POWELL RIVER FORESTRY HERITAGE SOCIETY
P.O. Box 186, Powell River BC, V8A 4Z6
email: info@prfhs.org web: prfhs.org

Paradise Valley Railroad history up to January 2016

The Forestry Heritage Society operates, maintains and develops a miniature ridable railroad called the Paradise Valley Railroad at Paradise Exhibition Park for the enjoyment and historic education of the public.

1. Why a miniature railroad?

Powell River has a rich logging railroad history, with many active railroads in operation from the 1890s until 1954. Unfortunately no rolling stock of this era survived locally. To help celebrate the railroad history, the Forestry Heritage Society decided in 2011 to showcase the railroad era using ridable miniature technology.

2. Site Choice

Paradise Valley Railroad (PVR) sought and received approval to locate at Paradise Exhibition Park because it is ideal compared to other locations around town:

a. The operating season of the Open Air Farmers Market is a good season for the train. (May to Sept.)
b. There is suitable fairly flat space available for us in this multi-purpose Regional Park.
c. The Open Air Farmers Market and Agricultural Exhibition members were eager for us to join them to bring more people to these wonderful Powell River seasonal weekend institutions.
d. Linkage to history: The Bloedel Stewart and Welch railroad operated in Paradise Valley from 1911 to1918. Maps show a spur of the historic railroad likely ran over the same area as the current miniature railroad track.

3. Milestones

a. 2011. The PVR volunteers built a Proof-of-concept 230" loop track in August 2011and operated with borrowed rolling stock at Fall Fair 2011, riding over 900 passengers and receiving enthusiastic community support.
b. 2012. We bought a "get started" package of a locomotive, cars, track and switches. Rolling stock was restored and operational July 1. Six hundred feet of track was added and debuted at Fall Fair.
c. 2013. We built a shed over the tracks in the spring; this enabled on-site storage of the train and a weekly operation schedule: 2 hours each Sunday during the Farmers Market operation. Built two hand cars to replace two borrowed each week. Hosted visiting steam trains from the Burnaby club.
d. 2014. We added a wheelchair car and third riding car to the rolling stock, plus other improvements.
e. 2015. We added two hand cars to make a total of four, plus many minor improvements. Held our first evening event: a hugely popular free Santa Train in December with many lights and a bonfire.

4. Operational Results to date

a. The miniature train in the community, particularly with hobbyists showing off their Steam Locomotives, is helping to fill that knowledge gap about early railroads. We rode 900 enthusiastic passengers on our 2011 demonstration track and over 1700 passengers on the three operating days in 2012, then over 3000 each season since then. Sunday operations average over 100 riders per day.
b. The $2 per ride we collect is paying off the $1000 annual liability insurance cost and helping fund more track and railway cars. Local businesses have been generous in donating material; they see it as a worthwhile community asset.
c. The railroad is clearly a fun resource for local families. We've had out-of-town visitors from other railways, and is has potential to become a general tourist attraction as well.
d. About 99% of comments we receive are positive.

5. Operational Plans

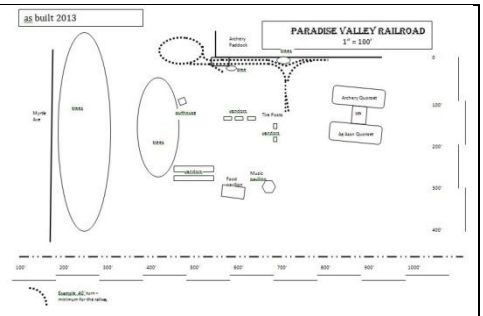
a. For 2016 we continue Sundays during the Open Air Farmers Market 12:30 – 2:30 pm, May -Sept.
b. Other dates planned include all "special" days at the Market: July 1, BC Day Aug 1 (Mid-Summer's Feast); and Fall Fair Sep 17/18
c. A few other dates such as School visits are planned.

6. Facilities and Plans

a. Track The railway has about 800' of track installed at Paradise Exhibition Park, plus some sidings. We have a rolling stock load-unload hydraulic lift transfer tray and elevated siding near our shed.
   i. **Plans**
      - In 2016 we are adding about 600' of track to provide a longer ride (most parks offer several thousand feet). We have some rail stockpiled for this expansion.
      - In time we hope to re-create track-side miniature buildings and miniature high-lead logging shows, miniature logging camp buildings etc that will educate people about early railroad logging. We plan to expand the "history story" aspect of our operation with information kiosks about the historical railways in Powell River.

b. Sheds We completed a shed in April 2013 over the track. It is used for storing the train on-site, and serves as a "tunnel" during the train ride. The shed is modular and movable.
   i. **Plans**
      - As our rolling stock increases, we will build other sheds to store more equipment
      - Eventually we will need water and electricity in at least one shed.

c. Rolling Stock The PRFMS owns and operates a 3" scale locomotive, ride-on tender, three 6' ride-a-stride cars, a wheelchair car, and a ride-in caboose; plus four hand cars. We rely on members and visiting friends to provide our back up and additional capacity for special events.
   i. **Plans**
      - We plan to build a 2.5" scale electric model of a steam Climax logging locomotive such as is pictured on our logo.

d. Shop facilities
   i. We currently rely on members' shops for all our development work.
   ii. **Plans** In time we may have an on-site shop.

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