



C&TS DISPATCH

VOLUME 35
WINTER

NO. 4
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Blockade: The Great Blizzard of 1951-52

as told by John Norwood

**Inspiring the Future: A Friends Educational
Experience for Children**

What Happened to Session D? A Summary

Restoration Begins on Express Car 163

2023 Work Session Schedule for A-D





C&TS DISPATCH

*Friends of the Cumbres & Toltec
Scenic Railroad, Inc.*

William Lock, Founder-1988

Vol. 35, No. 4 ❁ Winter, 2022

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C&TS DISPATCH

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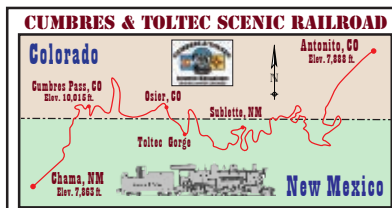
Assistant Editor — Jan Wright

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Editor Emeritus — Rich Murray

Email — cjames.nm@gmail.com

The *C&TS Dispatch* is published four times each year by *The Friends of the Cumbres & Toltec Scenic Railroad Inc.*, a New Mexico nonprofit corporation. The Friends is the official museum arm for the Cumbres & Toltec Scenic Railroad, a sixty-four mile-long Railroad and museum of railroad history and technology, operating between Antonito, Colorado, and Chama, New Mexico. The Railroad is owned jointly by the States of Colorado and New Mexico. As the museum arm, the *Friends* is dedicated to the preservation and interpretation of the Railroad. The Friends is an Affiliate Member of the *Heritage Rail Alliance (HRA)*. Family membership in the Friends is \$35.00 per year; outside the USA membership is \$50.00. All contributions are fully tax deductible and will be gratefully accepted. For information, please write us in Albuquerque at the *Friends of the Cumbres & Toltec Scenic Railroad, Inc.*, 4421 McLeod Rd. NE, Suite F, Albuquerque, NM, 87109, or call us at (505) 880-1311.



Denver & Rio Grande Railway: 1880-1886
Denver & Rio Grande Railroad: 1886-1921
Denver & Rio Grande Western Railroad: 1921-1970
Cumbres & Toltec Scenic Railroad: 1970-today

**The Cumbres & Toltec Scenic Railroad is both a
National Historic Landmark and a
State Registered Historic Site.**

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President's FORUM



Promoting the Friends

As I enter my nineteenth year as the Friends CEO, I need to pause and ponder. Members have commented that they enjoy my columns and I appreciate that. I always want my thoughts to remain relevant and interesting.

During this last summer and fall, the Friends enjoyed a very successful direct mail membership campaign, soliciting members from *Classic Trains* magazine subscribers in Colorado, New Mexico and surrounding states.. As of this writing, in early January, we have acquired 156 new members, approximately a 3% return from letters mailed. We are planning on another *Classic Trains* solicitation including a different group of states this year. To all of our new members, thank you for joining the Friends of the Cumbres & Toltec.

Given our recent recruitment efforts, it appears a good time to discuss the Friends' efforts through a different lens: I invite Friends members' to actively participate at the many model railroad and train shows around the country. These events represent many excellent opportunities to promote the Friends membership and volunteer activities, and the Cumbres & Toltec Scenic Railroad.

As this issue of the *C&TS Dispatch*

goes to press, we have members who have staffed or will be staffing shows in several locations. In January, the Friends were present at the **Dallas Area Train Show** in Plano, Texas and the **Amherst Railroad Hobby Show** in Springfield, Massachusetts, **TECO**, the **Train Expo Colorado** event occurring in Colorado Springs in February and Denver's **Rocky Mountain Train Show** that will take place in April. Along with C&TS management, we are preparing a major presence at the **National Narrow-Gauge Convention** in Denver from August 30th to September 2nd, 2023.

Our goal at these events is to market the Friends as an organization, what we're about and what we do, in order to recruit new members. Along with membership, the Friends has a rich history of providing a variety of volunteer opportunities for those who support our mission of historical preservation and a passion for the D&RGW's Narrow Gauge heritage. Along with our goal of member recruitment, these regional and national venues allow the Friends to be the ambassadors promoting the Cumbres & Toltec Scenic Railroad itself.

While the Cumbres & Toltec has crossed between New Mexico and Colorado for over fifty years, there are people who have never ridden or perhaps not aware of the C&TS. With the Friends' active presence at these shows, we can promote the Railroad as well as membership. We hope that our efforts help increase awareness and ridership; increased ridership keeps the Railroad on a financially even keel and provides a broader audience to observe firsthand what the Friends continue to accomplish and how we contribute to the preservation of the Railroad.

Are you aware of model railroad



On the cover: It's December, 1951 at Osier and a winter storm has settled over Cumbres Pass. This was nothing new for the men of the D&RG but this wasn't your ordinary storm. Heavy snowfall and wind froze locomotives, Rotary plows and railroaders alike for thirty-five days. The story, as told by Trainmaster John Norwood, first appeared in the October 1969 issue of *Trains* magazine Stay warm!

Photo by John Norwood, FCTS Collection, ERNG19520100-0035.jpg

or train themed events in your area? Are you interested in helping staff a local show or event? If you are not a regular work session attendee or docent—or even if you are—this is a fantastic way to volunteer and help the organization.

growing our membership base and as well as informing many audiences we normally do not reach. As an organization we are trying to make a concerted effort to place an emphasis on locating and staffing more of these events. If you are aware of a specific



Bill Kepner was one of many Friends volunteers who hosted the combined Friends and C&TS Railroad table at the Rocky Mountain Railroad Show in March, 2020. *Photo by Chris James*

We have the promotional materials in our Albuquerque Office as well as tabletop displays that we can ship to you for these events at our expense. We have also budgeted funds to underwrite shows' registration costs. Regardless of where you live, the Northeast, Deep South, Midwest, Great Plains or West Coast, we would welcome your willingness to help. If you have ridden the C&TS or volunteered for a work session your first-hand experiences will certainly enhance the promotion of the Friends and Railroad to the general public.

These efforts are extremely important and play a significant role in

event in your area or have an interest in staffing a show, please reach out to us. You may contact us by phone or mail at the Friends Albuquerque Office, e-mail Bill Kepner, drwg0570@gmail.com or e-mail me at timtennant@cumbrestoltec.org.

As always, thank you for all the support you provide the Friends!.


Tim Tennant



The 2023 Work Session schedule is different from previous years in that there will be no concurrent sessions in both Chama and Antonito. Sessions A, B, E, F and G will be in Antonito *only*. Sessions C and D will take place in Chama *only*. The reason for this change is the lack of support personnel when sessions are scheduled all along the line. See pages 4 and 5 for the A, B, C and D Work Session opportunities.

DON'T WAIT! JOIN THE FRIENDS OF THE C&TS!



2023 is going to be a great year for the Railroad and the Friends!

If you love trains, history and volunteer activities, JOIN US as we help preserve the "Living History" of the Cumbres & Toltec Scenic Railroad.

For \$35 a year, you and your family can become Friends and receive the quarterly *C&TS Dispatch*, train ride discounts, invitations to special events and the opportunity to participate in restoration projects each summer, along with the satisfaction of supporting and investing in the historic cultural heritage that is the Cumbres & Toltec!

Only \$35 per year for a basic Family Membership! Foreign: \$50

To join, send us this application (or a facsimile):

Name _____

Address _____

City, State, Zip _____

My check for \$ _____ is enclosed,
or

Charge my Visa / MC / Discover
[circle one] for \$ _____

Card # _____

Exp. Date _____

Signature _____

Email _____

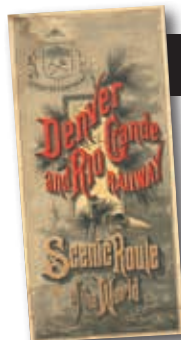
Mail to:

**Friends of the C&TSRR, Inc.
4421 McLeod Road NE, Suite F
Albuquerque, NM 87109
505-880-1311**

www.friendsofcumbrestoltec.org

**Already a Member?
Give this to a friend!**

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501(c)(3) of the IRS Code.
All contributions are deductible to the fullest extent
of the law. IRS# 85-036487



Friends of the C&TS: *TIME*TABLE

The 2023 Work Session schedule is different from previous years in that there will be no concurrent Sessions in both Chama and Antonito. Sessions A, B, E, F and G will be in Antonito *only*. Sessions C and D will take place in Chama *only*. The reason for this change is the lack of support personnel when sessions are scheduled all along the line. The 2023 schedule below, A through D, reflects these changes.

As of this writing, early January 2023, the Friends are in particular need for crew leaders for **Work Session Check-In** (Project 0210: C and D, Chama); **Friends Merchandise Sales** (Project 0222: A and B Antonito, C and D Chama); **Landscaping** (Project 0701: A and B, Antonito, C and D, Chama) and **Kitchen Volunteers**.

In addition, **volunteers** are needed for most of the season's projects at both Antonito and Chama and as well **Docents** (Project 0400) not only throughout the scheduled Work Sessions but throughout the summer season, on board the trains and in the Antonito and Chama yards. There are also volunteer opportunities at the Colorado Springs CRF.

Listed below is the abbreviated schedule for Sessions A-D, although remember that the project schedule is often quite fluid and may change throughout the season without notice. **Always check the FIDO schedule at bit.ly/3CIA8IA**. Registration begins March 1st. To register, visit: bit.ly/3iAJclp or scan the **QR code to the right**.



(TL = Team Leader “+ none” or “+ X” = indicates the number of volunteers needed.)

Support Services Projects					
Proj Num	Project Description	Session A 5/22 - 5/26	Session B 5/29 - 6/2	Session C 6/19 - 6/23	Session D 6/26 - 6/30
	Registration Deadline	5/15	5/22	6/12	6/19
0200	Chama restoration session Site Leader.			C. McMullen + none	C. McMullen + none
0201	Antonito CRF restoration session Site Leader.	J. Hickman + none	J. Hickman + none		
0206	Dispatch Editorial Photographer - Provides photography and editorial comment to the Editor of the Dispatch	C. James + 1	C. James + 1	C. James + 1	C. James + 1
0210	Work Session Check-In for Chama			TL NEEDED + none	TL NEEDED + none
0211	Work Session Check-In Antonito CRF	M. J. Smith + none	M. J. Smith + none		
0222	Friends merchandise sales - registration location.	TL NEEDED + none	TL NEEDED + none	TL NEEDED + none	TL NEEDED + none
0230	Food Preparation - Chama lunches and snacks.			TL NEEDED + 3	TL NEEDED + 3
0231	Food Preparation - Antonito CRF Lunches.	M. J. Smith + 2	M. J. Smith + 2		
0240	Tool Car Operation - Chama			C. McMullen + 1	C. McMullen + 1
0241	Bolt Car Operation - Chama			R. Brigham + none	R. Brigham + none
0245	Tool & Bolt Operation - Antonito CRF.	M. Smith + none	M. Smith + none		
0248	Paint Car Operation - Chama			F. Higgins + none	F. Higgins + none
0248	Lettering Coordinator - Stencil Car			P. Lounsbury + none	P. Lounsbury + none
0250	Carpentry Shop Operation - Chama			J. Hickman + 2	J. Hickman + 2
0262	Project Chronicing - Chama			S. McGee + 3	S. McGee + 3
0263	Project Chronicing - Antonito CRF	S. McGee + 1	S. McGee + 1		
0280	Work Session Preparation at Chama		B. Reib + 2		
0282	Work Session Close at Chama				B. Reib + 2
0294	Hauling & Vehicle Operation	B. Reib + 1	B. Reib + 1	B. Reib + 1	B. Reib + 1
0310	Safety Coordinator for Chama yard			C. McMullen (Asst. J. Engs) + none	C. McMullen (Asst. J. Engs) + none
0261	Inspection of AED Defibrillators.	J. Engs + none		J. Engs + none	
0311	Safety Coordinator for Antonito CRF	J. Engs (Asst. J. Hickman) + none	J. Engs (Asst. J. Hickman) + none		
0701	Landscaping Antonito Yard and Friends Ed Lowrance CRF / CSF complex	TL NEEDED + 2	TL NEEDED + 1		
0722	Car Painting Antonito CRF and AN based painting			D. Stewart + none	D. Stewart + none
0732	Car Lettering Antonito CRF		F. Pittroff + 1		

Friends of the Cumbres & Toltec Scenic Railroad, Inc.

0741	Caboose Annual Maintenance and Roof Repair	D. Atkinson + 1	D. Atkinson + none		
0779	Mechanical Maintenance - Antonito CRF	B. Kepner + 4	B. Kepner + 4		
1118	Restore UTLX Tank Cars 11036 and 11037 Operational Condition				
1197	Construct Period Trucks for Passenger Coaches	I. Kelly + 1	I. Kelly + 1		
1246	Restore UTLX Tank Car 11050 original GRAMPS car		C. Trunk (Asst: R. Worwag) + none		
1304	Restore Converted Stock Car 5774	D. Pyzel (Asst: B. Horky) + none	D. Pyzel (Asst: B. Horky) + none		
1332	Restore GRAMPS Tank Car 11056 to operational condition		C. Trunk (Asst: R. Worwag) + 1		
1354	Maintain and Repair MW02 to operational condition	J. McGee + 1	J. McGee + 1		
1360	Addition of a Covered Structure on west end of Antonito CRF.				
1363	Rebuild disassembled 9569 as an Idler Flat Car	I. Kelly + none			
1369	SHPO - Repair Telegraphphone booths, wood structures at key locations along the right-of-way.				
1382	Maintain, Repair, Upgrade, Paint & Letter Concession Box Car 3244.	D. Atkinson + 1	D. Atkinson + 1		
1389	Rebuild Box Car 3263 for use as Friends Stencil Car.				
1390	Railway Post Office Car 54 - Repair windows and windowsills then strip old paint and prime, repaint and re-letter	D. Atkinson + 1	D. Atkinson + 1		
1391	Rebuild Flat Car 6649 to roadable condition for MOW service	B. Oltmanns (Asst: B. James) + 2	B. Oltmanns (Asst: B. James) + 2		
1392	Box Car 3223: Install trucks, truss rods couplers, brake rigging, airlines, etc. to make car full operational (2023 - research and located needed parts)	D. Pyzel (Asst: B. Horky) + none	D. Pyzel (Asst: B. Horky) + none		

Projects in Chama, NM

Proj Num	Project Description	Session A 5/22 - 5/26	Session B 5/29 - 6/2	Session C 6/19 - 6/23	Session D 6/26 - 6/30
0700	Landscaping Chama - Yard and Gardens			TL NEEDED + 3	TL NEEDED + 3
0720	Car Painting - Chama Based			D. Stewart + 10	D. Stewart + 12
0730	Car Lettering - Chama Based				S. Jorgensen + 5
0760	Mechanical Maintenance - Chama Based			R. Lorentz + 4	R. Lorentz + 5
1017	SHPO - Stabilization and Repair of Coal Tipple			J. Sufkus + 2	J. Sufkus + 2
1186	Cosmetic Restoration Engine 483 and Tender for Static Display			R. Schoen + 5	
1286	Construction of Friends Storage Building			B. Conry + 2	B. Conry + 2
1300	Repair Office Car 04982: (i) deteriorated buffer blocks and associated hardware A & B ends, (ii) deficient safety appliances, and (iii) other minor defects found in a general inspection of the car. 04982 is a contributing asset.			T. Rider + 5	
1307	Install Sign Garden in lower garden area below the stairs on the west embankment in the Chama Yard.			J. Ferrell + 3	
1312	Reconstruct High Side Gondola 1000			M. Hagemann + 5	M. Hagemann + 6
1351	Reconvert P-Box 207 to Rider Box Car 3414			B. Stamm + 1	
1372	Joint Project RR / Friends Excavate Material, Install Retaining Wall, Swell, Sump Drain and Stabilize Track Bed			TL NEEDED + 5	TL NEEDED + 6
1375	Eagle Scout Project - Installation of Historic type double sided signage behind to the s/e side of the large fir tree behind the flag pole.			J. Engs + 1	
1376	Rebuild boxcar 3566 as a Hollywood Movie Boxcar (HMB) for public display			R. Young (Asst: D. Sowell) + 4	R. Young (Asst: D. Sowell) + 5

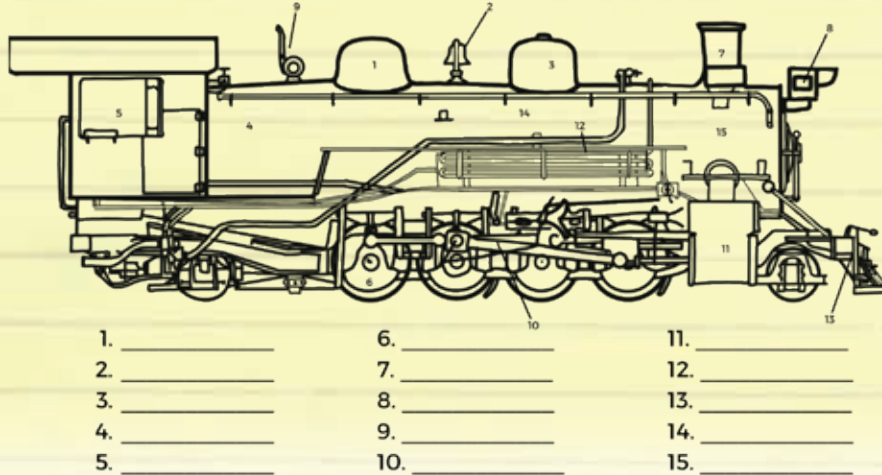
Projects Along the Right-of-Way

Proj Num	Project Description	Session A 5/22 - 5/26	Session B 5/29 - 6/2	Session C 6/19 - 6/23	Session D 6/26 - 6/30
0710	Removal of plant material along the Right of Way (ROW) that may impair SAFE and efficient Railroad operations. The ROW extends from the Yard Limit in Chama to the Yard Limit in Antonito. This is a high (1) priority Project				P. Davenport (Asst: R. Hassell) + 5
0740	Wood Preservative Treatment - Along the Line and Rail Yards				F. Higgins + 1
0750	Maintain All Railroad Signage Along the 64-Mile Long Track			J. Gross (Asst: M. Mahoney) + 4	

Inspiring the Future: A Friends of the Cumbres & Toltec Scenic Railroad Educational Experience for Children

By: Kathleen Walser and Melissa Sellers

Identify the Parts of the Locomotive



During 2022, a Friends' member found a document online created by Nan Clark and a team of volunteers in 2007. It was a fantastic educator's guide. When the PDF was shared with the Historic Interpretation Committee, led by John Ferrell, we knew this was a jumping off point for a new expansive education program. Nan's idea has now grown into a three-part education program that will not only focus on in-person activities but also include an in-depth virtual component. The goal of our education initiatives is to encourage children of all ages to learn about the Railroad, and inspire them (and their families) to come out and volunteer with us.

Our education program is being spearheaded by two moms, Melissa Sellers and Kathleen Walser. These two women have a vision to fill a need with these educational initiatives that will inspire children and their families as they learn about railroad history and how the Friends work tirelessly to preserve the Cumbres & Toltec Scenic Railroad.

Melissa is a mother of two. She started a science fair program in her kids' school district that has been going strong for 12 years. She brings so much insight to our education program. Her children, who have both volunteered with the Friends, are in college and high school. Melissa discovered the Historic Interpretation Committee this fall and has jumped in with both feet, playing a leading role in planning our education program.

Kathleen is a mother who is homeschooling her son.

In the past, she has been involved with Scouts BSA. She has experience with virtual education programs through her family's home school journey. Kathleen has a history degree and has been passionate about the C&TS and its history since she was in elementary school. She has been a long-time Friends member and is now the Friends' social media coordinator.

Field Trips

The first part of our in-person initiatives is a special field trip for local schools. We plan to partner with our docent team to achieve these goals. The local field trip will include a train ride, dedicated docents, yard tours, and a safety presentation hosted by Operation Lifesaver. Our field trip experience will show local schoolchildren how the Railroad, the Friends, and local communities are intertwined to form a cohesive partnership.

The plans for the field trips include inviting the 5th graders from the Chama Valley Independent School District and the South Conejos Independent School District. Our field trip program is still a work in progress, and we are working with the Railroad, local schools, and docents to iron out all the details.

Junior Engineer Program

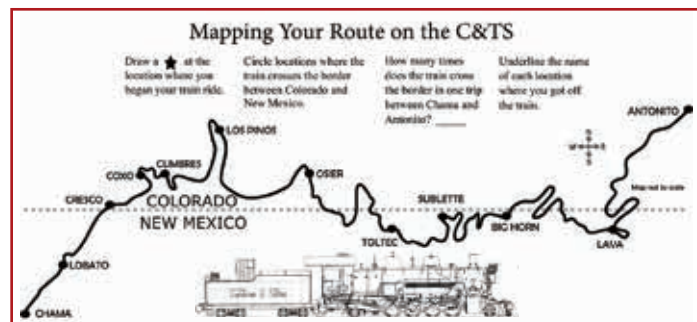
The Junior Engineer Program will focus on young railroad passengers. It will also be available to download

Note: Illustrations shown here are examples of content, not the actual size of some of the final educational materials.

online. This program is similar to Junior Ranger Programs at national and state parks. The handouts are designed with fun educational activities that will teach the children about the Cumbres & Toltec Scenic Railroad and its history. The hand-out was created to engage the kids in the experience of riding the Railroad and understanding what they see along the way.

Virtual Education Program

The third part of our program is the largest part. Our virtual education initiative will include many units about railroad history, historic preservation, how the Railroad works, and much more. We envision this as a tool to reach out to students from all walks of life and parts of the world who have an interest in trains. Each unit will include educational text, printable activity sheets, hands-on activities, educational videos, and more. The virtual program will use core subjects to engage children with the material. They will use math as they calculate things like changes in elevation and distance between section towns. They will focus on scientific principles as they discover how a steam locomotive works and build a simple DIY soda can steam engine. History will come to life as they read stories from the heyday of railroads. Then, they will use that historic perspective as they create a fictional journal of their journey west based on what they have learned. The wide variety of topics the virtual program will cover guarantees that there will be something everyone will enjoy.



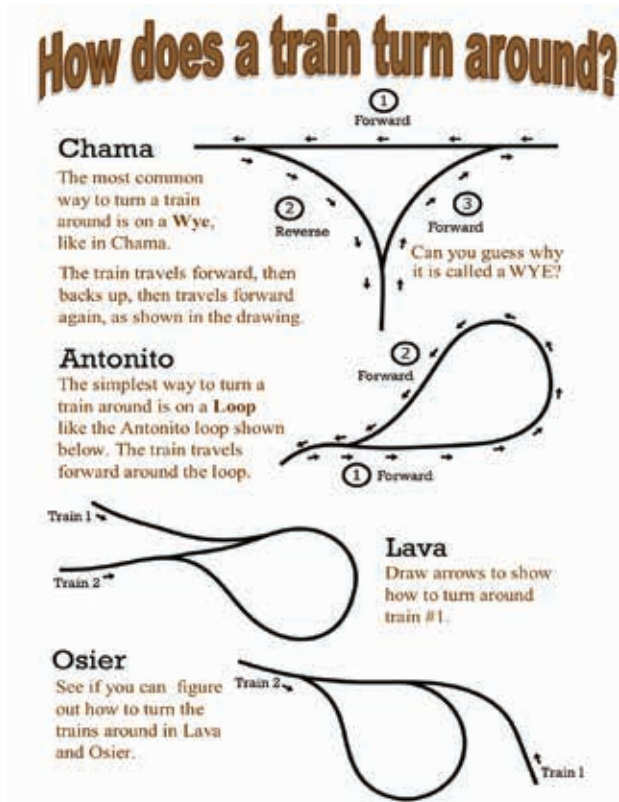
Our materials will be written and presented as text-based reading material, comic strips, and bite-sized chunks of information, all written for children to understand. This will allow younger children to work through units with the guidance of parents or teachers. It will also provide children with an opportunity to do their own research and dig deeper into topics they are interested in.

The virtual education program is a massive task. Our six-person Historic Interpretation Committee cannot get this done on our own and we need your help. Our first project is researching material. We have more than twenty main topics and a long list of sub-topics. These topics range from railroad history in America to types of railcars and their uses. They will also include topics like cultural expressions of the Railroad and its people, botany and animal life along the Cumbres & Toltec, and historic preservation and the Friends.

We are looking for people who have a special interest in these topics and volunteers who enjoy researching. We would never just send you out to blindly research, so we

have prepared a volunteer guide to aid you as you research. This includes a template for submitting your information, a guide for citing your sources, and ideas to help you research.

Along with research, we also need photos, videos, and artwork to add to our units. If you have a passion for visual arts, we would love for you to partner with us. We plan to include photos, drawings, and educational videos in each of our units that will bring the material to life as well as aid children in understanding the material. In addition to being part of our text-based material, art and photos will be included in our printable activities such as crossword puzzles, matching, map activities, and more.



Once we have completed the research phase, each unit will need to be fact-checked and proofread. We are also accepting volunteers for this portion of the project.

We are so excited about sharing our love for railroading and historic preservation with children. We want to thank you in advance for your encouragement and help as we embark on this new project. If you are interested in volunteering with the education program, please contact us at education@fctsrr.org or fill out our Google form: tinyurl.com/fctseducationprogram, available at the QR code to the right.



GOD MADE SNOW FOR FARMERS AND ARTISTS

But there were no farmers or artists around—just cold, tired, and hungry railroaders trying to survive

BUTTING into a snow-plugged cut just west of Osier, Colo., Rotary OY and Mikados 494 and 499 show what winter railroading is all about in the land of the Rio Grande's 3-foot gauge.

There is probably no better time than the Winter issue of the *C&TS Dispatch* to look back seventy years to the winter of 1951-52 and relive the incredible storm that literally froze the Railroad in its tracks over Cumbres Pass for thirty-five days. And there is no one better to tell this tale of endurance and survival than John Norwood. Why? He was there.

Norwood had a 37-year career with the D&RGW, beginning as a Telegrapher on the narrow gauge. He went on to become Dispatcher, Trainmaster, Superintendent, Assistant Vice President and Assistant to President Gus Aydelott. It's probably fair to say that no one knew the D&RGW narrow gauge system better than John Norwood. Along the way, he also took up writing and wrote several books about his railroad adventures. He passed away in Rio Rancho, New Mexico in 2008 at the age of 96.

This story was originally published in *Trains Magazine* in October, 1969 and is reprinted here with the kind permission of Kalmbach Media.

✍ Chris James, *Editor*

JOHN NORWOOD

photography / THE AUTHOR

I THE lonesomest sound in His universe is a blizzard wind blowing snow through ice-coated branches of spruce trees. Especially when those trees are in the throat of a mountain pass high in the San Juan Mountains along the Colorado-New Mexico state line. Especially if the sky is black but the land is white, and overriding the screaming wind is a quietness so intense you can hear each snowflake fall.

But most of all, when that wind has just bowled you over and you are face down in the cold smother of snow — all tangled up in the blizzard, your snowshoes, and a sled rope. Most of all, when you find yourself fighting panic that is almost tangible, and a gut-twisting cramp of fear in your stomach puts the taste of gall in your mouth.

The lonesome, southing wind is the voice of a sweet-talking siren promising warmth under the white blanket, whispering to you to quit fighting and relax in her white arms while you sleep with her — forever.

Cumbres Pass, on the narrow-gauge route of the Denver & Rio Grande Western Railroad, between Alamosa and Durango, Colo., was a siren. Over 10,000 feet in elevation, the Hill was like a beautiful woman — dangerous, alluring, always humming a seductive song. In the summer and fall soft and amorous; in the winter a vixen.

Cumbres was a siren in the image of Eve, the result of the world's first transplant. Eve, from the moment God created her from Adam's rib, was a tribulation to man. Some of the troubles she caused are still with us. She conceived sons who were farmers, and farmers need water for their crops. She conceived sons who were artists, and artists need beauty. So the Almighty created snow to make water for the crops — snow that falls in the winter to lie clean and white over the sleeping land and to mantle the tall spruce trees. Snow: useful, beautiful — and cruel.

In the winter of 1951-1952 Cumbres Pass had snowfall enough to make 10,000 farmers happy. It lay on the tall spruce trees and it lay on the land, drifted and torn into thousands of sculptured forms, magnificent vistas, and beautiful murals. So many, and of such beauty, that all the artists in the world could never match them.

But there were no farmers to look and gloat, no artists to see and marvel — only cold, tired, and hungry railroaders trying to whip the storm.

And more than that — simply trying to survive.

DECEMBER 28, 1951, at Chama, N. Mex., located at the foot of Cumbres Pass on the west side, was one of those winter days of turquoise sky and warm breezes. The kind of day the Chinook Indians called "Old Snow Eater." Trainmen and sectionmen went about their work bare-handed and in shirt-sleeves. The old snow on the ground turned to slush, then to water. The high ridges of the San Juans toward Cumbres Pass were clear and sharp against the cloudless blue. Barometers at all our weather reporting stations showed small drops but nothing to be concerned about. Weather reports from other sources promised continuing clear skies and warm breezes.

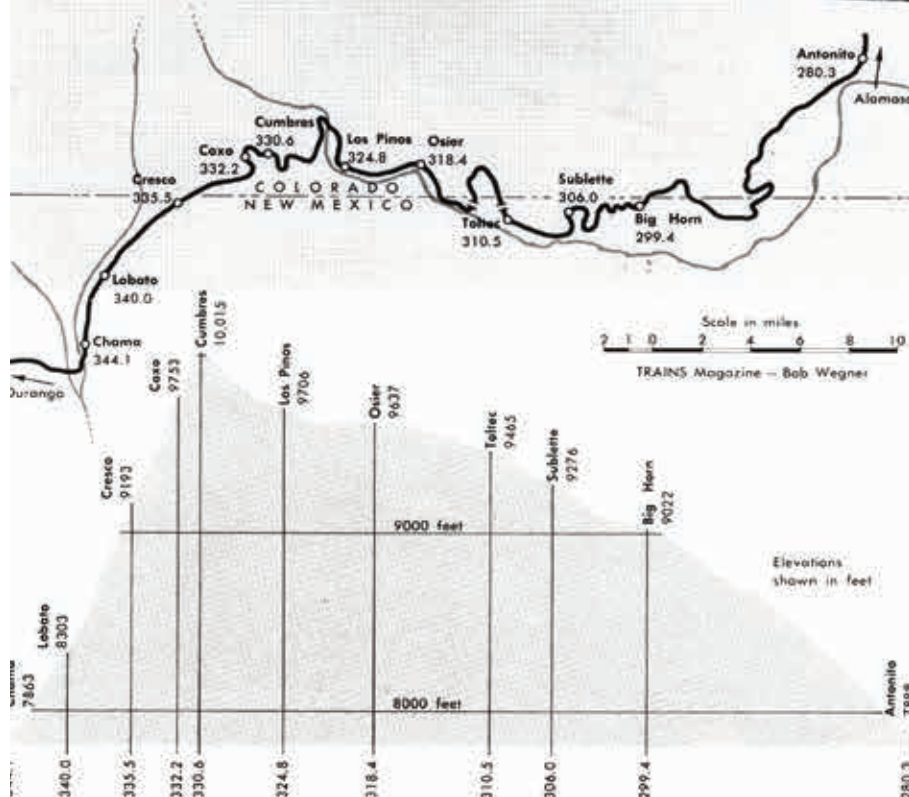
A Chama-Cumbres Turn departed Chama at 8:50 p.m. to shuttle a string of loads to the top of the Hill. Engineer Joe Dalla and Fireman Johnny Lira had been called for engine 491 to help this Turn to Cumbres, then run light to Alamosa. This was a routine move; the weather was good and the two men expected to be asleep in their own beds long before dawn. They reported for duty at the roundhouse lightly dressed, without heavy coats or overshoes. Each carried the usual Thermos of coffee, but their only food was a sack of candy "red-hots" Lira had bought with the change from his evening meal.

The Cumbres Turn had been gone from Chama about an hour when a heaving black cloud came racing in from the east, wiping out the stars as it came. From the cloud mass fell a misty rain. Those of us still awake and familiar with the vagaries of a Chinook gave the condition only passing notice as we headed for our beds. The train crews who were out in it did little more. Upon returning to Chama, the Turn's conductor mentioned to the night operator that the wind on top of the Hill was blowing hard and the clouds were hanging low and heavy. Several inches of new snow, together with the old, was drifting the setout track switches full.

None of this spelled anything to worry about. What the heck! Bad weather was expected over Cumbres Pass anytime between Thanksgiving and July 4. Long sieges or squalls of snow and wind were part of the daily fare. Most times you hated and feared the white stuff; at other times, when you were drifting downgrade and sit-



A SCENIC HIGHLIGHT of many a railfan's summer trip to the D&RGW narrow gauge — Windy Point, at Milepost 330.7 just below the 10,000-foot Cumbres summit — can turn into a railroader's nightmare of wind and snow during winter. Track in foreground is at Milepost 333; winter view was taken at a point farther to left than above photo.



ting in a warm cupola of a caboose on a still moonlit night so bright you could read print, it was different. You could look out across the wide, white alpine meadows and see blue-black spires of spruce trees sharply etched against the white—and you didn't want to be anywhere else. It was so ethereal it took your breath away. The most frustrated people in the world must be those who have been privileged to ride across Cumbres on a calm night when the snow was deep and the moon was full. Frustrated because it is beyond human capability to put the scene on canvas.

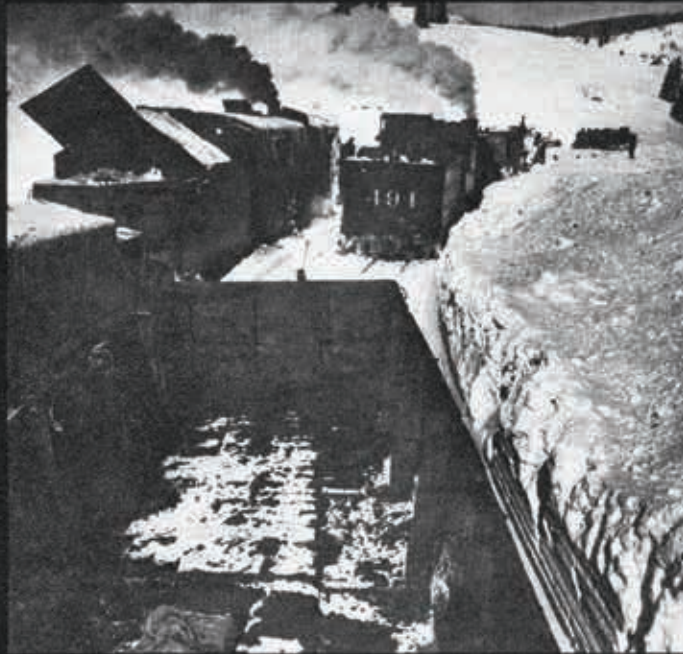
About 3 hours after midnight the callboy pounded on my door to tell me that the Alamosa train dispatcher wanted to talk to me. When you are Trainmaster of a district on a mountain railroad, a summons like this in the middle of the night is just part of the job. Stepping into the night from the warm lobby, I was struck by gusty winds and cold rain—a rain that was no longer mist but drops and trying hard to be sleet.

Walking to the station I had that queasy feeling that foretells trouble. What the dispatcher had to tell me removed any doubts. We had trouble.

THE 491, running light with Dalla and Lira on her, was overdue by the Big Horn annunciator. They hadn't called in, and the dispatcher had been unable to get either the Osier or Sublette section foreman to answer his night bell. This was worry enough without having an engine lost, for those isolated hill section foremen slept with the knowledge that when the bell rang they were wanted in a hurry.

That was the way the foreman at Cumbres responded when his bell was rung. He was only half awake when we asked him how the weather was. He left the phone off the hook while he went to look, and when he got the door open we didn't need his report. The phone acted like a microphone and the sound picked up was one you hear only when a real tomcat of a blizzard is blowing. The foreman finally forced the door shut, returned to the phone, and in a mixture of Mexican and railroad cuss words, confirmed our fears.

Again and again the bells at Osier and Sublette were tripped. From the strong answer-back we knew the bells were ringing, but no voices responded. I was ready to start climbing the walls, but I told the dispatcher I would hang on the phone while he checked airlines and the Weather Bureau for reports. Freak local storms over Cumbres often were of limited extent and didn't show up in the general weather predictions, but we had never before had conditions such as



STORY of a snowbound railroad striving to open the line and rescue a marooned locomotive: Rio Grande Rotary OY, which left Alamosa on January 1, pauses in Osier on January 4 after taking three days to plow out the last 5 miles of track immediately to the east.



THREE MILES west of Osier, 2-8-2 No. 491 has been stalled in a snowbank since December 29. On January 6, Rotary OY continues the clearing operation, boring out the first cut in a 2-mile stretch of railroad built on a canyon shelf above the Los Pinos River.

the Cumbres foreman was describing.

The reports we got had a sameness that made a man doubt his sanity. "Mostly partly cloudy, with rain showers extending east from the coast and a cold front that may bring snow and falling temperatures." The Weather Bureau did say that there were indications of a localized barometric low centering over the south end of the San Juans. An airline reported that a westbound pilot had encountered severe and unexpected turbulence in the same vicinity.

This wasn't any news to us—not by a long shot.

The Cumbres foreman was listening, and when all the reports had been relayed he broke in to ask what severe turbulence was. I told him it meant that the wind was blowing like hell over Cumbres.

He came back with, "They're telling me!"

A new voice cut in and said, "But it's blowing harder here at Big Horn." The voice was the Sublette section foreman, and he was at the old unoccupied sectionhouse at Big Horn. He told us that he and all the other men of the Sublette and Osier gangs were sheltered and had fire but no food. When questioned about the 491, his reply was that they had neither seen nor heard it.

The foreman explained that the previous day the two gangs had doubled up to transpose rail on a curve east of Sublette. Some difficulty had

been encountered, and it was almost dark when they put their motor cars on the rail to go to Sublette. They were away from the pole line and couldn't report in by phone, but the Osier men intended to tie up for the night at Sublette and to report their location from there.

They never reached Sublette. The first snow and wind hit as they started moving west. Both snow and wind were so severe that the motor cars couldn't keep moving. Deciding they could do better going downhill with the wind at their backs, the men unloaded all their tools and started east. The cars were able to keep moving for about 2 miles and then it became necessary to put them in the clear and to start counting ties. They took turns breaking trail in the snow and reached the Big Horn sectionhouse about midnight. There they tore up a floor and got a fire going.

At 6 a.m. the following morning the 491 still had not made an appearance and the storm was worsening. A snowplow train left Alamosa at 8 a.m. in the charge of T. J. Cummins, Road Foreman of Equipment, and E. N. Haase, Division Engineer. They were to plow to Big Horn, pick up the stranded sectionmen, then continue westward in an effort to find the 491. There no longer could be any doubt that it was stalled in the snow somewhere between Cumbres and Big Horn.

Running blind against the snow and an opposing movement of uncertain location was hazardous to the nth degree, but there was no alternative if Dalla and Lira were to be rescued. A veteran of the narrow gauge, Tom Cummins, was on the lead engine, and this bettered the odds.

About 40 miles west of Alamosa near the Lava watertank the plow outfit started to find snow. However, it was able to proceed without difficulty to Big Horn, and the hungry sectionmen were picked up. The plow proceeded westward with Cummins reporting from each telephone booth along the way. His reports had a frustrating uniformity. The 491 had not been found; the wind was hurricane force and driving an unbelievable amount of wet, heavy snow before it. Conditions were close to being hell.

In midafternoon Cummins reported from Osier that they had not yet found the 491 and were going on west. It was no longer a case of being close to hell. It was hell.

The next word from the plow again came from Osier. The time was 10:30 p.m. on December 29. The plow had reached Milepost 319, about 1 mile west of Osier. At this point they were temporarily stuck in deep snow. After they had jarred loose, it became necessary to back into Osier for water. As the caboose passed over the west switch, it derailed on accumulated ice. Everything bad that could happen



THROWING SNOW almost 200 feet into Los Pinos River canyon, Rotary OY has nearly reached Milepost 321 by midafternoon on January 6. Scene may look peaceful, but the cannonade of exhausts is deafening. Meanwhile, rotary OM reached Cumbres from the west.



STEADFASTLY plowing ahead, steam-powered Rotary OY chews through hard-crusting snow and blasts it into the cold Colorado air. Two sweating bare-backed firemen inside heave coal into the hungry firebox as the stack erupts a steady stream of black smoke.

followed in rapid succession. The Jordan spreader, a small flanger, and one pair of tank wheels of engine 492 also went on the ground. Conditions had reached the point where men could not work in the storm. Fires on the engines were banked and everyone took shelter in the Osier HQ.

At Chama we made up a second plow train, and rounded up and provisioned sectionmen to go along. Moving out eastward we found no snow for the first 5 miles. Then, at an elevation of 8500 feet, conditions changed. Snow depth gradually increased. So did the velocity of the wind. It began to hit us, coldly and fiercely.

The day was spent slugging it out with deep drifts—the throttles were kept down in the corner while the fireboys bent their backs and moved their scoops. At times it was necessary to use sectionmen and snow shovels to dig out around the engines to free them from drifts.

Finally, just west of Milepost 331, a mile west of Cumbres, we got it. A snowslide full of trees and rock had run in a location where a slide had never run before. Before the lead engine could stop we were buried cab deep in the hard, dirty baby avalanche.

It was apparent we could not free ourselves that night. On foot I broke through to Cumbres and reported our situation. The men of the Cumbres gang then returned with me to the stuck snowplow.

We fired up an acetylene flare to better assess our situation. It was bad. More help would be needed from the Chama end to pull the buried equipment from the snowslide. Power and crews for the relief train would have to come from Durango, several hours away. We were not going to be able to break loose to reach Dalla and Lira for some time.

A council of war was held on the caboose. A decision was reached that Conductor Frank Young would be in charge and, weather permitting, would try to shovel the equipment partly free while awaiting the relief train from the west. I would return to the phone at Cumbres to arrange for this relief, rest a few hours, then go on east to try to find the 491. At Cumbres on the first trip I had found a pair of snowshoes, a light toboggan, and food. Snowshoes and I were working partners of long acquaintance.

Back at Cumbres I contacted the dispatcher and found that the division Superintendent was also on deck. From my description of the situation there was no question about the need for assistance, and the Superintendent said he would take over and get it started. He repeated to me the news he had received from Cummins at Osier.

While I was informing the Superintendent of my plan to leave Cumbres on snowshoes in a few hours, Cummins butted in on the phone conversation to tell me I was nuttier than a

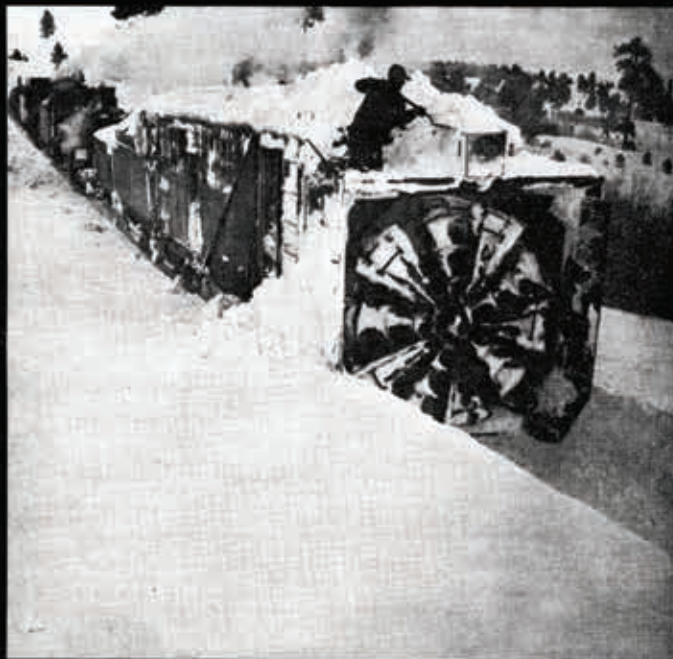
fruitcake and that I was talking suicide. The boss took it up and said he was ordering me not to do it. The discussion was settled by my telling them both to go to hell and hanging up the phone.

I hadn't much more than warmed the blankets and fallen asleep when the night bell rang. The Superintendent had got the Chief Engineer down to his office in Denver and he wanted to talk to me. He didn't mince words—he just wanted to be assured that I thought there was a chance to get through on snowshoes. I told him there was.

He said, "Okay, boy. The best of luck."

A LITTLE after 5 a.m. the toboggan was loaded and I tied on the snowshoes. The first mile was sheltered by a grove of spruce; several cups of coffee and a hot breakfast rested comfortably under my belt. Cummins was right. I was as nutty as a fruitcake, for I was enjoying the feel of the wind and the motion of the snowshoes—"Knees tight, hips loose, pick up the toe and drag the tail."

There is a trite old saying, "Pride goeth before a fall." Swinging away from the tree-belt shelter into the wind funnel at Tanglefoot Curve I got the fall. Tanglefoot Curve was built to cross a steep little valley near the edge of the escarpment. All the relatively warm air from the lower elevations funneled through this gap



SOMETIMES the rotary bites off more than it can chew. The discharge becomes plugged with heavy, soggy snow, and a man with a shovel has to clear it out. Two days later, mechanical problems forced Rotary OM, working east from Cumbres, to retreat for repairs.



ONLY when the wing started scraping the rocks at the right did the crew realize that the rotary had derailed here. Rerailing was not a problem: the rotary was backed out and the wheels always followed the flange marks in the ice and came back to the rails.

and was compressed and spewed out in a jet. Winter and summer it was always the same. I knew it but became careless.

A dozen steps away from the trees that jet stream caught the toboggan and sent it hurtling by me, then hit me between the shoulder blades with a second blast — and I was face down in the snow. The tail of one racquet was jammed in the webbing of the other and the sled rope was tangled in the whole mess. My pride and cockiness left with the wind that knocked me down.

Suddenly the sharp edge of panic became real. Breakfast was a cramp in my stomach and the hot bitter coffee came up with a taste of gall. Being frightened is one thing; being just plain scared is another. The instinct to survive told me to get up and beat a retreat to Cumbres and safety. But then I realized that there was so much snow, wind, and darkness that I didn't know in which direction safety lay.

Desperation generates strength, if not courage. When I finally had the webs untangled and was on my feet, I turned my back to the wind and started moving — and kept on moving. It was slow and rough. The tilt of the snowshoes told me I was going downhill; the wind at my back pushed me along.

After what seemed an eternity (actually it was about an hour) without knowledge of direction or distance,

I ran into our telegraph wires. The snow was so deep they struck me across the chest. Holding one wire in my gloved hand as a guide, I kept moving and at last came to one of our high wooden snow fences and was able to orient myself.

SNOWSHOEING is never child's play, even on good snow when the weather is calm. On December 30 on Cumbres Pass the snow wasn't good and the weather wasn't calm. After making a few thousand snowshoe tracks in the snow, I left the snow fence and reached a point where there was supposed to be a telephone booth beside the tracks. At the time, there was only drifted snow, but using one of the webs as a shovel I dug down and found the booth. Hearing the dispatcher's voice washed away all the lonesome and lost feelings.

Neither of us had much news. At Osier everyone was under cover waiting for a break in the storm. A couple of men had made it from Milepost 331 to Cumbres and had reported that everyone was okay. Rotary OY was out of Alamosa heading west and Rotary OM was being prepared at Chama awaiting the arrival of power and crews from Durango.

We still didn't know where the 491 was, its situation, or the fate of Dalla and Lira. The phone booth was at Milepost 323. If the 491 wasn't found in the next couple of miles we might have something more se-

rious than an engine stuck in the snow. East of Milepost 321 the rails are on a partly natural, partly man-made shelf high above the Los Pinos River. A derailment along this shelf could be catastrophic.

Between the phone booth and Milepost 322 there was no engine. Now came the time of sweating out what was beyond each curve. One curve, two, three, four curves. The next one had to be the place or we really had something to worry about.

Rounding that last curve there was nothing to see but a smooth surface of snow extending unbroken from the low hogback across where the track should be and into the valley. Dejection and a reluctance to pass this point slowed me down, and I guess I lowered my eyes a little.

The next thing I knew I was blind, coughing, and my face was being burned by something hot. Johnny Lira was throwing a scoop of hot ashes out and he didn't see me in time to stop his swing.

The 491 was completely buried in the drift at Milepost 321. Dalla and Lira were tired, hungry, and sleepy but at the bottom of the tunnel they had kept open for air it was warm and dry.

Lira and Dalla told me their story.

Shortly after leaving Cumbres about 11 p.m. on December 28, they had noticed a low cloud moving down the valley of the Los Pinos River. They had seen a lot of these in the



THE ROTARY won its battle with snow, but could not digest rock. At the first crunch, the pilot stopped the wheel and the rotary was backed away so workmen could clear the rocks by hand. After reaching Milepost 321, Rotary OY returned to Osier that night.



FOLLOWING an unsuccessful attempt to pull out 491 on January 7, workmen built fires under the frozen cylinders. Two mornings later they made another try. The locomotive came out with such ease that the engines jarred the cook car, spilling pork, beans, and cook.

past and weren't disturbed. At Milepost 327 they hit heavy snow. By the time they reached Los Pinos the fall was much heavier and the wind was a gale, but they kept moving.

Rounding the curve at Milepost 321, they saw a wholly unexpected mountain of snow ahead of the engine; but before the brakes could stop them they were into it, stalled and buried.

At that point they did the only logical thing for men without heavy clothing or food to do. They banked the fire, dug a ventilation shaft, closed the storm curtains, and settled down to wait for someone to come after them.

THE MEAL we cooked in Lira's scoop held over the coals in the firebox tasted better than a state dinner. The smoky-tasting coffee was better than a vintage wine. And it was heaven to strip off my wet clothes and stand before the firebox door and soak up heat while they dried. I learned then how Sam McGee must have felt when his partner cremated him on the marge of Lake Lebarge up in the Yukon.

Warmed through and dressed again, I left the pack of food with the two enginemen and took off for Osier. They would have to wait until I could return with heavy clothes and warm footwear before they left their cave in the snow.

If any sun had been shining so

there could have been a sunset, I would have reached Osier at sundown. But there was no sun—only the low clouds and snow. But with dry clothes and a full belly the struggle from the buried engine to Osier was a breeze. I was stepping high and feeling high as I walked into the sectionhouse. The two man-size slugs of Taos Lightning that Tom Cummins had been saving for medicinal purposes went down smoothly and then exploded like a Fourth of July in my bloodstream. I was *really* high, and feeling a lot different from when I was face down in the snow about dawn.

During the night the soft, wet snowflakes turned to ice pellets. The air was full of them and they were being driven from the direction of the snowbound engine by a 50 mph wind. It was not humanly possible to face into that combination.

Near midafternoon the pellets turned to flakes once more and the wind lost part of its fierceness. I reached Milepost 321 about dark, too late to try to get Dalla and Lira back to Osier that day. We ate a little and made preparations for morning.

At midnight we drank a toast of strong black coffee to the New Year of 1952. There was no steam to blow the whistle, but the wind helped us celebrate by supplying a screaming, howling uproar. During the first two hours of 1952 it blew a fury greater than anything that had gone before.

Then came ear-splitting quietness and absolute calm. The only sound made by the storm was that of the feathery flakes of snow falling.

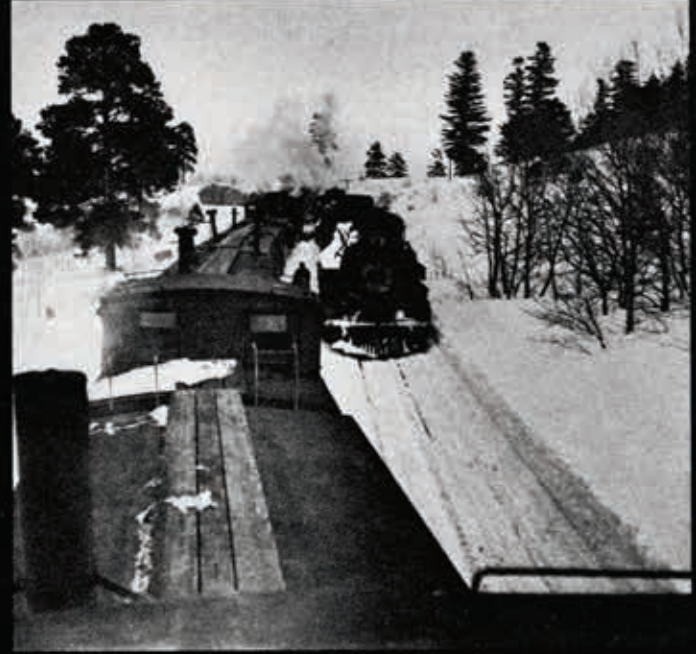
WHEN a pale light in the east announced daybreak it was still calm and snowing. We made a last pot of coffee over the coals before we dumped the fire and drained the engine. Dalla and Lira didn't shed a single tear as we departed from Milepost 321. No regrets or fond farewells were voiced by either—they just wanted to get going.

The trek from Milepost 321 bordered on being anticlimactic. The recollection I have is one of plain hard work as I packed a snow trail for the two men behind me who were without snowshoes. I do remember vividly that about a half mile from the end of our trip I suffered a severe attack of *mal de racquet*. Stay off snowshoes and you will never experience *mal de racquet*—the most exquisite pain known to man. The only relief is to scream once in a while deep inside and to keep moving to a protected place where you can warm and knead the muscles in your calves.

We walked up to the door of the Osier sectionhouse at 10:10 a.m. on January 1, 1952. I untied the thongs of the snowshoes, stuck their tails in a snowdrift near the entrance, and right at that moment, didn't care whether I ever tied them on again.



THE FIGHT is over, and on January 12 a train leaves Chama to pick up the cripples and clean the line. During the height of the wind and snow on December 30, author Norwood crossed the 408-foot long, 115-foot high bridge at Milepost 319.98 on his hands and knees.



AT BIG HORN SIDING just before dark, everything is switched together in the best order for the run to Alamosa. After living for days in the snow-covered San Juan Mountains, the men gave the dispatcher a final order, "Tell our families we're almost home."

In the meantime, Rotary OY out of Alamosa got to Milepost 313 and stalled. A team of bulldozers made it as far as Milepost 310 coming in overland and had to give up. Rotary OM opened the line east of Chama as far as Cresco, 5 miles west of the outfit in the slide at Milepost 331.

Shortly after noon the snow stopped at Osier, and a few patches of watery blue sky appeared. We immediately advised the Alamosa office of the apparent favorable weather change. A plane had been provisioned and was being held in readiness for this news. Ten minutes after our message was sent, the plane, piloted by Norman Kramer, one of the great mountain flyers, was in the air. The bombardier was a Rio Grande Roadmaster.

Ten minutes after takeoff we heard the plane overhead and raced outdoors to watch the bombing and pick up the food to be dropped. Kramer and his plane came barreling in from the west through a hole in the clouds on his bombing run. Halfway to us the plane whipped over with the wings perpendicular, and big brown parcels of food spewed from the cabin door. Six bombs kicked up six craters as they hit the snow in a precise pattern.

Kramer leveled off, wagged his wings at us, and disappeared in the overcast. Minutes later Rotary OY at Milepost 313 was being bombed, but under conditions much more

hazardous than at Osier. Milepost 313 is in the canyon with the high rims about a mile apart. Kramer had to make his run by coming in on a steep dive from the south wall and pulling out before colliding with the north wall. Three such runs were necessary to drop the six bombs on Rotary OY. Accuracy was phenomenal. One bundle struck a tree above the cook car and slid downhill over the snow right through the open door. The cook picked up the sack, removed the protective padding, and started stowing away the groceries. He was convinced this was the *only* way to have supplies delivered.

At Osier there was more jubilation. For the past 24 hours we had been on short rations consisting of unsalted, unseasoned frijoles and unsalted tortillas. We were drinking nothing stronger than hot water. Ordinarily frijoles and tortillas make prime food—if they are salted and seasoned. They don't when they aren't. The redeeming feature of tortillas is that the longer you chew them, the bigger the lump in your mouth becomes. By the time you finally swallow, your food intake has been considerably increased. Too, they're a long time in digesting.

The second day of the new year brought more blue sky and little or no wind. Kramer made two more drops of food to us at Osier. Rotary OY had moved from Milepost 313 to Milepost 315 and was out of the

canyon. Kramer bombed them with more food too.

In midafternoon of the following day a detachment from the Army Mountain and Cold Weather Command, guided by our Division Water Service Supervisor, came in over the snow from the north. Their vehicles were two versatile DUKW's—light sea landing craft that operated efficiently as snowcraft. They brought more food, but best of all they gave us mobility less physically demanding than snowshoes.

As you find wherever there are soldiers, the DUK's were covered with graffiti. Among the wisecracks and bits of philosophy had been written in big letters: "Unit of Railway Operating Battalion. Ride at your own risk."

We promptly took advantage of the DUK's and traded rested crews from Osier for tired men from Rotary OY. The trade was made about a mile east of Osier. The snow was so deep and packed that a hole was not to be bored through to Osier until late on January 4.

On the west side of Cumbres, Rotary OM had not been idle. All the marooned employees at Milepost 331 were taken back to Chama on January 2. The next day all the stalled equipment was dug out of the slide and towed to Chama. The line west of Cumbres was ready for the OM to start plowing to a meet with the OY.

From the first light until after dark on January 5 at Osier we rerailed equipment—starting fires and getting up steam in the engines we had killed earlier—until we were ready to drop. On January 6 Rotary OM arrived at Cumbres at 10:05 a.m. and plowed a hole to the east end near the start of Tanglefoot Curve. Tunnels were dug to the doors and windows of the telegraph office, and an operator opened a point of communication. The OY working west from Osier reached Milepost 321 and returned to Osier for the night.

On this date, too, the forces at Osier were counted and a selection was made of those who would remain. The rest were shuttled by DUK's to a highway head about 10 miles from Antonito. The only dissension in the ranks during this entire operation occurred while I was selecting the men who would be taken out on the DUK's. Dissension is too mild a word—it was open mutiny. Nobody, including Joe Dalla or Johnny Lira, wanted to go home.

The next day Rotary OM opened the line 2½ miles east of Cumbres, bucking deep, hard-packed snow all the way. The Osier group spent the day digging out around the 491. One pull was attempted near dark, but the dead engine would not budge. Condensation had formed ice in the cylinders and the pistons would not move. It was necessary to build fires around them to slowly heat the iron.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

RAILROADING and snow have been no strangers to John Norwood. His father was a boomer telegrapher; and John, who was born in 1915, went trapping on skis and snowshoes before joining D&RGW in 1937. He has held both operating and office posts, and at present is Director of Service Planning and Quality Control. **I**



A party in the charge of Conductor George Andriko with engine 494 and a caboose was left to keep the fires burning properly during the night. The others returned to Osier for rest and water.

On January 8 Rotary OM had to return to Chama for repairs, more coal, and general reoutfitting. The two units of the Railway Operating Battalion made a round trip to the highway and shuttled in additional food. The OY spent the day redistributing the dwindling coal supply among engines and rotary. We dug nearly a carload of old weather-slacked coal from below the rotted stringers of an old coaling platform. A carload of coal is a lot of wheelbarrow loads, and it takes plenty of sweat and muscle to push that many loads up a snow ramp high enough to dump over the side of an engine tender. One engine with a cook car ran to Milepost 321 to relieve the group watching the fires and to do some more digging around the engine.

Word came back from the group at engine 491 that by morning the cylinders would be free of ice and ready to move. At daybreak we moved from Osier to release the dead engine from its cave in the snow. After arriving at the scene of operations, we cut off the cook car and bunk cars about 300 feet from the working face and tied them down with hand brakes.

The engine that was to make the pull moved to a coupling with the 491. The coupling was tried, and sand dried on a scoop in the firebox was spread on the rail behind the drivers. One final inspection was made to see that we hadn't overlooked anything and we were ready.

No matter how careful you are, you can always overlook something. We didn't take into account how much work had been done around the 491 and that the fires which had melted the ice in the cylinders had to a degree warmed up a lot more metal. Neither did we take into account the skim of ice left on the rails about 100 feet east of the two engines. We surely never expected the 491 to come out of the snowbank as easily as she did.

This combination caused the only injury suffered by anyone during two weeks of hazardous work. At the same moment the 491 broke loose, the cook lifted a 5-gallon pot of boiling-hot frijoles from the stove to move to another location. The tow engine came onto the skim of ice; the engineman felt what was happening and set the brakes. The two engines didn't slow the least bit—until they came to the cook car.

The first sound heard after the bang of couplers coming together

hard was a series of squawks, howls, and Mexican cuss words—all indicating pain. Came the coupling and the cook lost his balance—and his hold on the pot of hot beans. Beans and man for an instant were airborne. The beans, with a slab of salt pork in them, landed first. Next, the cook made a perfect two-point sit-down on the pork. The toboggan ride across the floor mounted on the hot, greasy slab of pork through the wash of hotter beans unfortunately was solo. No photographs or tape recordings are in existence to pass down to posterity.

For several days afterward at least we could say that we had the most upright cook anywhere. He couldn't bear to sit down, and what little sleeping he did was on his stomach.

We ate lunch at Milepost 321—without beans—and 2 hours later we had the 491 sitting on a spur at Osier.

Rotary OM almost made it to Los Pinos, but it had a breakdown and the crew reported that they would return to Chama for repairs at daybreak.

The return to Chama was uneventful and repairs were made rapidly. The OM headed east again at 3:45 p.m. During this time the OY opened the drift at Milepost 321 and worked on west.

At 8:15 p.m. on January 10, two ugly brutes covered with snow, icicles, and cinders stood side by side at Los Pinos. Cumbres Pass was open, and those two dirty hunks of iron and wood pushed by a bunch of mountainbred railroaders once again had kicked the Hill in the teeth. We weren't foolish enough to have any notions that it was the last round for the winter.

Just before midnight on January 12 we had moved all the equipment—including the dead 491 and Rotary OM, which was by now completely inoperative—to Alamosa. The men went home to get reacquainted with their families. The OY outfit was spotted for resupplying and for steaming off the icicles and snow. The OM went into the backshop for heavy repairs.

UP AROUND the top of the world, where storms are conceived and born, a second generation was in the making. The birth came on January 17. The baby was a big, sprawling, brawling brat, meaner and trickier than the one we had just put to bed.

The snowbirds flocked to the now clean and resupplied Rotary OY and headed back for another round with the Hill, that bitch. It took us until February 1 to hogtie her and to show her who was boss.

But that is another story. **I**

ADDITIONAL PHOTOS FROM THE 35-DAY BLOCKADE

John Norwood shot many photos during the great storm that didn't make it onto the pages of *Trains*. Here are some that are in the Friends of the C&TS Photo Archives.

Captions are from the original source photos



FCTS Collection: ERNG19520100-0005.jpg

On December 28, 1951, D&RGW Locomotive #491 was running light heading east from Cumbres and got stalled in deep snow three miles west of Osier. This caused a 35-day snow blockade until Locomotive #491 was finally rescued. Long Creek, Colorado (MP 321).



FCTS Collection ERNG19520100-0055

D&RGW cars completely buried under a snowdrift at Cumbres Pass with drifting snow up to top of the snowsheds and depot. January, 1952.



FCTS Collection RD023-032

D&RGW #494 is rescuing a dead K-37 491 on Cumbres Pass, Colorado, January, 1952.

D&RGW narrow gauge train at Osier, Colorado, January, 1952. The scene includes two cabooses, one Rotary plow, one 2-8-2 Mikado and two Army snow vehicles.

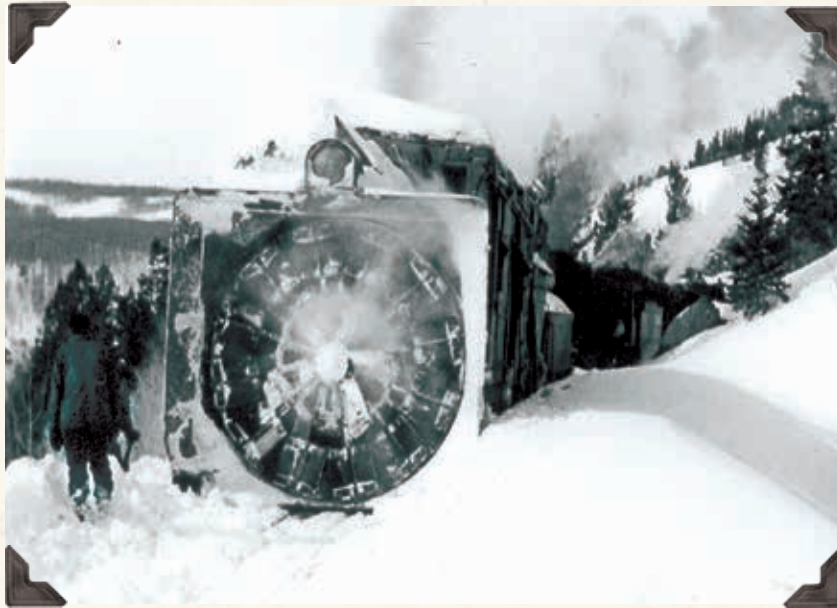


FCTS Collection ERNG19520100-0085



Clearing D&RGW Rotary
Snowplow OY's chute in deep
snow cut on Cumbres Pass,
Colorado.
January-February, 1952.

FCTS Collection RD023-035



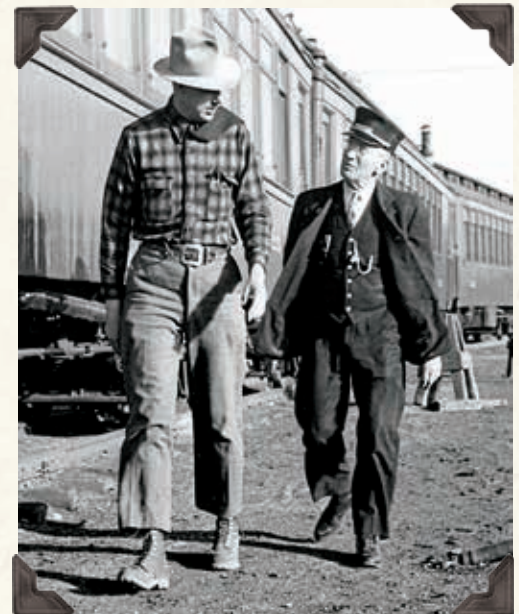
D&RGW Rotary Snowplow
OY idling near Osier, Colorado
January-February, 1952.

FCTS Collection RD023-038



Army snow cats at Osier coming to the rescue at
the snow blockade. Osier, Colorado, January 6, 1952.

FCTS Collection ERNG19520100-0005



FCTS Collection ERNG19500400-0015

D&RGW Trainmaster John
Norwood and Conductor Stanley
Edmiston walking along the
San Juan Train in the Alamosa
coach yard. Stanley Edmiston
was the conductor on the last
westbound San Juan on
January 31, 1951. Photo by
Wallace Kirkland, April, 1959.

Whatever Happened to *Session D*?

by Paul Davenport

WILDFIRE THREAT, WATER ISSUES CAUSE TURBULENCE FOR FRIENDS WORK SESSIONS

Background photo by Michael Mee

Extrême wildfire conditions and then a crippling municipal water outage in Chama combined with other challenges threw one monkey wrench after another in the planned 2022 lineup of preservation and restoration work sessions and projects of the Friends of the Cumbres & Toltec Scenic Railroad.

Many projects, including most of those scheduled in An-

tonito, took place as planned during seven summer sessions. In Chama, the D Work Session was canceled within hours after work started, and along much of the Railroad's right-of-way, forest closures limited access. So while a lot of scheduled work got done as planned, several high priority projects fell by the wayside, awaiting resumption in 2023. Nor did it help that volunteer participation was down compared with previous years, shrinking the overall workforce.

A prime example of delayed important work: Planned roof repairs were not made to the historic Section House in Sublette, the mid-line location where road access was cut off when the Carson and Rio Grande National Forests were closed to the public because of the wildfire threat. That threat was elevated by extreme dryness in the region and commitment of all available fire crews to fight blazes in New Mexico and

other states. The Friends requested an access exception for

Sublette after the Railroad received a waiver so contractors could continue repairing 2021 fire damage to the Osier Dining Hall, a key part of the Railroad's passenger service.



The roof of the Sublette Section House was in serious need of repair and restoration, but access to the site was through national forest lands, was closed to any access.

Photo by Don Atkinson

“The answer was no,” said John Engs, Project Committee chairman for the Friends.

That left the Sublette Section House with only temporary protection from ice and water on a part of the roof where multiple rafters had broken and were in need of replacement.

Monsoon rain beginning in late June allowed the forest closures to be lifted in late June, but it was too late to start the Sublette work, Engs said. “The crews (scheduled to work in Sublette) had already come and gone.”

With the Section House still needing roof repairs and no guarantee that the temporary ice and water shield will protect against severe storm dam-

age this winter, Engs said in September as the 2022 work sessions’ season wound down. “The major concern that we have is Sublette. We will put the priority to working Sublette in 2023,” said Engs.

Similarly, D Work Session’s cancellation meant that the annual Chama-based project to trim trees and brush along the right-of-way – designated a high priority by the Friends for fire prevention and safety – couldn’t do any cutting. That crew at the beginning of D retrieved its saws and equipment from an off-site storage location but had to turn around and take the gear back when the work session was called off.

Weeks before D, the tree and brush crew was among several ROW projects that were canceled outright because of the forest closures and their crew members reassigned to other projects. But then days before D, the tree and brush crew was reinstated, with the proviso that it work



How do you illustrate a crew that wasn’t there?

Photo by Paul Davenport

only on west-side areas not in the national forests and only with manual hand tools. That changed early Monday of D when the crew got word that battery-powered saws were OK but not gas-powered saws.

But D’s cancellation later that morning scrapped the

crew’s plan to work in the Narrows, near First Crossing and elsewhere.

So with no trackside cutting until 2023 and with the heavy rain that started in late June, “that means that we’re going to have a lot of growth,” Engs said.

In the Chama yard, C Work Session was fairly normal for the car-painting crew but that project was hindered by the beginning of monsoon rain as that week wound down. The water distribution system leaks forced the

Chama water outage cancelling the crew’s second week of work, said Team Leader Don Stewart.

“We started working in the morning and got word from (Site Leader) Craig

(McMullen) that they were running out of water in a lot of places (in Chama). That wasn’t a total surprise because there was word during C that the water system was struggling to overcome the leaks. The work session cancellation



Session D was short-circuited by water issues but that didn’t stop everything...at least not at first. Photo by Michael Mee

in Chama was announced around noon.” Stewart said a few members of his crew remained in Chama to scrape cars to prepare them for painting but that others staying in hotels without water left town.

Two reefers were primed during C but the D cancellation means those painting jobs, including at least one that had been planned to be part of a fall photo charter train, will have to wait to be finished in 2023, Stewart said.

In the meantime, “they’re white. They look like ghosts.”

Chama’s water situation eased late in the week of the system outage. By then, however, “that was too late to get anybody (back) to do anything,” Engs said.

While some volunteers in Chama in the work session were staying at locations that had wells or other water sources, canceling the Chama portion of D was the correct call, Engs said.

“I think we did what we needed to do. There was no way

that people staying in hotels would be able to continue to stay there. You have no water. You have no toilets. There was no way it was going to work.”

Earlier, the fire threat and forest closures prompted the Railroad to delay the start of its operating season for a month. That forced cancellation of early runs of the fireman and engineer student trains, so they weren't available to move cars from Chama to the Ed Lowrance Car Repair



Call waiting...until 2023.

Photo By Michel Mee

Facility in Antonito for needed work by Friends crews, Engs said.

The cancellation of early student trains also sidelined a planned Friends project to rehabilitate seven of the Railroad's telegraph booths that needed to be transported to Antonito from remote locations along the ROW.



From this....



...to this. All it needs is the rolling door. Photos By Michel Mee

However, in a twist, more work than expected got done on construction of a new storage building for Friends equipment, with some being done in both C and D but also later in the summer. A few volunteers unexpectedly showed up in Chama in mid-August and an ad hoc

“While it was a letdown, we managed to cram a lot of progress into just a few hours of work, and we believe we’ll be able to hit the ground running next year.”

~ John Ferrell

crew that also included Friends members who summer in Chama was able to install the roof, Engs said.

Stewart, a Friends volunteer since 1994 and the orga-



Painting at the Ed Lowrance CRF was able to continue uninterrupted.

Photo by Don Atkinson

nization's current board chairman, said he hadn't previously experienced anything like the D Work Session shutdown but that he's optimistic that Chama's water situation will be resolved by 2023 and that there won't be another severe wildfire threat.

“At least that's my prediction,” Stewart said, citing the heavy monsoon rain.

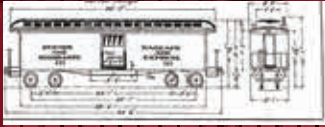
Count on the crew that was to have erected a Sign Garden interpretive area near the Chama Depot to be ready to resume work in 2023, said

John Ferrell, the team's leader. “While it was a letdown, we managed to cram a lot of progress into just a few hours of work, and we believe we'll be able to hit the ground running next year.”

Engs also expressed optimism about 2023's work sessions, adding, “I just hope our volunteers are (optimistic) as well.”

Added Don Stewart, “I think by 2023 we might get back to somewhat of a normal thing.”





D&RG EXPRESS CAR 163 RESTORATION AT THE COLORADO SPRINGS CRF

D&RGW No. 163 is a railroad express car of the type known as a “BE,” a baggage express car. The type came into use in the late 19th century to provide transfer of baggage for passengers and express shipments, later known as REA, the Railway Express Agency. Constructed by the D&RG at the Burnham Shops in Denver in 1881 and was originally numbered 15. In 1885, it was renumbered 163. The Car was in regular service until passenger service was discontinued. During the later years it ran as part of the San Juan consist between Alamosa and Durango, Colorado until January 31, 1951. In June 2022, the Car was relocated from the Friends Car Storage Facility in Antonito, Colorado, to the Friends’ Colorado Springs Restoration Facility located at the Pikes Peak Trolley Museum where restoration began. It is expected to take between five to seven years to complete.

Photos by Don Atkinson



Restoration work on D&RGW No. 163 began this October and continued every two weeks during the fall and into the beginning of winter. Even before the protective canvas “cocoon” was installed, work began on the exterior of the car, removing sheet metal that covered some rotten siding. Once the cocoon was in place and steps were installed for interior access, the metal roofing was removed on the south side of the car and the crew began documenting the interior’s condition. The interior siding was found to be in fairly good condition which will make the removal and replacement of the floor much simpler. With much of the exterior siding removed, inspection and replacement of the sills and cross members could begin. In the beginning of the new year, Friends finished removing the interior floor and discovered historic wood-shaving insulation installed when the Car was built in 1881. Work will continue through the spring and intermittently during the summer when Chama and Antonito work sessions don’t get in the way.



Protection from the elements for both rolling stock and personnel.



Inspection of the interior for restoration planning.



Removal of the rotting siding revealed needed structural work.



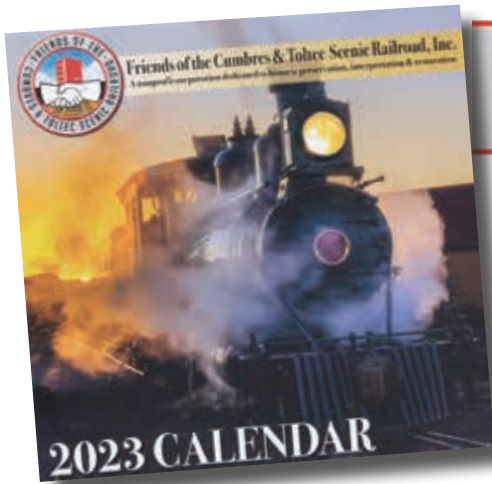
Rotten cross-member framing was replaced as needed at the sill plates.



The interior floor was removed which exposed both the frame and original 1881 wood-shaving insulation.



Inside and out, a lot of scrap was produced.



FRIENDS
OF THE CUMBRES & TOLTEC
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Submission deadline is **February 15th!**
See submission requirements and
guidelines at:

<http://bitly.ws/z52u>

Friends of the Cumbres & Toltec Scenic Railroad, Inc.		
Statement of Financial Position		
December 31,		
	2021	2020
ASSETS		
Current Assets		
Cash & Cash Equivalents	\$ 391,830	\$ 239,300
Receivables	\$ -	\$ -
Inventory	\$ 12,291	\$ 13,888
Prepaid Expenses	\$ 15,144	\$ 14,689
Total Current Assets	\$ 419,265	\$ 267,877
Property, Furniture & Equipment - Net	\$ 551,506	\$ 612,976
Investments, Unrestricted	\$ 545,182	\$ 648,442
Investments, Permanently Restricted	\$ 90,150	\$ 90,150
Collections	\$ 241,343	\$ 340,212
TOTAL ASSETS	\$ 1,847,446	\$ 1,959,657
LIABILITIES & NET ASSETS		
Current Liabilities		
Accounts Payable and Accrued Expenses	\$ 41,227	\$ 24,266
Deferred Revenue	\$ 154	\$ 230
TOTAL CURRENT LIABILITIES	\$ 41,381	\$ 24,496
Net Assets		
Net Assets without donor restrictions:		
Reserved For Future Operations	\$ 250,000	\$ 250,000
Total designated	\$ 250,000	\$ 250,000
Undesignated	\$ 1,097,828	\$ 1,258,089
Total net assets without donor restrictions	\$ 1,347,828	\$ 1,508,089
Temporarily Restricted	\$ 458,237	\$ 427,072
TOTAL NET ASSETS	\$ 1,806,065	\$ 1,935,161
TOTAL LIABILITIES AND NET ASSETS	\$ 1,847,446	\$ 1,959,657

Statement of Activity		
December 31, 2021		
Support and Revenue		
Grants and Contributions	\$	446,226
Member Dues	\$	160,993
Work Sessions and Merchandise	\$	61,249
Charters net of expenses	\$	8,944
Investment and Interest Income	\$	1,412
Other Income	\$	1,253
Total Support and Revenue	\$	680,077
Expenses		
Program Services	\$	511,116
Supporting Services		
Management and General	\$	127,465
Fundraising	\$	170,595
Total Expenses	\$	809,176
Change in Net Assets	\$	(129,099)

To review a full set of audited financial statements, go to our website at <https://www.friendsofcumbrestoltec.org>, then go to ABOUT: BOARD and scroll down to 2021 AUDITED FINANCIAL STATEMENTS.



Friends of the Cumbres & Toltec Scenic Railroad, Inc.
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On Monday, October 24, 2022, the Friends of the Cumbres & Toltec Scenic Railroad got a good taste of winter railroading with the return of the *Toltec Rattler*, a charter trip celebrating the 50th anniversary of the first *Toltec Rattler* charter on the reborn Railroad in 1972. The anniversary train ran from Chama to Big Horn and back. Although the day was cold with fresh snow and low temperatures in the 20s and highs never reaching the freezing point, the sun came out to create a very interesting day for photography. *Photo by Don Atkinson*

Inset photo: *NGRRA Telltail*, Vol. 1 No. 4, November, 1972. *Photo by Russell F. Smith*