

Spanning the Gap

Pocono Mainline Rail Excursion Delaware Lackawanna & Western Railroad



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Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area, established to conserve lands that would have surrounded an immense reservoir, and Steamtown National Historic Site in Scranton PA established to preserve railroad yards, engines, and history, would appear to have little in common. Yet, not only are they linked in history, but on Saturday, August 30, 2003, they will experience an actual physical linkage when an all-day excursion train leaves Scranton for the Water Gap, the first passenger run in 30 years.

Though smaller rail lines had linked industry in the Middle Delaware Valley with larger freight lines and with canals, the Delaware, Lackawanna, & Western Railroad (DL&W) established the most important passenger rail link to the Pocono area when it connected New York City to the town of Delaware Water Gap PA in 1856. This convenient escape for city dwellers to a vacation in the countryside entirely changed the economy of the Poconos with large resort hotels, nearby dairy farms to supply the hotels, even steamboat cruises on the Delaware. So successful was this rail connection up until the auto age - there was even a branch line up to Bushkill - that Pocono residents can forget that the tracks did not end here, but continued onward 64 miles to Scranton PA, and from there to Buffalo NY on Lake Erie.

The ride along this Pocono Mainline Route, passing through the scenic Water Gap, traversing Pocono Summit Lake on a land bridge, and crossing the headwaters of the Lehigh River to Scranton, was celebrated in DL&W timetables and decor of the



Blowin' steam -- leaving Steamtown National Historic Site. (NPS Photo courtesy of Steamtown National Historic Site)



Scranton-bound steam engine 759 draws an admiring crowd at East Stroudsburg in a photo probably taken in the 1970s. The roof of East Stroudsburg Railroad Tower is just visible behind the forward plume of steam.

time. Much of the line was damaged in the storms of 1955 -- the same hurricanes that gave impetus to plans for a dam and reservoir on the Delaware River above the Gap -- but service was quickly restored, and today there are seven preserved stations along the excursion route.

The DL&W ended passenger service in 1970. Three years later, the Delaware and Hudson Railway ran an excursion from Hoboken NJ (on the Hudson River) to Binghamton NY, but since then passengers have not been able to travel the Pocono Mainline, except on special excursion trains.



Approaching the end of the excursion at Point of Gap Overlook PA, within the recreation area.