

Greetings!

This is your Maintenance of Way Team update for December 20, 2015. The last week of Polar Express spells the dawning of Christmas week. But first, some serious work out on the line needed doing. So, let's not hold-up Christmas by delaying this update any further.

*Now is the winter of our discontent. Made glorious summer by...* a new patio heater for the MOW Lounge in the Erecting Shop! Thank goodness we have a direct link to the North Pole via the Polar Express. All those letters to Santa really paid off! No longer will the Team have to freeze to death while the EIC drones on endlessly during job briefings. So, Tuesday, Pat Scholzen spent the afternoon putting it together. Then, to test it, Heather Kearns, Alan Hardy, Cliff Hayes, Frank Werry, Frederick Carr, Gene Peck, and Harry Voss gathered 'round as Pat fired it up for the first time. Let there be warmth! Soon, everyone was toasty-warm and ready to work on projects. The bulk of the evening was spent reinstalling the transmission in the A-4 motorcar now that it had a new clutch. Once again, Fred descended beneath the A-4 with the transmission. Frank brought in the forklift to which the transmission was strapped. Then, delicately, Frank raised the forks as Cliff, Gene, and Harry bolted it into position. This was quite an interesting ordeal and, of course, a total success! With that, the Team returned to the warmth of the lounge to close out the evening.

Last Sunday afternoon, shortly before the Polar Express departed on its southbound journey to the North Pole, a rather significant oak branch came crashing down onto the tracks just south of Miller Park. Although it was moved off to the side by members of the train crew, a considerable portion remained dangling overhead threatening the "first bell of Christmas." Time to call in the Weed Team! Mike Taylor, "Ginsu" Dave Megeath, and Heather set their strategy for a counter attack and reclaim our territory. They headed down the line in the man-lift where Dave would fly into the boughs above with the gas-powered chainsaw on a stick, slicing and dicing at the menacing twig. Down it came with a thunderous thud. Elves everywhere were jubilant! Christmas would not be canceled after all! A city tree crew happened to be working nearby doing tree maintenance on the levy and, in exchange for a bag of cookies, disposed of the massive stems. Back in Old Sacramento, the Team finally had a chance to test the chipper with its new blades. A great day for the mighty Weed Team!

Meanwhile, back at the Shops, Alan, Fred, Frank, and Cliff spent Thursday evening putting the A-4 back together. The drive shaft had to be re-attached as did the reverser, clutch peddle, brake rigging, and battery. Essentially, the A-4 is ready for action once again. But first, the engine will be serviced, oil changed, and radiator refilled.

*It was a dark and stormy morning.* But like all Saturdays at MOW, freshly fired dough of sugary goodness was on tap for Clem Meier, Heather, Steve Nemeth, Fred, Frank, Michael Florentine, Chris Carlson, Jose Gomez, Harry Voss, and John Rexroth. The plan for the day was to replace ties under Track 2 leading into the Central Pacific Passenger Station (CPPS) in Old Sacramento. It was built to be an historical representation 1860s track. Built on redwood ties, it's 61.5 pound rail. In other words, really light stuff. Recently, we've encountered a number of broken joint-bars on that track. There is significant deflection in the track which may have contributed to the cracked joint bars. So, the plan was to put in a few new ties and try to stabilize it. The ties along this track are practically buried in mud. So, Clem, Jose, Fred, Frank, Mike F., John, and Steve began by pulling spikes, digging around, and unburying the ties. It was like digging in wet cement. Conductor Heather conducted Alan in the tamper across the UP Main. Chris brought in the Jackson 125 Tie exchanger. After breaking up the ground around the ties with shovels, picks, and mattocks, the trencher on the 125 was deployed to dig a trench on the outside of the rail through which the old tie could slide out and the new tie inserted. Being redwood, the ties came out mostly intact. It's not that they had rotted – they're soft and, over years under traffic, the rails had cut their way deep into the ties allowing for vertical motion in the track. Not good.

Throughout the day, the Team continued this effort. Once an old tie was out, the trenches were deep enough that new ties could be pulled into place by hand using tie-tongs. Everyone traded off spiking, nipping, and filling in the tie-cribs. Steve and Mike F. put on spiking clinics as, one after the other, they drove spike after spike by hand. Heather donned the huff-and-puff machine and removed dead leaves from switches in Old Sacramento. Then, She and Harry filled dozens of garbage bags with leaves for disposal. Former Manager of Track Programs, John Chandler stopped by in his Polar Express *Station Master* hat (complete with "scrambled-eggs") and took up the mattocks (but made sure not to get his shoes dirty). After each new tie was put in, Alan in the tamper attempted to tamp what was essentially rocky-mud. As he would tamp, the Team would shovel more dirt into the cribs for further compacting by the tamper. It was a noisy affair and, as the doors opened for Polar Express at 2:30, we had to conclude machine use (for the most part) by then. As the day concluded, it was clear that most of the deflection had been eliminated. Although there's much more to do (the area is desperate for rock), the Team was confident that it had improved the safety of this track which handles a great deal of very heavy traffic, such as the SP 6051. Before heading back to the Shops, Steve, John, and Jose returned the MOW work-train to the container. Chris and Heather got all the MOW equipment re-spotted up on the old 150 Track. It had been quite a day. Hard work for sure but, real accomplishment was achieved in the MOW Team's ongoing effort to build a better Railroad.

For Christmas week, the MOW Team will gather only on Tuesday at or before 5 o'clock. We're taking Christmas Eve and Saturday off because we want to make sure that all our magnificent volunteers and supporters have the merriest of Christmases possible. In fact, Christmas is made possible by the MOW Team: no track, no Polar Express. So, Merry Christmas to all. We'll be back next week.

See you out on the line,

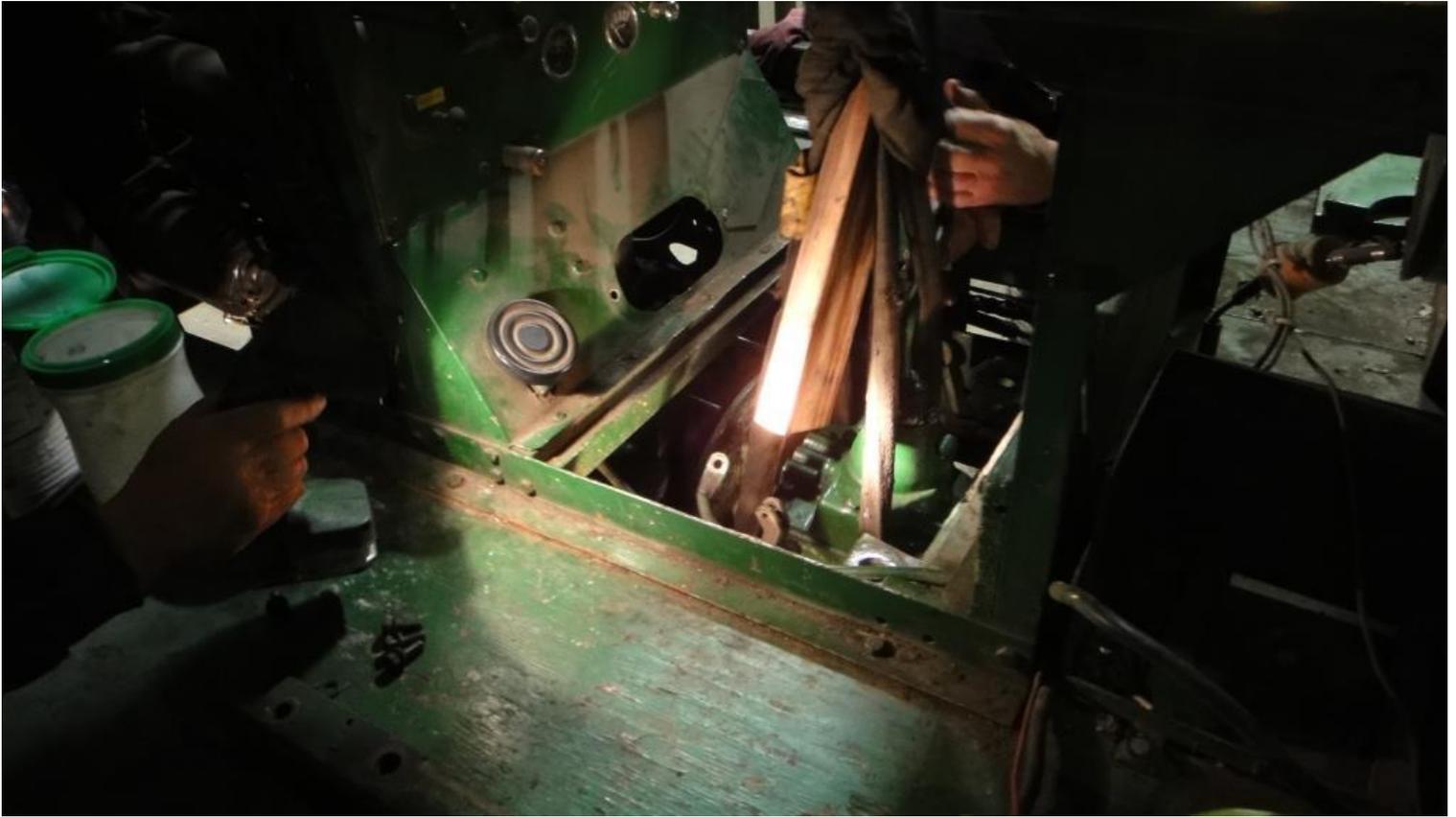
Alan, Chris, and Richard.



Fred under the A-4 positioning straps around the transmission...



...Which Frank lifted into position for Cliff, Gene, and Harry to bolt in place



All strapped in, the transmission rises from the depths and into position



As all the accoutrements were hooked-up, Frank installs a battery in the A-4



Mike T. watches "Ginsu" Dave Megeath excise the remaining vegetative threat to the Polar Express



Back in town, the chipper is finally tested



Jose, Fred, Steve, and Clem start digging out the ties and pulling spikes along Track 2



Harry expressing his pride at resurrecting the compressor from dead battery purgatory...



Chris on the Jackson 125 tie-exchanger uses the trenching feature to create a hole big enough for the old tie come out and new tie to go in



With the trench dug, Chris pulls the tie out



With a new tie in place, Steve and Frank set spikes, Fred and Clem nip it up, while Mike F., Alan, and Jose back-fill the crib



Fred nips as John sets spikes



Clem nips as Mike F. drives in the spikes



Meanwhile, Harry and Heather bag-up leaves



After the 125 pulled a tie out, Steve grabs it with the tie-tongs to get it out of the way for disposal



Jose, Mike F., John, and Alan use timber-tongs to bring-in a new tie



Watch out, Batman! The Joker's right behind you!



Jose back-fills the tie-crib while Mike F. nips-up the tie as John drives a spike with a short-handled sledge



And now Clem nips as Steve, again, demonstrates his world-famous-as-seen-on-TV windmill spiking technique



Clem nips as Steve drives spikes



Polar Express Station Master and Manager of Track Programs Emeritus, John Chandler, stops by to re-live his glory days



Ah, just like ol' times



"Just one more..." Chris pulls one more tie on Track 2



Jose nips-up the tie while Steve drives the spikes



Alan in the tamper skillfully attempts to compact the mud and rocks under the ties



Day is done, gone the sun, and the Team debriefs under the warmth of our new heater. Thank you, Santa!