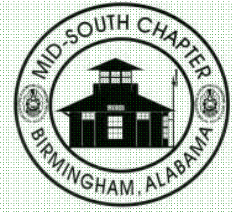




# The Mid-South Flyer

May 2010



A publication of the Mid-South Chapter of the Railway & Locomotive Historical Society, Inc

## May 8th program

### Take a ride on the Alabama Mineral

Most rail fans have a favorite piece of railroad, usually the track that ran by the house or through their hometown. For Alan Dismukes, the L&N's Alabama Mineral became a late favorite that has since become the focus of his interest in local railroad history.

A child of the diesel era, Alan missed out on much of Birmingham's colorful railroading, which led to an insatiable curiosity about local railroad history. As he describes it, he became interested in the Alabama Mineral "because of the (Heart of

Dixie Railroad Museum's) Calera & Shelby operation (over) what is left on the Calera end Nobody I asked could tell me very much about the history of the line, so I decided to gather up material on my own and have been accumulating photos, employee timetables, condensed line profiles, old news articles, and any Alabama Mineral-related stuff I could get my hands on. Since I couldn't find someone who was an authority on the Alabama Mineral, I guess I am going to have to be the guy!" Alan hopes to gather enough material for a book on the line to sell in the museum's gift shop. "What I really regret is that I don't have any first-hand accounts from people who worked on the line," he said.

As a compliment to his interest in rail history, Alan currently serves as editor of the museum's "Cinders From the Smokestack" newsletter and is a qualified engineer on the museum's Calera & Shelby Railroad, which operates the southern-most remnant of the former Alabama Mineral. He also enjoys the unique honor of being the last man to fire a steam locomotive over the line, when the Flagg Coal #75 paid a visit to the museum in 2009.

Alan promises to bring an interesting talk and slide presentation on his "new favorite" rail line for our May 8th program, including many photos taken along the now-abandoned right of way.



*Pulling the grade through Oneonta, a quartet of L&N diesels head a long freight for Gadsden in this scene from the Alabama Mineral's "upper loop" during the mid-1980's. (Marvin Clemons photo)*

### Inside this issue

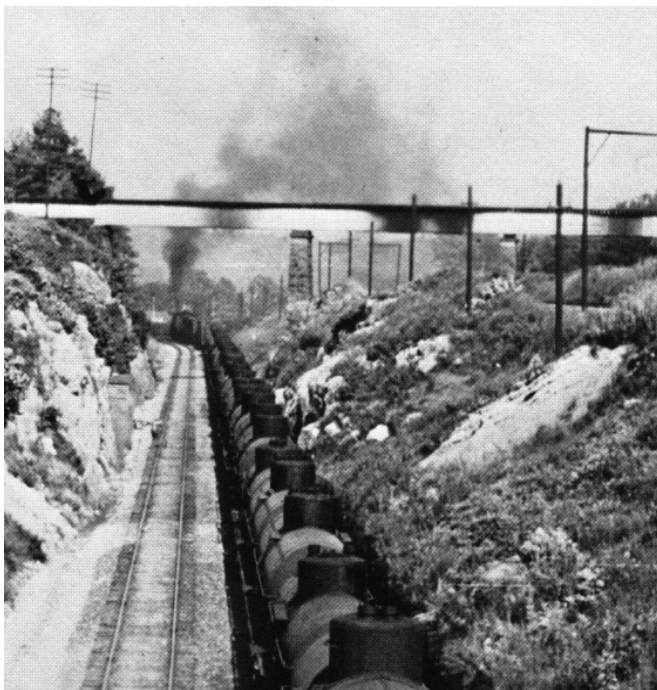
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## April program highlights

# Chapter treated to a weekend “double-header” on the Birmingham Mineral’s Red Mountain lines

Mid-South Chapter members and guests received a double treat at the chapter’s first special members program on the weekend of April 16 & 17.

On Friday evening, chapter member Lyle Key recounted the history of Birmingham Mineral Railroad’s Red Mountain route. Lyle related that L&N created Birmingham Mineral Railroad Company as a subsidiary on January 7, 1884 and that Birmingham Mineral started building its first two branches along Red Mountain just five days later. The nine-mile long North Branch ran west along the north side of the mountain from Magella on L&N’s S&NA mainline to Sloss, and the initial 2.71 mile long segment of the South Branch ran along the south side of the mountain between the mainline turnout at Graces and the station of Redding. Both of these first Birmingham Mineral branch lines were built to a broad gauge of five feet, and they had light 58-pound rail with the track laid on a dirt surface. They were converted to standard gauge in conjunction with L&N’s general Southern gauge change in May of 1886, and the track structure subsequently was upgraded with slag ballast and heavier rail.



*View of Red Gap trestle crossing the Alabama Great Southern Railroad looking east towards Irondale*

Lyle discussed the Birmingham Mineral branch lines that were built along Red Mountain between 1884 and 1904 and covered some of the notable bridges, depots, and water tanks. His presentation included a picture from member Marvin Clemons’ collection that showed the Red Gap Branch bridge over the railroad corridor at Red Gap plus another old photo that had been taken from that bridge. A photo of the depot at Woodlawn was shown, and Lyle explained that it subsequently had been moved to Heart of Dixie Railroad Museum in Calera and restored to house Heart of Dixie’s **Bill Boone Memorial Railroad Library**.

After Birmingham Mineral finished building its various lines in 1904, it conveyed all of its property, rights, and franchises to L&N. At that time, Birmingham Mineral had 56 miles of track on Red Mountain, and four of its connecting branches stretched 32 miles from Trussville on the northeast to Ferro (just southwest of Bessemer) on the southwest.

## Birmingham Mineral's Red Mountain lines (continued)

On June 30, 1917, L&N conveyed its short branches serving mines on the west end of Red Mountain to TCI. The branches conveyed to TCI had a total of 8.74 miles of track. TCI subsequently built a 1.4 mile long connecting track between the Muscoda Branch and the Fossil Branch, and thus created a continuous rail line on the north slope of the mountain from Muscoda on the west to Ishkooda on the east.

Lyle then summarized the abandonments on the Red Mountain Route that began in 1933. His presentation on abandonments included a detailed discussion of a lawsuit filed by some English Village residents in 1946 seeking to enjoin the railroad operation at nearby Hedona as an abatable nuisance. The most recent abandonment on Birmingham Mineral's Red Mountain Route was in 1984, and it involved the portion of the Gate City Branch between Boyles and Ruffner #2 mine. That left the old North Branch – one of Birmingham Mineral's first two branches on Red Mountain – which survives today primarily as a convenient route for empty coal trains from Birmingham to the Jim Walter coal mines between Blue Creek Junction and Brookwood.

On Saturday morning, a hardy handful turned out on a gorgeous spring day for a hike over the old South Branch led by Red Mountain Park Ranger Eric McFerrin. The group spent about two hours hiking over a portion of the South Branch's roadbed and visited a couple of adjacent mine sites. They toured the inside the 1918 vintage hoist house for Woodward's Redding/Songo vertical shaft mine, which was found in surprisingly good shape considering its age. Eric brought along old photos showing how things looked in the area when the mines were in operation. Everyone was impressed with the park's good work in clearing the thick undergrowth off the old South Branch right-of-way and the old mine sites we visited. Eric explained that the thick undergrowth helped preserve the vestiges of the mining operations that have survived, since no one wanted to wade through the vegetation that had grown up around the old mines.

*(Editor's note: Thanks to member Lyle Key for providing an excellent account of his presentation and the mine tour)*



*The Birmingham Mineral's Red Gap Branch wound along the top of Red Mountain from Irondale to Graces. This scene is just west of the Vulcan statue near where the line crossed over 20th Street.*

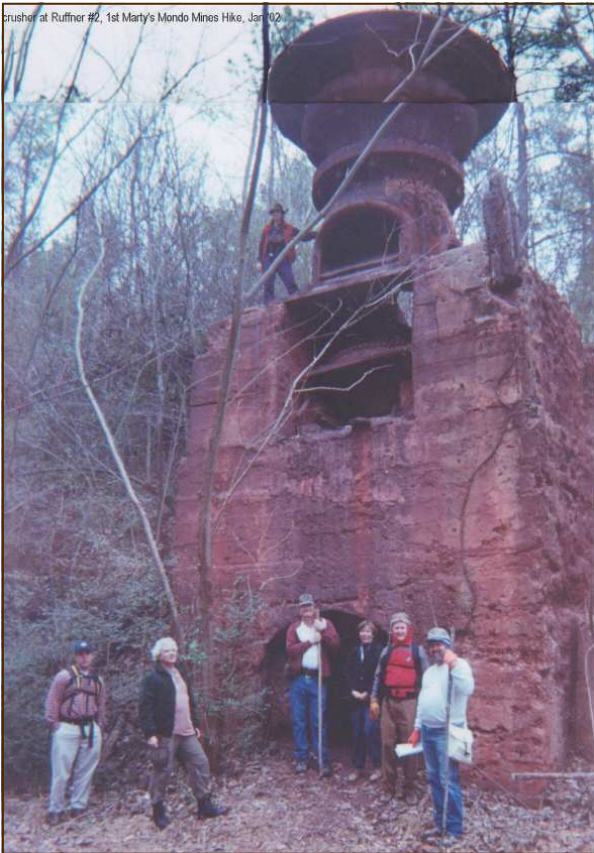


*The Temple at Delphi surrounded by tourists? No, just the Mid-South Chapter's entourage exploring the well-preserved remains of Woodward Mining Company's Redding/Songo vertical shaft mine. Thanks to member Ken Smith for the photo.*

# Chapter News and Events

## Frank Ardrey receives R&LHS photography award

Wearing a satisfied smile, Mid-South Chapter member and renowned southeastern rail photographer Frank Ardrey proudly displays his R&LHS award for lifetime achievement in photography. Frank joins the distinguished company of previous award winners including such notables as Phil Hastings, William Middleton, and Richard Steinheimer. The award was presented to Frank by R&LHS board member Mark Entrop during a March 27 ceremony and reception at Fair Haven Retirement Center. Frank's long-time friend and MSC chapter member Lyle Key presided over the ceremony attended by a number of Mid-South Chapter members, friends and family. *(Photo by Ken Smith)*



## MSC members walk the Gate City Branch, tour Ruffner mine ruins

On Saturday, March 20, a group of rugged Mid-South members (see if you can pick them out) joined with the Birmingham Chapter of the Society of Industrial Architecture for a walking tour of the Gate City Branch and remains of Ruffner ore mines. Taking the hike were Marvin and Kayron Clemons, Bryan and Toni Schaffer with kids James and Jordan., Natasha Bettis, Jason Lamb, and James Lowery. Our thanks to SIA and MSC member John Stewart for extending the invite. *(Photo by James Lowery)*



## Event Calendar

May 21 & 22 (Friday & Saturday) NMRA Southeastern Meet @ Bessemer Civic Center  
June 5 (Saturday) Chapter Cookout & Social — 10 am to 5 pm — Leeds Depot  
June 26 (Saturday) Board of Directors — 2 pm — Leeds Depot  
July 10 (Saturday) Chapter Meeting—2pm—Leeds Depot

## Golden Era Classics



***Sun sets on the Coast Line*** — How's this for a nostalgic photo of the former Atlantic Coast Line, nee Atlanta, Birmingham & Coast? *Trains* columnist Don Phillips caught this late autumn view along the Lineville sub near his home town of Talladega. The orange hues of the Coast Line cabooses and PFE reefer blend in nicely with the late afternoon sunlight and fall foliage. Great shot, Don!

### **Where are we?**

Not a fair question, you say, since we could be almost anywhere with a curved trestle over a boggy river bottom. So here's a hint: The scene is located north of Birmingham on a former rail line that's become a recent topic of conversation (BIG hint). Some would say that it was, and in one respect still is, one of the most scenic rail routes in Alabama. Curious? Attend the May 8th program and learn the answer to our mystery location. In the meantime, where are we?



## From the Observation Platform by Marvin Clemons, Chairman

There's an old adage among railroaders about having had a "good run," meaning you got your train over the road on time and in good shape. I think it would be true to say that at least so far on our journey, the Mid-South Chapter has had a pretty good run.

Since leaving the station just 18 months ago, the chapter has managed to operate without any major delays, other than for a slow order or two and an occasional detour due to unexpected obstacles on the track. Still, we've managed to keep our programs on schedule (with the notable exception of "The Incredible Sperry Boys" slide show) and get the newsletter published (mostly) on time.

As everyone knows, keeping a train running on time and without incident doesn't just happen. It takes a good crew working together to have a good run. Fortunately, the Mid-South Chapter has a steady and reliable volunteer team keeping us on track and underway. Interesting and entertaining programs, a steadily growing membership, and strong community relations don't just happen. Members have volunteered their time and talent to help make them happen.

We've come this far thanks primarily to the efforts of a dedicated crew of volunteers. But our small crew needs help to keep this train going strong, and the leadership is responsible for insuring we have sufficient crew ready and available for the chapter to continue the good run. We'll soon be asking our members to "mark up" on the call board for a future crew assignment. So be thinking about which job you'd like to bid on when the crew caller calls on you!



**Meet in Meridian**—It's been quite awhile since passenger trains of different railroads shared the station platform at Meridian, Mississippi. Member Mick Nussbaum captured the rare event on March 18 as Amtrak's *Crescent* for New Orleans made it's regular station stop next to Kansas City Southern's business train, which had recently arrived from Jackson. Which train would you rather be boarding on this early Spring day?



**What? The Mid-South Chapter Meeting**  
**When? Saturday, May 8th at 2 pm**  
**Where? Historic Leeds Depot**  
**Who? Alan Dismukes presenting a slide show and lecture on the Alabama Mineral Railroad**

### *The Mid-South Flyer*

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*The Mid-South Flyer* is published bi-monthly by the Mid-South Chapter of the Railway & Locomotive Historical Society (R&LHS), Inc. The R&LHS is a non-profit educational organization dedicated to the study and preservation of railroad history.

National and chapter dues are \$42 and include subscriptions to the Society's twice-yearly magazine *Railroad History* and quarterly newsletter, and the chapter's bi-monthly newsletter, *The Mid-South Flyer*. For membership information write to:

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