

Railfan

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This article is about railway enthusiasts. For the Railfan PlayStation 3 games, see Train Simulator series.

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A railfan or rail buff (American English), railway enthusiast or railway buff (Australian/British English), or (often with a more specialized meaning, described below) trainspotter (British English), is a person interested in a recreational capacity in rail transport.[1][2] Railfans can be found worldwide.

Other names

Excessively enthusiastic railfans are sometimes referred to pejoratively as foamers,[3] especially by American rail workers, in reference to the joking notion that they foam at the mouth in their excitement over train operations.[4]

In the UK, railfans are mostly called railway enthusiasts and sometimes trainspotters, but in the USA they are known as grizzers or gricers, according to their speciality (see below). The term trainspotter has become somewhat derogatory when used by the general public. They are also known as Zeds due to the fact that many special trains have a reporting code with a 1Zxx prefix. There are still some pure 'trainspotters' (see below), but a large proportion of UK enthusiasts have wider interests than mere 'spotting'. In Australia, they are sometimes called gunzels.[5][6]

The term metrophile is used by some to identify a railfan with a particular interest in metro (subway, underground) systems.

The study of railways, or a general interest in them as a hobby, is sometimes known as ferroequinology (literally, "study of iron horses"). The term is rarely used by non-railfans. The Railway Magazine attempted to popularise the term railwayac without success in the early 20th century.[7]

In Singapore, railway enthusiasts may also be known as 'train enthusiasts'.

Activities

The hobby extends to all aspects of rail transport systems. Railfans may have one or more particular concentrations of interest, such as:

- * Railway locomotives and rolling stock**
- * Still-used or disused railroad lines, bridges, tunnels, stations, and other infrastructure**
- * Subways and other local rail transit systems**
- * Railway history**
- * Railroad photography**
- * Railway signaling**
- * Rail transport modeling**
- * Timetable collecting**

- * **Railway art or architecture**

- * **Railway operations, economics or commerce**

- * **Railway preservation/restoration**

- * **Monitoring railroad radio communications with a radio scanner.**

Indeed, the scope of the subject is so large that fans may additionally concentrate their interest on a particular country, town, operating company, field of operations, or era in history – or a combination of any of the above.

Railway photography

Train photography is a common activity of railfans. Most railfans do their photographing from public property, unless they have permission to use a specific private property owner's land. Occasionally, they run into problems with law enforcement, especially due to post 9/11 paranoia, because they are sometimes viewed as suspicious. In 2004, for example, the New York City Subway attempted to institute a photo ban. This was met with fierce opposition, and was ultimately scrapped. Railroad companies also sometimes dislike railfans, considering them a nuisance[citation needed]. Railfans respond that their presence makes the railroads safer, since they typically know what is normal behavior and can detect criminal behavior, or something that appears to be abnormal.

Some railroad photographers have become well known for their works. Many railfans are familiar with the works of H. Reid, Otto Perry and O.Winston Link; in the UK with Derek Cross (1929–84), John Whitehouse, Maurice W. Earley (1900–82), Rev. Alfred H. Malan (1852–1928), Brian W. Morrison, Ivo

Peters, Jim Spurling (1926–Present), H. Gordon Tidey and Rev. Eric Treacy; in New Zealand, with W.W. (Bill) Stewart (1898–1976); or in Germany with Carl Bellingrodt (1897–1971).

In the United Kingdom all photography is prohibited on the Tyne and Wear Metro without written permission from Nexus the operators of the system. As of 2010 this is the only system in the UK where such policy is in place.

Photography is allowed at all stations on the National Rail network.

London Underground allows tourists and rail enthusiasts to take pictures and videos while passing through a station however flash and tripods are not allowed. Anyone that wants to take pictures and videos for more than 15 minutes at a station has to obtain a permit from the London Underground Film Office.

In Australia Connex Melbourne require any railfan wishing to take photographs to obtain a permit, which are valid for various lengths of time.[8] This system has been met with resentment from the railfan community, with the permit scheme seldom enforced.[9][10]

The Spanish RENFE railroad company also requires an application for a permit. In the United States this requirement is illegal. Even on private property, photographers cannot be forced to delete digital photos or destroy their film. It is their property, and cannot be taken or destroyed without a court order.

In Greece railway photography is prohibited on all networks, without proper legal justification. Casual family photography is sometimes tolerated, but railfans are frequently confronted by security guards, who attempt to seize cameras and do not hesitate to call the local police. This prohibition has been actively enforced in Athens Metro and ISAP stations since 2004 and was recently extended to the mainline network of OSE after orders of the former managing director Mr. Psilianos in October 2007.

With the advent of digital photography and desktop PC graphics software, many railfans have begun augmenting their railway photography through digital manipulation of their railway images.

The Union Pacific railroad corporation makes available to its employees and shareholders a full color calendar each year depicting its trains in different parts of the United States where it maintains its rail lines.

Trainspotting

"Train spotting" redirects here. For other uses, see Trainspotting (disambiguation).

Those who are "trainspotters" make an effort to 'spot' all of a certain type of rolling stock. This might be a particular class of locomotive, a particular type of carriage or all the rolling stock of a particular company. To this end, they collect and exchange detailed information about the movements of locomotives and other equipment on the railway network, and become very knowledgeable about its operations.

A trainspotter uses a data book listing the locomotives or equipment in question, in which locomotives seen are ticked off. In Great Britain, this aspect of the hobby was given a boost by the Ian Allan "ABC" series of booklets from the 1940s onwards. Sometimes, trainspotters also have cameras, but railway photography is mostly linked to railfans. Moreover, in contrast to modern railway companies' attitudes, at its inception in 1948 British Railways handed out free copies of a locomotive data book to school-children.

Some trainspotters now use a tape recorder instead of a notebook. In modern times, mobile phones and/or pagers are used to communicate with others in the hobby, while various internet mailing lists and web sites aid information exchange. Railbuffs can maintain private computerised databases of spotting

records as well. Radio scanners are common equipment for listening to railroad frequencies in the US to follow rail traffic.

It is a misconception that all railfans are 'trainspotters'. Many enthusiasts simply enjoy reading about or travelling on trains, or enjoying their rich history - which may extend to art, architecture, the operation of railroads, or simply modelling, drawing or photographing them.

Certain train operating companies in the United Kingdom are banning trainspotters from taking photographs on railway station platforms (although, in theory, such activity may be possible if permission is requested beforehand). The reasons for the ban appears to be 'security' and a fear of terrorism.[11][12]

Basher

A term used by railway enthusiasts to mean several different things.

* 'Bashing' used on its own is a general term for a railway enthusiast's trip, excursion or holiday involving train travel and observation.

* 'Line bashing' (see 'complete riding' below) is more focused, and would be an attempt to cover as much of a railway network as possible. This can also be called 'track bashing' especially if the person wishes to try and cover individual sections of track such as crossovers and sidings, in addition to completing an 'A to B' journey on each section of line. In the UK (especially), Germany, and to a lesser extent in other countries, railfans often use a special excursion train for railfans (usually known as a 'railtour') to cover freight-only railway lines in order to complete their 'coverage' of a country's rail network.

* Another development from trainspotting (almost unique to the UK) is the 'haulage basher' or locomotive haulage enthusiast [13] These individuals attempt to ride behind or in the cab (some people do not count the latter as proper 'haulage') of as many locomotives as they can, marking them off in a book as would a regular trainspotter. Even the shortest 'haulage' will count, such as being hauled for a few hundred yards by a shunting locomotive when one portion of a train is being hooked up to another at a junction. In some cases fans who like the sound of a particular type of locomotive working hard hauling a train will ride behind them as much as possible, even following English-built locomotives exported abroad, Portugal's 1800 Class (similar to BR Class 50) being one example. 'Haulage bashers' sometimes use unusual words and language known as 'basherspeak'.

Complete riding

Another enthusiast activity is attempting to ride the complete railway network of one or more cities, state, or countries. This may take months or years in the case of dense networks. The definition of 'complete' riding may change from person to person, and non-passenger routes may be included by travelling on special excursion trains, others may attempt to ride on each individual track and curve, rather than the route as a whole, some may not include riding during night, and others may require visiting each station rather than just passing through. British enthusiasts who attempt to cover a railway network are usually referred to as "gricers" or "track bashers" (see above).

There are informal competitions for visiting all the stations in a particular network in the shortest time; examples include the Tube Challenge on the London Underground and the Subway Challenge on the New York City Subway.

Timetables

Timetables are a source of train schedule information which are useful for railfans planning photography expeditions. Timetables are also useful for railfans who attempt to cover an entire city's railway network in one day, riding from first to last train. Other railfans collect old train timetables, and imagine trains not existing now, or search for historical matters relating to the railway.

Collecting railroadiana

Many railfans also collect "railroadiana" or "railwayana". Railroadiana refers to artifacts from railroads and railroad operations and could include nearly anything to do with a particular railroad, including public or employee timetables, locomotive number boards, dining car china, passenger train tickets, tools and pieces of equipment such as lanterns, or sometimes items as big as train horns, or track speeders. Although few can afford the acquisition cost or the space for storage, some railfans collect full size rolling stock or locomotives.

Collecting unusual tickets is a pursuit for some railfans. For example, China Railway does not sell round-trip tickets officially, but one could buy a multiple-trip ticket with the identical starting and ending station, making a round trip. This problem was fixed in the latest ticket-selling software. Another example is the two railway stations Dongfanghong (The East Is Red) and Taiyangsheng (The Sun Rises) in Heilongjiang province, approximately 600 kilometers apart with no direct train connecting them. Someone bought multiple-trip tickets from one to another so the ticket read Dongfanghong -> Taiyangsheng, this is a famous lyric in a Chinese song The East Is Red.

Fantrips

Many railway preservation groups run special trips for railfans using restored trains, often on "rare mileage" - locations that do not see regular passenger service.[14] These trips are both social events, as

well as an opportunity for railfans to photograph unusual trains. Chasing a fantrip by road for the purposes of photography is often referred to as "Motorcading" in Australia.[15][16]

Exploring abandoned railways

Searching for and exploring abandoned railways is another area of railfan interest. Using old maps, one may find the former route, and the abandoned railway stations, tunnels and bridges may remain after a railway closure. Some abandoned rail rights-of-way have been converted to rail-trails for recreational use such as bicycling, walking, hiking, running or jogging. This would be considered railbanking, where the right-of-way is preserved, by keeping it intact, for the potential reactivation of rail service in the future.

Other activities

Some railfans are interested in other aspects of railroads not directly dealing with the trains. They may be interested in studying the history of the railroad companies, their infrastructure, law, financing and operations, including never-built plans. Abandoned railroad grades can often be found long after the railroad stops using them. Trams (and occasionally even monorails) may also be of interest.

Some enthusiasts combine their interest in trains with the hobby of monitoring radio communications, specializing in listening to radio communications of railroad operations using a scanner.[17] Some websites such as railroadradio.net offer live audio feeds of railroad radio communications.

Various magazines, clubs and museums are designed mainly for railfans, concentrating on the history of trains and railroads. Some clubs organize fantrips, either by car or by train; the New York

Transit Museum owns some old equipment with which fantrips are occasionally run on the New York City Subway.

See also: List of railroad-related periodicals

Origins of interest

The motivation for someone developing an interest in railways ('becoming a railfan') can come from many sources.[18][19]

Many railfans have a fixation with steam locomotives, which sometimes also fascinate the general public, as seen by the attendance at stations to view steam-hauled railtours. Sometimes the appeal of trains is nostalgic, recalling an earlier era when the railroads played a central role in commerce and transportation, and the depot was the center of every town. Nostalgia may also result from the long, lonesome wail of the train's horn, which mimics vocalizations that want for a more simple time, as heard in country or folk music worldwide.[20] Sometimes the appeal is due to a fondness for large machinery that can be inspected and photographed up close. Sometimes there is an appeal of the scenery of the railroad running through open, uninviting terrain, or the gritty ambiance of the urban train yard. In this case, urban exploration poses a similar appeal. Some people were raised near streetcar tracks or railways. Everyday activities were associated with railroad, which seemed to be a part of life. This may lead to an interest in railcars, how they move, numbering, and other rail systems in the world and how they compare with their native ones. If these people move to another locale, their interest in railroads might be nostalgic.

Another appeal of the railroads is the business side of railroading. Railroads were long central to economic growth and commerce, and still are to some extent. The history of railroads and railroaders

(such as James J. Hill) is a fascination for some, whether they view them in a positive way as capitalist heroes or in a negative way as robber barons. Ayn Rand's novel *Atlas Shrugged* features the troubles of an American transcontinental railroad.

An interest in model railroading can often lead to an interest in 'the real thing', perhaps to aid in building more accurate models or operating more accurate trains.

Many railfans once worked in railroading, or had relatives who did, leading to a lifelong interest in trains. Others may develop an interest in trains through a hobby, such as model railroading.

Many people who would not think of themselves as railfans just like trains. Most cannot explain why. Songs and stories have glorified railroading ever since the invention of the locomotive, especially in the United States, while children's toys and books about trains continue to be popular (such as *Thomas the Tank Engine*). The *Railroad Tycoon* series of simulation computer games is another example of railroads' enduring popularity.

Safety

Railfans in America have been asked to keep railroad areas safer by reporting crimes and suspicious activity.[21] In the United Kingdom the British Transport Police have asked trainspotters to report any unusual behaviour and activities at stations.[22]

In the United States concerns about terrorism have led to situations where railfans are followed or confronted by local law enforcement or transit police[citation needed].

The BNSF railway instituted the 'Citizens for Rail Security' (CRS) scheme for the general public to report suspicious activities on their railways. Obtaining this card is common for railfans and is a derivative

of the BNSF 'On Guard' program for employees. However, this card does not recognize members as employees or contractors, and asks them to keep off railway property. No other U.S. railroad supports such a scheme.

Many experienced railfans have enhanced knowledge of railroad operations and hazards that can help the railroad, such as reporting malfunctioning crossing gates and other equipment.[citation needed]

Network Rail, the British rail infrastructure owner and station operator, has produced guidelines for the behaviour and responsibilities of railway enthusiasts at its stations.[23] In May 2010, the dangers of train spotting were highlighted after an enthusiast, standing next to the tracks filming a steam train, failed to notice an express train coming in the other direction, and was nearly killed.

In popular culture

In the United Kingdom in particular, trainspotting is seen by many of the individuals who are not themselves involved with the hobby as being virtually synonymous with "dull" and "geeky," and the term has gained an ulterior meaning as any sort of activity that appears pointless to outsiders and is perhaps even a symptom of a neurological disorder such as Asperger's Syndrome.[26]

The activity of trainspotting was briefly mentioned in a passage set in a railway station, in Irvine Welsh's novel of the same name; however, it was left out of the 1996 film adaptation altogether. The novel *Trainspotting* and its film adaptation are not directly related to the hobby, although it may be inferred from the movie's opening scene that either the title expresses the author's view that the hobby is pointless, or that it seems pointless to outsiders, or alternatively, that trainspotting, like heroin use (the subject of the book) is a recreational activity very foreign to outsiders.

Jargon

Railfans have jargon that can be foreign to others. See:

- * [List of British railfan jargon](#)
- * [List of American railfan jargon](#)
- * [List of New Zealand railfan jargon](#)
- * [List of Chinese railfan jargon](#)

See also

- * [List of notable railfans](#)
- * [Darius McCollum](#) - who has been arrested for impersonating New York City Transit Authority employees and operating trains without authority
- * [Rail terminology](#)
- * [Rail transport modelling](#)
- * [Sensible Train Spotting](#), the world's first computer train spotting simulator
- * [List of railroad-related periodicals](#)
- * [RR](#) (2008 railfan film by James Benning)

Similar hobbies

- * [Aircraft spotting](#)
- * [Bus spotting](#)
- * [Gongoozler](#)
- * [Roadgeek](#)