

PROLOGUE

Recently a fellow member of the Greenville Chapter of the National Railway Historical Society asked whether I knew anything about the location of the Blue Ridge. On being told "yes" he tactfully but correctly urged me to "write it down." This paper is the result.

As a native of upstate South Carolina I had long heard of the Blue Ridge and had been to the Stumphouse Mountain Tunnel several times. As a boy I had spent many Summers in the mountains of western North Carolina about 15 miles from the proposed route. As a "railfan" and budding civil engineer the route captured my imagination as little else has.

It is as one historian said about the Confederacy: "There is nothing so romantic as a lost cause."

- H. H. Watkins, Aug. 20, 1993

The Blue Ridge Railway
Location
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The Blue Ridge was conceived in the 1830's or 1840's as part of a route from Charleston, S. C. to Knoxville, Tenn. The economic and political factors are fascinating, but beyond the scope of this paper. Actual construction work apparently started in 1851.

Most of the following information comes from three sources:

- 1) Report of the President and Directors, and of Chief Engineer Walter Gwynn, to the stockholders, 17 November, 1857.
- 2) Extensive study of the "topo sheets" published by the Geological Survey and the Tennessee Valley Authority at a scale of 1:24,000; and of the Geological Survey's much earlier maps, at a scale of 1:125,000.
- 3) Personal observation, mostly in the Summer of 1973, when my very patient wife and I spent a lot of time looking for the old grade; and brief return trips in 1979 and 1993.

The route, as envisioned in 1857, would have used the line known to most contemporary readers as the "Southern" from Charleston to Belton, S, C, at least as an interim measure.

I assume that the route started from downtown Charleston, just north of Marion Square, where the "Old Citadel" is, and just east of King St. At King and Ann Streets there was, at least at one time, a building used by the Southern, which was, I believe, inherited by the Southern from the South Carolina Railroad. This preceded by many years the old downtown station farther east, near the Cooper River, which a few "old timers" may remember.

This line is, of course, part of the line from Charleston to Hamburg, just across the Savannah River from Augusta, Ga., on the practical head of navigation on the Savannah River, and was projected by Charleston interests to divert "upstate" trade from Savannah to Charleston. The line has a good route, by way of Summerville, Branchville and Aiken-which is as far as we need to follow it.

From Branchville the line goes north by a very circuitous route to Columbia, via Orangeburg, St. Matthews and Gadsden. From Columbia the line heads northwest by another circuitous route built by the Greenville and Columbia, through Alston, on the east side of the Broad River, Prosperity, Newberry, Ninety Six and Greenwood to Belton.

A branch of the G. and C. extended some 9 miles west to Anderson. Actual construction of the Blue Ridge started just east of Main Street in Anderson, where there are still a couple of railroady-looking structures. The Blue Ridge built a deep cut through the ridge there, and presumably a timber bridge to carry Main Street over the cut; and much later the rather interesting two story depot, which still stands.

Just past Main St. the line makes a curve to the right and proceeds towards Pendleton, crossing Twenty Six Mile Creek by a bridge 110 feet high, and Twenty Three Mile Creek by one 61 feet high. Leaving Pendleton the line crosses Eighteen Mile Creek, and the Seneca River by a bridge 600 feet long. Apparently the town of Seneca did not exist when the construction was done, but the Blue Ridge crosses the Norfolk Southern and continues on a parallel track about a mile, then curves to the right and crosses US 123 at a horribly congested intersection.

The line continues from Seneca to West Union. I am convinced that Walhalla was not part of the original route. The 1892 topo sheet shows the end of track about a mile east of Walhalla. From this point the presently existing track makes a curve to the left and then to the right and goes parallel to the main street of Walhalla several blocks to the end of track. Originally the grade curved to the right there. It is plainly shown on the Walhalla "topo" sheet and I walked this part of the line

several years ago, through a pig pen. The line crossed Cane Creek there, 500 or 600 feet south of the dam that forms Browns Lake, (Which is not on Cane Creek, but a tributary.) Bridge piers are visible on Cane Creek, unless they have been destroyed within the past few years.

The line passed west of Browns Lake, crossed SC 183 and went just east of Walhalla Middle School. Part of Secondary Road S37-58 is apparently on, or very close to, the grade, which crossed S37-181 just west of the intersection of these two roads. I have pencilled on an old map "Fricks Meeting House," although I do not know the significance of this. There is a filling station-convenience food store, "Mike's" there now. Just west of here the line crosses the intersection with White Cut Road, and continued almost due north about 2 miles to the "horseshoe curve." The line made a drastic left curve here and continued along "Turnip Top Mountain." I estimate the central angle of "Horseshoe Curve" to be 247 degrees and the curvature about 6 degrees. (By way of comparison, the famous "Horseshoe Curve" in Pennsylvania has a central angle of 220 degrees and the curvature is 9 degrees.) ("Trains, March 1941.) Anyone eager to do so can drive for a short distance along the old grade, easily found by following White Cut Road about two miles.

From Horseshoe Curve the line proceeded southwest along the crest of Turnip Top about 2-1/2 miles, passing Saddle Tunnel, 475 feet long and Middle Tunnel, 425 feet long.

About 1/4 mile past Middle Tunnel, the line curved about 90 degrees to the right and crossed Cane Creek, upstream of Isaqueena Falls (Of Indian legend fame) and downstream of the Walhalla reservoir. The east portal of Stumphouse Mountain Tunnel is perhaps 3/8 or 1/2 mile past the Creek. In the 1930s there was an enormous pile of stone, removed from the tunnel, between the creek and the tunnel. This is gone now; my understanding is that it was sold to Georgia and used to pave the highway between Pine Mountain and Clayton, Ga.

Stumphouse Mountain Tunnel was the toughest single part of the whole Blue Ridge project; about 5800 feet long, through what is said to be unusually hard granite. The tunnel is on a grade ascending westward at about 1 1/2 percent. Four vertical shafts were to be used, extending from the surface above the tunnel to the tunnel floor to provide more "working faces" for the crews to drill from, and also for ventilation of the completed tunnel. At least one of these was completed down to the level of the tunnel floor.

In the 1940's or 1950's Clemson College used the tunnel for the storage and curing of Roquefort Cheese. Excellent cheese was made there, but better artificial temperature and humidity control became available, eliminating the necessity to drive from Clemson to Stumphouse to attend to the cheese-making.

Leaving Stumphouse Mountain Tunnel the projected line continued straight for nearly two miles, through Lake Crystal on Jerry Creek. It then curved to the left, crossing the ridge between Village Creek and Whetstone Creek, and proceeded almost due west for about 5-1/2 miles, crossing Whetstone Creek twice before reaching the Chatooga River.

The railroad would have crossed the Chatooga on a bridge 450 long and 110 feet high, just south of the confluence with Dick's Creek. Chief Engineer Gwynn described the site as "most favorable for a bridge." The abutments were to be set back on two bold prominences and "the bed affords safe, rocky foundations for the two piers."

Crossing the Chatooga, the route continued along the south side of Dicks Creek to Wall Mountain, where a 2300 foot tunnel would carry it through a ridge into the valley of War Woman Creek. The Wall Mountain Tunnel would ascend westbound at about 1-1/2 percent.

At the west portal there was years ago a pile of stone excavated from the tunnel; this was removed some years ago for highway purposes, and it is impossible to follow the line exactly through the pasture there. After the tunnel the line curved left, then right, and after about 1/2 mile reached the first of two bridges over War Woman Creek. The bridge would have been 100 feet long; the east abutment was completed and is quite an imposing sight, being readily seen from the gravel road. The west abutment was carried to "above the high water line" but is not now visible, at least from the road.

The line continued almost due west along War Woman Creek, about one mile, then recrossed the creek on a bridge about 60 feet long. Apparently no construction was done on this bridge. Another two miles brought the line to Saddle Gap Tunnel, 1700 feet long. The earthwork was done to a vertical rock face about 30 feet high. A good assumption is that the grading crew had done their work to this point, and the work was waiting for the tunnelling crew to finish at Wall Mountain. The location of the east end can be easily found by driving through the picnic area at Warwoman Dell, getting on the grade at the parking area and walking west along the grade for perhaps 1/4 mile.

Apparently little work was done on the west approach to the tunnel.

Leaving Saddle Gap Tunnel, it is about 1-3/4 miles to Clayton, where the line made a 90 degree right turn and headed almost due north following "Stikoa," now spelled "Stekoa," Creek. From Clayton it is about three miles to the ridge between Stekoa Creek and the Little Tennessee River at Mountain City. This being the Tennessee Valley divide it was basically downhill all the way to the state of Tennessee. From this point the line proceeded along the Little Tennessee River to the "Locust Stake"

on the Georgia-North Carolina line.

At least until after 1857 no construction work was done on the North Carolina portion of the line and only a small amount in Tennessee. By the time of the 1857 report 3,700,715 cu. yds. of earthwork had been done in S. C. and 51,000 cu. yds. in Georgia, an aggregate of 71 percent of the required earthwork in those two states.

My personal impression of the earthwork is as follows:

From Anderson to West Union, 33 miles, rolling country but not particularly difficult.

From West Union to Stumphouse very heavy grading over rough country.

From Stumphouse to the Chatooga River, some heavy grading, but not particularly difficult.

From the Chatooga River to Wall Mountain, a short distance of very rough terrain and heavy grading.

From Wall Mountain to Saddle Gap, a breeze.

From Saddle Gap to the Locust Stake, easy going.

The five tunnels, of course, would be difficult by any standards, the Appalachian granite being very hard, and of course this was before the introduction of pneumatic drills or dynamite.

From the Locust Stake the line paralleled the Little Tennessee River through North Carolina and about 22 miles into Tennessee. I do not know which bank of the river the line would follow, or whether a decision had been made for much of the distance; my assumption is that the right bank would be more favorable almost all of the way. The mileage through North Carolina would be about 76.

The upper reaches of the Tennessee, in the Franklin area, flow through fairly gentle country. Below Franklin, at about the Macon-Swain county line the terrain gets quite rough, with steep and rocky banks which would require a lot of blasting. From about this point, most of the original route, for the next 30 or 40 miles is now below the waters of Lake Fontana.

From the Macon-Swain county line to the confluence of the Nantahala and Little Tennessee rivers near Almond was about ten miles, and to Bushnell another seven miles. Bushnell was at the confluence of the Little Tennessee and the Tuckasegee rivers about 12 miles west of Bryson City. Both Almond and Bushnell are now below the waters of Lake Fontana.

From Bushnell the line would have run about 13 or 14 miles along

the north bank of the Little Tennessee, to Fontana. At Fontana is now the highest dam in the eastern United States, rushed to completion in the early 1940,s principally to supply power for the aluminum refinery at Maryville, Tenn., which requires tremendous amounts of electricity to convert raw bauxite into aluminum for war planes.

Downstream of Fontana the line would have passed the sites of Cheowa, Calderwood and Chilowee dams and continued about 21 miles into Tennessee, leaving the Little Tennessee at Mile 29 on the river, just west of Citico Creek.

At this point, near the confluence of Fourmile Creek the line would have a 90 degree curve to the right and headed northeast along the creek. After about 13 miles along the creek it would have passed the site of the Maryville Dragway, then a minor summit about Elev. 1050, and entered the valley of Pistol Creek, which it would have followed into Maryville.

From Maryville it was about 17 miles to the junction with the East Tennessee and Georgia at Knoxville, just west of the Holston River. The line from Maryville to Knoxville was to be through fairly easy country, and a great deal of the earthwork had been completed by 1857, as well as one of the required seven piers in the river. By the time the project was finally abandoned, of course, the bridge was complete.

APPROXIMATE MILEAGES

Anderson-Knoxville	195
Charleston-Knoxville, as outlined	452
Charleston-Knoxville, via New Market-Aiken short line	410
Charleston-Chattanooga, via Citico Creek	464
(Charleston-Knoxville, via Southern Ry.)	422

APPROXIMATE ELEVATIONS

Charleston	15
Walhalla	1000
East Portal, Stumphouse Mtn. Tunnel	1480
Ridge west of Stumphouse Mtn Tunnel	1680
Chatooga at Bridge Site	1430
Bluffs at Chatooga River, 500 ft. apart	1500
Tennessee Valley Divide at Mountain City	2170
Tennessee Valley at Fourmile Creek	850
Ridge Just South of Maryville	1050
Knoxville	1000

EPILOGUE

After the Confederate War various attempts were made to complete the Blue Ridge. There is, for example, a sign in War Woman Dell referring to the "Black Diamond Company," which apparently worked for a time on the line, west of Stumphouse.

The bank panic of 1873 undoubtedly hurt the company badly and by 1876 the Stumphouse Mountain Tunnel was estimated to be costing \$50,000 per mile. The Richmond and Danville obtained control (through its C. and G. subsidiary) in Nov. 1880. In 1881-1882 surveys were made "by direction of J. W. Fry, Supt. C. & G. R. R., and Ch'f En'gr. Blue Ridge R. R." of several possible by-passes of Stumphouse Mountain. These were all quite short, and apparently no construction work was done on any of them. Of interest is the "Loop Line," which would have a loop reminiscent of the loop on the old Louisville and Nashville's "Hook and Eye" Division; and of California's Tehachapi Loop.

In 1894 the Blue Ridge became independent again, and in 1900 started on Stumphouse Mountain Tunnel again, but not much was done before the company was "reorganized" in 1901. I have seen no record of any work done after 1901.

The enclosed map shows a line from New Market, just east of Greenwood, S. C. to the South Carolina Railroad at Aiken. This was apparently the original intention, but the completion of the C. and G. in 1853 made it more expeditious to start construction from Anderson, using the route outlined earlier. In the Directors' report of 1857 distances were tabulated using the New Market-Aiken route, (which would be about 40 miles shorter than the line as outlined) indicating that it was still contemplated. Since both the South Carolina and the Blue Ridgewere largely promoted by Charleston interests there should have been little difficulty arranging for trackage rights, or a complete merger.

In the early years of this century the Southern planned a new route from Knoxville to Atlanta, using about 120 miles of the Blue Ridge route. Three subsidiary companies were used for the construction.

The Tennessee & Carolina Southern started construction from Maryville, Tenn., which had been reached by the Blue Ridge, and built southward, eventually reaching Calderwood on the Little Tennessee. The Carolina & Tennessee Southern built westward from Bushnell, by that served by the "Murphy Line, and reached Fontana. The Tallulah Falls line was extended from Cornelia, Ga. to Franklin.

When work on this project was stopped, mostly by the bank panic of 1907, only about 15 miles separated the T. & C. S. and the

C. & T. S. and perhaps 20 or 25 miles separated the Murphy Line from the Tallulah Falls.

I estimate the distance from Knoxville to Inman Yard in Atlanta as about 240 miles by this route, as compared to approximately 218 miles by Cleveland and Cohutta.

It is interesting to note that, although the Blue Ridge failed to complete its intended line, the 44 miles that were in place at the time of the Confederate War, are still operating.

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Rainy Mountain, GA-SC
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Dillard, GA-NC
Prentiss, NC
Franklin, NC
Corbin Knob, NC
Alarka, NC
Wesser, NC
Tuskegee, NC
Fontana Dam, NC
Tapoco, NC
Calderwood, TN-NC
Tallassee, TN (Line leaves Little Tennessee Valley)
Binfield, TN
Blockhouse, TN
Maryville, TN
Knoxville, TN

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