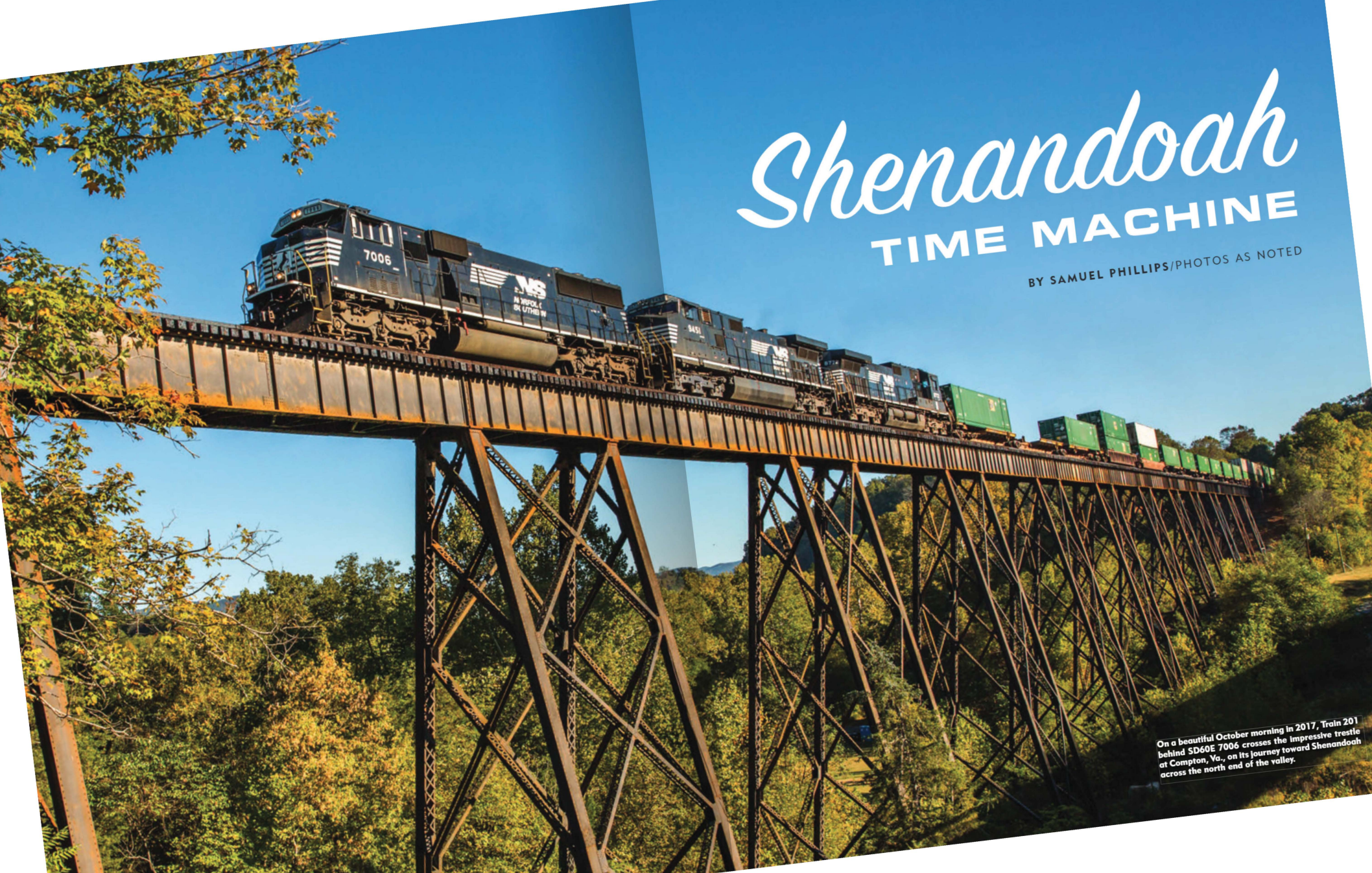


# Shenandoah

## TIME MACHINE

BY SAMUEL PHILLIPS/PHOTOS AS NOTED



On a beautiful October morning in 2017, Train 201 behind SD60E 7006 crosses the impressive trestle at Compton, Va., on its journey toward Shenandoah across the north end of the valley.





ABOVE: Train 15T flies south at track speed through beautiful farmland at Lewis Run near Grottes, Va., with a lengthy cut of cars on the head end for Waynesboro on October 1, 2017, behind ET44AC 3640.

LEFT: A picture-perfect morning provides a gorgeous reflection in a pond as Train 38Q rolls north through Arcadia with a pair of newer ACES on the lead on November 10, 2012.

THERE ARE FEW PLACES I'D RATHER BE than spending time along Norfolk Southern's Shenandoah Valley Line. Traversing some of the most beautiful scenery Virginia has to offer, the Valley is also the last stronghold for classic Norfolk & Western infrastructure. The Valley became a part of the N&W in 1890 and begins in the historic Star City of Roanoke, Va., and ends at Hagerstown, Md. The Roanoke District between Roanoke and Shenandoah, Va., spans a distance of 131 miles. From Shenandoah north is considered the Hagerstown District; this portion of the line is almost entirely in Virginia.

Railfanning the Valley is like taking a step back in time. Finding a Class I Railroad in 2018 that still has color position light (CPL) signals, old mileposts, whistle boards, and code line strung from wayside poles, is just unheard of. Each passing siding from Front Royal to Roanoke hosts CPL signals with few exceptions. All the intermediate signals have been replaced and the new siding built just South of Elkton at Island

Ford hosts new signals, but pretty much everything else is CPLs.

Well-known photographer O. Winston Link featured the Valley in some of his most-prized photographs. Places and towns such as Vesuvius, Buena Vista, Natural Bridge, Luray, and others were staples of his treasured photographs. The Valley was featured multiple times in Link's work; in fact, the Valley is where Link first met the N&W in the town of Waynesboro and fell in love with the railroad. Link knew the Valley was a special place infused with beauty in so many forms.

Little has changed over the years; the towns situated along the Valley are beautiful and quaint communities displaying the history of the area. Walking through present-day downtown Buena Vista or Luray is like stepping back into one of Link's photographs.

One can feel the history of the railroad when spending time between Roanoke and Front Royal. It's almost mysterious and connects you to the glory days of the N&W. So little has changed over the

years that it amazes you when looking at it. The only thing that has changed has been the motive power, tree growth, and a slow decline in train traffic.

#### Current Operations

What is it about the Shenandoah Valley that is such a mysterious draw? Maybe it is the beautiful mountain scenery infused with the drama of mountain railroading. Or maybe it's the small towns that reflect American history. There is no doubt there's something special and intriguing here, which is why I've fallen in love with it and spent many hours photographing it.

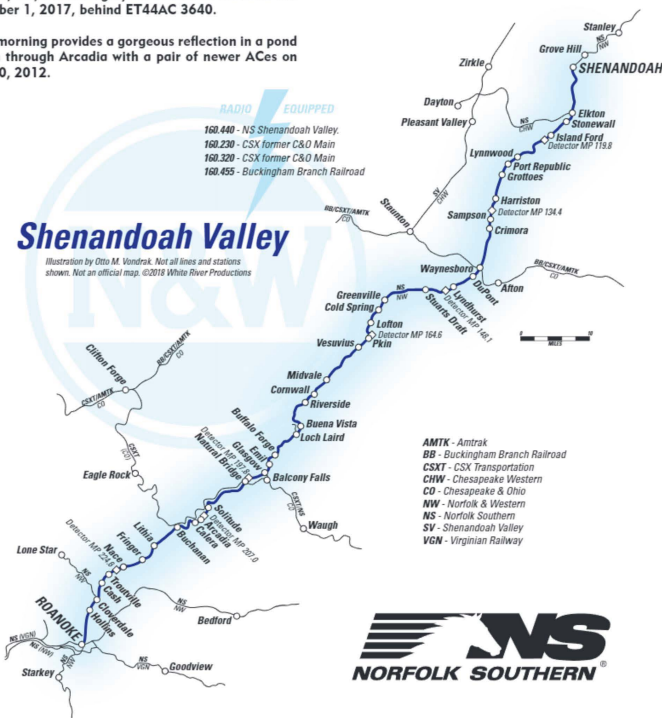
On today's Valley, the only guaranteed trains that are running across the entire length of the railroad are 202/201 and 15T/16T along with the sporadic northbound hopper train operating as a 747, 777, or 781. There are some locals on certain portions of the line and grain trains north of Elkton. The south end below Shenandoah is the most predictable, with 201 being a morning southbound from Shenandoah and 15T

following a couple hours behind. Both virtually guarantee good shots will be had on a trip to that portion of the Valley.

Trains 37Q and 38Q have been the last trains to be abolished, upon the closing of the hump yard at Sevier in Knoxville, Tenn., in spring 2016. Train 37Q was a guaranteed afternoon southbound on the north end between Shenandoah and Front Royal. Since it has left, getting a southbound in good light north of Shenandoah has been quite the challenge.

#### Roanoke to Glasgow

The Valley begins in downtown Roanoke by the O. Winston Link Museum, just east of CP Randolph Street. From there, it passes along the backside of East End Shops before turning north and crossing U.S. 460 heading toward CP North Roanoke. At Cloverdale, the Cloverdale Branch splits from the mainline and heads up to Lone Star, roughly ten miles to the northeast. There is also a siding here but it is rarely used for train meets.







river as well as the C&O on a gorgeous trestle. Light-wise, a late evening northbound here will yield the best results for a beautiful image. While you wait, the old store at Natural Bridge is beautifully restored and sits to your left. Check it out — it has a lot of history and beautifully restored relics. Link photographed several trains crossing the James here back in the mid-'50s and little has changed since then. Imagine standing there watching N&W steam roll by as a C&O coal train thunders east underneath with an Allegheny on the point...

Glasgow hosts a 5,563-foot-long siding and a connection with the C&O at Balcony Falls. Once upon a time it was used often, but to my knowledge is very rarely used these days. The N&W refers to this area as Glasgow, which is named after the town, but directly below it along the James, the C&O refers to it

as Balcony Falls where an old station and cooling tower still stand. It's a really cool area with a ton of history. This is where the Valley will cease to follow the James and C&O as they stray to the east toward Lynchburg.

#### Glasgow to Waynesboro

North of Glasgow the tracks follow the Maury River toward the town of Buena Vista. The tracks are relatively inaccessible in this stretch. However, this part of the railroad, and more specifically Goose Neck Dam, is where Link photographed his famous waterfall shot that took several days to set up. Of course, everything is treed in now.

Buena Vista is a quaint little town with a beautiful old downtown area and home to an 8,061-foot passing siding and a small yard that is frequently used to store work trains. The south end of the

siding at Loch Laird is hidden in the woods, but the north end is situated right in downtown, making a nice shot. There are no locals that service this area; only the road trains pass through Buena Vista.

As the tracks leave town, they cross over Route 60 on a small bridge that still has NORFOLK & WESTERN written across it in bold lettering. The tracks enter a stretch of remote countryside north of town and pass through a little area called Riverside. River Road (Route 608) follows the tracks all the way from Riverside to Vesuvius. Riverside offers a few really nice locations as the tracks follow South River. There are a lot of tight curves and rock cuts in this section of the Valley and northbound trains ascend a light grade toward Midvale.

The 6,012-foot passing siding at Twin Falls and Midvale is adjacent to River

Locals V81 and V82 service this section of the Valley between Roanoke and Glasgow Monday-Friday. V81 usually departs Roanoke mid-afternoon and services a quarry at Buchanan and sometimes a small facility in Glasgow before returning to Roanoke. V82 is a night job that runs up the Cloverdale Branch to Lone Star and returns to Roanoke before sunrise. Both jobs can vary on what they service, however. Sometimes Lone Star (also called Roanoke Cement) gets serviced twice in a day by both locals.

From Cloverdale, the tracks ascend a relatively steep grade to Troutville; heavy-laden northbound trains will bog down on the climb. Troutville is the first passing siding north of Roanoke that is used on a regular basis. At the north end of Troutville, at a place the railroad calls Kinsey, the tracks swing to the left around a sharp curve and start descending toward Nace.

The next little community of Lithia is one of my favorite places on the entire Valley. Link shot his famous "Living Room on the Tracks" image here. Both ends of the passing siding offer a beautiful shot of the CPLs guarding each end, and between the two are beautiful farm scenes. The south end is named Lithia, and north end is Ellis Run. By this point, you are witnessing the scenery and solitude that made me fall in love with the Valley. This area of the Valley is relatively slow-paced and laid-back chasing. A lot of curvature prevents trains from traveling very fast.

Next stop is the town of Buchanan, where the Valley will begin to follow the James River and, on the opposite bank, the ex-Chesapeake & Ohio mainline to Richmond for the next 18 miles to Glasgow. One plus to railfanning this area of the Valley is the C&O across the river, with several access points around



**TOP:** In near-peak fall color, Train 777 passes through Arcadia, Va., with empty coal hoppers bound for Bailey Mine on the old Monongahela. Train 777 had just met 15T at Troutville a few minutes prior to this scene on November 1, 2016.

**ABOVE:** An increasingly rare SD60 standard-cab leads 16T north through the control point at Twin Falls on a dreary and rainy February 7, 2018.

**RIGHT:** Train 777 catches beautiful late evening sunlight at Natural Bridge, Va., on November 26, 2016, as it crosses the James River and ex-Chesapeake & Ohio mainline with 105 empties going to Shire Oaks, Pa., for loading on the former Monongahela.

Buchanan and Alpine if you hear a train coming on the scanner. The tracks leave Buchanan and become accessible again at Arcadia, one of the most well-known locations and a must-have when chasing the Valley. Located along Solitude Road, the south end of the passing siding at Arcadia lends itself well to beautiful shots. However, one can't beat the early morning northbound view with the pond, mountains, signals, and farm.

The tracks become inaccessible north of Arcadia following the James River through remote territory until Natural Bridge, where the tracks cross over the







ABOVE: Timeless scenes can be found all along the Shenandoah Line. Train 15T passes Natural Bridge in the late evening with the old general store and former station site in the foreground behind C40-9W 9293.

RIGHT: Train 16T passes over the high trestle just north of Troutville, Va., just after sunrise on a bitter cold and snowy winter day on January 5, 2017, with C40-9W 9651 in charge.



Road a few miles north of Riverside. The north end at Midvale is a great place to photograph northbounds, and is where the grade starts to stiffen.

River Road will briefly curve away from the tracks north of Midvale before rejoining them just south of Vesuvius. Between here and Pkin is a three-mile stretch of double track with equilateral switches at each end. Vesuvius is home to an old general store at milepost 170 that Link used in his "Sometimes the Electricity Fails" photograph. It's in pretty bad shape these days but still stands adjacent to the mainline. Vesuvius is also the start of where the tracks really begin to climb. Northbound trains really start digging in and losing speed just after passing the south end of the double track at Vesuvius. The interior of the general store and the gas pump featured in the photo have been relocated

to the Link museum in Roanoke.

Once this was a helper district on the N&W, and northbound trains would get pushed upgrade to Lofton. Even with today's technology and extreme motive power, it's not unheard of for a train to stall on the climb to Lofton.

Pkin, located adjacent to Cold Springs Road, is one of the most scenic locations that features CPLs. Tonnage northbound trains will be down to a crawl as they grind up the last couple miles of the steep ascent toward Lofton. Just north of Pkin at a little road crossing called Mount Joy Lane is one of the only places to get an afternoon northbound with good lighting and a spectacular mountain backdrop.

Local V83 will sometimes come south to Pkin and Vesuvius to run around its train before heading back to Waynesboro. There are a couple of small industries



around Stuarts Draft and south of town that require the run-around move at Pkin.

The tracks pass through the small communities of Lofton, Greenville, and Wilda before arriving into Stuarts Draft, where a 5,842-foot siding is located. Stuarts Draft is a neat little community,



ABOVE: A Chesapeake Western local running as NS V92 passes through a bucolic farm scene in Elkton, Va., before branching off to make the journey over to Harrisonburg with interchange cars from Shenandoah on October 1, 2017.

LEFT: Train 15T rumbles south throughout Lithia, Va., on a beautiful winter afternoon in January 2017 with an old N&W whistle board in the foreground.

run north and south of town to service various industries within a 20-mile radius. Trains 15T and 16T both stop here to pick up and set off cars. On rare occasions, they blow through town without stopping, but most of the time you can bet on them stopping to switch.

The Buckingham Branch Railroad crosses over the Valley just south of the yard at Waynesboro with an interchange track heading into the NS yard. Aside from its local, CSX runs westbound empty coal and grain trains across the Buckingham between Doswell and Clifton Forge, which can account for several trains a day. Amtrak also operates its *Cardinal* across the Buckingham on Wednesday, Friday, and Sunday in both directions.

On a morning visit to Waynesboro, one will likely see V83 making various moves and servicing several industries around town before venturing north or south.

home to around 9,000 residents and a small downtown area situated near the tracks. A long telephoto of a late evening southbound splitting the signals here is a beautiful image, and a keen eye will spot the distant CPLs at Lipscomb at the north end of the passing siding located at the end of the long tangent.

The town of Lyndhurst is the only community separating Waynesboro and Stuarts Draft. It features an old depot situated next to the tracks.

#### Waynesboro to Shenandoah

Waynesboro hosts a decent-sized yard and home base for a couple of locals that





ABOVE: A rare northbound loaded coal train for the Winchester & Western grinds up Lofton Hill near Pkin, Va., in beautiful late evening fall light with gorgeous color in the background.

RIGHT: Trains 16T and 201 meet at Stuart's Draft early in the morning of November 26, 2016. This is a rolling meet, and 201 won't even have to come to a full stop before 16T clears and he gets a clear signal south.

The nighttime job is V85. Waynesboro also hosts multiple sets of CPLs on each side of town, in addition to the yard area. It's easy to spend a morning around here capturing various angles.

North of town, the tracks enter beautiful rolling countryside as they head toward Shenandoah. U.S. Route 340 will closely follow the tracks all the way from Waynesboro to Shenandoah passing through small communities such as Dooms, Grottoes, Sampson, Lewis Run, and others before arriving at Elkton.

Sampson and Lewis Run are two favorite locations in this stretch of railroad, both featuring beautiful CPL scenes. Spring and Sampson bracket the first siding north of Waynesboro at 5,872 feet. Lynnwood/Lewis Run is the next siding at 5,155 feet.

One note to remember is that Waynesboro north to Front Royal is a fast-paced railroad, with speeds varying from 40–50 m.p.h. in a lot of locations. You can still chase, but the shots have to be farther apart.

The town of Elkton is home to the newly built 14,000-foot siding at Island Ford and Stonewall constructed in 2013

as part of Norfolk Southern's Heartland Corridor project. Also, a branch owned and operated by the Chesapeake Western Railroad splits from the main at Elkton and heads west to Harrisonburg. Locals V92 and V93 utilize this stretch of railroad and operate as far north as Shenandoah Yard with Chesapeake Western crews. Grain trains also utilize the branch to Harrisonburg sporadically. Those trains come from Hagerstown and change crews at Shenandoah before heading south to Elkton and over to Harrisonburg.

#### Shenandoah to Front Royal

Shenandoah is a beautiful little community, situated in the heart of the Shenandoah Valley, with a small yard and crew change point. Locals V66 and V67 are based from here and switch the yard and service industries close to town, such as Elkton. The yard office and station at Shenandoah are adjacent to First Street in downtown. One can also get a good view of the yard from the town's railroad overlook on First Street.

All trains stop for a crew change here. Trains 201 and 202 are stop-and-swap

and are usually in town less than 20 minutes. Trains 15T and 16T do some switching before heading south or north, which can take a while depending on their work. Local K47 usually departs Shenandoah late in the evening, goes north to Hagerstown, and returns late at night.

Unfortunately, the traffic patterns at the time of this article aren't good for the north end between Shenandoah and Front Royal. Trains 15T and 201 are both usually in Shenandoah at sunrise, and K47 doesn't return south until night. Sometimes 201 and 15T are delayed enough to catch them in good light in the morning, but that's no guarantee. Train 202 is your best bet for a train in good light. If he's on schedule, an early morning departure between 6:30 and 9:00 a.m. from Shenandoah can be expected. Train 16T can also run in the morning, but there's no rhyme or reason to its schedule. Your only other hope for a southbound would be something unexpected or one of the sporadic grain trains going to the Chesapeake Western. One plus, though, is that much of this section is accessible with ATCS Monitor, which will allow you to see exactly where trains (if any) are located.

The tracks depart Shenandoah following the South Fork of the Shenandoah

River before curving away and passing through beautiful scenery and reaching the first town and passing siding of Stanley. Link captured a very powerful and striking image of a southbound freight train led by a Y6 in downtown Stanley. Much is still the same here comparing that scene to the present day.

The next sizable community the tracks pass through is Luray, another place Link made famous in his photography. A beautifully restored depot sits adjacent to the main in downtown. This section of the Valley is surrounded by mountains on each side with absolutely gorgeous rolling hills and farmland around the tracks.

Vaughn and Summit bracket the next passing siding north of Luray. The south end at Vaughn is easily accessible and a beautiful southbound shot pretty much all day. Route 340 follows the tracks closely north of Summit and adjacent to the highway are some very impressive trestles including Compton Viaduct, a beautiful early morning shot for either direction.

Acorn Hill and Bentonville bracket the next passing siding. Acorn Hill is a gorgeous morning northbound location with CPLs and a rugged mountain backdrop. The north end of the siding is also really cool with code line, an old milepost, and CPLs.

From here, the tracks become relatively hard to stay with as they follow the Shenandoah River with few access points until Front Royal. At the junction at Front Royal, the Hagerstown District connects with the B Line, a bridge route that shoots across to the ex-Southern Railway mainline at Nokesville, south of Manassas. A lot of trains utilize this route daily, and it continues to become even busier.

North of Front Royal, the Hagerstown District is void of CPLs and not much other N&W infrastructure is left besides an old milepost here and there, some sections of old code line, and a couple depots (notably the one at Boyce). The Valley below Front Royal is clearly the most desirable section of the railroad to spend time along and photograph.

#### A Railfan's Railroad

The same charm that drew Link to the Valley sixty years ago is still very much in evidence today. From rugged mountains to pleasant rural scenes to small-town charm, the Shenandoah Valley is still a special place — even a New Yorker like Link was drawn to the magic. Come for a visit and you'll see why. 📷

*Samuel Phillips is a Southwest Virginia native and resides in Radford, Va., along the former Norfolk & Western mainline to Bristol. His main interests are in photography and railroading and has been taking photos of trains since he was five years old.*

*[Next month we'll head the other way out of Roanoke as Gavin Wilkes and Tyler Nolan explore Norfolk Southern's Christiansburg District between Roanoke and Bluefield, W.Va.—Ed.]*

