

Spring 2014 Steam Workweek Report

—J. Chris Allan, Steam CMO

Due to several poorly timed illnesses, I hadn't been back to museum property since the summer of last year. Suffice to say I was ready to get out of the confines of the greater Los Angeles area and head north. On Tuesday I made it to Concord and spent a wonderful day with my parents, old home week for me. The next day Dad and I made our way back to Plumas County by way of the scenic Feather River Canyon, always a treat for the eyes and the spirit.

After arriving at the museum we were pleased to find the accommodations in such a clean state, thanks to Rick Grunninger and David Elems for putting in so much time and effort into cleaning and organizing. We were hosted that evening by the ever gracious Debbie and Kirk Baer, a nice period of decompression after the drive, and an equally nice welcome back to Portola.

The next morning, Wednesday, those in attendance, including Steve Lee all the way from Cheyenne, Wyoming, had a hearty safety breakfast at Sharon's Café on Commercial Street. Dad ordered the famous full plate of biscuits and gravy, his one indulgence for the year, and finished it with only a bit of trepidation.

Getting back to the museum, I was heartened at the sheer amount of work that had been accomplished on the needle-scaling and priming operation. Kirk, Charlie, Matt and Dave Anderson had gotten the tender frame side sills and two trucks completed, they really look great! Charlie spent some time getting the new steel deck plates in place on the tender frame, in preparation for drilling the rivet holes. Later in the afternoon the contingent from the Bay Area: Dave, Severn, Jeff, Ken and Nancy arrived and got settled in. Hank and Michael worked on relocation of one of the right side air reservoir brackets, necessary so that we can use the new



The WPRM Steam Crew assembles for breakfast at Sharon's Cafe in Portola.

drilled tanks which don't fit quite as well as the original lap riveted vessels. That evening Dad and I along with new volunteer Mike had a sensible meal at Lena's Cantina and we called it a night. It was a bit chillier than we anticipated.

Friday morning after literally taking over the majority of the space at Sharon's, leaving well fed yet again, we hit the shop with whatever we could muster. We were very lucky to be joined by two gents who work on the former Western Pacific tugboat "Hercules", Erik and Channing. This ocean going steam tug is now preserved by the National Park Service in San Francisco along with several other vessels and artifacts, and is well worth a visit. I set these boys on the task of finishing up the fitting of the rear tube sheet knuckle patch, started by our boilermaker Norman. Some drilling and reaming was still required to prepare for the riveting operation to take place the following Sunday and Monday.

Roger Stabler started early on making up a test rack for the locomotive's air compressor from heavy angle iron. He and Mike chopped and welded until the compressor could stand on it's own. At that they began inspection of the various check valves, shuttles, and appurtenances that make it run. A gallon of Marvel Mystery Oil was poured into anywhere and everywhere on the steam and air sides. The diesel boys were tuning an air horn outside, which encouraged everyone to don a pair of earplugs. The sweet sound of a Nathan M5 (at least after they got it tuned) spurred us on.

Ken, Nancy, and Jeff began the task of drilling for the rivets on the tender frame plates. Thanks again to our friends at the Golden Gate Railroad Museum for the use of their magnetic base drill press, a real necessity for an operation such as this. They went at it tirelessly, and by the end of the weekend, only a few holes remained to be drilled. Around 4:30pm we started the shop cleanup, and soon after we were enjoying a bit of fellowship and libation. Later we once again traveled en masse to Kirk and Debbie's for a nice cocktail hour and cookout at their compound. Kirk was able to talk tugboats with Erik and Channing as the rest of us caught up on what's been happening in the world of steam preservation since we last met. Thanks from all of us to Kirk and Debbie for letting us into their beautiful home and

allowing us a nice change of scenery from the rail yard.

By Saturday we were up to full speed. A great deal was being accomplished by everyone, including Bob Sims who had recycled and rescued a set of cabinets from one of our parts cars. Bob stripped them down and re-sized them to fit into the steam tool car, and they look as good as new. I am hoping that now our boiler tools will have a nice organized home from now on. Thanks Bob for everything you do!

Michael and Hank repacked the grease pads for the main drivers. This involved a great deal of slicing and squishing of the waxy stuff. These will be installed in the summer when the engine is again over the pit.



(Top) Channing prepares to weld an anti-creeper to the staybolt cap. (Bottom) The finished product.

Eric and Channing took on the challenge of removing the remaining flush staybolt caps from the wrapper sheet. Most of these had been removed previously, but the most stubborn had been left. The guys along with Severn figured out a smart method of removing them: this involved welding an anti-creeper, which is a track part, directly onto the cap, and using it as a handle that could be wrenched on. This process worked very well, and is a good example of the ingenuity required to work on old machinery in less than ideal situations.

Roger and Mike hooked up the house air and finally got the air pump to start doing its thing; the result was quite dramatic, with Marvel Mystery Oil shooting everywhere and the familiar “thump-thump”.

Black clouds finally closed in, the temperature dropped significantly, and the snow came. It was too warm to stick, so it just made a sloppy mess. I had misgivings in regards to the evening BBQ, but as quick as it blew in, it was gone and blue sky dominated. The evening meal of grilled chicken, donated by Dave Anderson, and my chili (an old family recipe, if your family name is Chasen) was enjoyed by all. After, Dave Roth was appointed entertainment chairman, treating everyone to the evening’s feature film. Another fun and productive weekend for the WPRM steam crew.

Dad and I made our retreat Sunday morning back to Concord where I actually got to see my mother on Mother’s Day, probably the first time in over 20 years! The visit was too short before I had to get back on the road and head back to Southern California, where we celebrated my wife Rita’s Mother’s Day with my daughters. The next day the temperatures at our house in Lakewood were in the high 90’s. For me it was hard to believe that I was being snowed on just two days before...

Epilogue:

After Dad and I left, Norman Comer and his burly helper arrived to complete the riveting on the



Norman riveting into the knuckle patch.

knuckle patch. This was accomplished through mainly brute force on Norman’s part. Riveting overhead is not a task for the weak of heart, or weak of upper body strength. Norman, being a tug-o-war champion is one of the few in our circle that can take this on. Steve was able to borrow the propane forge from Wasatch Railroad Contractors, thanks to him and John Rimmasch for making it happen. Kirk was appointed the red-hot rivet passer, probably not the



Kirk Baer prepares to pass a hot rivet.

job he thought he would undertake when he woke up that morning.

In the meantime, Erin Swain is manufacturing the windows and doors for the cab at his home in Flagstaff, Arizona. He hopes to have these completed by the Fall work session. So far from photos he has sent, they look great!

The Superheater flues purchased through the fundraising drive are now fabricated and waiting to come down from Washington State. Thanks to Stathi Pappas of the Mount Rainier Scenic Railroad for getting this done. We now have just about everything needed to put the boiler back together. All we need now is sweat, tears and lots of labor.

Please consider a monetary tax deductible donation to help us along. Checks may be made payable to: **FRRS, PO Box 608, Portola, CA 96122**. Please note “**165 Steam Fund**” in the memo line of your check.

Thanks again to everyone who has donated cash, materials, time and even moral support. We are getting ever closer to Western Pacific steam returning to Portola! - JCA