ON TRACK with your Director

Ed Carnegie:

Happy New Year and what a better year it should be! December 2011 will be a month to remember. It started out with a great visit from Cal Poly’s new President, Dr. Jeffrey Armstrong, and his wife, Sharon, to tour and experience Swanton Pacific’s Ranch and Railroad. Mary Ann and I arrived at SPRR Thursday afternoon, prior to their visit, to spruce things up a little before attending the luncheon, provided by the Ranch, for the President and his wife on Friday, Dec. 2. The next morning, Saturday, Fitz, Pete, and Richard arrived to share in a delightful two-hour, one-on-one visit with the President and his wife. They toured the entire railroad facilities, and concluded their visit with an enjoyable train ride to the wye and back.

Early the next week, permission was finally received to proceed with the final work to complete the bridge revetment stabilization. On Friday, Dec. 9, Pete, Fitz, Richard, Randy, and I set up equipment to start filling and tamping gravel into the void under the revetment. The job consisted of transporting the gravel to the bridge, using our side dumps on a flat car, and then shoveling the gravel into a shoot that guided it to where the gravel was needed. Vibrators were then used to move and compact the gravel under the revetment. The next day, Saturday, Scott, Ray, Robert, and Bruce joined us. We were able to finish the task, replace equipment, and clean up the area. It took us 11-hours to complete the job. Unfortunately during this same time, the water pump on our Massy backhoe broke. Fitz, Dave, and Richard worked on fixing it, but it meant we had to borrow the loader from the ranch. I was amazed how fast the bridgework went, but this was due to having so many of our volunteers involved in helping. My many thanks to all of you.

At the same time, Lou, Chris, Amy, and Mary Ann moved historical SPRR material from the Cal Barn back to the refurbished OSH Caboose in order to have the Cal Barn ready for the annual New Year’s Eve celebration. Sunday—was less hectic and other small tasks, along with track cleaning were concentrated on getting ready for New Year’s.

Volunteers began arriving on Thursday, Dec. 29. The locomotive and train crew: Marty, Randy, Scott, and Bruce made sure all systems were a go for the 1914, and made a steam run on Friday. Pete and I spent the better part of the day aligning and ballasting track at the wye along with fighting the weeds.

News Year’s Eve started early with a meeting to make sure everyone had a task and nothing was forgotten. Visitors arrived on and off all day long. The 1914 was fired up; it still had pressure from the day before, which meant that all steam systems were tight. The first run was after lunch, with another run about every hour until a break was taken for a very successful potluck in the Cal Barn. I estimate about 85 friends and neighbors attended. Geoff, and crew, did a wonderful job with the bonfire, and as tradition has been, Ken McCrary supplied his hot mulled cider. Every train ride that ran, one could not find an empty seat, which is about 150 people, and often the crowd left by the fire usually looked the same. Shortly before midnight, it looked like we still had about 300 guests, so the 1st run of 2012 was full.

A good time seemed to be had by all. It was often heard during the evening—this was the best New Year’s. THANKS to each of you for your help. Let’s ALL look forward to a GREAT 2012.
Cal Poly President, Dr. Jeffrey Armstrong admiring our 502

Scott loading gravel into shoot to fill void under revetment

UPCOMING EVENTS/PUBLICITY

NEW SOCIETY SUPPORTER
Garret Tollkuhn  Santa Cruz, CA

On behalf of the entire organization, we welcome you into our "train family" & we certainly look forward to seeing you at some of our next events. Many of our supporters may not recognize you right away, so please introduce yourselves so that we can get to better know you & vice versa.

Mary Ann Carnegie

Jan. 14/15  1st work weekend of the year
Feb. 11/12  work weekend
March 10/11  work weekend

Well, it looks like SPRR is now back on track, and once again it will be “business as usual” with upcoming scheduled events, workdays, Al Smith and Cal Poly Days again. With these will come lots of fun, but lots of hands will be needed to make these many tasks successful. So a major drive for us volunteers will be to help recruit new SPRR volunteers. Our organizations needs to continue to grow and develop and what better way than to get new members and make new friends.

With the New Year we also have a wide-open schedule of available Sat. night dinners to be hosted by our volunteers. Perhaps different ethnic nights could be done to coincide with the holiday[s] for that particular month—but any type of dinner is appreciated. Remember that for the Sat. night dinner: if you are the chef, bring the receipts for the cost reimbursement; $5.00 is charged for those staying to eat to help cover the costs.

Reminder:

Membership for Swanton Pacific RR is being accepted. See attached membership form.
TRANSPORTING AND STORING THE OVERFAIR LOCOMOTIVES AND CARS

Through its nearly 100 years, the Overfair locomotives and cars have experienced several relocations and storage sites. The engines have survived due to careful owners, but the wooden passenger cars have not survived.

The story begins with Louis M. MacDermot, who lived on an estate covering an entire block in west Oakland. In mid 1913, he was awarded the concession to build and operate an intramural railway at the Panama Pacific International Exposition (P.P.I.E.) due to open in February 1915. He started construction in his "back yard." As each Overfair locomotive was completed, it was hauled to the Oakland waterfront, put on a barge or scow, and delivered directly to the receiving dock at the P.P.I.E. The first completed locomotive was the work engine No. 1500, an 0-6-0T type. (Figures 1 and 2).

As shown in the first photo, the No. 1500 was loaded onto a heavy-duty dray that had large wheels and a low bed. How was that dray then taken to the Oakland docks? By a team of draft horses or by an early type of automotive truck? Notice the locomotive boiler lying on its side between the dray and the shop building. That suggests the No. 1500 was ready in late 1913 or, more likely, in early 1914. Perhaps that was the boiler for the No. 1915, which was never completed by MacDermot.

After the P.P.I.E. closed in November 1915, all the Overfair Railway’s rolling stock had to be transported back to the MacDermot estate in West Oakland. The locomotives were housed in sheds or stable/garages, but the cars were placed helter-skelter throughout the grounds, where they reposed, unattended, for 25 years. (Figure 5). A few of them were transferred in 1925 to the Little Puffer Railway at the San Francisco Zoo.

In late 1940, MacDermot moved the Overfair equipment to the Alameda County Zoological Gardens in south Oakland. Compare the dray used in 1940 with that used in 1914, Figure 3 versus Figure 1. An Oakland Tribune article on November 10, 1940 writes: "...Two of the locomotives and 13 of the tourist cars already have been moved to the Zoological Gardens. The third engine started there yesterday..." On July 5, 1941, the newspaper reported: "...half a dozen of the 40 passenger [that] they will use eventually have been refitted." That statement implies the remaining 15-20 cars of the 60 built in 1914-15 had already deteriorated beyond repair.
Figure 3: Loading an Overfair locomotive for transport from MacDermot estate to Alameda County Zoo Gardens in early 1940, L.M. MacDermot at right in dark clothes.

Figure 4: Loading Overfair passenger cars at MacDermot estate for transport to Alameda County Zoo Gardens, 1940.

The refitted cars had their roofs removed. The remaining cars, still with roofs, were placed in a field, Figure 6.

In 1944, attendance at the Zoo had decreased greatly due to wartime restrictions on gasoline, tires, etc, and to the long work hours in the wartime industries of the East Bay area. In declining health and in impoverish financial status, MacDermot was forced to cease operations and to move again.

To be continued.

Figure 5: Overfair passenger car stored on grounds of MacDermot estate in the 1930’s.

Figure 6: Overfair passenger car stored in a field at the Alameda County Zoo Gardens. Photo by Warren Miller and friends, May 17, 1942, prior to entering military service.

Note 1. The Alameda County Zoological Gardens has had many names through the years as it evolved from a private ownership to operation by a non-profit organization under oversight of the City of Oakland. It was also known as Durant Park at that earlier time. Finally, it assumed the more familiar name of the Oakland Zoo.

Note 2. Photo credits: Figures 1 to 5 were found either in the Oakland Tribune files or in Al Smith's collections with some duplications from both sources. In addition, SPRS member Doug Richter donated a copy of Figure 4 to us. Figure 6 was given to us by Warren Miller from his collection of personal photos.