

Greetings!

This is your Maintenance of Way Team update for October 5, 2014. It's kind of amazing how much a handful of volunteers can accomplish in pursuit of keeping the SSRR's track infrastructure in service. This was one of those amazing weeks and, as we shamelessly use this weekly update to "toot our own horn," let's get this update a-tootin'!

The amazing Weed Team gathered on Tuesday to continue pruning back the trees that might interfere with the passage of Santa's Village south to the North Pole. Mike Taylor, Heather Kearns, Dave Megeath, and Jeff Allen fired up the rail-mounted man-lift and headed out of town to accomplish their vital mission. They managed to not only provide proper overhead clearance but, also, they attacked vegetation that was impeding the sight-lines of the engineers through the curves at Miller Park. The Nuisance Weed Team does a tremendous job keeping the green menace along our line at bay.

Meanwhile, back at the Shops, Pat Scholzen, Alan Hardy, Cliff Hayes, Gene Peck, Frederick Carr, Bob Ress, Frank Werry, and Harry Voss kept the home-fires burning. To access the hydraulic pumps on the tie-shear, half the machine has to be taken apart. Just about everyone on Tuesday's crew were involved. Bob and Fred managed to pull the dual-drive unit, the final impediment to accessing the pumps. The thought is that one or both of the pumps are bad which is why it's not generating sufficient pressure for the machine to function. Harry, our small engine expert, started on a project to restore to operation a rail drill.

Thursday, Alan, Joshua Ilac, Cliff, Frank, Mike Harris, and Heather were on the scene. Josh managed to remove the hoses on the hydraulic pumps. Alan began cutting through the deck-plate of the prehistoric tamper that is being converted into a ballast hopper. Cliff welded a new draw-bar bracket onto the J3K Tamper that won't interfere with the light reference sensor buggy mounted on the back. Mike H. and Frank focused their efforts on both the tie-shear and Kalamazoo tug. Heather fired-up the Big Green Machine to seek out a new head-block for a switch to replace a bad one down at Baths (which was our plan for Saturday). Using Big Green, she then spotted our two flatcars on the 560 track onto which the head-block was placed.

Saturday's project was the replacement of the head-block at Switch 17, the north switch at Baths. A head-block is the 18 foot long "mega-tie" that essentially anchors the switch and supports the switch-point operating mechanisms as well as the switch stand. The old one was completely cracked through. Heather and Steve Nemeth sacrificed their doughnut rations in order to get our rail-mounted equipment, stored in Old Sacramento, ready to move down the line. We used the old-old tamper as our head-end power and had to cross over the UP Main into the Rail Yards to pick up the flatcars with the head-block. Conductor Frank made the necessary calls to the dispatchers in Omaha while Engineer Steve and Fireman Pam Tatro handled the tamper's roundtrip. Ed Moriarty piloted the A-6 Motorcar with our tool cars attached. Alan, Clem Meier, Fred, Mike Miller, and Harry, fully fueled with doughnuts (thanks to Harry!), headed down to Switch 17 at Mile Post 2.85 and began dismantling the switch to free up the cracked head-block. They brought in the section-gang machine which quickly pulled the old one out just as the tamper and tool cars with the new head-block arrived on the scene. Clem, Frank, Mike M., Steve, Pam, and Fred dug out the crib to make room for the new head-block. Ed, Heather, and Alan, using tie tongs and timber tongs, positioned the new head-block for insertion. Then Alan, at the controls of the section-gang machine, pulled it into place. Next came the tricky part – getting everything in proper alignment. It took a bit of shimmying around to get the head-block straight and level. Then it was just a matter of reassembling the switch mechanism and adjusting it. Folks, changing-out a head-block is a major undertaking – especially as our time was limited by special charter train in the afternoon that required the switch to be functional. The special train eliminated any "wiggle-room" we may have needed for contingencies should things have not gone smoothly. Fortunately, we had a tremendous crew who, despite doing this kind of work infrequently, really know what they are doing. Everything went as planned and we managed to have the head-block changed-out and the switch back in service by noon.

Despite being back in service, the switch needed some additional adjustments. The control-rod was binding slightly against the base of the stand when thrown to the Main. After lunch, Steve and Mike M. headed back to Switch 17 to implement the fix. Mike's idea was to adjust one of the prongs on the stand that holds the rod in place. It worked brilliantly. Switch 17 is now one of the smoothest operating switches on the whole railroad. By the end of the day, the Team was tired but very proud of this accomplishment. It was an amazingly successful day made possible by a great team who all work well together.

For the week ahead, the Weed Team will be weeding again on Tuesday. Join this amazing crew at 8:30 a.m. over at the Shops. In the evening on Tuesday and Thursday, the MOW Team will be up and running over in the Shops starting at 5 o'clock. Saturday, it's an 8 o'clock a.m. start as usual. Again, many thanks to the amazing volunteers who keep the trains on the tracks!

See you out on the line,

Alan, Chris, and Richard.



Dave, flying high above the tracks, clears the way for Santa's Village to pass



Mike T. mulches the organic debris





Bob and Fred removing the dual drive unit from the tie-shear which gave the Team access to the hydraulic pumps



Alan cuts open the deck of the prehistoric tamper which is being converted to center-dump ballast hopper car





Mike H. helps with the pump removal on the tie shear



Heather finds a head-block to replace the cracked one down at Switch 17, the north switch at Baths





The old-old tamper was our "locomotive" on Saturday. Engineer Steve, Fireman Pam, and Conductor Frank are ready to roll. We used the occasion to bring our existing hoppers, which Alan singlehandedly repaired and painted, back to Old Sac.

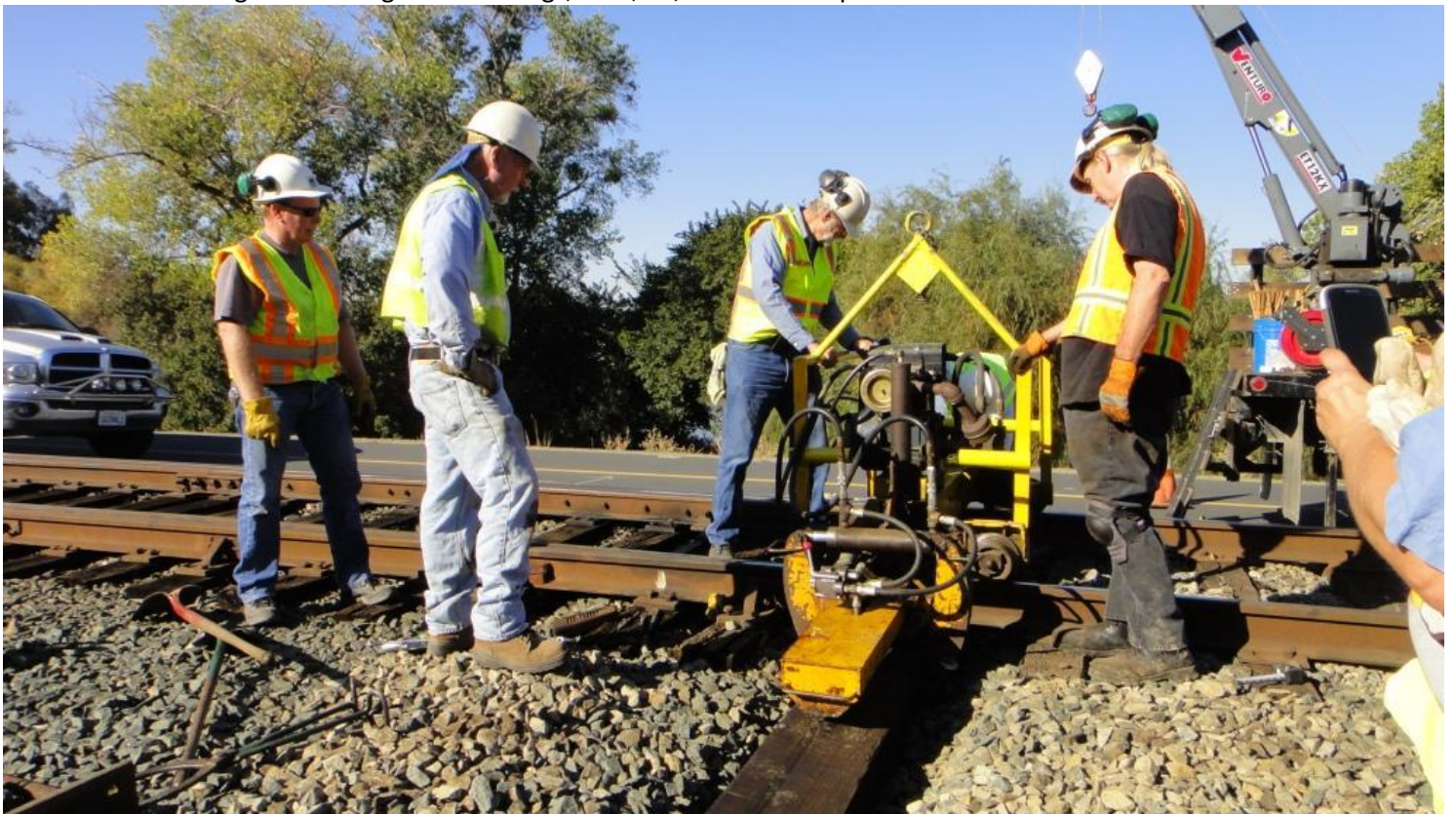


The old cracked head-block is removed and Clem, Frank, Mike, Steve, and Fred dig out the crib to make room for the new head-block





Using timber-tongs and tie-tongs, Alan, Ed, and Heather position the head-block for insertion



Alan uses the section-gang machine to pull the new head-block into place





Precision placement: Steve, Pam, and Heather shimmy the new head-block around to make sure it is in the precise spot



Steve sets spikes in the gauge-plate while Heather and Fred attach the control-rod to the connecting-rod. Ed positions the other end of the control-rod onto the switch stand which Pam holds steady while Clem nips the end of the head-block.





Mike M. spikes the gauge-plate down while Steve nips the head-block



Trading places: now Steve spikes while Mike M. nips.