

The Manifest, September 8, 2014(C)
Railroad News and Musings from
Green Country Model Railroaders' Association SM

Summer finally got here, didn't it? I understand the human body takes about three weeks to adjust to environmental conditions such as seasons and daylight savings time. That would help explain why Tulsa almost always seems uncomfortable to me. The well-known highly variable weather means we're always uncomfortable because we never have time to get fully acclimated before the weather changes again. Thus, the comparatively mild summer we've had means the usual hot, dry, dead grass August seems even hotter. But...does that also mean we'd feel better if it got hot and stayed hot? Hmmmm...

Large model railroad layouts can suffer from the effects of heat. It is not good to leave them in, say, an attic or other area that is not heated or cooled except when being used. Foam shrinks, wood shrinks or swells with changes in humidity and we've seen locos that do not work well at all when just brought indoors from a car in freezing weather. The big issue is the metal rail, since most metals show a noticeable positive coefficient of thermal expansion. (I like to sometimes insert a bit of intellectual and cultural finesse into this column. In non-engineering English: Most metals get bigger when they get hotter.)

Rail joiners are used to mechanically align and connect joints in the rail, typically every three feet when using flexible track, or at turn-outs. (They should not be relied upon for dependable electrical connections.) For best results, most are soldered to the rail. In very large layouts, however, a few well-spaced joints are not secured. The ends of the two sections of metal rail are thus aligned, but can slide within the confines of the joiners as the metal expands and contracts. In the "This is only funny because it didn't happen to me." category is the experience of yesteryear's eager "do-it-yourselfers" who installed the newly-marketed vinyl house siding the same way they had done with wood – nice and tight. In extreme temperatures after installation it buckled and wrinkled more than your great-grandparent's face.

So...that got me to thinking more about something I mentioned briefly several years ago. The trend in mainline 1:1 scale track is to weld together 1/4 mile sections of rail. It's absolutely fascinating to me to watch the videos of this process and see how flexible steel can be. But wouldn't that be subject to the same expansion/contraction phenomenon as model rails? Take mainline track from, say, Kansas City to LA – essentially one 1500+ mile long piece of metal for each rail. It turns out that the same problem arises, but they handle it in a different way. We sprinkle ballast between the ties to look realistic, but the large railroads have machines that really pack the ballast with great force. Thus, they end up with a huge, powerful spring waiting to cut loose as the southwest desert sun bakes the metal. I recall a few years ago a track maintenance crew had replaced the rail, planning to return the next day to ballast the track. Unfortunately (and expensively), they forgot to post the slow-order warning. Ka-boing! Many, many cars were dumped onto the ground.

Starting this month's news from everywhere, you can charter a train, but you would get there faster if you chartered an entire airplane:

<http://www.chicagotribune.com/news/local/jonhilkevitch/ct-rent-a-jet-getting-around-met-0811-20140811-column.html#page=2>

If you are fortunate enough to have property with a creek on it which requires a bridge, perhaps you'll want to re-purpose trains:

<http://www.brainjet.com/random/2831/27-incredible-photos-most-people-havent-seen?param4=d-dy-2831#slide/3>

It's tough enough building a railroad on land, tougher using a bridge, and possibly even tougher under the ocean:

<http://news.yahoo.com/photos/tunnelling-under-london-slideshow/>

In this same photo series is the sidewalk or street equivalent of the 1/4 mile welded rail I mentioned earlier. Who would have thought?

<http://www.brainjet.com/random/2831/27-incredible-photos-most-people-havent-seen?param4=d-dy-2831#slide/10/0>

Railroads frequently experience grade crossing collisions, but think about a grade crossing accident with a jetliner:

<http://www.brainjet.com/random/2831/27-incredible-photos-most-people-havent-seen?param4=d-dy-2831#slide/22/0>

It always causes problems when trains leave the rails:

<http://www.wesh.com/news/freight-train-derailment-prompts-sunrail-delays/27872340#!bPP32J>

Oklahoma is included in a number of states that have agreements to fund AMTRAK service in their state:

<http://thehill.com/policy/transportation/215659-indiana-reaches-deal-to-extend-amtrak-service>

Interested in railroads? A career in this arena may not be as difficult as you think, Check out the requirements:

<http://work.chron.com/average-salary-federal-railroad-inspectors-10249.html>

We are chartered with promoting rail safety. Here is announcement of a new national effort to bring safe practices to the public eye:

<http://news.yahoo.com/video/federal-state-rail-agencies-launch-042314332.html>

In this regard, I'm sure you will find a problem in the following video from the interesting town of Eugene, Oregon. Without commenting on the overall theme, notice the people riding in the gondola with no regard to safety or legalities:

Freight train: <https://www.facebook.com/eugene.oregon.58?fref=ts>

To me, it's rather like the people I see in my neighborhood taking toddlers with no protective equipment on a motorcycle ride. In a perfect world, it would be an emotional high. In this world, disaster is only a moment away. As I always say, just one amputation can ruin your whole day! If you want to take a ride in an open rail car, take an excursion train and observe proper safety precautions.

So, with that in mind, it's not too early to plan your autumn vacation in what is arguably the most beautiful season. I'll wager many of you have taken one of these trips:

<http://www.grindtv.com/outdoor/excursions/post/4-cool-train-rides-take-fall/>

Humor? We've got it, folks! One of the favorite jokes among youngsters, I'm told, is, "Do trains have teeth? No? Well, then, how do they choo, choo? "

Remember we have our regular membership meeting this coming Thursday at 7:00 at the layout. It will be the last meeting to plan before the Bixby show October 4th. Stay cool and enjoy trains!

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