

### Skunk Train

(NM) [www.skunktrain.com](http://www.skunktrain.com)

“The Skunk Train is a historic railroad that transports people back in time,” says Robert Jason Pinoli, vice president of Sierra Railroad Company. Of several operating trains, Skunk Train is the most famous. In actual fact it transports passengers from Willits to Fort Bragg . . . but it’s been traveling the same tracks for 123 years, through redwoods that have been there for centuries longer. It traverses the Noyo River Canyon base and the forest floor, through thousands of acres of private, untouched lands.

Most tourists depart from Fort Bragg, just 3½ miles from the Pudding Creek estuary and a mirror-glass dam populated by osprey and blue heron. There are thirty bridges over 40 miles of track on the forest floor. Though the Skunk Train owns its route, all the land around it is private, and much of it is off the grid.

Its real name is the Cal Western Railroad, but locals came up with the nickname around 1925, because the odor

of the burning crude oil that powered the vintage rail cruisers smelled skunky to them. Hence the now-beloved Mr. Skunk logo. However, there are further comparisons, in Pinoli’s opinion. “You are essentially on the back of this animal, riding along the forest floor.”

“The loggers who worked in Fort Bragg at the turn of last century would use the Skunk on Sundays as a way to escape everyday lives,” he explains. “They’d pile onto the train and go for a ride out to the redwoods for Sunday picnics, and to play along the riverbank. Locals made it famous back then.”

One of the most interesting things about the train is that locals still use it for transportation today. You get a peek at the society-shunning redwood dwellers who board and depart at flag stops along the route. Tourists are allowed to use only the Fort Bragg and Willits stops. Most do it as one round-trip ride. The journey is narrated, to guide people in viewing the native flora and fauna all around them.