

Greetings!

This is your Maintenance of Way Team update for July 27, 2014. No matter how things go, no one can ever accuse the MOW Team not trying its best to accomplish great things for the railroad. This week was no different. We had ambitious plans and noble intentions. But, as the old parable says, "Best laid plans..." and all that. Nonetheless, we still accomplished a great deal this last week. No question. So, let's get this story started.

On Tuesday evening, Pat Scholzen, Gene Peck, Cliff Hayes, Mike Harris, Chris Carlson, Josh Ilac, Heather Kearns, Frederick Carr, and Frank Werry gathered at the Shops. Our trusty track inspectors had identified some issues with the head-block at Switch 16, the south switch at Miller Park. The "head-block" is the extra-thick and long tie (about 15 feet in length) which supports the switch-points, the adjacent stock rails, and the switch-machine (stand) for aligning the switch. We decided that changing it out might make a good project for Saturday. Replacing a head-block is a big project so the Team spent the evening staging for this endeavor. Chris located a replacement head-block in our ever-moving materials yard. Of course, it was buried in the back of the tie-pile and required some cajoling to get out. Frank, Josh, and Heather unburied it and Chris on the Big Green Machine managed to grab it and spot it for a move over to Old Sacramento. Meanwhile, inside the Erecting Shop, Mike H. and Fred continued their valiant efforts on re-plumbing the hydraulic system on the Kalamazoo (former regulator). That project is coming along nicely. Pat, Gene, and Cliff engaged their expertise on several other mechanical projects. All in all, it was a good evening for the Team. We sure felt encouraged about our plan for Saturday.

Thursday evening started with Mike H. donating a refrigerator to the MOW Team for use in the Erecting Shop. Many thanks, indeed, to Mike for his kind donation! The evening plan was to stage the new head-block down at Switch 16. Flat cars and the A-6 motorcar were employed by Conductor Frank, Engineer Heather, Josh, Cliff, Matt Blackburn, and Mike H. to make the move. Mike H., on the Big Green Machine, brought the head-block over and positioned it on the flats. Then the team headed south to Miller Park where the cargo was unloaded. Back at the Shops, the Team got all the tools together and loaded the section-gang machine, which we were using to pull the old head-block, into our trusty Chevy Truck so that all would be ready for Saturday. We were on course and on schedule for big project on Saturday morning.

Saturday started off really well with two pink boxes of doughnuts. Chris, Frank, Michael Florentine, Steve Nemeth, John Rexroth, Heather, Josh, Harry Voss, and Fred, sugared-up for our big day. Heather, Steve, Mike F., and Josh headed over to Old Sacramento to set up our motorcar work train along with the "old-old" tamper for the journey down the line. However, we had a few mechanical issues with some of our big machines back at the Shops that delayed the arrival of the bulk of Team at the work site. For a project like this, time is of the essence and we started to feel the pressure of the ticking clock. Nonetheless, once on site, the Team began dismantling the components of the switch mechanism necessary for us to pull out the head-block. Most of the nuts and bolts were frozen and getting it apart took longer than we expected. "Tick-tock, tick-tock, tick-tock." The section-gang machine was deployed but couldn't grab the head-block because the gauge-plate was in the way. We had hoped that we wouldn't have to remove the gauge plate but, saw no alternative. "Tick-tock, tick-tock, tick-tock." It was now just an hour from train operations. With the need to have the switch serviceable before train time, and the clock ticking away, the decision was made to abort the mission before we got to the "point of no return." Disappointed but not discouraged, we stabilized the existing head-block and got the switch put back together and functioning properly before the first train. In the meantime, Chris and Mike F. took the tamper and tamped a significant portion of the line through Miller Park. This needed to be done anyway. With everything loaded up, the Team waved to the train and all the passengers as it rolled by and then skedaddled back into town with the equipment.

In the afternoon, Chris, Fred, Frank, and Heather worked in the shops on various machines. Chris managed to find and correct the electrical problem with the "new-old" tamper that was preventing the squeeze motors from functioning. Steve, Mike F., John and Josh headed down to the Setzer Yard take care of several issues that needed corrective action. We did, in the end, get lots of stuff done on Saturday. We'll make another attempt at replacing the head-block soon.

This coming week, the Team will gather on Tuesday and Thursday at 5 o'clock p.m. Saturday, the pink boxes will arrive at 8 o'clock a.m. As always, many thanks to our fantastic volunteers! The work you do as volunteers is an inspiration to us all.

We'll see you out on the line,

Alan, Chris, and Richard.



Mike H. loading the new head-block on the flatcars with the Green Machine



At Switch 16, Heather demonstrates the proper supervisory stance





After getting the head-block on the ground Cliff and Frank put Josh to work...



Many thanks to Mike Harris for donating the new MOW refrigerator!





Fred, John, Chris, and Harry trying to get the section-gang machine to grab the head-block



Reality has set in. The gauge plate must be removed. Steve, Chris and Mike F. start that process





“Tick-tock, tick-tock, tick-tock.” With a reverse in course ordered, Mike starts putting the switch back together



Chris and Fred work to reconnect the switch machine





Steve tightening down the final bolt...



...and Josh pounding down the last spikes in the reassembly of the switch