

Christmas Time at Sagebrush Short Line Railroad

One of the advantages of having a railroad in the high desert of California is the mild winters we inhabitants of this sand swept area enjoy. Well, we'll call them mild compared to Minnesota.

The weeks before Christmas, the Ridgecrest Area Independent Live Steamers (RAILS) host a Christmas Train Ride extravaganza at the Sagebrush Short Line Railroad. Guests are invited by the RAILS volunteers to ride the Christmas Trains, Thursday, Friday and Saturday evenings. Invited guests enjoyed riding the trains and visiting Santa Claus (yes, even the adults lined up to give the jolly old man their wish lists).

Each evening Santa arrives around 5:30 pm from the North Pole by rail (he had to leave his reindeer behind, as they are quite skittish around the locomotives), and waits for young and not-so-young to visit.

Christmas lights surround the 5200 feet railroad track as grown-ups and children delight in viewing, from their seats on the train, lighted snowmen, candy canes, soldiers, deer, castle, Christmas trees, polar bears, angels, penguins and even "Old Saint Nick" with his sleigh and reindeer complete with Rudolph.

The holiday crowd enjoys a safe time during the three nights of The Christmas Train Run. This is due to RAILS volunteers. They unselfishly give their time and spirit to share large scale railroading with family and friends of the community.

Christmas Train Ride history

Christmas 1999 – SBSLRR had Christmas lights on the front fence. The track was 300 feet long and the locomotive would drive to the end of the track and then back up. This was a one night event.

Christmas 2000 – The Tie Owners finished the track loop around the arena and installed lights on both the fence and arena. Family riding passes were provided to Tie Owners so they could invite their family and friends to ride the Christmas train. This was the first year Santa arrived by train on the Sagebrush Short Line Railroad. In two evenings approximately 400 invited guests visited the railroad.

Christmas 2001 – The Christmas train ride was increased to three nights. The new loading depot was finished at the south end of the arena. Approximately 600 invited guests visited Santa Claus. Lights were on the fence and arena. The west loop recently completed allowed the train to travel 3300 feet on the railroad. Six trains pulled passengers.

Christmas 2002 – Ken Armstrong was appointed Christmas Decorations Director. With the help of Jim Gillard they started building additional Christmas displays. Lighted angels, soldiers, candy canes and deer were added. Terry Haven and Ken built 4 much needed bench riding cars. 732 invited guests visited the SBSLRR.

Christmas 2003 – The Christmas train rides were cancelled due to insurance issues.

Christmas 2004– Ken and Jim built a full size Santa sled and 9 reindeer leaping into the air. The jungle gym locomotive was all decked out in Christmas lights. 1375 invited guests visited the railroad.

Christmas 2005 – Terry, Ken and crew complete an additional 4 bench riding cars. For this year, Ken, Jim and crew fabricated a new lighted Christmas castle which stands 22 feet high, 36 feet in length. Terry, Warren and Linda were in charge of the SBSLRR Christmas train rides. 1522 invited guests visited the railroad.

Christmas 2006 – SBSLRR was well lit with the usual Christmas displays, and with new additions. Ken, Jim and crew fabricated two large polar bears to go with a couple of babies. Six new penguins with an igloo perched along the track to greet the visitors. Saturday evening the rains came and washed away the Christmas Train Ride. Many visitors braved the rain and cold in hopes that the trains were running; but much to their disappointment, the steel wheels would not provide traction on the wet aluminum rails. 1400 invited guests rode the Christmas Trains on Thursday and Friday evenings.