

## ***The Goldhill & Udell Southern Railroad***

Please note: The railroad is now a fallen flag. It was last operated on July 21, 2004. For the most recent pictures [click here](#). It was in a barn in Petaluma that was taken over by the "pot people".

<http://home.earthlink.net/~picturegus/Lastgoldhill.htm>

A new railroad will rise. I am planning a California Western Railroad layout to occupy a 19.5 foot by 20 foot garage. Its location is yet to be determined. Details are in the Yahoo Group files of HO Railroading.



The GOLDHILL & UDELL SOUTHERN RAILROAD was started by a select group of mine owners in the town of Goldhill CA around 1904. They incorporated as the GOLDHILL MINES RAILWAY with ten shareholders. They planned to a narrow gauge railroad to connect with the river at Gilardi's Landing where steamships could take their ore to be processed in Crockett. they graded for five miles and laid track on two before their attempt failed. The steamship company went bankrupt before the the first ore shipments reached Gilardi's Landing. The railroad then decided to build on to the small town of Udell some twenty eight miles downstream from Gilardi's. There it was hoped they would interchange with the new Southern Pacific line which was expected to be built through town. This attempt also met with disaster, the ore dropped in value and most of the mines shut down. Faced with this prospect the GOLDHILL MINES RAILWAY filed for bankruptcy. The towns folk of Goldhill would not give up on the little railroad, they petitioned the county government and incorporated the GOLDHILL SOUTHERN RAILROAD. Finances were a problem and the town folk couldn't raise the necessary construction capital. Along came Mr. Boris Udell, an ultra-rich eccentric who's family settled in the Valley of the Moon. With his strong financial support the GOLDHILL SOUTHERN RAILROAD was to finally start construction. It was decided at this time to build a standard gauge railroad to facilitate interchange. Udell insisted on feeding his ego and the railroads name was formally changed to GOLDHILL & UDELL SOUTHERN RAILROAD. The mine owners were not happy with this but decided not to fight Udell on this point. The first track was laid on May 5,

1908, with the first train operating four weeks later. By August a schedule was established and regular mixed train service was operating over the completed portions of the line. It was two more years before the track reached Udell. The first train into town on Sept 25, 1910 was greeted with a two day celebration. the townsfolk greeted the arrival of the new railroad with an enthusiasm not seen since the arrival, three years before, of the new schoolmarm and preacher.

The Southern Pacific finally reached Udell in November of 1911 and the long awaited connections were made. Ore shipments were the mainstay of the railroad for many years but since its value was low the railroad never made much money on its freight traffic. In the early 1920's a connecting rail line was built into Goldhill. This line the CAL WESTERN was to supply the bulk of the freight traffic for the next twenty years. Passenger service was always first class on the GOLDHILL & UDELL SOUTHERN until the war years caused a decline in maintenance of the rolling stock. The mining town of Goldhill turned to farming when the mines finally died out in the thirties. Orchards of plums, pears, and apples became the mainstay industry for the surrounding area. Refer service took over for ore traffic, yet freight traffic off the CAL WESTERN and the refer business barely covered the operating expenses, profits stayed low and the line was never updated. The passenger traffic was at a low ebb after the war, so in 1954 the railroad petitioned for abandonment, but the CAL WESTERN protested and the abandonment was denied. **\*\*SEE NOTE BELOW\*\*** The railroad was soon sold to the SOUTHERN PACIFIC. Passenger service was terminated with the startup of AMTRAK in 1965. The SP developed and sold off almost all of the surplus land and assets of the GOLDHILL & UDELL RAILROAD. During the economic slump of 1975 the railroad again tried abandonment and this time the ICC approved their petition and the railroad ceased operations in early 1976.

The people of Goldhill and Udell were very upset about the loss of their railroad and proceeded to form the GOLDHILL & UDELL SOUTHERN RAILROAD Historical and Technical Society. They attempted and were successful in negotiating the purchase of the line from Goldhill to Udell. By negotiating with employees and shippers the Society was able to begin operations by November of 1976. **(Or 1956)** The SOUTHERN PACIFIC granted switching and trackage rights in the yard in Udell and a new era was begun for the GUS RR. The former car shop was converted to a museum and rebuilding shops for antique railroad equipment both purchased and donated to the Society. Limited passenger service was restored, excursion service was started and new shipping was actively sought out by the new management. Since the railroad is operated by the museum staff quite a variety of rolling stock and motive power is used on the line. It is the avowed purpose of the society to operate a working railroad with as much restored equipment as possible and still remain solvent. Most of the restoration of equipment and

operation of special excursions are done by volunteers. paid crews handle the freight and passenger operations on a day to day basis. Normal traffic on the GUS RR sees an early morning Interchange train to Udell, a noontime way freight working industries from Udell yard to Goldhill and two yard locals working Udell and the industries to the south. Passenger service consists of a single commute run in the morning and evening and a mid-day train connecting the AMTRAK Coast Starlight. Various specials are run on demand with weekend picnic trains in the summer being very popular with tourists and railfans.

A new business district was formed by the railroad and hosts an oil distributor, a lumber yard and space is currently being negotiated to a small time engine rebuildier. This and the continuation of traffic from the CAL WESTERN has helped the railroad's bottom line. All industries on the railroad's line are actively pursued for their freight business. The quarry south of town is supplying ballast and many shipments of "export" rock.

**\*\*NOTE\*\*** What if time stopped back in 1956 and the railroad wasn't abandoned , but the townsfolk took it over anyway. The time frame would be the late fiftys, early generation diesels, some active steam, shorter cars, ... Ummm.

### [Pictures](#)

<http://home.earthlink.net/~campgus/hopics.htm>