

**THE  
MARKER**  
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ALBERTA PIONEER RAILWAY ASSOCIATION  
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**RAILS IN THE NORTH WEST**

*by George H. France*

The casual observer of Canadian National (CN) freights highballing across Alberta on the main line will note solid trains of loaded grain hopper cars, heading for the West Coast or Great Lakes terminals; unit coal trains headed for West Coast export; box cars of paper pulp, chemical fuel and oil tank cars and bulkhead flaw loaded with lumber headed for the USA. These trains were marshalled in major yards such as at Edmonton, but the various loads originated on branch lines, regional railways, and short lines. Lines that wound deep into mountain valleys, or pushed through dense forest and muskeg. Older, lighter, but less powerful engines struggled to haul the loaded cars over steep grades and often-indifferent track and deliver them to the main line. These wilderness lines offer attractive but sometime strenuous adventures for motor car tours.

Come then, and take a look at some of these northern lines.

The summer of 2002, I had the opportunity to work with two American "Speeder" motor car trips over northwestern Alberta and BC rails. As local railway historian, I provided history and trackside milepost guides for the former Northern Alberta and Great Slave Railways, and rode on the Northern Alberta Railways (NAR) West and BC Rail lines. This is a review of the lines as I evaluated them.

Canadian National still owns and operates Edmonton, Dunvegan Yards to Smith. (Mile 130.9)

RailLink Mackenzie Northern, owned by Rail America, operates the system from Smith to Hay River. (Mile 377 ex-Roma Junction)

Smith to McLennan is in good order with considerable tie replacement over the last several years. McLennan is still the main Divisional Point and Headquarters for Mackenzie Northern.

The old NAR main line is truncated at Girouxville (279.7). MT cars are stored here and farmers load producer cars. Unit grain trains are loaded at Falher Agricore Terminal.

RailLink had major teething troubles learning to work the 2.2% uncompensated Peace River hills with older model Geeps. In the dry seasons the locomotives started many grass and bush fires, the worst burning out Tolko's High Prairie OSB mill's entire winter log storage yard. Traction motors were burnt out at an unacceptable rate. The operation is now stabilized, utilizing six-axle units, mostly leased CN SD-40s. Trains still have to double and even triple the southbound grades.

The Daishowa-Marubeni Pulp Mill, ten miles north of Peace River, sees a daily turn from McLennan. This was regularly pushed from Duet Junction to the mill with a caboos leading. There is a section of bad track where the grade is sinking close to the river, so the

locomotives now load the train in both directions.

The old Great Slave Railway from Roma Junction to High Level is in fairly good order with fuel, oil and lumber loads. The Meikle River trestle at mile 80 is overdue for heavy maintenance. North of High Level, the track is in marginal condition with slow running. The only traffic is fuel and oil tanks for transloading to barges at Hay River.



Roy Smith, President of the Prince George Rail Museum (left), poses with author George France at Mackenzie, BC.

The NAR line to Hines Creek now ends at the Cargill fertilizer warehouse, a half-mile west of Grimshaw (65 ex-Winagami Junction). This section is still owned by CN and leased by Mackenzie Northern. The wooden elevators at Grimshaw stand silent, but two farmer groups load producer cars on either side. The La Prairie Group, Highway Maintenance shop is adjacent to the track and they have heavy lifting equipment to change out traction motors on demand. Although the rails are gone, the old UGG wooden grain elevator still operates at Hines Creek, leased to local farmers to store grain.

Another American-owned company operates Alberta RailNet from Swan Landing on the CN Main to Grande Prairie, the former Alberta Resources Railway. Grande Cache Coal Mines are shut down, but there are prospects to reopen a new site. At present some coal is hauled in from Mountain Park Subdivision to fuel the ATCO Power plant (coals to Newcastle). The line shows the effects of heavy traffic with corrugated rail and could use a rail grinding service. It is interesting to see that Alberta RailNet is offering individual car loading service to all customers. Every spur has cars spotted for grain, fertilizer, feed, seed, oil and fuel, lumber and scrap iron yards.

With the severe drought in the north, grain traffic will be very light for the next year and the US softwood lumber duties will restrict that traffic, so the short lines will be hard pressed to maintain sufficient business. This makes it hard for them to maintain track and equipment.

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(RAILS continued from Page 1)

The old NAR main is operated north to Rycroft, the site of three new concrete grain terminals. This is overbuilding, and the UGG plant a few miles out of Rycroft may be destroyed as surplus. Rails remain as far as Wanham (17 miles east) where a hardboard plant is being commissioned. The derelict canola crush plant at Sexsmith is being re-configured to a glue factory for the OSB mills, but is not using rail service yet. The spur to Spirit River is used for storing MT grain hoppers.

The line north of Grande Prairie has seen tie replacement but is noticeable for short rails, some only four feet, suggesting broken rail patches. There are many low and step joints. Such are of con-



Southwest Motor Cars tour at Dawson Creek, BC. Author's note: "Car on left is Prince George Rail Museum. Paul Roy - Jim Harte. Next is Mike Heaton's A4 which he kindly let me ride on." (Photo: George France)

cern to speeder operators, as the light, short wheelbase can bounce badly and can derail on them.

Just north of Woking the tracks traverse some very unstable ground as they cross the Saddle River. There is some very bad track that shows evidence of derailments and it is possible the line may have to be relocated to better ground.

Alberta RailNet still operates track west to Beaverlodge, Albright and Hythe to service two remaining grain points, but service is only as needed. Alberta Transportation would like to see the rails taken up and the trackbed used to twin the #43 Alaska Highway, but this work was put on hold at last Alberta government budget.

From Hythe to Dawson Creek the track is owned by CN but embargoed, allegedly because of a weak trestle at Tupper.

The South West Motor Cars trip got through this section of 50 miles, but with extreme difficulty, with weeds "as high as an elephant's eye", five barb wire fences across the rails, and the Snake River road at Tupper paved right over the iron. The suspect trestle was no problem and simply looked to need maintenance. This was a section that even the hardest "railriders" would not wish to repeat, but this line from Grande Prairie to Dawson Creek should be retained, as we shall reveal presently.

The Agricore grain terminal, an oil loading dock, and a feed and seed mill on the CN side of Dawson Creek are all serviced under contract by BC Rail. The old NAR Station Depot is beautifully preserved, a true memorial to its service as the loading off point for building the Alaska Highway during World War II.

## B.C. RAIL

Dawson Creek is a very active rail point. Louisiana Pacific Pulp Mill and Louis Drefus Group's new grain terminal require daily service. There are several other grain, fertilizer and oil loading facilities.

The first obstacle on departing Dawson Creek is the Alaska Highway road crossing. The BC Rail tour escort switched on the crossing lights but road traffic, not seeing a train actually crossing, ignored them. Flagmen were sent out 200 feet on either side, but even then, two vehicles passed the flagmen, screeching to a halt when they saw a flag-waving hirail starting to cross. Maintenance-of-way vehicles do not have right of way, so road crossings are always a hazard to motor car operators, and great vigilance is required.

The track to Chetwynd entails several grades in excess of 2% crossing the Pine River and descending to Chetwynd, so big power is required. A few miles out of Dawson Creek, the rails cross the Kiskatenu River on a high wooden trestle. This is a very high-maintenance area due to several miles of unstable ground. It may become necessary to relocate the track a couple of miles away, a major undertaking.

A failure of the track here could be alleviated by routing trains over the Grande Prairie Sub, which could be easily re-activated: Chetwynd is the junction with the line to Taylor, where oil, chemicals and sulphur arc loaded; Fort St. John, a major oilfield service and lumber town; then 250 more miles north through the wilderness tundra to Fort Nelson. Trains haul processed lumber and raw logs from this point.

In the longer term, if the Railway to Alaska becomes reality, the line would go from Fort Nelson. It would then be very attractive to route the oil trains over the Dawson Creek-Grande Prairie subs to reach the refineries at Edmonton.

On all the northern B.C. Rail lines there is active rail replacement underway. There are lengths of Continuous Welded Rail (CWR) going in on curves and several experimental sections of concrete ties on severe curvature points. Dragging equipment detectors, solar-powered, are installed at critical points, with major detector plants at sixty-mile intervals. Generally good running track, but with noticeable low joints.

Mackenzie is another hive of activity, but it is all lumber-oriented, and suffering from the US duties. The daily Mackenzie Turn out of Prince George is a hundred-car train drawing four six-axle units: a far cry from the thrice weekly "switcher" with a lone Alco hauling ten cars that I witnessed some years back. Lumber is the lifeblood for BC Rail, and the industry is being paralyzed by the US duties, which forebodes lean times for this railway.

## TUMBLER RIDGE

Conceived as a political railway, not as an economic one, Tumbler Ridge has been one expensive headache. It was built through some high mountain wilderness and required two tunnels: the Sentinel Tunnel, five miles long; and the Wolverine, full of hydrogen sulfide gas, three miles long. Both are very wet with water cascading from

the walls and roof. They are located on the south side of the valley, because of severe avalanche chutes on the north faces; nevertheless, avalanches regularly destroyed the electric catenary overhead. Two years ago the electric locomotives were shut down and mothballed at Prince George. They will never run here again: the catenary is now a shambles, and modern diesel technology has improved their operating capabilities beyond the electrics, which cannot move from under the wires. But the long, wet tunnels are not ventilated, and it takes several hours for the air to purge after diesels have pulled a heavy coal train through.

The Quintette Mine is closed, being un-economic at present coal prices. There are possibilities of re-opening it if prices rise, but there is no firm commitment at this time. So, in September, BC Rail crews lifted the rails from Murray Shops around the Quintette loading loop. The Bulmoose mine is to close early in 2003 and the Agri-Tec loadout will shut down.

When traffic ceases on the Tumbler Ridge line, nature will soon wreak havoc with the track. The line is all CWR, but with some low joints in the tunnels that send chills up a motor car operator's



Author George France at Tacheda Junction, BC. Author's note: "Flagging is an essential safety procedure."

spine. BC Rail will be anxious to transfer this good rail to its main lines; it is too valuable to leave idle.

It is all good CWR track down into Prince George, but with some bad joints: One gap was measured to be over two inches between rail ends.

Prince George is a maze of lumber operations, all rail serviced. As soon as the speeder tour cars were stopped in the busy BC Rail North Yard, three trains headed north: a hundred-car unit coal train for Tumbler Ridge, followed by another full train to Chetwynd, Dawson Creek and Fort Nelson, and the third, the Mackenzie Switcher. It's a busy railroad today, but lumber is in big trouble and coal is grinding to a halt.

The tour cars crossed over the Fraser River on a high bridge and descended to the interchange with CN Rail. It was a slow process of negotiating access to a foreign country or another railway company, but actually just moving from one busy yard to another active one.

A speeder rail tour is an education in itself providing an inside look at railroading at work. 📷

## MEMBER NEWS

ALAN VANTERPOOL will be giving a talk entitled "The Role of the Railways in the Formation and Subsequent Development of Prairie Communities" to the Edmonton District Historical Society. The meeting will be held in the McQueen Community Hall, 10825 McQueen Road, at 19:30 on Thursday, January 30.

The first half of the talk will be similar to the one Alan gave at the 2002 Annual General Meeting of the APRA. The second half will cover the period from 1914 to the present.

Admission is free. Goodies, coffee and juice will be served. To get to the venue, proceed west on 107th Avenue past the traffic circle on 142nd Street. Then take the first turn north (i.e. to the right), pass by a Baptist Church. The Community League will be on the right near Archbishop MacDonald Catholic High School.

## OUR THANKS

TO THE MANY people who have contributed their time, money and artifacts to keep the Association and the Museum a living historical resource for Alberta and the world.

Special thanks go to **Leona Baldwin**, whose generous donation subsidized the publication of this issue of *The Marker*.

## MONTHLY APRA MEETINGS - WINTER SCHEDULE

JANUARY 14 (2ND TUESDAY)  
FEBRUARY 4

(MEETINGS ARE usually held on the first Tuesday of each month in Room 112, Eastglen Composite High School, 11430 - 68 St., at 1900 hours. All members welcome. For further information, contact Hans Huizinga at (780) 473-9045.)

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## RAILROAD REPRINTS

*The Museum has acquired a large collection of old issues of Railroad Magazine. As a service to its members, selections from these magazines will be reproduced from time to time in The Marker.*

*Here is the second of three parts of an extended article from the March 1942 issue. Note that all original spelling and grammar is preserved.*

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### SECTION-CAR (PART TWO)

*by Bob White, Section Foreman, Grand Trunk Western; Secretary-Treasurer of Harmony Lodge 108, Brotherhood of Maintenance of Way Employes*

THE old reliable hand-car would probably still be in more general use except for the fact that it demanded too much of a section man's time and energy—and the railroad had other uses for them. Both the men and companies were ready to give a hearty welcome to any section-car which could get crews over the track faster.

The problem of speed scarcely bothers the resourceful gandy dancer who works on the Manitou & Pike's Peak cog railway—at least not in the evening. At the close of each day, I learn from Gerald M. Best of Beverly Hills, California, the section man coasts home down the mountain side on a specially-built velocipede which is equipped with cogs. But you can bet he doesn't pump his way up the hill in the morning.

Back in the 1870's pioneer settlers at Hayes City, Kansas, along the Kansas Pacific lines, used to spend their Sunday afternoons scooting along the rails in a hand-car equipped with an eleven-foot mast and bellying canvas sail. With a brisk prairie wind behind her, the contraption could do up to forty miles per hour—a speed which, according to a contemporary journalist “rivals that of the fastest express trains.”

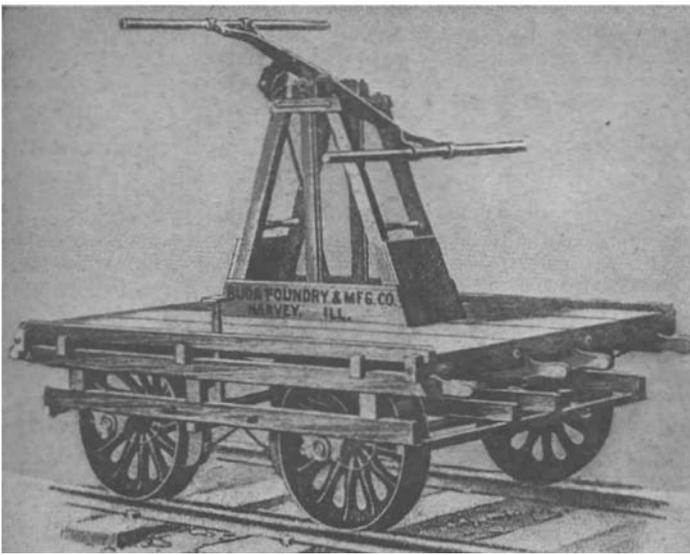
“Sailroading” received official recognition in 1875, when C. J. Bascom, a KP official, converted a hand-car by equipping it with eighty-one square feet of sail to convey repair parties to pumps, telegraph lines and section jobs along the pike. Bascom's railboat was six feet long, carried four thirty-inch wheels and weighed about six hundred pounds, yet she once made an 84-mile run in four hours, over a curving section of track and with a full load!

These sail-cars used on the KP were amazingly versatile. With their canvas properly set they could tack or point almost right into the wind. But they were not the first vehicle of their kind. Back in 1829 the Baltimore & Ohio had been rigging square sails on some of their push-cars to transport section gangs. The B&O sail-cars were not built as efficiently as were the later ones on the KP.

Sail-cars are still in use in South America. At Antafagasta, Chile, each morning a section gang numbering about twenty-five men clambers aboard their two sail-rigged track-cars on the British-owned railway there and scoot along before a strong morning west wind to the place where they are working, five or ten miles from town. When their day's toil is finished the men climb back on their inland ships, reverse the sails, and navigate back to camp—driven now by a prevailing east wind that springs up each evening.



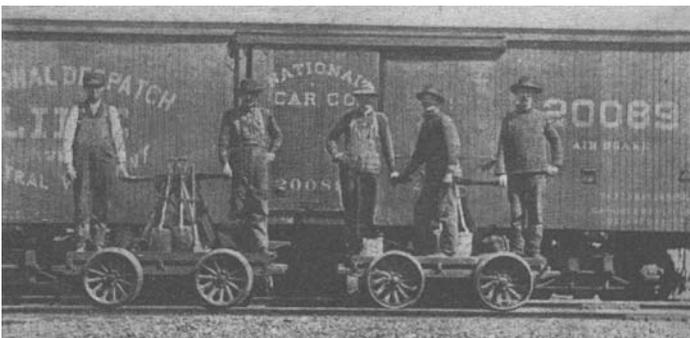
"No nostalgic longing fills the heart of the section-man at sight of an old-time 'back-breaker' beside the right-of-way. But as an emblem of track maintenance, it will probably never be supplanted."



"Straight grained hardwood, 'elegantly varnished,' will soon lose its sheen, but the handles of the oldtime gandy-wagon were kept well polished by calloused hands"

Lee Falkenberg, a section boss working on the K&W Railroad, soon after the turn of the century, must have read about some of the stunts performed with sail-cars. Or maybe he just had an inventive nature. Anyway, one day in the late fall Falkenberg's gang was working in Slug Run, Iowa, a valley about a mile west of Leroy. The men were struggling up the grade, pushing a small dump-car loaded with slag for surfacing the track. As I got it from Charles Doughten, one of Falkenberg's men, this is what happened:

"We were working in a deep cut pretty well protected from the wind, but before quitting time a baby gale had come up. The boss seemed pleased about something, but kept it under his hat until we started placing our tools on the hand-car. The dump car, from which all the slag was now removed, was merely a skeleton framework with a removable platform, and it was probably this fact that gave the king snipe his bright idea. Uncoupling the handles from the hand-car, he then fastened the platform from the push-car on cross-wise for a sail, promising us a merry ride into town with no work



"Back in 1908, this gang surfaced, lined, and picked up low joints on Toledo, Saginaw & Muskegon track out of Carson City, Mich."

attached to it. The four of us piled onto the hand-car and went flying down into the valley, occasionally applying the brake a trifle so we wouldn't be blown off the track.

"The converted hand-car sped before the strong wind, up the grade, out of the valley and on toward Leroy. Then when we reached the top of the hill the boss wished he hadn't picked such a windy day to try his crack-brained scheme, and so did we all. The full force of

the gale pushed the car along the track at break-neck speed, rapidly increasing our velocity. Falkenberg had planned to brake the car when we pulled alongside the depot at Leroy, but long before we reached town he was standing with his full weight on the brake trying vainly to slow us down. It was impossible for us to throw off the sail. Whoever tried it was likely to be hurled from the careening vehicle.

"Down the straight stretch of track we hummed, racing right through the town without even slowing down. At length we struck an up-grade which, augmented by the brake, caused us to stop. We tossed aside the board that had served us too well and sadly pumped our way back into town - against the wind."

**T**HE early section-cars were all right for a crew of about four men who could take turns at the handles, but it required a lot of elbow grease for a single worker to operate one of them. The next link in the evolution of sectioncars was forged by a non-railroader—in fact, by a man who could have been legally prosecuted for his deed.

Back in 1879 a mechanic named George Sheffield worked in a shop at Three Rivers, Michigan. If he had lived across the road from his place of employment, that would probably have been the end of the story. But Sheffield dwelt in a village several miles from his job. In order to put in his ten hours daily he had to eat breakfast at five a.m. and it was usually dark when he got home at night. While walking to and from work he often mused what a blessing it would be if the Michigan Central would only run its trains at times when he could ride them, instead of his having to walk the right-of-way six days a week.

One day Sheffield found a solution to his problem, and it was cheaper than paying railroad fare. In spare time at the plant, he built a queer-looking three-wheeled velocipede with flanged wheels. This consisted of a seat mounted on two wheels which rode on one rail, and a sort of outrigger connected with the third wheel, which traveled on the other rail, supporting the vehicle. A lever, sticking up in front of the seat, was connected to the wheels, enabling the rider to propel himself on the railroad. Best of all, the invention was so light that it could be easily lifted on and off the tracks by one man.



"A nattily-dressed roadmaster exemplifies the cleanliness of travel via Sheffield velocipede"

Without mentioning the matter to anyone, Sheffield started using the railway tracks as his own private transportation system. One evening, when scooting home from work, he noticed a break in the track which could easily have derailed the night passenger train. The mechanic lost no time reporting this to railroad authorities, and they had the track repaired.

The brass hats were grateful for the information, but their gratitude did not prevent them from demanding what the mechanic had been

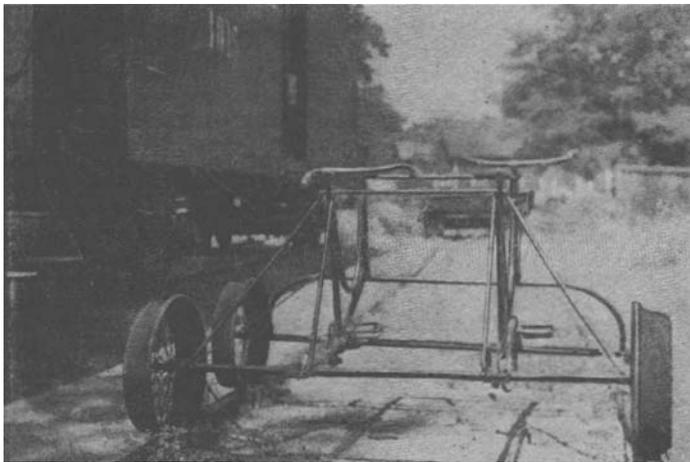
(SECTION-CAR continued on Page 6)

(SECTION-CAR continued from Page 5)

doing on the track. When George Sheffield admitted he had been traveling over their pike twice a day for several months they were ready to have him thrown in jail. Fortunately, one far-sighted railroader among them realized the potential uses of Sheffield's velocipede and persuaded the Michigan Central to furnish all its track inspectors with similar vehicles. However, there was no place where the devices could be bought, so Sheffield decided to build them himself. He resigned from the shop and started a company of his own, the Sheffield Car Company, and coined barrels of money manufacturing the new vehicles.

Mr. Sheffield gradually made improvements in his velocipede, and competition sprang up. Some models were furnished with trays for carrying light tools or oil cans for signal maintainers. Within a short time track inspectors all over the continent were making their rounds on some variation of Sheffield's invention.

One type had a frame just like a bicycle sitting astride of four wheels, two on each track, and was operated by foot pedals. This one also



"Old pushmobile on the Virginia & Truckee. We don't know who ran off with the saddles"

came in the "bicycle built for two" version, with two bike frames mounted side by side and a set of pedals for each rider. Extra equipment for this vehicle included a chair which could be fastened to the front of it. The "deadhead" rider was frequently the roadmaster who made his periodic inspections on such a velocipede.

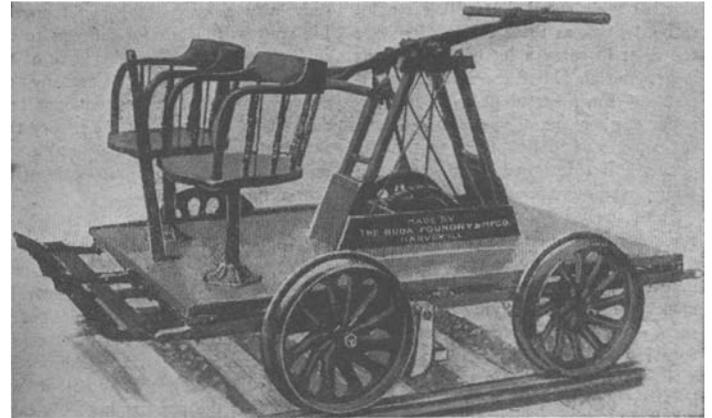
Sheffield's velocipedes are in use today, but I haven't ridden one since 1928, when I was patrolling Grand Trunk Western track on Sundays.

**V**ELOCIPEDES answered the demand for a means of transporting one or two men at a time over the track at reasonable speed, but still left a lot to be desired, as these contraptions are too light to carry a lot of heavy tools and material. Men continued experimenting for the real need of maintenance workers, namely, a motor-driven car capable of getting them to the site of work not fatigued from supplying their own motive power on the journey.

In the early 1890's some railroads installed a gasoline engine drive on many of their water service stations. This innovation prompted ingenious road men to fiddle around trying to adapt the small en-

gine to the velocipede cars. Before long in every railroad yard you visited you saw either a push-car or a hand-car provided with a small engine, usually rigged up by the foreman or one of his gang. In every section-car garage along the pike you would spot a drum of gasoline and the proverbial piece of chamois through which the fuel had to be strained before using, to free it of any water. If you failed to see a primitive motor-car scooting around, you would only have to look in a scrapbox near the toolhouse for the remnants of one, because that is where many of the makeshifts ended.

By 1893 the Buda Company, which I have already mentioned, placed on the market the first ready-made section motor-car. I don't



"Two-seated inspection car, manufactured at the turn of the century, put the brake within easy reach of a roadmaster". Car manufactured by The Buda Foundry & Mfg. Co.

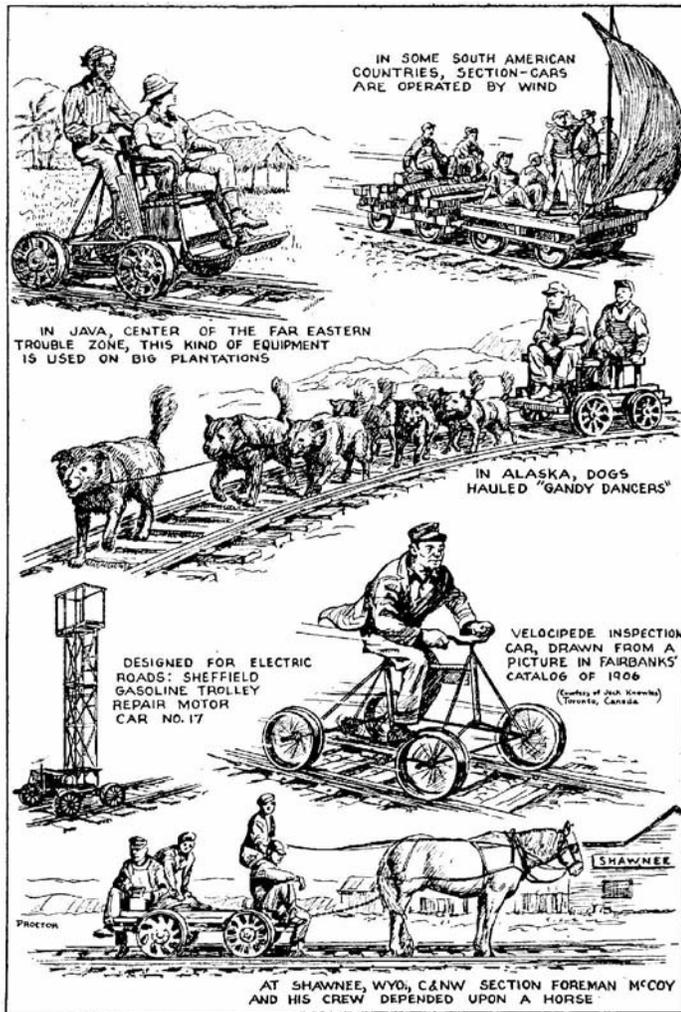
believe the infant engine in this early "doodlebug" was complete assurance against the section men occasionally having to make use of the handles, which were also part of the car. The first "pop-car" really to prove its ability was a Sheffield model placed on sale around 1898. This was just a three-wheel velocipede with a motor. But out of the development of the automobile came various devices which facilitated the building of the present-day track cars.

At the beginning of this century the only way a king snipe could provide his crew with a motor-car was to dig in his own pocket for the price of the engine, about \$125. The Company generously furnished the car to mount it on, as well as the fuel, on the theory that this system would give the section men more incentive to take good care of the power unit.

Fortunately, in 1926, the skids were put under this practice in a statement issued by the International Railway Congress that "motor cars (provided due regard is paid to regulations to safety of running on the line) constitute an economic means of transporting men and materials." When it was proved that the pop-car not only eased the toil of the gandy dancer but also increased the railroad's profits, then the Company was naturally willing to go the whole hog and provide such conveyances with no strings attached.

The Canadian National Railway System today has 2687 track motor-cars which carry track workers, signal maintainers, switch tenders and official inspection parties. The CNR also has 3836 push-cars, 1283 hand-cars and 648 velocipedes—representing a total investment of a million and a quarter dollars. The fact that there are more push-cars than motor-cars indicates that the put-puts are able to pull heavy loads as well as carry men and materials on them. The hand and foot vehicles are not in regular use, but are merely re-

tained for use in emergencies or while motor-cars are undergoing repairs. The Pennsylvania has 2100 doodlebugs, the Santa Fe has 1500, the Illinois Central has 1150 and there are at least 1600 on the Union Pacific. Space does not permit a complete list of Class 1 roads, but I can say there are over 65,000 rail motor-cars used in the United States and Canada alone.



**E**ARLY doodlebugs had one- or two-cylinder, four-cycle, air- or water-cooled gasoline engines, driving through roller chain, and with either a friction disc or planetary transmission. Inspection cars of that type held supremacy on the rails until about 1908, when the two-cycle engine came into vogue. The newer type of motor met the requirements of the job better, since it could run equally well in either direction and did away with a lot of complicated moving parts which had made repair bills high.

By 1910 all section and inspection cars had their engines either direct-connected, belt-driven or chain-driven with friction transmission. The vertical engine proved unsuitable, so the horizontal engine was universally accepted, as it is to this day. The modern cars have enough power to make a fast getaway under any reasonable load. They have combination horsepower motors, such as five-and-eight and eight-and-thirteen. The lower ratings are normal, while the higher power is useful for pulling several trailers loaded with well-fed section workers.

Now that we have fast, efficient motors, it's hard for some people to realize the trouble that gandy dancers used to have with their cars not many years back. I heard of a horse being used to haul a section car as recently as 1921. Marshall E. Schaeffer tells me that one day when he was station agent on the Chicago & North Western at Shawnee, Wyoming, the motor of the local section gang's pop-car became indisposed. Just about that time a gandy dancer who lived on a cattle ranch rode into town on his nag, which he offered for use as motive power. The offer was accepted. They hitched Dobbin to the track-car and he pulled the boys out to the working point for several days until the Buda got back from the shops. Mr. Schaeffer, who now lives at 200 Sterling Place, Brooklyn, New York, sent me a little old snapshot of that outfit; but it wouldn't reproduce very well in the magazine, so I had an artist draw it for you.

Another picture by the same artist shows dog-power in Alaska. Back in 1900 a narrow-gage pike connected Nome with the nearby mountains, where considerable mining was done. Well, in that year the territorial government clamped a high tax on railroads. But as there was not enough traffic over the narrow-gauge to carry the cost, so service was just discontinued. Soon afterwards someone got a brilliant idea. He acquired an old push-car, hitched up a team of huskies, and started selling railroad tickets to the general public. I believe dogs are still used for railroad power in Alaska, but am not sure.

**N**ON-RAILROADERS very rarely are permitted to ride in speeders, cabooses or engine cabs. With good reason, too. Lots of folks see us streaking along the right-of-way in our "toy" cars and figure it must be lots of fun. Well, we section men don't regard our motor-cars as playthings. I.C.C. reports show that more lives are lost from section-cars than from locomotives. An average of ninety-nine people a year meet death in falling off section-cars or colliding with trains while riding such cars, and three and a half thousand are injured that way.

Take the case of Ralph Samartino, better known as "Sam." For the past forty years Sam has been "railroading" in a wheel-chair at the Rio Grande Hospital, Salida, Colorado - and why? I'll tell you the story as I read it in the Rio Grande Green Light, issue of December 15th, 1941.

One Saturday almost exactly at the turn of the century, Sam got his first job—as a section laborer in the D&RG's Pueblo yards. The following Tuesday, after less than two full days of railroading, he was thrown off a hand-car by some impact he doesn't remember, paralyzed from the waist down! Today, at sixty-six, he is otherwise healthy and comfortable. He is cheerful, eats a normal diet, has a good appetite, reads, occasionally helps around the hospital, receives visitors, and once in a while is taken to a movie show. But doctors say he will never walk again.

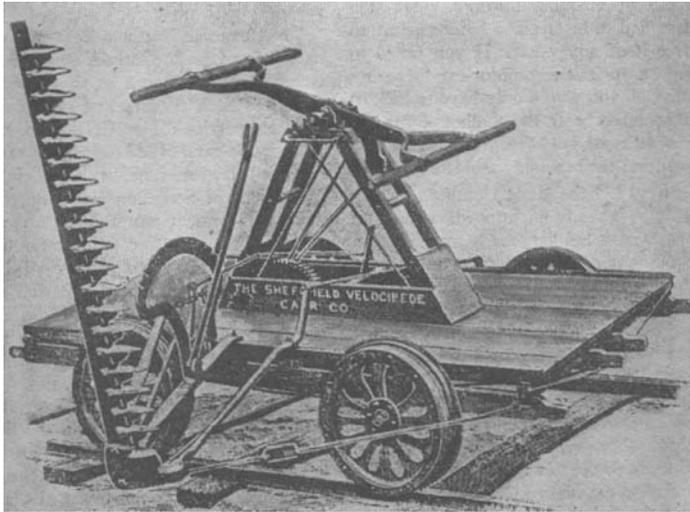
"If I had my life to live over," Sam remarked wistfully, "know what I'd be? A railroader."

Maybe some of you section men who stand squarely in your own brogans, and grumble when you feel like it, will appreciate Sam's uncomplaining courage for forty-two very long years, and will send

*(SECTION-CAR continued on following page)*

the old fellow a letter, or even a card, to show him that he isn't forgotten. As I said, riding section-cars isn't the safest job in the world.

I personally know of five pop-cars that were smashed up by trains within fifty miles of my section on the Grand Trunk Western at Saranac, Michigan. Luckily, only one man was permanently crippled in the five accidents, but even that is nothing to boast about. Glancing at the rules, I note thirty-eight that tell how to forestall



"Sheffield's Model 1 hand-car was available with a nifty weed-cutting attachment that didn't simplify the section-hand's problem when he had to get the old girl off the track in a hurry"

accidents of this type. They admonish us to take such precautions as never using the main track when a siding is available, requiring men to face both forward and backward when traveling in hand-and motor-cars, seeing that track cars are never too heavily loaded to be removed easily from the rails in the face of danger, using the protection of signals whenever possible, and numerous other safety rules.

It's true that a line-up helps, but what are you going to do if the dispatcher sends out a light engine an hour after you get your line-up? Most of the section men just jump when a locomotive creeps up on them. I can't tell you how they land, I'm glad to say, for I've never had to "join the birds" myself. But I can tell you that the eleven curves in seven miles of track on my GTW section give an engine plenty of chance to sneak up on you. Engineer Wilcox and some of the other hogs have often seen my car hit the ditch most unceremoniously.

One day I was out working with the gang when we heard a locomotive approaching. Two of my men knew what to do in such a case; but before we had a chance to remove our doodlebug from the track, another man—a greenhorn named Watson—ran around the car at least four times frantically looking for a handle to pull it off the rails with. Watson said afterwards, "That damn engine looked like a mountam coming after me."

I mentioned a while back that railroads don't encourage guests on their section-cars. Well, the Webber's Falls, Stigler & Warner Railway in Oklahoma was an exception. This ten-and-a-half-mile pike was built two years before the first World War by farmers and business men to connect the towns of Webber's Falls and Warner. The

General Manager was a grocer, the president was a farmer, and the brakemen were cotton pickers. The only "rails" on the pike were the conductor and the hogger. Both were plenty disgusted with the cast-off material the road had bought from a Texas junk dealer. After the WFS&W had been in business a scant year, an I.C.C. inspector happened by, and he was disgusted too. In fact, he condemned the pike's only power as unfit for service as a passenger locomotive. Then in May, 1913, the road folded up.

Well around December of that year a former Midland Valley maintenance-of-way employe named W. E. Beatty approached one M. J. Maples. Mr. Maples had a Government contract for carrying mail between Warner and Webber's Falls, and was using a one-horse shay for the purpose. The two gents bought a three-and-a-quarter horsepower section-car, second-hand, and took over the operation of the defunct WFS&W. The first run left Warner at 5.30 p.m. Christmas Eve, but was not completed till 8.30 the next morning. Beatty explains the slow trip as follows:

"The car was belt-driven—you know how a leather belt will slip when wet—and the weather that night was plenty wet and snowy. Then when the belt did hold, the wheels would slip on the icy rails. We hadn't thought to get the only means of fighting that condition, even though it is cheap enough. Most section-cars in winter work are equipped with strong short brooms, attached vertically in front of the cars, so as to sweep the snow off the track. Of course, this device is only of slight help anyhow. By the time we got three miles out, the motor wouldn't go at all, so Maples and I stayed the night at a farmhouse, hanging the belt beside the fireplace, next to the children's Christmas stockings, so it was good and dry by morning."

The return trip was more successful. That pop-car chugged out of Webber's Falls at two o'clock Christmas afternoon, and arrived at the other terminus in three and half hours fiat.

The future must have looked pretty rosy, for the two partners soon afterward bought a four-cylinder, fourteen-horsepower section-car capable of making forty miles per hour. Unfortunately, they had to push this car down the track to get it started. You should have seen the passenger pushing the car, and then jumping on. For rolling stock they used two push-cars, which carried miscellaneous freight.

There must have-been a lot of miscellaneous freight going between Webber's Falls and Warner, for the new management prospered in a modest way. The small motor-car comfortably handled six or seven passengers and the large one fourteen. At fifty cents a trip, for adults, the profit was not bad.

The legal owners of the road watched these signs of prosperity with greedy eyes. Early in February, 1914, they served notice on the former section hand and his partner to cease hauling freight and passengers over the tracks. As Beatty and Maples had no written contract, they had to quit. But after that the owners never did succeed in putting that road back on a paying basis.

*(The final installment of this article will appear in the next issue of The Marker.)* 📖

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### MANY THANKS

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