

DISPATCH



Plowing out La Veta Pass

Keeping trains moving on highest freight line

Above:

A freight train moves through La Veta Pass.

Right:

A plow hi-rails to clear La Veta Pass.

Below, left:

Snow begins to blanket La Veta Pass in October.

Below, right:

Snow-covered trees line La Veta Pass.



At 9,242 feet, Colorado's La Veta Pass is the highest standard gauge railroad in North America. With winter temperatures that can dip to 30 below, it often has the coldest temperatures in the lower 48 states. Wind and snow are heavy, and the grade slants up to 3.5 percent on the 2,200-foot, sharply curved ascent.

"It's a challenge," said Andy Cyrus, San Luis & Rio Grande Railroad superintendent.

To keep the tracks clear of snow, which can often collect in the steep-walled cuts or drift high across the tracks, SLRG hires a local contractor to remove the snow. Equipped with a plow and rotary blower — each mounted on old ballast regulator frames — the contractor clears the tracks.

Cyrus said La Veta Pass is located at Milepost 207 at the Fir Station site. Access is limited. The nearest road crossing on the east is at Milepost 192 and at Milepost 215 on the west.

Freight trains haul grain, minerals, specialty rock products and produce from the fertile San Luis and Rio Grande Rivers across the Sangre de Cristo Mountains at La Veta Pass to the interchange with Union Pacific in Walsenburg, Colo. The trains run at night to best meet the interchange schedule, leaving plowing to be done during the day.

The historic excursion trains typically don't run during winter months, Cyrus said. Occasionally, special winter weekend passenger trips are offered, giving photographers a chance to record high altitude rail operations.





IPH General Roadmaster Randall Roberson, right, inspects the incoming unit train of ballast rock at the new Levelland, Texas, NGL facility.



IPH General Roadmaster Randall Roberson, foreground, assists Balfour Beatty Rail crews in unloading ballast rock from the unit train onto newly built tracks at the Levelland facility.

Texas gas facility nears completion

A new facility for loading natural gas liquids, also known as condensates, into railcars is nearing completion in Levelland, Texas, on West Texas & Lubbock Railway.

The facility — includes several thousand feet of new track, storage tanks and a new pipeline connection — should be completed by the end of first quarter.

NGL production, a byproduct of crude oil production, has grown dramatically in the Permian Basin oilfields in recent years. The rail terminal will allow the NGL's to be shipped to new and varied markets not currently served by pipeline

networks in the region.

“Levelland is committed to the growth of our rail-based businesses, and the development of this NGL transload facility is a testament to our efforts,” said Shawn A. Kirkpatrick, executive director, Levelland Economic Development Corporation. “The Levelland EDC is excited for the owner and project partners, and proud to have had the opportunity to work with them throughout the process. Our community receives numerous benefits, the most important of which are job creation and increased rail traffic.”

SNC team boosts community holiday spirit

The Saratoga & North Creek team got into the holiday spirit by giving free and reduced price rides to community members Dec. 6-7.

“It’s an opportunity for the railroad to give back to the community,” said Justin Gonyo, general superintendent. “It puts us in a different light.”

For the first time, the Candy Cane Train ran in North Creek, N.Y., as part of the city’s Dec. 6 Lights On festivities. Rides were free, thanks to the city footing the bill.

North Creek businesses were encouraged to light up their buildings with white lights, natural greenery and red bows to enhance the Lights On theme. Usually, Santa and Mrs. Claus would be at the tree lighting, but this year they were missing. The

railroad participated in an elaborate skit: the Christmas couple’s sleigh had crashed outside of town and children needed to board the train and stage a rescue.

Once rescued, the train brought Santa, Mrs. Claus and the children back to the station for punch and cookies.

Reduced cost rides at \$5 were offered the next day for a Holiday Train excursion between Corinth and Thurman, N.Y., on the vintage equipment used for the Polar Express. The popular Polar Express from Saratoga Station to the “North Pole” ran from Nov. 15 to Dec. 29. It is in its third year, but the schedule allowed for the Dec. 6-7 excursions, Gonyo said.

The events gave him, a fourth-generation railroader, the opportunity to don his grandfather’s vintage conductor uniform.



A motor car is decorated by Saratoga & North Creek Railway employees for a holiday parade.

His great-grandfather, George, was a station master; grandfather, Robert, was a station agent; and father, Tim, is a locomotive engineer.

Mass Coastal rail projects underway

Mass Coastal Railroad is in the midst of significant construction and line enhancement projects. During the summer and fall of 2013, grade crossings in Fall River, Mass., were replaced in advance of a Massachusetts Highway Department interstate bridge project. The crossings were along the planned detour around Battleship Cove and needed rebuilt to handle the expected increase in volume, said Steve Hill, Iowa Pacific chief engineer.

While the state project was ongoing overhead, the railroad used the opportunity to remove the main line beyond the wharf lead to rebuild. Construction halted for winter, but will resume in spring.

Meanwhile, the replacement of 42,000 rail ties along 33 miles of right of way leading to Fall River and New Bedford began during the fall and will resume in spring. The work is needed in anticipation of the Massachusetts Department of Transportation Rail Division's plan to add passenger service.

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts purchased the rail lines from CSX Transportation to provide access for future South Coast Rail service, which will be offered by Mass Coastal Railroad.

"The upgrades strengthen the track to provide safe operations for current freight service while getting the corridor ready for the complete rehabilitation required to provide higher speed passenger service," said Jean Fox, South Coast Rail project manager.

The South Coast Rail project will restore passenger rail transportation from South Station in Boston to the South Coast of Massachusetts to the cities of Taunton, Fall River and New Bedford — the only cities within 50 miles of Boston not served by commuter rail.

A related rail project in New Bedford, headed by the city, will extend the lead. In the long term, it will be part of the passenger network. In the short term, it will provide access to a new freight customer, Hill said.



Employees check out the main line beneath Highway 79 before it is removed as part of a massive rebuilding project.



A crossing is torn out on Water Street, near the Fall River, Mass., wharf at the beginning of a rebuilding project. Water Street needed rail enhancements as the road has become the main detour route during the Highway 79 bridge reconstruction, which is over top of Mass Coastal's track.

Holiday events spread cheer

The Polar Express and Train to Christmas Town events brought holiday cheer to folks throughout the country, courtesy of Cape Cod Central Railroad, Mount Hood Railroad, Rio Grande Scenic Railroad, Santa Cruz & Monterey Bay Railway, Saratoga & North Creek Railway, Texas State Railroad, and West Texas & Lubbock Railway.

The Polar Express Ride—licensed by Warner Bros. Entertainment—is based on the hit film starring Tom Hanks and book by Chris Van Allsburg. Hosted by the Cape Cod Central, Rio Grande Scenic and Santa Cruz & Monterey Bay, the Train to Christmas Town is an Iowa Pacific Holdings' proprietary event based on the book by Peggy Ellis and accompanied by music from Trout Fishing in America, a Grammy-nominated folk band.

In total, 130,600 tickets were sold on seven railroads in six states. The most significant growth was on the Santa Cruz line, with a 26 percent increase in ridership over 2012.

"We had a great Polar Express season," said Ron Kaufman, MHRG general manager. "Our customers had a great time."

To accommodate the fifth year of increased growth, with 7,500 riders this winter, Mount Hood added a shuttle bus service to take passengers from the alternate parking area.

"The kids really like the color scheme," Kaufman said. "Not every day do you get to ride a pink and maroon trolley bus."

In the United Kingdom, Iowa Pacific Holding's Dartmoor Railway in Devon County and Weardale Railway in County Durham hosted the Polar Express—attended by 56,546 people—for a second



New trolleys were rented to handle the increased customer traffic for the Mount Hood Railroad-hosted Polar Express Ride.



year. Dartmoor experienced a 42 percent increase in ridership compared to last year.

"It was an excellent year for us in terms of riders and customer satisfaction, based on excellent results on our post-ride surveys," said Debra Goodman, special events director. "Also, our gift shop sales showed a marked increase at all locations, especially with the Train to Christmas Town book sales."



The Conductor, Mrs. Claus and Santa prepare to ride aboard the Mount Hood Railroad's Polar Express Ride.

For more information, visit <http://www.premierrails.com>.

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New engineer cards reflect upgrades

IPH locomotive engineers are receiving a new System Part 240 Engineer's certification card that displays the engineer's operating credentials on all IPH railroads. This is one of the final steps in implementing the enhanced IPH System Part 240 Engineer Certification Program.

"The IPH Part 240 program is unique as it allows IPH to treat its railroads as a non-connected system comprised of individual territories," said Art Miller, administrator for IPH Operating Crew Certification programs.

The new engineer cards show on one document the engineer's certifications and special qualifications on all IPH railroads.

"Gone are the days when an IPH locomotive engineer might have three, four other or even more engineers cards in his wallet," Miller said. "The new photo ID cards also present a professional public image."

Engineers now become certified on one IPH railroad. If the engineer is needed on another property, operating authority on the other railroad can be granted by using a streamlined territorial

qualification process.

"Time required for an engineer to 'mark up' on a new railroad is cut from two weeks to no more than three days," Miller said.

Operating crew assignment flexibility is important to IPH. The company frequently temporarily transfers personnel between properties to handle seasonal demands such as holiday passenger operations, freight traffic surges and other special operations.

The new photo certification card distribution comes after nearly two years of work that included extensive FRA collaboration. Centralized crew records storage at the NOC in Janesville, Wis., also was a major component of the program.

In addition, a number of standardized program administration forms are now in use.

"These forms allow local railroad managers to easily record significant events such as annual recurrent training and stop tests in restricted speed territory," Miller said.



New locomotive engineer certification cards, which reflect new training standards developed with the FRA, enable IPH locomotive engineers to display operating credentials on a single card.



Before implementation of the new IPH certification program, locomotive engineers required a separate card for each IPH railroad certification possessed.



Halliburton completes rail expansion

A key customer of the Texas-New Mexico Railroad, Halliburton recently completed a major expansion of the rail trackage associated with its Monahans, Texas, sand facility.

The 7,600 feet of additional trackage greatly enhance the facility's rail capacity and allows for additional flexibility in rail delivery methods.

Hopper cars rest on new tracks with at Halliburton's Monahans, Texas, sand facility.