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# THE DESERT WIND

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## Memorial Day Weekend on the Real Narrow Gauge. -from Brian Ratliff

Memorial Day at Joshua Tree is a crap shoot on the weather, anywhere from nice to holy smokes it's hot! Plan for hot but bring your long sleeved shirt. This year's temperatures were wonderful.

The retired folks, Al and Lynn Ratliff, arrived Thursday afternoon and all us working stiffs showed up Friday afternoon on, okay at least employed. The weather included wind Friday night but it could of been worse. I made it up mid afternoon and Mike Thompson with son Nathan and his dad Bruce made it up by 8:30 that night.

Saturday morning dawned calm and temperate. As sleeping in till 6:00am seemed like a waste of day, firing up commenced early.

The Heisler blasted the sleepers awake by 7:30. As Mike came up to work no time was wasted in getting the buckets and screw



Tom Arnold photo.

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guns rounded up to finish the last ties on the Palmer bridge. And fill was moved across the span to fill in the roadbed on the west end of the bridge.

Paul Lavacot and Celeste showed up early and Paul finished off the freight tail of the Wye and crossover too. And spent the rest of the day tidying up the cut that the tail fills. The ballast train was busy moving aggregate to fill the embankment bracing that finished off the East end of the bridge. Everyone took turns with the sledgehammer pounding in stakes to hold the boards. Another fifty



feet of bracing was put in below the station to keep the roadbed near the track instead of down the hill on Sunday and Monday.

On Saturday afternoon after nap time the attention shifted to the steaming area and it was decided to attempt the wall project. As Mike had watched more people build walls than I had and had some experience at it he was the mason and I just kept the hod full of mud for him. By Saturday dinner time we had two thirds of the bottom course and a few blocks of the second down in concrete, OK, mortar.

Saturday night was the break out your long sleeves for the last time evening. And after doing our best to counter global warming due to bovine flatulence, that would be steak dinners for all, the fire was actually nice. Sunday morning it was back to the wall. Blocks were hauled to the site by the Plymouth and the ever versatile Westside flats. A trip to the Hardware store was made in the morning to stock up on mortar-mix. The other project for the trip was to replace the Rudy Goldberg irrigation control valve with something that might be repairable in the future or even added to should the need arise. The trip to the hardware store acquired the needed parts that would make it work. After the water was shut off the old riser was severed below ground level where it was grafted to the PVC piping. A new riser and header for the sprinkler controller was assembled and properly re-glued to the PVC pipe. In doing all this a guzzler was fashioned to water the animals, birds and insects that have known the old leaky faucet as a reliable source of liquid gold in the dessert. Upon completion

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## The Real Narrow Gauge ...continued from page 1

of the plumbing the soakers were turned on and within hours you could see evidence that again the trees were being watered.

The Sunday evening wall work got us within six blocks of completion of the top course, enough for the day.

Monday the Heisler again was steamed up in the cool of the morn and Mike tackled the remaining blocks. The wall has been extended 19 blocks along the lead tracks and four courses up to the level of the tracks. When the wall gets filled with concrete and the wall back filled then one can use the east lead track without fear of tumbling into the engine house pit. A steaming bay can now be fabricated and the fill dirt removed once the next bridge is completed up the high line.

A lot has been accomplished this season with what and who we have to work with. Thanks to all that lended a hand in the following projects that got accomplished this season. This is not all that got done, just all I could think of.

- 1) Re-decking the Palmer Bridge.
- 2) Regrading of the Wye.
- 3) Relaying of the track on the Wye.
- 4) The freight legs of the Wye.
- 5) The new switches in the Station and North leg of the Wye
- 6) Retaining wall segment of the engine house; excavation, forming, pouring and setting of block.
- 7) Cleaning out of the Tedder shed area.
- 8) Concrete pad under the tool shed at the patio.
- 9) New retaining wall and steps at the unloading area.
- 10) Retaining boards along the station tackage, Wye to east of station.
- 11) Irrigation system reworking.
- 12) Construction of one new pull through campsite, and reclamation of one other.
- 13) Car barn track threshold rails and inside tracks.
- 14) Drainage and trestles west of the road at the station.
- 15) Expansion of parking area west of campground.

Thanks again, great year, see you when it cools off! ☼



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## JT&S President's Message July 2006

As we look forward to our next season at JT&S it's easy to get excited. The Narrow Gauge group has a great start on the new engine house at the turntable, the highline will be extended, and the re-designed wye will be completed.

The Grand Scale group finished the stringers on the Jack's Gap bridge and are prepared to put down ties and rail in the early fall. The west abutment was beefed up and the east side will be ready for rail as well. The goal is to be running in Spring 2007.

Don't miss the Fall Meet where on November 11th we will dedicate the car barn to Rudy van Wingen and the Jack's Gap Bridge to Jack Sessums. It will be a fitting tribute to these two great men and a celebration of their contributions to this wonderful hobby.

I'm very happy to report that the purchase of the remaining 25% of the property was completed. Thanks to our many contributors and the cooperation of the Chuck Barnes family, the Joshua Tree & Southern Railroad Museum now owns 100% of our property.

Gary Connelly and Terry Watson plan to make a lot of progress on the back display room in the station. When they are finished, we can bring out more pieces that are now in storage.

The rewiring project for the standard gauge cars has improved our power situation tremendously. The removal of the old overhead wires has done wonders for the look of that area. Special thanks to Jack Cleary, Rich Middlebrough, and Eric Bauer who slaved for several days to get the job done. Look for brighter lights next time your up there.

Once again we look forward to Bill Shepherd returning the week before the Fall Meet to continue his work on the Grand Scale and Narrow Gauge engine houses. If your interested in participating, let me know. We have lots for folks to do.

The Train Mountain Triennial Ramble came to JT&S this year and we got a lot of positive comments from the attendees. I was able to attend this year's Triennial in Chiloquin, Oregon. What a terrific event. JT&S had a good showing and thanks to Paul Lavacot a lot of exposure. Paul had a booth in the vendor's area where he displayed our picture board and handed out our brochures. There were so many people that I was there for 2 days before I ran into some of our members! It made me appreciate our intimate dinners and campfires at the end of the day at JT&S. Great job Train Mountain!

These are only the highlights. A lot of other work was done by all groups to make our next season a great one. My thanks to those who work so hard to for the benefit of all.

- Tom Arnold ☼

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## Grand Scale Division Report.

The 2005-06 season has been our most productive and busiest yet. The reality of an operational 15" gauge railway in Joshua Tree is within reach, indeed at our fingertips, thanks to the efforts that everyone has put forth.

Our Shay #6 made its public debut at the Grand Scales Convention on October 1st and 2nd, 2005. This machine languished in the desert for many years before being taken under wing by Ken Kukuk of the West Side Locomotive Works, and emerged as something we can all take pride in. Ken's volunteerism, generosity, and expertise are an inspiration to us. Many individuals got the opportunity to pull

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## Calendar of Events

### •*Workday Schedule:*

*September 9, 2006*

*October 14, 2006*

*December 9, 2006*

### •*Fall Meet Spectacular:*

*November 10-12, 2006*

Email [tomamailbox-jts@yahoo.com](mailto:tomamailbox-jts@yahoo.com) for more info and member camping reservations.

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### **GSD Report** ...from page 2

the throttle on #6 at the Conventions "Rent-an-Engine" activity, and was the second most popular locomotive, after Ken's 2-8-0 #13. Proceeds from this activity went to defray the cost of restoration. Thanks to Greg and Susan Robinson from the Grand Scales Quarterly magazine, organizers of the Convention, and Sean and Melissa Bautista of Hillcrest Shops, the Hosts. Shay #6 is currently housed at Hillcrest and will return to Joshua Tree when suitable storage is available.

The intrepid Ken Eells has been leading the charge on the Roundhouse fund-raiser, aka the "Blockhead" program. This effort has garnered enough funding to pour the foundation and purchase enough cinder blocks to get the wall structure up to the height of top of rail. A gracious thank you to all who donated to this worthwhile project. Ken plans on another funding "push" in the Fall to get us the rest of the way. Bill Shepherd has been tirelessly leading the construction effort along with Ken, and Tom Arnold. Bill's tenacity is inspiring to say the least. He has tired out many of us younger guys, and we appreciate his guidance. Ken also was able to place the turntable bridge in front of the Roundhouse, this has been

### **- Board of Directors and Officers for 2006 -**

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**Chris Allan - Treasurer, Director**

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**Allan Ratliff - Director**

**Bill Shepherd - Director**

an ongoing project for a few years now, and it's good to see it finally go in where it belongs. With the table and the roundhouse going in it is easy to visualize what the completed facility will one day look like.

Surmounting our greatest psychological barrier was my personal goal for this work season. The long-envisioned bridge over the dry-wash (now named the "Jack's Gap Bridge" in memory of our friend Jack Sessums) is finally up, save for decking and rail, which will have to wait until Fall. This was accomplished in no small part by Rick Mugele, Roger Stabler, and "Ole" Olson. The main span was set in place during the Fall Meet in November of 2005. The final span beam was raised at our last workday, on May 13th, 2006. This represents not only a necessary extension of our operational capability, but it shows what kind of teamwork we are capable of. John Zitrick has acquired through his employer more materials for the decking and safety equipment. Mike, Joseph and Joshua Brehm have taken on the renewal of the West Abutment, which is a formidable project, and they are attacking it with great zeal.

Of course we couldn't have done it without my lovely wife Rita's craft service, and thanks also to her for her efforts to photo document the build process. Her patience and encouragement are appreciated.

Thanks go to Ole Olson of Joshua Tree for continuing to help us out with his backhoe and loader, performing grading and moving chores, without his help we would still be at square one.

Thanks also go to our sponsors and patrons:

***The Lasseter Family Foundation***

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***Searles Valley Minerals***

***The Sessums Family***

We can all be proud of the collective effort put in over the past season. I can say with great confidence that the 2006-07 season will bring actual operations over our own track, issuing in a new "Golden Era" for the Joshua Tree and Southern Grand Scale Division. Have a wonderful and safe summer, and we will see you back on the track in the Fall.

*-Chris Allan, GSD Coordinator ☀*



*Across at last...*



*The last span beam (stringer) on the Jack's Gap Bridge goes up, thanks again to Ole's backhoe. Roger Stabler (right on ladder, and John Zitrick (sitting up top) position the beam prior to Roger welding it into place. Thanks to Rita Allan for this photo, taken at the May workday. The plan is to have decking and rail placed on the span prior to the November Meet.*



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ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED

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