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BLOG: RAILROAD TO THE MOON - COG RR

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by GSA Tim Adams, Southern NH University Class of 2014

I'm sure most, if not all of you remember these quotes "One of these days... One of these days..." and "To the moon, Alice!"

I use those quotes as the Cog railroad is sometimes called the 'Railroad to the Moon' since, when permission to build it was being discussed, one of the State Legislators remarked during the proceeding that the builder, Sylvester Marsh, should be given permission to build, not merely up Mount Washington, but also to the moon. Seems like not many people believed it could be done!



Well, while Jackie Gleason never did send Alice to the moon, and the Cog railway didn't make it to the Moon (yet anyway) the Cog did make it to the top of Mount Washington which is all that Sylvester Marsh had wanted to do in the first place.

Marsh first obtained a charter to build a road up the mountain in 1858 but because of the Civil War didn't get started until 1866. When the road was finished he started looking for investors for the actual railroad.

While the railroad wasn't finished in 1868, they started serving paying customers in August of that year. The train finally reached the summit the following year and has been in continuous operation since that time except during the world wars. Yes, those dates are correct. Next year the Cog railroad, the only currently operating cog railroad in the United States will be 150 years old next year!



Quite an achievement for a railroad that many people thought would never be built.

A lot has changed with the Cog Railroad over the past 149 years and more is planned for the coming years.

In the beginning, the Steam engine dubbed 'PepperSass' was used to build the railroad. This engine is still on sight but the smokestack has been removed so it doesn't really look like it once did. I expect that the work that is being done on it will be completed shortly and it will be returned to it's normal place in the main yard where passengers board the current fleet of seven trains that travel up and down the mountain daily.

One of the biggest changes in recent years was the move away from Steam engines to biodiesel locomotives. This change helped reduce emissions and also the Cog's reliance on foreign oil. It was also significant since the biodiesel engines use one tenth of the power that the older steam engines used.

Currently, all of the coaches and engines used on the mountain are built and



maintained right there at the mountain! In fact, the cog railroad on Pikes peak, currently not operating, had talked about buying equipment from them.

One of the next items to be built will be a work coach without a floor! That will allow workers to access the rails beneath the coach and actually replace them while staying, mostly anyway, out of the weather. You see, most of that work will be done in the middle of the winter!



Replacing the rails is the next big improvement in store for the tracks. an example of what was to be done was right at the start of the trip up the mountain. A new bridge right at the start of the trip up the mountain was built this past winter and incorporated the new track.



They have also added electronically operated switches so the brakeman doesn't need to get out and physically change the track for the train going up, or down the mountain. As such, while you do slow down when you come to the switch area, you don't necessarily stop when you get tot them.

The old track was a standard 2 inched high with a 2 inch base which was connected to the railroad ties. The new tracks will be 6 inches high and have a base that is 6 inches wide. Sound to me like the added support from the added base width will make the trip even safer then it currently is, but the Cog has a very good safety record as it is.

There have been accidents, actually two accidents over the life of the Cog Railroad. One was caused by a derailing and the other by a broken front axle in the engine.

One item I found interesting was the simple fact that while the railroad was being built, several persons working on it would use a 'sled' to decent the mountain at the end of the work day. The record decent of 2 minutes 45 seconds is something that I don't expect will ever be broken, unless of course they build a zip line down from the top! I'd ride it, would you?

While the summit was socked in and a bit on the cool side, it was an enjoyable trip both up and down the mountain. I missed a couple of photo's that I would have liked to get but, when you can't see the Grand Mount Washington Hotel from the summit, you can't very well take a picture of it.

I also missed a face on of 'Kermit'. Yes, that famous frog, well a rock painted to look like Kermit was there along the side of the rail. While I'm sure it's there for the kids to see and wave at, it also is used as a marker for the engineer so he knows where on the mountain he is when the mountain to totally socked in with bad weather.



GSA Tour photo album: <https://photos.app.goo.gl/8P7W4tDwgxVeejKR2>

Some of Tim's pictures from the trip can be viewed at <https://cograilroad.shutterfly.com/pictures>

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