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## Durham to Duncan – Norfolk Southern

Your tax dollars at work! The strange story of the former Durham & South Carolina RR and the relocated line that never went into service.



Looking north from the westbound lane of US64 to the east of Jordan Lake and south of Durham. This relatively new section was installed by 1974 and was supposedly never put into service. It was removed in 1979.



Looking south from the eastbound lane of US64, across the road from the picture to the left. This will hopefully become part of the American Tobacco Trail. (Pictures from January 2002)

### **The New Hope Valley Railroad/The American Tobacco Trail (Adapted from article written by Al Capehart in 1993)**

[From the NC Rails to Trails/American Tobacco Trail web page.](#)

The New Hope Valley Railroad was started in 1904 to be a connector between the Seaboard Air Line main line at Bonsal in Wake County and Durham, NC. Although the railroad was never incorporated, the founders, W.R. Bonsal, S.O. Bauersfield, and H.A. London purchased seven strips of 100' wide right-of-way in Chatham for \$186.50. On January 20, 1905, the same founders had chartered the Durham and South Carolina Railroad, which was authorized to build from Durham to South Carolina. On March 7, 1905 after having floated a \$300,000 mortgage bond, the Durham and South Carolina Railroad purchased the interest of the New Hope Valley Railroad for \$27,691.36, the founders getting a very good return on their initial investment. Yes, the railroad business is confusing and complicated, as re-organization is sometimes used to restructure debt or re-direct profits.

The fact that the New Hope Valley Railroad was never incorporated, resulted in undue legal problems associated with the right-of-way, condemnation, and ownership. This early feature has continued as a characteristic of this rail line today. It is being played out between the Norfolk Southern Railroad, the U.S. Corps of Engineers, the North Carolina Department of Transportation, local governments, adjacent land owners, corporations, citizens and volunteer groups. There is now a community wide effort spearheaded by the Triangle Rails-to-Trails Conservancy to preserve the remains of this abandoned corridor by getting it placed in the public domain as a linear park and to have it available for future light rail transit.

The Durham and South Carolina RR began construction in earnest in 1905. The right-of-way purchase and grading from Bonsal to south of East Durham was completed July 7, 1905. The line followed the New Hope Valley River basin passing the communities of Seaforth, Farrington and others until it joined the Durham and Southern RR and again the Seaboard Air Line RR in East Durham, using their trackage to reach Durham proper. Construction on the 30 mile line began September 15, 1905 and was completed October 15, 1906. By 1917 in its efforts to reach South Carolina the D&SC had gotten to Duncan in Harnett County, where it connected to the Norfolk Southern. Here the D&SC stopped. Perhaps, Mr. Bonsal, when he looked at his office railroad map in the Bonsal Building in Hamlet, was satisfied with his 42 mile railroad and the connections he had made.

The first locomotive of the D&SC was a rebuilt 2-6-0 from the Southern Implement and Engine Co. of Atlanta, GA. It had 18 x 24" cylinders and was lettered D&SC 47 and was delivered to the Hamlet office in 1905. The rolling stock of the railroad included three combination cars (baggage and passenger car combined), two box cars and five flat cars. The D&SC also acquired two 4-6-0 Baldwin locomotives. It was a surviving railroad, but it had something that the old Norfolk Southern didn't have and wanted very much. It had access to the lucrative tobacco and textile factories of Durham. So in 1920, the old Norfolk Southern entered a 99 year lease with the D&SC paying \$100,000 a year. Again, Mr Bonsal and friends had made a very good return on their initial investment. In ca. 1925 the rail spur from Keene, Riddle Rd. and Fayetteville Rd., was built right in to the heart of the American Tobacco Company Factory at Blacknall and Willard Streets in Durham, a distance of about three miles. In 1957 Norfolk Southern purchased the D&SC outright.

In April 1969 the US Army Corps of Engineers entered into a relocation agreement with the D&SC, and NS as a third party, to move the rail line from the New Hope Valley River basin to higher ground in preparation for the building of the New Hope Dam and Reservoir, Jordan Lake. The Corps spent about \$250,000 to negotiate and acquire the land for the rail line and then \$4,900,000 to construct the 18.5 mile railroad. The new line branched off the old one about 1000 feet south of what is now I-40 at a place called Penny, and rejoined it near Beaver Creek. Again the railroad gained, for it had given up right-of-way in the river bottom and received fee simple ownership on the high ground. And, who better than the railroad knows how to build a railroad, so Norfolk Southern was engaged to build it. The 70 lb. steel rails used on the Durham and South Carolina, were now replaced with 100 lb. steel.

On March 14, 1974 the transfer took place with the D&SC, Norfolk Southern, getting the new steel and fee simple property and the Corps having met its obligation under Public Law 88-253

of October 15, 1966. However, in January of 1974 the Southern Railway and the Norfolk Southern merged (this company eventually became the new Norfolk Southern after the Southern Railway merged with Norfolk & Western in 1982). This made the D&SC line redundant for Southern, and it was decided to abandon the line. The relocation agreement stated that before the transfer, three trains were to run over the new line to test it's stability. The story goes that the third train backed out taking up the steel and ties for their salvage value. Service was never re-established on the line and actual abandonment began in 1979. The adjacent property owners were and still are furious.

Others were delighted. Carolina Power and Light had begun its Shearron Harris Nuclear plant right on the DS&C line and acquired the 12 miles of rail corridor from the plant to Duncan, seeing the value in the gravel ballast and ties. The Division of Highways of NCDOT didn't have to build an expensive railroad bridge over I-40, the developers of Woodcroft acquired the RR property at the intersection of Woodcroft Parkway and the RR for commercial development. The developer of Folkstone acquired half of the RR corridor in 1982 for \$1,800 and sold it to the City of Durham for part of its Greenway in 1992 for \$28,000. Some of the adjacent property owners in Wake County have been able to buy back from NS the property they sold to the Corps. Cary has purchased two miles of the corridor to carry their water line from Jordan Lake to their filtration plant. The East Carolina Chapter of the National Railway Historical Society purchased six and a half miles of the line from the Durham and South Carolina RR in 1983.

They now operate the New Hope Valley Railway, a hobby railroad, and the NC Railroad Museum. They have 2 GE locomotives and offer train rides on the first Sunday of the month, May through November. Norfolk Southern is now in the real estate business. In April 1987 the Durham City Council, at the encouragement of the Durham Urban Trails and Greenways Commission, passed a resolution stating that all abandoned rail corridors in the City were incorporated in the City's Greenway System Master Plan and were thereby protected from being developed upon, with the intent that they should be saved for future rail service by interim trail use. Similar action has been taken by the Durham County Commissioners.

Since the late 1980's, the Triangle Rails to Trails Conservancy (TRTC), a volunteer citizen group, has been working to have the corridor preserved. A Master Plan for the ATT was prepared in 1992. As of late 1998, about 95% of the corridor has been acquired. Through multi-year efforts in Durham, Wake and Chatham counties, the American Tobacco Trail (ATT) is being planned and constructed on much of the original corridor.

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