



**For Immediate Release**

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## **THE GREAT SMOKY MOUNTAINS RAILROAD**

The Great Smoky Mountains Railroad, originally known as the Western North Carolina Railroad, gives passengers an opportunity to relive railroad travel on the Murphy Branch as it was in the 1940's. The one hundred eleven miles of railroad track extended from Asheville to Murphy. In 1894 Southern Railway (Norfolk Southern) gained control of the Murphy Branch. Norfolk Southern now owns the line except for the western most sixty-six miles. Of those sixty-six miles, the Great Smoky Mountains Railroad owns and operates the line from Dillsboro to Andrews. The remainder of the line from Andrews to Murphy is owned by the State of North Carolina.

The history of the railroad includes the harsh conditions encountered during construction by convict labor. In the 1800's when the railroad was built the mountain area was a wilderness, which made construction all manual labor with hand tools and crude explosives, carving the railroad through and along mountain ridges just wide enough for the railroad bed in places. The harsh conditions caused many men to lose their lives from sickness and accidents. Some of the convicts tried to escape, knowing that they would be shot in the back. The construction of the railroad delivered the Western North Carolina Region from extreme famine. Additional information about the history and construction of the railroad can be found in "Passage through Time" the official milepost guide book.

In 1988, when the railroad was abandoned by Norfolk Southern due to the lack of freight traffic, the State of North Carolina purchased the track and a group of private investors leased the track from Dillsboro to Andrews, operating as the Great Smoky Mountains Railway. American Heritage Railway purchased the railroad in 1999 and changed the name to the Great Smoky Mountains Railroad. Today GSMR operates as a scenic excursion train and continues to haul freight to Andrews.

Today, preserving that history, the Great Smoky Mountains Railroad offers excursions from the Bryson City and Dillsboro Depots. Mystery Theatre and Gourmet Dinner Trains operate on the weekends. Special events offering train excursions, combined with themed events include: Little Engine That Could™, Day Out With Thomas™, RAILFEST, PEANUTS™ The Great Pumpkin Patch Express, and The Polar Express™ and The Polar Express™ Dinner Train. Excursions departing or arriving the Bryson City Depot include admission to the Smoky Mountain Trains Museum, a Lionel™ model train museum ranked in the top ten such museums in America, displaying over 7,000 engines and cars.

For more information and reservations call 1-800-872-4681 or log onto to [www.gsmr.com](http://www.gsmr.com).

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