

Clinchfield Railroad ^[1]

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by Donald W. Kern, 2006

The Clinchfield Railroad is a transmountain line connecting the [Chesapeake & Ohio](#) ^[2] at Elkhorn City, Ky., and the [Atlantic Coast Line Railroad](#) ^[3] in Spartanburg, S.C., to serve the bituminous [coalfields](#) ^[4] of Kentucky and Virginia. It represents the last major railroad constructed in the eastern United States and is unusual in that it has been a profitable venture since 1915. The line totals 290 miles of track, with 117 miles located in North Carolina. Traversing the eastern United States' most rugged terrain, the Clinchfield has 54 tunnels representing 3.5 percent of its total length, an amount greater than any other railroad in the country.

The line was built in ten segments between 1890 and 1909, with construction on each end and in the middle occurring simultaneously. The first trip of the (nearly) completed line took place on 22 Aug. 1908. The line merged with the [Seaboard Coast Line](#) ^[5] in 1967 and became part of [CSX Corporation](#) ^[6] on 1 July 1986.

The Clinchfield was famous for the "Santa Claus Special" ^[7], a special train that ran the Saturday after Thanksgiving to distribute Christmas presents to children of Appalachia who lived along the line. This tradition has continued under CSX.

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