

Working on the I

Mountainside model railway is for serious hobbyists

Story by MELANIE JONES

When Larry Taylor, 85, found a Lionel model train set under the Christmas tree at age 9, he was hooked. As an adult, that fascination only grew as he traveled on some classic rail lines. Getting his then 2-year-old grandson model trains cemented his plans.

While he was still working full time, Larry promised himself he'd build a railroad after he retired. And that's exactly what he did, with a little help from his friends.

They built Eagle Point Railroad, which is known as a live steam railroad—one-eighth the size of the real thing. While most such railroads are built in public parks, this one is built on a mountain in Dunlap, with 5 miles of tracks running through the trees. It mimics a real railroad with trestles, bridges, tunnels, miniature towns and industries. It's even big enough to carry passengers.

But not everyone can access Eagle Point. For the most part, it's run by the Chattanooga Society of Model Engineers and welcomes members and their guests. Some groups, like scout troops, can make appointments to visit the railroad. Eagle Point is so popular, it has welcomed guests from as far away as England and New Zealand.

The land itself is in a trust in the name of Larry's wife, Dianne, so it will live beyond him. "I still play with trains," Larry says, but his daughter, Amanda Murphy, manages the finances and member contracts.

CHUGGING ALONG

As an electrical engineer by trade, Larry was uniquely qualified to build the railroad, which he constructed to meet actual railroad standards. "The handbook that I used was 'Building Railroads,' and it was published in 1953," Larry says. "It showed different construction techniques, so I took that and just scaled it down to one-eighth."

Very little of the railroad is accessible by vehicle—except the trains. In fact, Larry and his friends had to use trains to access areas to build the railroad and haul in supplies. "As you extend the track out, you took the materials out there on the train and continued just extending it, and that's how we built the whole railroad," Larry says.

Larry and his friends took care to be as sensitive as possible to the environment. "We followed the contours of the land. We leave the trees," he says. "One of the hazards we have is, in stormy



Larry Taylor poses by a "Hippo" steam engine.

weather, trees coming down on the track. That's not much of a problem except when some of the big trees fall." On one occasion a huge tree fell and destroyed a bridge. "We had to rebuild the bridge, but that's living in nature."

A few trees can't stop the railroad, and neither can snow. One of the engines is equipped with a snowplow to keep the railroad open. "It's like the real railroads," Larry says. "A lot of times, highways get closed, but the railroads keep running."

When Eagle Point Railroad started, most of the members used steam engines that burned coal, but in the past 10 years or so, more have opted for diesel engines. Larry has three models of diesel engines built by people in the hobby.

Because the trains can operate in most any weather, Larry says there's somebody at the railroad most of the year. The only thing that keeps them away is extreme cold.

That doesn't stop them from pursuing their hobby, though. Live steam railroads exist across the world. Members of the Chattanooga Society of Model Engineers often visit railroads in Florida during the winter. Florida hobbyists will come to Eagle Point when it gets too hot there.

REAL WORLD

Because the railroad is laid out like a real one, running through miniature towns and industries, there is always plenty to do.