

May 1, 2002

Frederic XXXXXX

Dear Fred,

I understand that you are the creator of "Fred's Web site" that has well written articles about trains and many outstanding photographs of western scenes and hobo art. Do you work for the San Francisco Chronicle as a photographer? If this is true then the quality of the photographs is understandable for they are very superior. As a simple writer of club newsletter articles I recognize the quality of your writing and if you are associated with the Chronicle, the professionalism of your writing is also understandable!

If you are not the Fred XXXXXX that created "Fred's Web site," then please ignore the rest of this letter.

I'm writing to you as a member of the speeder / motorcar hobby to express my concern for an article posted on your web site about riding the UP track through Tennessee Pass. The hobby calls unauthorized rides such as yours "bootlegging." It's obvious in your article that you understood that you were involved in trespass. Perhaps you believe that since the sheriff was not waiting for you by your truck at the set off point then no harm had been done. This is not true.

Your activity has harmed the legal hobby of speeder riding simply because you did trespass. "Bootlegging" or riding without permission hurts the hobby. Here's how. There is no such thing as abandoned railroad track. Unless the rail has been pulled up, the ties sold for backyard planters, and the stone ballast dug up for fill; the track is not abandoned. In this case the UP owns it and is financially responsible. Riding without permission is trespassing. Run-ins between railroad officials and trespassers make the companies suspicious of all motorcar operators. Bootlegging activity has caused problems for just about every club trying to organize legal events. This is a "frail hobby...completely dependent upon the goodwill...of the railroad owners."

Over 1200 members of the North American Railcar Operators Association and their 650 insured and certified operators struggle constantly to improve relationships with the railroads. We, who do not participate in trespass, must overcome the distrust of railroad officials toward speeder owners created by trespass.

I invite you to come on one of our events to see how the hobby operates, meet the people involved. You'll see the things we do on each event (inspections, safety meetings, crossing procedures, etc) to be safe and operate in a way that gets us invited back to the railroad for another run. Once you've met the members of the hobby you will see the people harmed by bootlegging.

You might check out the site [www.narcoa.org](http://www.narcoa.org) to see more information about the legal and organized hobby of speeder trips.

Sincerely,  
Wayne Parsons  
Granada Hills, CA

Reply from "North Bank Fred"

Hello Wayne:

I appreciate your concern about the speeder article on "Fred's Website" but there has been a slight, and probably unavoidable, mis-understanding that arises when there is a link to an individual page on a website and the visitor misses some information that was given on a previous page.

My name is Fred and I am the creator of "Fred's Website". Fred XXXXXX is a [very good] photographer for the San Francisco Chronicle and is associated with some articles posted on my site, but is not involved with the website itself nor the speeder article, which was written by Too Tall Ken. The purpose of posting "articles" and "stories" on my site was to gather whatever interesting information I could find about trains and hobos - if a particular subject was brought up it was because I thought that visitors to my site would enjoy reading about it, and not because I may or may not have any personal endorsement for the subject. I hope you realize that if I discarded some tidbit of information because I thought it might offend someone there would be nothing left to read.

As far as speeders go, I find them very interesting. I came very close to purchasing a "fixer upper" several years ago after watching a large group of them go past my house on the Siskiyou Branch in Northern California. From almost 30 years of hopping freights I'm well aware of the thin line of trust between the railroads and those who wish to "use their facilities" for whatever reason. Many times in the middle of the night I'd come upon some crewman or yardworker and have just a few seconds to project a sense of understanding and professionalism toward his concerns and let him know that if my presence made him uncomfortable in any way then I would simply leave. As I'm sure you've found out by now, once you lose a person's (or a company's) trust, it's very difficult to re-establish any sort of working relationship with them.

Irresponsible speeder operators ruin things for you and your group and irresponsible tramps (and rail-riding serial killers) do the same for me. I'm sorry to hear that the speeder article caused such an alarm - I was completely unaware of any possible repercussions from posting it, and will forward your email to Ken. Thanks for taking the time to write!

Take care,  
Fred