

Train club brings a piece of history to life

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Walking to the south end of the fairgrounds, past all the rides, the vendors and the fried delectables sits a quaint red caboose and in it, pictures, stories and a model train.

12-year-old Ben narrates technical information with such passion and precision, he captures the attention of all who wander into the tucked back train cart caboose that upon first glance, would have one thinking Del Norte County Fairgrounds has joined the tiny house revolution. He tells stories rich in local logging and transportation history, pointing out fun details in pictures on the wall as well as the model train and railyard in front of him, all built from scratch.

From exposing miniature details and how they differ from others in the world of model trains to fine tuning his inherent talent in electrical wizardry, his train comes to life. He excitedly shared train-related treasures he had found with his metal detector out in the Bertsch Track as well as adventurous outings to find a rumored long-lost engine behind the fairgrounds, of all places. How refreshing it was to hear a youngster growing up in a tech-obsessed era speak of outdoor adventures and hands-on crafting of tiny electrical machinery.

When asked what his favorite thing about being in the Del Norte Short Lines Club, he responded “The members. Everybody is just so nice.”

His smile then started to fade a bit, recalling how few members they have these days vs just a few years ago. Of course, a club started in the '70s is bound to have a good set of old-timers but unfortunately for this club, many of them have perished over the last few years. Because of this, Ben explained, they no longer had the

ability to maintain the larger train set-up they once had proudly displayed in one of the bigger fairground buildings.

When asked what years these railways that used to lay down through sections of what would now be Kings Valley Road, Lower Lake Drive, Pebble Beach, Bertsch Track and Mill Creek were operational, Ben answers “the 1800’s.” His fellow club member David then adds “They were operational right up until World War II. You see, the logging companies were already switching over from railways to trucks and when World War II hit, they disassembled all the tracks and engines to be melted down and repurposed to support the war effort.”

While it’s unfortunate the tracks that used to roll through these parts have since been pulled up and repurposed to fuel the war machine, it’s nice to know their history is being preserved by enthusiasts like Ben and David. Should anyone want to join this kind, creative and knowledgeable group of enthusiasts that are the Del Norte Short Lines Railway Model Train Club - they meet at Apple Peddler every Saturday at 9 a.m., Ben said.