

THE BLUE JAY LINE

(Information for the following article is derived mostly from Benjamin F. G. Kline's 1976 book about the logging railroads of western Maryland, *Tall Pines and Winding Rivers*, especially pages 85 and 100.)

For local railroad historians, the name "Sand Patch" has many connotations. It refers to the spectacular, 19-mile long railroad grade of 1.94 percent between Hyndman PA and the 2,257-foot high summit of the Allegheny Mountains in southwestern Pennsylvania. It also denotes the 4,475-foot long, double-track tunnel at the summit of the famous railroad grade. And the name is also applied to the interlocking tower (SA) which controlled the track switches near the western portal of the railroad tunnel. But a hundred years ago, Sand Patch also referred to the interchange point between the Baltimore & Ohio (B&O) Railroad main line track at the summit of the Allegheny Mountains and the narrow-gauge railroad known as the Blue Jay Line.

The Blue Jay Line was a 36-inch wide track which ran for a total of about 12 miles in length from its interchange with the B&O Railroad at Sand Patch in southeastern Somerset County, Pennsylvania, to the sawmill site at Pocahontas PA, and on to the timberlands along Piney Run in the extreme northeast corner of Garrett County, Maryland. This

narrow-gauge railroad was built in 1898 by the Blue Jay Lumber Company, Limited, a partnership organized on 25 April 1898, which included Patrick C. Lynch, George H. and Eli Barlow, all from Corry PA in Erie County.

The circular sawmill was set up about a mile south of Pocahontas, barely within Pennsylvania. The narrow-gauge track extended southward into the timberlands, composed of hemlock and hardwood trees located along the tributaries of Piney Run in Maryland. Motive power was provided by BJ 3, a 25-ton, 2-truck Heisler geared steam locomotive which was built for the Blue Jay Lumber Company in 1898 (Construction Number 1023).

The Blue Jay Line out of Pocahontas continued in operation for only about four years. Around 1902, the Pocahontas sawmill closed down, and some of the equipment was moved to a new logging site at Blue Jay in Raleigh County, West Virginia. The Heisler locomotive was sold to the Stoddard Lumber Company in Baker, Oregon. The timberland remained the property of the Blue Jay Lumber Company until it was sold to the city of Frostburg MD in 1931. At that time, the growing town needed a more dependable source for its municipal water system. So a dam was constructed on Piney Run to impound the water and create a 25-acre reservoir. Now fish swim where a Heisler steam locomotive once ran on long-vanished rails.