

TRACK GUIDE

**A detailed guide to the trackage you will see on your trip to
Whittaker Station or Bald Knob at Cass Scenic Railroad**

The Cass Depot: The Cass depot is an adaptation a standard C&O design, constructed in the 1970s to replace the 1923 depot, which burned in 1975. The 1923 depot had replaced the original, which, because of its small size, layout and location, had become obsolete.

The Cass Mill: The parking lot was formerly the storage area for finished lumber produced by the Cass mill. The mill buildings are between the track and the river.

Mill buildings (starting at the end of the parking lot):

- The brick structures toward depot were drying kilns.
- The metal building was the boiler house.
- The farthest brick building was the powerhouse.
- The millpond was past the powerhouse (and is barely visible).
- Sawmill ruins are in the foreground between the metal boiler house and the track.

The mill was owned by West Virginia Spruce Lumber Co (1902-1910), West Virginia Pulp & Paper (1910-1942), and Mower Lumber Co (1942-60). It burned in 1922, was rebuilt in 1922-23, and closed July 1, 1960. Capacity was 125,000 board feet per 11-hour shift. It produced 35 million feet of lumber per year during peak production. The mill was abandoned when lumber operations ceased in 1960. It was quietly moldering away when it was struck by two arson fires in the 1980's that completely destroyed its wood parts.

The tracks from the depot to the water tank were originally part of the C&O Greenbrier subdivision. The following guide is keyed to track mileage from the Cass water tank.

- 0.0** **Water tank was shared with C&O Railroad.** The logging railroad began here. The line follows Leatherbark Creek to a saddle in the mountain where the line originally gained access to the vast timber resources in the Cheat and Elk River drainages to the north and west. The C&O Railroad was the primary link between Cass and the outside world because the lumber products from Cass were shipped out on this line. The original water tank was replaced by a redwood replica in 2005; the metal parts of the structure are the originals.
- 0.2** Cass Shops. The original (1922) shops were on this site, but were destroyed by a major fire in 1972. The current shop complex includes a locomotive shop, a passenger car shop, and a restoration building where volunteers are rebuilding one of the Cass geared locomotives for eventual return to active service.
- 0.2** Cass dead line. The track on the left side of the train holds a variety of locomotives and other equipment in various states of disrepair. Some of these are slated for repair or restoration; others are beyond reasonable hope because of financial constraints.
- 0.1-0.4** Original trackage in 1901 was on cribbing through the wet bottomland of Leatherbark Creek.

- 0.5** Two Leatherbark Creek bridges were wood stringers until replaced by steel in 1959.
- 0.7** Back Mountain Road grade crossing. The grade steepens to 4%, plus. From here to the top of Cass Hill at mile 6.8, the average grade is 4.55%.
- 1.0** Grade is 5%.
- 1.4** Gum Road crossing.
- 2.3** Lower switchback leads into a 6.3% grade. Switchbacks were commonly used on logging railroads to allow the track to gain elevation in a relatively small space dictated by the rugged topography. They were rarely used on mainline railroads because of the need to stop and restart the train at each switchback.
- 2.6** Gum Curve. 158° of a circle, starting as a 22° curve on a 3.65% grade, it sharpens to 29° on a 2.35% curve.
- 2.7** Cass Cave. About 3,000 feet away, and hidden behind the hill across the valley, is Cass Cave. This wild and dangerous cave is over three miles long and it is likely that part of the cave extends under the tracks. It contains a 150-foot waterfall.
- 2.9** Logging road. Grade is 6.1%.
- 3.1** Limestone Cut. Grade is 6.7%. The cut was made with hand tools and black powder in 1900.
- 3.3** Upper switchback. In the teens a bypass for the switchbacks was proposed, but never built, requiring bridges, a 30° curve and much earthwork.
- 3.5** Road crossing of the access road to Whittaker; begin a 7.1% grade. The steepest rail length is about 8.7 percent on this 0.2 mile long S-curve.
- 3.8** Whittaker Station. (restroom facilities, snack bar, and a reconstructed logging camp).

Once the site of a construction camp from the building of the railroad, here now is the Mountain State Railroad & Logging Historical Association's Whittaker Camp One display. On the west (left) side of the display area are three portable shanties, patterned after the remains of actual shanties at one of the last logging camps in the woods. The saw filer's shack has big windows to provide light for the filer's work. The others housed the foreman, surveyor, train crews, and men deemed more important than those who actually cut the timber, the wood hicks.

Next to the shanties is an abbreviated camp train, representing where the wood hicks washed, slept, and ate their meals. The kitchen and dining car is a reproduction of a typical camp car. The small 4-wheel caboos was constructed in 1883 and used in Clay County, West Virginia, before coming to Cass. The display also includes an original Mower Lumber Company bunk car, but that car is currently in Cass for an extensive restoration

The center track holds a log loader, built by the Meadow River Lumber Company at Rainelle, West Virginia. This large loader was designed when Meadow River started

harvesting whole trees, cutting the trunks into shorter logs in the mill instead of in the woods. The loader rests on a Meadow River skeleton log car, one of a large fleet manufactured at Rainelle. The other flat is a very early example of a steel flat car, from Elk River Coal & Lumber–Georgia Pacific at Swandale, West Virginia. The four-wheel bobber caboose, reportedly ex-B&O, brought up the rear of log trains into Swandale for many years.

The remaining track holds a tower skidder, assembled from older Lidgerwood engines and winches by Meadow River Lumber Company. A tower skidder brought logs on a aerial cable from distant cutting sites to the railroad, where a log loader could stack them on the cars. When all the logs were removed from a site, the far end of the cable was moved so that eventually all timber in a circular area around the skidder was taken out. Every time the cable was moved it meant many hours of back-breaking work as the crew carried 100-foot lengths of small cable through the woods between the skidder and the new anchor site. When these lengths were joined, the crew then used the skidder's rigging engine to stretch the 1" main cable out to the new setting. The skidder remained at the same set for several months.

- 4.0 Culvert over Whittaker Run. On the low side of the track is the old grade with a sharper curve. For the next mile watch below the track for discarded locomotive smokestacks dumped off here in the old days.
- 4.1 The original Lima-built water tender from Cass Shay #2 is in use as a water storage tank.
- 4.5 Logging road crossing from the 1970's. Grade is 5.75% for a short way.
- 4.7 Austin Meadows. Farm fields once came up slope to this spot. A Scenic Railroad stop and overlook were originally planned here.
- 4.8 Skidder set on the uphill side of the track apparently never used, was built here about 1940. Grade is down to 3.25%.
- 5.1 Gobblers Knob.
- 5.4 Skidder set, 225-foot siding on the uphill side of the train, a skidder set in 1940-1941. The main cable stretched nearly 3,000 feet to the far mountainside. Incoming logs hung 500 feet above the creek. A tangle of old cables marks most skidder sets. The grade is a steady 5% plus. A camp was located on the low side between here and the next skidder set.
- 6.0 Overlook. The grade is 5.4% - 6%. The view is the Leatherbark Creek Valley (which the train left at the lower switchback).
- 6.2 Skidder set from 1940-41.
- 6.2 Logging spur to Camp 5, dating from 1911.
- 6.3 Washout. Site of a major 1996 washout that closed access to Bald Knob for almost a year. The large effort to repair the washout cost over \$1M and a man was killed in a construction accident.

- 6.6** Orange cross on the left is rumored to be at the site of an old grave of an Italian track worker.
- 6.7** Old Spruce. A three-mile line cut sharply to the left up to the head of Shavers Fork, logged in 1901-05. In 1945-50, Mower went back with 13 miles of track and 20 skidder sets.
- The present track going off to the left actually follows the route of the main logging line that connected to trackage going into the Cheat and Elk River drainages at the long-abandoned mill town of Spruce. Northward, the track follows the Cheat River to Elkins. This trackage was abandoned by the CSX railroad in the 1990s and was purchased by the West Virginia State Railroad Authority. Their contractor, the West Virginia Central RR, now runs excursion trips out of Elkins and Cheat Bridge along this very scenic route.
- The track from this point to Bald Knob was actually just a logging spur and was never the main line. It was constructed to allow the last trees to be removed and was some of the last track remaining when railroad logging operations ceased in 1960.
- 7.1** Unused railroad grade on the high side was built in the spring of 1960 to the head of Leatherbark Creek, but the company shut down before track was ever laid.
- 7.4** Spruce overlook. A few foundations from the old town of Spruce are visible in the valley below. Spruce was built in 1905 at an elevation of 3,853 feet and was rumored to be the “highest and coldest town in the east.” It featured a large bark-peeling mill for pulpwood, then later became a railroad shop town before it was abandoned in the 1950’s. Access was always by train because there were no roads to the town.
- 7.5** Oats Creek water tank is on an 8% grade. The train stops here to take on water. There were few water towers constructed on logging railroads; Shay locomotives can use a steam siphon to draw water from any convenient source. The water from Oats Creek is diverted into an old boiler shell so the engines can draw water here.
- 7.6** Snowshoe Overlook; 8% grade. You can see up toward the head of Shavers Fork, which was logged 1902-05, 1945-50 and has been used by skiers since 1976. The buildings of the Snowshoe ski resort may be visible on top of the distant mountains.
- 8.2** Johnson Run; the grade is 7%.
- 8.9** Camp train siding and skidder set from 1950.
- 9.0** Change in forest type. Notice the forest has changed from mixed hardwoods to red spruce. Red spruce covered most the higher elevations in this area prior to logging, but the trees have been slow to recover since they like cold, wet, shady areas. The hardwood trees that initially grew after logging have provided sufficient shade for the red spruce to regain a foothold. In another hundred years or so the mountaintop may again be a climax red spruce forest.

- 9.1 The Wye in 1950-51 led to a mile-long spur with five skidder sets and a camp train. The side track is now only a few hundred feet long, but allows a train to be turned around if necessary. It also allows a train to avoid the very sharp curve in the mainline track at this point.
- 9.1-9.8 The track averages 1.5% downgrade, passing around the top of the Big Run watershed. Track was built up the Big Run from Shavers Fork in 1910 when horses skidded logs. Steam skidders brought logs up hill to the present track in the 1950's.
- 9.8 Shay No. 4 derailed here in deep snow in 1958 and had to be left several days until Shay No. 1 plowed through to help rerail it.
- 9.9 Skidder set.
- 9.9 DP Switch on the lower side led to the 10-mile Cabin Fork line from 1951-59. Much of the Cabin Fork grade is now Forest Service roads.
- 10.0 Logging road crossing.
- 10.3 Camp on uphill side, late 1950's.
- 10.4 Water tank, seldom used by Cass Railroad.
- 10.7 Logging railroad grade veers left. There were two skidder sets and a camp on the loop around the summit. The camp (about number 105 in sequence), was used in 1958-59 and was the last full camp in operation.
- 10.8 Grade is about 9%.
- 11.0 End of track; the logging railroad reached this spot by looping around the summit from the opposite direction.

The Bald Knob overlook provides stunning views to the east on a clear day. Standing on the overlook platform, the furthest mountains in the distance are on the Virginia border and are about 11 miles away. Cass is hidden from view, but is about 45 degrees to the right and about 4 miles away. Below the overlook you can see the radio telescopes of the Greenbank Radio Observatory in the valley.

The overlook is frequently assumed to be the top of Bald Knob, but it is not at the mountain's peak. The overlook is at an elevation of about 4,700 feet and the actual summit is 4,842 feet and about 1/4 mile to the southwest. A fire tower at the summit was abandoned years ago when the second growth trees became tall enough to obscure the view.

Track Guide information is provided by the Mountain State Railroad & Logging Historical Association in June, 2007. Prior to use by others, please call Cass Scenic Railroad for use permission. 304-456-4300 ext 108.

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