

SANTA TRAINS 1996

By Gordon Wollesen

Portola Railroad Museum's 1996 annual Santa Trains are now history. The 4th year of our December Santa Trains was a rousing success. December 7th and 14th were the dates, and as in the past, our caboos train was outlined with Christmas lights as was the locomotive. The train was spotted on three rail, right outside the diesel shop. Inside the shop the Christmas tree was well decorated and Christmas lights were strung at strategic locations. The Beanery was decorated to complete the Holiday setting. As in the past, the Beanery served cookies, hot chocolate, cider and coffee to those that visited the museum. The train provided rides to all that wanted to ride. All this was provided, as always, at no charge; it was our donation to the community.

The planning started in September, after Railfan Day. This year our planning and preparation started later in the year because we had lots of prior experience doing this. It was still lots of work. A week before Thanksgiving, the train was made up and a call for assistance was sent out. On the Saturday before the first Santa Train, things began to happen. The yard was set up and two cabooses were decorated. By the next Saturday morning all five cabooses were finished. The tree had been finished on Friday, but the shop interior, locomotive and Beanery remained to be done. By 3:30 PM all was ready. At 5:00 PM the generators were started, lights checked, power tied on to the train and the train aired up. Crew assignments were made and we were ready for the crowds.

December 7th (NOT 1941) dawned partly cloudy, warm and with some wind. Rain showers patted us off and on during the day. By train time it was raining continuously. The biggest problem was the mud in the parking lot. People began to arrive about 5:00 PM and the first train pulled out about 5:40 PM with a fairly good load of passengers. Santa Claus was smart and stayed in the engine house to greet one and all. As the evening progressed, the train had fewer and fewer riders as the weather deteriorated. The Beanery had an

ample supply of hot drinks and cookies, but the takers were not there. The train ran 5 trips that evening and by 8:15 the last run was made. No more people. I estimate that 200 people took advantage of our hospitality.

December 14th dawned clear, warm, with a light wind and still muddy. All was ready by 5:00 PM. People began to arrive at 4:30 PM and at 5:30 PM the train rolled out with a fairly good load. As the train rolled by the parking lot we saw that there were about 50 cars parked and a convoy coming in. The crew was advised that each trip would be "load and go." The second, third, fourth, fifth and sixth trips were made with full cars - less than standing room only! Trips seven, eight and nine had fewer and fewer riders. A record number of trips, and what a night it was. I estimate that 600 people showed up and had fun. The weather was good, clear, but cold and the mud problem disappeared - it froze!

Overall our 1996 Santa Trains were a success. Everyone that visited the museum had a good time. Lots of favorable comments were heard and a lot of "Thank You's" were given to all the crew. And, the annual question was heard, "Are you going to do it again next year?" The annual answer is "Yes."

Now the "Thank you's" go to all that helped put it together and make it happen. Hap Manit, Norm and Barbara Holmes, Bruce and Sue Cooper, Lolli Bryan, Steve and Mary Habeck, Ken Roller, Edna Ede, Ken and Missy Iverson, Jim Holliwell, Gordon Wollesen, Tom Graham, Melissa and Judy McGrath, Vickie Krois, Jim Druckmiller, Ed Powell, Bob Carr, Marty Anderson, Harold Lantz, Don Borden, Vic Neves, Jordan, Barry and Zarah Levine and last but not least a special "Thank You" goes to Santa Claus, Rolf Gaudard.

After the first night's operations, a special crew meeting was held in the Beanery. We held the usual crew comment session and very quietly worked into the main reason for the meeting, a surprise Birthday Party. Melissa McGrath celebrated her eighteenth birthday. It was a real surprise!



CMO Report

By Hank Stiles

I hope everyone had a very nice holiday season and got at least part of what you wanted under the tree. I myself like the chance to get together with family and friends that we seem to be to rushed to take the time to appreciate at other times of the year. It is now time for a lot of us (me included) to go on a diet, lots of rabbit food, so as to be in shape for our upcoming summer at the museum.

As for things at the museum, we will be all right if it does not wash away in all this rain. We had a lot of snow at Christmas time, now all this rain has washed it away along with a good chunk of the Feather River Canyon. The word on the Union Pacific is that it will take up to a month to repair the track when it stops raining. At this point you can't get to Portola by car. I live in Sacramento and I can't get to Stockton to go to work, both highways 99 and 5 are closed. So those of you who are enjoying good weather, count your blessings, things could get worse, as we in central California can attest.

This summer at the museum we would like to get an

ALCo RS-2 in service and repair the air compressor on the ALCo B unit. We may need them this coming fall. Also we would like to replace the traction motor on our BLW DS-4-4-660, that along with the 100 or so smaller projects we will have to take care of.

A fleet the size of ours (larger than many short lines and some regionals) needs a lot of upkeep. With that I would like to invite all of you up to the museum the first full weekend of each month April through October for the Locomotive Maintenance Clinics. This is your chance to help out and learn at the same time. We all have a good time and it is so much fun when they run well.

So we would like to see as many of you at our museum as we can this summer, not only for the clinics but anytime you can. Please come up when you have the time, you won't be disappointed.

Until then stay dry if you can.

Hank