

TOWPATH TRACKS

Newsletter of the Whitewater Valley Railroad
Connersville, Indiana USA

March 2026



This year's training class has 18 participants. They share a common interest in railroading and come from various backgrounds. As this is written, there is one more day of class and then the final Saturday will be the graduation trip to Metamora.

We're using the same curriculum that has been used in the past. The class spends the morning learning about our history, rules, safety, volunteer opportunities, and other related items. In the afternoon, they are putting these skills to work in the yard practicing coupling, hooking up air hoses, and orienting themselves to our property and equipment. They also get an opportunity to participate in some track maintenance.

The outdoor exercises acclimate the participants to specific railroad terms. For example, a common railroad phrase is "that will do." When an engineer hears this on the radio they understand that to mean "bring the train to a controlled stop." On the other hand, the command "stop" on the radio implies an emergency stop and the engineer will take that action.

Cars and engines can be "coupled" together to form a train. An alternate term is to "tie" them together. When separating equipment, they can be "uncoupled" but an alternate term is to make a "cut."

TOP RIGHT

One of the students is throwing a switch in preparation for another movement.



RIGHT

This hand signal means "easy" which tells the engineer that the next signal will bring the engine to a stop.



BOTTOM RIGHT

The student is lifting the "cut lever" which releases the lock on the coupler knuckle. He will then use the radio to tell the engineer to back up, leaving the car behind.

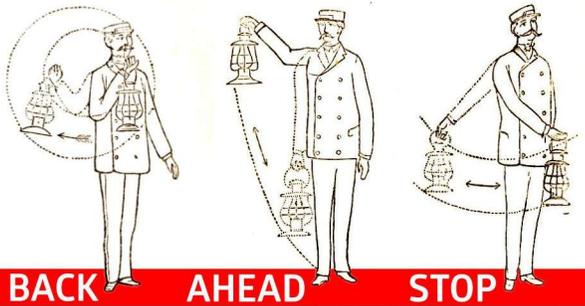


Our crews utilize radios for communication, but hand signals may be used when the crew is close enough that the engineer can easily see the crew member. In this photo one of the students is using a hand signal to show the engineer how far it is to a safety stop before coupling.

Before radios became commonplace, railroaders used dozens of hand signals to communicate with crew members while moving cars. Some were standard signals that were in the railroad's rule book. Others were unofficial but understood by the crew members. These signals might vary from one end of the railroad to the other, based on local practices.



For example, the conductor might signal to the brakeman what track to put the cars on. There was a signal for how many cars to go before stopping. There was even a signal to notify the crew that it was time to "go to beans" (take a meal break.)



These illustrations are from a 1913 Nickel Plate rule book and show three common hand signals. The rule book only featured six hand signals, the balance were made up by the crews. Our rule book features seven hand signals and we do not use any unofficial hand signals. *Note: The STOP signal shown above would have meant a controlled stop. If the signal was given with a rapid movement, that meant an emergency stop. This was often referred to as a "washout" signal.*

Track Update

by: Nic McCoy

The bridge inspections have been completed by our contracted engineering firm and there were no surprises. The Laurel bridge, once again, has a large amount of tree debris piled up against the south abutment and we'll be contracting with R. L. Coon Excavating to clear that out. We have used them in the past and they're nearby in Rushville.

WASHOUT

Although not as bad as prior events, this year's washouts will take attention away from other track projects.



Unfortunately, but unsurprisingly, the shuttle track has washed out again, though luckily not as bad as the year prior. Plans will be made as we find out more about what the state is planning to do with the canal with regards to increasing water flow. The canal takes a lot of runoff during hard rain events like the one that happened in early March. When this happens, the water overflows and crosses our tracks on its way to the river

continued on next page

which is nearby. Other areas have erosion but luckily, due to the rip rap dumped in the last two years, nothing too serious was washed away (besides the shuttle track).

The training class has made it through Track Day with some progress made on spiking the lean-to switch though, with the class being smaller this year, not as much was completed as expected. With the Scouts and Spartan Service Day coming up, hopefully their labor can advance this project.

Progress is being made on the tie sheer with a lot of hoses being replaced and new hydraulic controls fabricated. Tony Schwering and Kaliga Thomas have been working on that. The first ties of the year have been put in near mile post 55 and the Laurel siding has been dug out for some work to get it in usable condition.

Facilities Update

Work continues on refurbishing the old shop. We've cleared out unnecessary items and are well on our way to creating a machine shop with a welding and fabrication area. Nate Hess and his father Neal have been working on that project and the lighting is now complete. In addition, we have outlets for both 240 and 480 volts to power machining equipment and welders.

Repairs have been completed to the forming die that came with the press we bought at auction last fall. We just need to finalize the floor plan so we can begin to move items to their final position.

Shop Update

by: Tom Nitza

532

The replacement coolant drain pipe was reinstalled and the hoses routing water into the fuel heater have been removed to eliminate possible leaks. We won't be operating in weather cold enough to need them. The engine was filled with water and used to perform some switching. The coolant water level did not drop.

9339

Inspection work has been completed. No problems were noted.

709

Two new studs were machined and the top end of the engine was reassembled and is now

working as it should. We may, at some point, machine enough studs to refurbish the overhead on all the cylinders but right now the emphasis is getting inspections completed so the locomotive fleet is ready for the season which will be starting soon.

EJ&E Caboose

The doors now work without binding and a padlock has been installed on the north door to match our other equipment which eliminates having to carry multiple keys. The bulk of the work was repairing several air leaks in the brake system piping which weren't necessarily easy to get to. Ultimately, we also had to replace both brake valves which had internal leaks. Finally the car passed a single car air test without any problems.

EJ&E CABOOSE

Dave and Kaliga are finishing the job of changing both brake valves. In this photo, one of the valves is outlined in white. The other valve is behind Kaliga's head.



Easter Bunny Express

The Easter Bunny Express will need help at the bunny patch on the day of the event (Saturday April 4th) as well as help preparing the bunny patch at the campground and cleaning the coaches the day before (Friday April 3rd)

You can reach out to Beth Schwering at abschwering@gmail.com if interested.

SHOP VOLUNTEERS

- Dave Bossart
- Carrick Dunn
- Bryan Kasper
- John Lord
- Mike Scott
- Ryan Scott
- Kaliga Thomas
- Travis Weller

Director Election

The next Board of Directors election will be held March 27, 2026 at the membership meeting at 7:00 p.m. at South Conn. There are four board members up for reelection:

- John Sprinkle
- Tom Nitza
- Travis Weller
- Rob Rogers



To vote, you must be present at the meeting and be a member who has been in good standing for at least 25 days prior to the election, and be at least 18 years of age.

- Neither absentee nor proxy ballots shall be permitted.
- Your annual dues must be paid by March 2, 2026.

Please consider participating in this important event and help guide the future of the organization.

Member Update

by: Katie Rogers

It is dues renewal time for members. All Yearly Members are required to pay for membership before they can crew any train or have the other benefits of membership. Membership is \$30 for yearly membership or \$200 for lifetime membership. Membership can be paid at Grand Central, either in person or by phone (765-825-2054). If you are unsure of your membership status, use the membership email listed in the box at the right and I will get back to you as soon as possible.

In other news, our annual membership luncheon will take place on April 11th following the rules test. The rules test will take place at our South Connersville yard, while the membership luncheon will occur across the street at Elmhurst. This luncheon, like last year, will be a pitch-in dinner/potluck. We ask that each family bring either a side or a dessert. The railroad will be providing the main entree of pulled pork and pulled chicken. Please use the link below to RSVP for the event. We ask that all RSVPs be completed by March 31st, 2026. If there are any questions, please reach out to katie.rogers@whitewatervalleyrr.org.

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Towpath Tracks is published by the:
Whitewater Valley Railroad
P.O. Box 406
Connersville, IN 47331
765-825-2054
www.whitewatervalleyrr.org
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Dues: \$30 annually, or \$200 lifetime
The Whitewater Valley Railroad is a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit operating railroad museum dedicated to preserving an historic branch line railroad, the restoration of railroad equipment, and the conduct of educational railroad programs.