading waterfalls, and over the “Ol’ Trestle at Goat Canyon” with all the sites and sounds along the way before returning to “Main Street Station.”

Mark says he enjoys the unpredictability and challenges of working outdoors and chooses small-scale plants that are hardy to Zone 7, with full Southern sun exposure, drought and animal resistance. “It’s been under construction for nine years now, but this railroad will never really be done,” Mark says, as he is constantly thinking of, adding, and modifying elements.

A chance to visit the Cascade Peak and Buena Vista Railroad will be on Saturday, Oct. 7, from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. during the Central Coast Railroad Festival and includes an optional Scavenger Hunt with three levels of complexity, giving visitors the chance to spend more time discovering things and ask questions.

Short on time? With so many choices of where to go and what to

see during the Central Coast Railroad Festival, we’re lucky to have a perfect sampling of trains and layouts at three locations right here in the Atascadero and Santa Margarita areas.

In addition to seeing the Garden Railroad at the Edwards residence, you can swing by the Historic Santa Margarita Ranch (also open Saturday, Oct. 7, only from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m.) for a visit to the Pacific Coast Railroad Company to view Steam Locomotive #3 along with two historic Santa Fe & Disney passenger coaches dating back to the 1950s which will be offering rides on a 1.6-mile journey around the ranch headquarters with sights of rolling hills and additional rail equipment along the way. (Adults \$10, 3-12 years \$5 and 2 and under Free).

Got the railroad bug and wanting more?

Head on up to Atascadero to Central Coast Trains at 7600 El Camino Real suite #3, open 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., to see and be inspired by several operating indoor model train layouts and while there, check out the many options to start or add on to your railroading hobby.

Woo, woo! No matter your age, the clickety-clack and whistle-blow of trains seem to have an irresistible pull and you’ll find something for everyone at the Central Coast Railroad Festival.

For a complete schedule and locations for all areas, self-guided tours and goings on for the 2023 Central Coast Railroad Festival, you can visit ccrrf.com/schedule-2023.html. Join or learn more by visiting the San Luis Obispo Railroad Museum slormm.com; the Central California Coast Garden Railroad Society cccgrs.org; or the SLO Model Railroad Association slomra.org ■