

# Carolina Conductor



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Monthly Newsletter of the Carolina Railroad Heritage Association, Inc.

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## Preserving the Past Active in the Present Planning for the Future

**Web Site:** [hubcityrrmuseum.org](http://hubcityrrmuseum.org)

**Facebook:** Carolina Railroad Heritage Association & Hub City RR Museum

### Meeting Site:

**Fountain Inn Presbyterian Church**

307 North Main Street

Fountain Inn, SC 29644

Third Friday of the Month at 7:00 p.m.

### Hub City Railroad Museum and SOU Rwy Caboose #X3115:

**Spartanburg Amtrak Station**

298 Magnolia Street

Spartanburg, SC 29301-2330

Wednesday 10-2 & Saturday 10-2

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Articles can be submitted anytime.

# Clinchfield Railroad

## How the Clinchfield Railroad Crosses Four Mountain Ranges

*From an article in the  
Laurens Advertiser  
dated September 10, 1910.*

Dr. H.K. Aiken of this city who recently made the trip over the Clinchfield Railroad with the South Carolina Chambers of Commerce excursion party, prepared the following story which appeared in Sunday's Columbia State:

The globe on which we now live was once a red-hot ball of molten material. It has cooled off considerably, but the cooling process is not yet completed for down towards its centre our planet is still hot beyond conception. The increasing temperature of deep mines, the geysers and volcanoes and the records writ in rocks tell us this. However, as a result of the gradual cooling of its outer crust contraction took place and the portions that sank became bottoms of the seas and lakes of our age while protruding portions are the hills and mountains of today. Two of these primary ridges have been

named by geographers the Blue Ridge and the Cumberland mountains of the Appalachian system or group of mountains. They extend from northeast to southwest and as a consequence the general trend of the streams in this section of the world is through the valleys lying between the ridges. Heretofore all railroad construction has followed the line of least obstruction and paralleled the direction of course, of those mountains. To shorten the distance for traffic between costal plains of the southeast and the transmontane Ohio River valley was a dream of many statesmen. Calhoun had the vision; so, had Hayne, but his hopes he buried in an incomplete rock tunnel above Walhalla.

It remained for the organizers and engineers of the Clinchfield route to successfully complete the mighty task of crossing four ranges of mountains in their widest part, going over and through them at right angles and thus build an enduring highway for commerce, of uniformly low grade. 240 miles in length, completed at present from Dante, Va. to Spartanburg, Sc. This result was brought about by a combination of engineering talent, stupendous monetary outlay, and faith

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# Museum Happenings



Recent donation made from the city police department to the museum of a photo and badge of a Spartanburg station agent.



Mac McMillin reviews a book at our annual "Book Night" program. Many interesting subjects were covered and a couple of surprises discovered.



Pat O'Shields removes water damaged Bondo to reveal some damage the caboose received while in service.

A REA stake truck as seen recently at the Hunter farms spring event.



## Wanted—Articles for the Carolina Conductor

Submit an article of 200 words or more with some photos and captions and see them in print. Every one of us has some unique railroad experience that would make interesting reading for our membership. Your editor always needs more contributions of railway history and news.

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in the future. But given these requisites there yet remains the need of another and that was the need of a Moses to guide the way to the promised land. Geo. L. Carter of Tennessee essayed the role and right well has he filled it. The prime requisite in an industrial leader of today is initiative. Carter has it to spare. Next to it comes ability to wisely choose your lieutenants and to know M. J. Champion, general manager; J. J. Champion, traffic manager; R. F. Brewer, industrial agent, and Theo. Dehon, Jr., division passenger agent, of the present Carolina, Clinchfield and Ohio organization is to be aware that he has this gift also.

Keeping his eye on both goals he led his surveyors over the trail that Daniel Boone and Sevier blazed when they came to help our own Williams annihilate Ferguson and the British at Kin's Mountain. Where the Tennessee pathfinder crossed the Toe River is now "Boonesford" station on a modern and model railroad. The Daughters of the Revolution have also marked the trail with artistic monuments to be seen at intervals from your Pullman window. After Boone's day travel over the trail was very light and the way became over-grown and closed until the Carolina, Clinchfield & Ohio people reopened it. This they have done in a way that would warrant the assumption of well their belief in the adage "what's worth doing at all is worth doing well."

### Through River Gorges

As the construction of this road proceeded from the north towards the south, most of the descriptive literature so far put out supposes

that the traveller is making his way in the same direction, but as most of us would approach this modern marvel from its southern end, we will in this account travel up from the comparative lowlands of South Carolina, go over the summit of the Blue Ridge at Alta Pass, N.C., journey down the banks of the Toe River of that state; through the gorge of the Nolichucky (as the stream is called after crossing the state line of Tennessee), on down to Johnson City in the valley of East Tennessee, then down the Holston river valley past Kingsport, tunnel Clinch mountain to get into the valley of Clinch River and up the valley of Lick Creek to Dante, Va., hid among the coves of the Cumberland mountains.

From Spartanburg, whose altitude is 758 above sea level, up to Bostic, N.C. the landscape is too familiar to hold attention and one is impressed with the excellent character of the rock-ballasted roadbed, the absence of the clang and clatter of loosely jointed, light rail, the wide sloped cuts and increasing height of the stone-faced fills as you cross the Pacolet and Broad rivers. There is a feel of permanence beneath you of the 100-pound rails like the sensation imparted when walking over a heavy velvet carpet on the floor of a well-built mansion. The altitude of Bostic is 920 feet, and you are leaving the cotton belt behind. Here the Clinchfield crosses the Seaboard Air Line running from Charlotte to Rutherfordton. The C.C.&O. uses the telephone in transmitting train orders. Every baggage car and freight cab on the line is equipped with a trolley pole device for in-

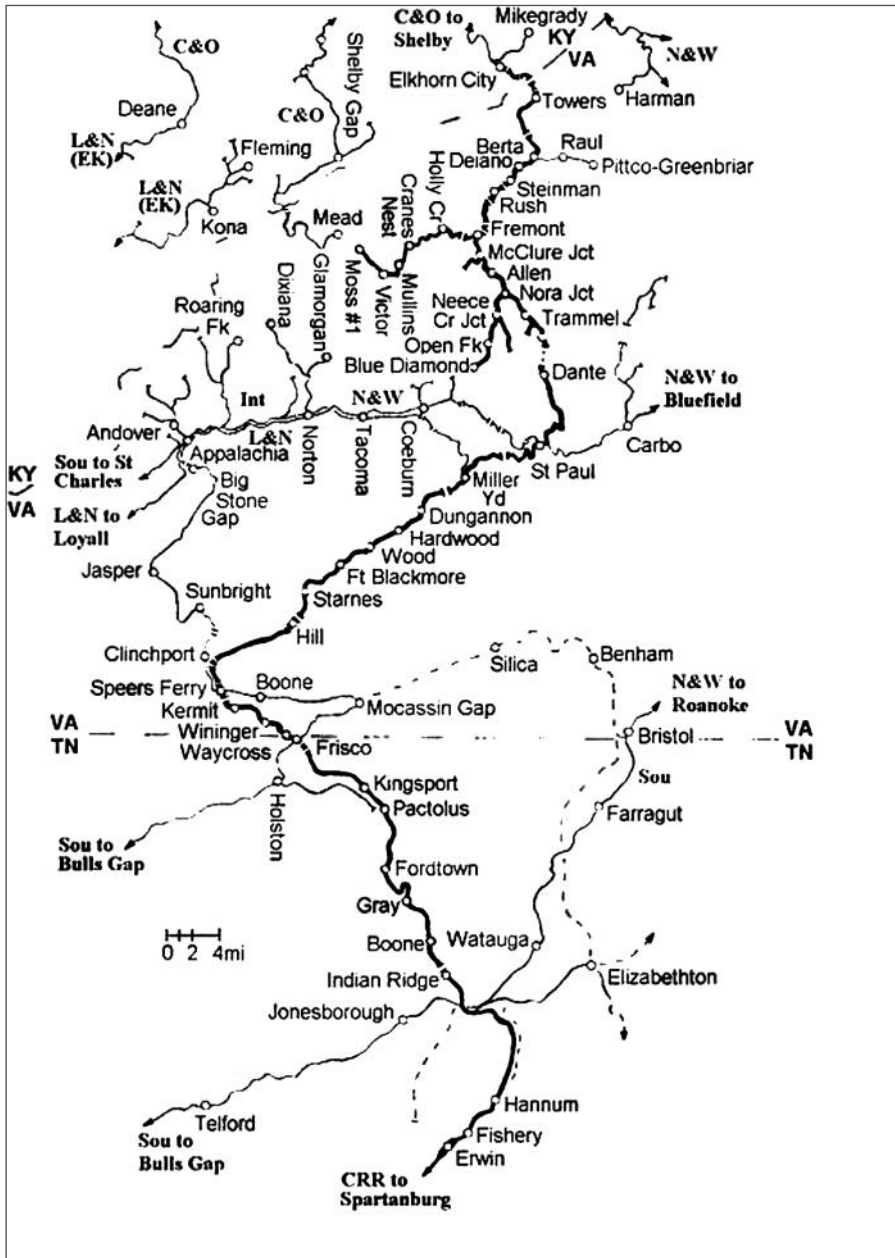
stant connection with the wires so that if a train of any class is detained between telephone stations a report of conditions can at once be sent in to headquarters. Leaving Bostic, the valley of the second broad river is ascended, the first tunnel is passed, and you are in Marion, N.C., altitude 1,320 feet. Here, at the foot of the southern slope of the Blue Ridge mountains, the Southern's line from Salisbury to Asheville is crossed. The stations of the two systems are about two miles apart and transfers are made by hack. Marion is a county seat in the Catawba valley, with a cotton and two hosiery mills, furniture factories and the largest population to be found between Spartanburg and Johnson City.

### An Easy Grade

The Three C's road of some years ago had Johnson City as its destination but was never carried beyond Marion for at this point the problem of scaling a vertical height of 1,300 ft. looms large before the would-be-railroad builder. What it means to do this on a grade that is practicable is difficult to convey to the average mind. To come and see "the lay of the land" is about the only way most of us could be made to comprehend the difficult character of the undertaking. The diagram grade map and the flat drawing of the surface windings, printed herewith (*not printed in this edition, Ed. See map on next page.*), will assist somewhat. The little box like thing climbing the hill represent the tunnels. Disregarding whatever was in the way whether this was a mountain or a chasm, the C.C.&O. climbed to the top at a uniform grade of 63 feet to the mile. The

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In the stock-shaped loop shown on the map (*not printed in this edition, Ed.*), to gain 400 feet vertically, there are six miles of track having nine tunnels in this distance. Tired at last of doubling, the Gordian knot is cut, and the summit of the Blue Ridge is pierced by a straight tunnel; one third of a mile long and perhaps 150 feet below the crest of the ridge. At this end of it is Alta pass, about 90 miles from Spartanburg and 2,629 feet above the level of the sea. Before starting down from this point, let's stand for a moment. Here is one of the finest views to be had in all the region. To your right is Mount Mitchell, the tallest peak this side of the Rockies, then Clinchman's dome and a little more to the left the massive, square outlines of Table Rock. On your left-hand Linville mountain faces you while in front of and below is spread out the Catawba Valley as a Cyclorama painted by the Father and Preceptor of all art-nature. To linger over a scene like this is to forget the transient, trivial things o'er which we groan and sweat and to realize in some degree that this world is a beautiful garden made for man to wander in, if we find it otherwise, the fault lies in the creature and not with its Creator.

work is some of the best construction to be seen east of the Mississippi river reminding one of the Moffatt road out of Denver or the "Short Line" up the Cripple Creek, Colo. The loops, passes or zigzags are taken to avoid lesser peaks that buttress the main ridges of the mountains. Where there was no way around these then a tunnel was called for. Most of these are

through the hardest kind of granite. At one point on the way down, you stand on the rear platform and look back through three tunnels at the same time. At another point on the way up, the train emerges from one tunnel, makes a loop on an embankment over 400 feet high and goes back through the same butte by another tunnel a few feet higher up.

The Clinchfield has an open observation car from which an unobstructed view can be had, preferably on the return trip. Going up, the cinders from the engine are best guarded against by carrying with you a pair of automobile goggles.

**Winds the River**

Starting down the northern face of the Blue Ridge at Alta Pass, the

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route soon strikes the right bank of the Toe River and winds and curves with it for 47 miles. The grade in this distance, following the bed of the stream, is much less, 28 feet to the mile. All of this distance is virgin forest, mountain, and cove, with a cabin or small sawmill to be seen now and then.

ter power on the Nolichucky River, near by and this point will likely become of importance in the near future.

Johnson city is the largest town in Washington county, Tenn., and is well situated in a broad and fertile valley. Population about 10,000, exclusive of some 1,500

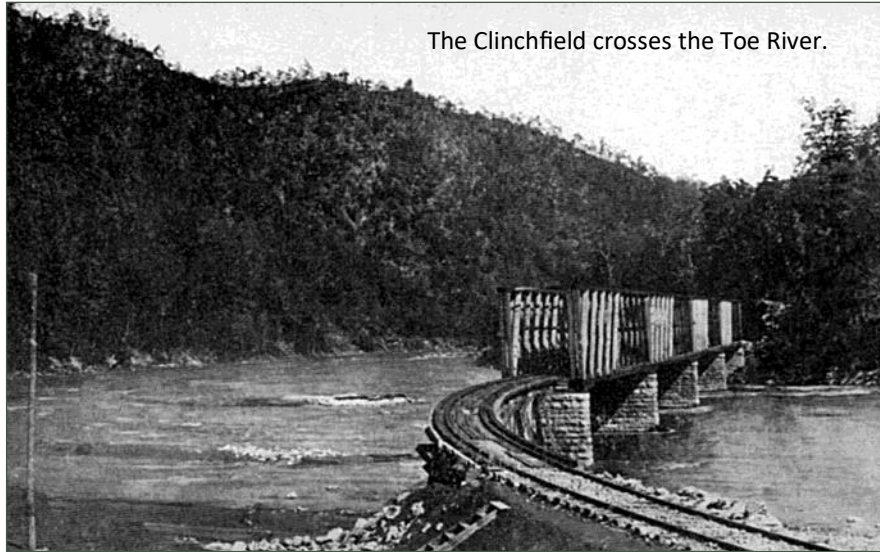
has always been Republican in politics as few slaves were owned here before the war. From Johnson City to Dante is 85 miles of valley, hill, or mountain, among which will be found some splendid farming country, some of it in blue grass with beef cattle and sheep, orchards, and corn fields. Seams of Coal.

At Dante, the Clinchfield Coals corporation tallied with the railroad corporation (allied with the railroad corporation) owns over 300,000 acres of coal lands. The coal outcrops in seams of drifts, varying in thickness from four to ten feet. These layers lie in the mountains at different heights and extend throughout the area, in a solid seam that neither gets thicker nor thinner. Sometimes the seam of coal is overlain by a seam of limestone rock and when this is the case, no roofing is necessary to the tunnels which the miners make in going into the side of the hill for the coal.

There is no shaft mining here. The coal seams extending in a horizontal plane of uniform thickness throughout so many acres, it is an easy matter to calculate the number of tons that any particular hill or mountain will yield. We were told that a seam of coal one foot thick over an acre of land would yield 1,000 tons. The Clinchfield Coal Company is at different levels, the combined thickness of the three being 15 feet. This would yield 16,000 tons to the acre and as they have 317,000 acres you can figure out for yourself about how much coal is in sight of Dante.

To describe the process of mining coal might be interesting

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The Clinchfield crosses the Toe River.

Communication with the rest of the world was infrequent and difficult before the coming of this road. Stations have been located and named so far. Before the state line of Tennessee is reached the Toe has gathered volume and becomes a river of some size, passing out through narrows, eight miles in length, whose walls, green and well wooded, rise 1,200 feet. At the mouth of this gorge and accessible from the valley of east Tennessee is a summer resort, Unaka Springs, where the road crosses the river. It is a little higher than Johnson City. The scenery all along here is fine. At Erwin, Tenn., 16 miles this side of Johnson City, are located the Carolina, Clinchfield & Ohio shops, plans are forming to develop a large wa-

inmates of the mountain branch of the national soldiers' home. The late Senator Brownlow secured this home for his native town some two or three years ago. The government purchased a tract of some 150 acres on the outskirts of the city and has spent two or three million for buildings and equipment. These are of the best, as to quality and of liberal proportions. Thirty miles of graded and macadam road, parks, conservatories, a beautiful little theatre, ball park and other attractions make it a valuable asset to the people of Johnson City. The annual appropriation for the maintenance of the home is over \$1,000 a day, and most of this spent there. The inmates all saw federal pensions besides. This section of Tennessee

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but would make another story. These mines are comparatively new and their output, at present, is only a marker to what this could and will be made, later on. When the home trade, the inland demand is supplied and the mines are daily yielding more than enough for this, what is to be done with the surplus? The steamships and the battleships of the world will take it and that road can deliver it cheapest whose rails run from the "tipple" at the mines to the "breakers" beside the deep water. Rogers' great road, the Virginian, can do this and is doing it every day. The Chesapeake & Ohio and the Norfolk & Western extend from these same Virginia and West Virginia coal fields to maritime coaling stations and it is certain



Typical Clinchfield depot at Green Mountain, NC.

that other systems will go through the wall that separates the coal from the sea. The shortest line, the

lowest maintenance costs, the road whose rails ramify the most populous tonnage producing territory where local traffic will help to care for fixed charges and where a return load for the emptied coal cars can be secured, this is the road that will come off victor in a battle of giants, whose outposts are even now manoeuvring for position.



**Clinchfield No. 1** is a 4-6-0 "Ten Wheeler" type steam locomotive that was built as #423 in 1882 by the Columbus, Chicago & Indiana Central in Logansport, IN. It was built to haul freight trains, then later in 1899, the locomotive was renumbered #543 and, the following year, was sold to the Ohio River & Charleston Railway where it was renumbered #5. Seven years later, #5 was sold to Black Mountain Railway in Burnsville, NC, where it was renumbered #1. It ran there until 1955, when it was sold back to the Clinchfield where it ran in railfan excursions.



Hotel served by the Clinchfield at Unaka, NC.

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# The More Modern CRR



The Clinchfield RR (reporting mark CRR) was an operating and holding company for the Carolina, Clinchfield and Ohio Railway (reporting mark CCO). The railroad travelled from the coalfields of Virginia and Elkhorn City, Kentucky, to the textile mills of South Carolina. The 35-mile segment from Dante, Virginia, to Elkhorn City, opening the coal lands north of Sandy Ridge Mountains and forming a connection with the Chesapeake and Ohio Railway at Elkhorn City, was completed in 1915.

The Clinchfield was the last Class I railroad built in the U.S. east of the Rocky Mountains. The 266-mile railroad provided access to numerous scenic wonders of the Appalachian region and is probably best known for the state-of-the-art railroad engineering techniques applied in its construction, as exemplified by the Clinchfield Loops climbing the Blue Ridge Mountains north of Marion, North Carolina.

The Clinchfield Railroad began operating the line December 1, 1924, and for many years it was leased jointly by the Atlantic Coast Line Railroad and Louisville and Nashville Railroad. When the L&N merged with the ACL's successor, the Seaboard Coast Line Railroad, effective January 1, 1983, forming the Seaboard System Railroad, the separate operating company was unnecessary and was merged into the Seaboard. The line is now owned and operated by CSX Trans-

portation as their Blue Ridge Subdivision (Spartanburg to Erwin, Tennessee) and Kingsport Subdivision (Erwin to Elkhorn City). At the end of 1925, the railroad operated 309 miles of road and 467 miles of track; mileages in 1970 were 312 and 501.

## History

The conceptual beginnings of the Clinchfield Railroad predates the railroad era, leading back to the period of westward movement after the Revolutionary War where turnpikes and other ground transportation routes were considered. Discussions related to a transportation route from the Ohio river to the South Atlantic was during a convention held at Estillville, Virginia in 1831. The Estill plan closely resembles the route followed by much of the Clinchfield construction.

## The Charleston, Cincinnati, and Chicago Railroad (1886-1893)

In 1886 ex-Union Gen. John T. Wilder received a charter for the Charleston, Cincinnati, and Chicago Railroad, commonly referred to as the "Triple C" Railroad. This was the beginning of the modern Clinchfield. The promoters proposed a 625-mile line from Ironton, Ohio, to Charleston, South Carolina, with an extension down the Ohio River to Cincinnati. It would serve the rich agricultural lands of the Piedmont, the summer resorts of the North Carolina mountains, the rich timber and mineral deposits and coal fields of Virginia and Kentucky, with termi-

nals on both the Ohio River and the Atlantic seacoast at an estimated cost of \$21 million. Johnson City, Tennessee, was to be established as the headquarters for the Triple C Railroad and a division point.

Wilder succeeded in financing the project which included support from the London based banking firm of Baring Brothers. Construction progressed at three different locations, from both termination points and the middle. The middle section, built north and south from Johnson City, tracks reached Erwin, Tennessee, in 1890 and grading was 90% complete from Johnson City to Dante, Virginia. Financial issues were reported as early as the third quarter of 1889 where it was reported that contractors were not being paid on time. As early as December 1890, financial issues started to impact the railroad with the failure of Barker Brothers and Company, of Philadelphia, that had been handling bonds for the railroad. By 1893, the Triple C financial problems were exasperated by the failure of the Baring Brothers, of London England, and the national panic of 1893.

## Ohio River and Charleston RR (1893-1902)

On July 17, 1893, the assets of the Triple C Railroad held by Baring Brothers were sold at a foreclosure for \$550,000 to

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Charles E. Heller. This included: 171 completed and operational miles between Camden South Carolina and Marion, North Carolina; 20 completed and operational miles between Chestoa and Johnson City, Tennessee; 60 miles completed but not yet operational miles and 85 miles between Johnson City and Dante, Virginia that was still under construction. The new owners renamed it the "Ohio River and Charleston Railroad."

**South and Western Railway (1902-1908)**

At the time an enterprising entrepreneur, George Lafayette Carter, was involved in developing the coal fields of southwestern Virginia and needed a railroad to transport his coal to a seaport. In 1902, he purchased the Ohio River and Charleston Railroad, renamed it the South and Western Railway.

**Carolina, Clinchfield and Ohio (1908-1983)**

The charter was granted, and the railroad was renamed the Carolina, Clinchfield and Ohio on March 31, 1908. The line from Dante, Virginia to Johnson City was completed in

early February 1909 and the line was completed into Spartanburg, South Carolina with the first train, with Mr. Carter on board, arriving on October 29, 1909.

**Family Lines and CSX**

The Clinchfield lost its identity in the mid-1970s when it came under the "Family Lines System" banner, a marketing name for Seaboard Coast Line, L&N, and several smaller railroads. The Clinchfield is remembered for its famous "Santa Claus Special" that debuted in 1943 and ran the length of the Clinchfield's main line between Elkhorn City and Kingsport, Ten-

nessee, handing out gifts to the children along the route.

**Freight Schedules**

Most of their traffic was coal trains, but the Clinchfield did operate a few scheduled freight trains. Northbound Clinchfield trains had odd numbers and southbound even (most railroads used even numbers for northbound trains). This was done so that their trains would mesh in with connecting trains from the SCL on the south end at Spartanburg and the C&O on the north end at Elkhorn City.



The Clinchfield ran Challenger locomotives of the same design as UP.



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