

# KEEPING TRACK

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## ***The Word From the Prez***

### **“Golden Rule” Could Improve Fun Level of ASMR Activities**

I have noticed recently that something seems to be affecting some of our members adversely. So I think I need to remind everybody that our club is made up of different members, each with different personalities, which is good. We all have a common interest in railroading, but we seem to be lacking in common courtesy lately when we are operating on the layout. I especially noticed this during our most recent operating session. These are competitions and we all want to win (me included), but they are not do-or-die situations! Hopefully we are participating in our contests to have fun (Model railroading IS fun-- Right?), and learn something about prototype operations in the process. But, here's what I observed: as one member was trying to switch his cars out of the Abilene yard, three others approached and one of them entered and started to work the yard also -- interfering with the first member. I was one of the three but I waited until I could get by on the main line and then proceeded elsewhere on the layout to pick up some of my other cars. Later, I returned to the yard for the cars I needed from there. This same thing happened again a short time later. On other occasions I have observed a member or a guest running a train, sometimes at unprototypical speeds, not paying attention to where their train was, and ramming into another member's train. My main point is that in both types of situations I've mentioned, we need to be courteous to one another. We need to follow the "Golden Rule". Some members don't want to run their trains on the layout because they fear that they might be damaged through others' careless inattentiveness. Real railroads can't effectively operate this way. We need to copy the real railroads and let another train clear an area before we enter it. It is possible that if we get the "RailOP" program set up on the club layout it will resolve some types of operating conflicts. But, in the meanwhile, maybe we need a refresher on railroad operating "rules".

Bottom Line: *Just remember to be courteous to each other, and things should go a lot smoother for everybody.* Model Railroading should be fun, and with a little common courtesy we can make sure it is a good experience for ALL the members in our club.

***Your Prez, Ken Riediger***

## **Cody Hilliard Out-operates Competition for August**

Five ASMR members participated in the August operations contest on August 19, with Cody Hilliard maneuvering like "Casey Jones" to take the win. Also participating were the two Kens, Riediger and England, Mel Herwick, and Jim Gibson. Ken England had to depart prematurely because of a business call, and the others finished in the order of Riediger, Herwick and Gibson. (See *Editor Speaks* column for some of Gibson's "lessons learned".)

## **August 5 Meeting Notes**

Pres. Ken Riediger opened the meeting at 10:12, at Cody Hilliard's home, and the following items of business were discussed. Ken reported on CD options, and members voted to invest \$1,500 in a CD with a 5% rate of return. Ken is going to look further into an interest bearing checking account for the club's operating funds. Ken reported that he had ordered two Digitrax throttles, but the supplier is having problems. So, he cancelled that order and placed one with a supplier in New Mexico for the throttles at \$59 each, well below MSRP. Regarding the club's modular HO layout, Jim Gibson suggested that we need to coordinate who is doing what on their modules so we end up with a more unified theme and flow to the layout, and Cody Hilliard was named to oversee that situation. Before closing the meeting, Ken reminded members that election of officers is coming up again in October, and we should be thinking about who we would like to see handling the club's key offices next year. Following the close of the meeting at 10:45, Cody Hilliard used his home computer and big screen TV to present an informative program on a computer programming system for DCC equipment.

## **The Editor Speaks**

### **For Me, Operating Sessions Are An Ongoing Learning Process**

Lately, during operating sessions, I find myself with no hope of winning and, in fact, fighting to just keep from coming in last. It may seem a little bizarre for a guy in that situation to be passing out tips for better operating techniques, but I have some ideas I want to discuss anyway. In "The

Music Man”, one of the characters wisely said, “You gotta know the territory”. He was talking about selling musical instruments, if I remember correctly, but his advice applies equally well to model railroad operations. I had this painfully brought home to me during the August operating session when I failed to note the difference between the “Abilene Yard” and “Abilene Team Track”, and left two cars in the former, when one of the pair was destined for the latter. Trying to go back and fix the problem at that stage of the game would have been very time consuming, and it was late, and very hot. And since I was only battling for next to last place anyway, I conceded to Mel Herwick and “shut ‘er down” without delivering my last two cars. To his credit, Mel was still diligently working away to finish, all by himself, when I left. There are several places on our layout that can trip you up like that. For example, earlier in the game I was happily headed for a pickup at a facility I had in my mind as being Tri-State Refinery. When I got there and couldn’t find the car I was looking for, I finally realized that Tri State Refinery was actually located way over on the new “peninsula” part of the layout, and took off in that direction. Another operational “trap” is heading down the wrong parallel track in the Abilene Yard to pick up a car. It’s easy to do if you don’t pay close attention to where the track you’re on ends up, especially entering from the yard’s west end “ladder track”. From there, most of the cars are located around a blind curve from where you entered. A third easy (stupid) mistake is not checking

a car’s number carefully and picking up the wrong one. Some cars even have the same last couple of numbers, so you have to check the *whole* number. My overall goal is to try and keep from repeating previous mistakes and avoid making new ones. There’s hope. One area where I feel like I’m doing better is moving cars around more efficiently, such as getting them out from between other cars, putting them where I want them in my train, and setting them out in the least number of “shoves”. This is the essence of operations, in my opinion. If I can perfect this technique, make fewer dumb mistakes, and draw a reasonable “hand” of waybills, I should be able to progress more quickly toward working my way up from the bottom of the barrel, operationally speaking. Meanwhile, the main idea is to keep learning and above all, keep having fun!

JG

## **Model RR Meets & Shows**

Sept 16 & 17 – Centra Mod 24<sup>th</sup> Annual Model Train Show, Temple.

Oct 7 & 8 – Southwest O Scale and Oklahoma Narrow Gauge Meet, Oklahoma City.

Oct 28 & 29 – Rail Historical Society Train Show, Tyler

## **The Story of an Abandoned Railroad Tunnel in Texas**

For many years around the turn of the century, Fredericksberg needed a railroad to more quickly haul its produce to market in San Antonio. Back in those “horse and buggy days” it took 10 or 11 days to make the 75 mile trip through the Hill Country, and veggies arriving in the Alamo City after that long in a hot wagon were often ruined. In 1912, following numerous false starts, Fredericksberg and San Antonio businessmen got together and raised \$200,000 to fund construction of a 75 mile rail line, and in January, 1913, the San Antonio, Fredericksberg and Northern RR was chartered. The most formidable geological obstacle was a ridge 10 or 11 miles south of Fredericksberg. Known as the “Big Hill”, it was as high as 2,300 feet in places and covered too much of an area to reasonably go around. Engineers elected to build a 920 foot long tunnel straight through the hill, and work began simultaneously at both ends. Digging and blasting 24 hours a day in three shifts, the construction teams met on July 15, and the measurements were so precise there was only a few inches of offset between the two bores! The first train passed through the tunnel on August 16, 1913, and the rails reached Fredericksberg on October 28 of that year. The SAF&N operated for nearly three decades before closing down in 1942, another victim of the overwhelming competition from trucks and automobiles.

Today, the “Big Hill” tunnel remains as a “rock solid” reminder of the SAF&N, and it is now part of a Texas “wildlife management area”, appropriately enough named “The Old Tunnel WMA”. Located about 11 miles south of Fredericksberg on the *Old San Antonio Road*, it is home for some three million Mexican free-tailed bats, and a variety of other interesting flora and fauna abound in the surrounding area. If you would like to know more about this bit of Texas railroad history, or the tunnel’s current WMA role, just Google “Old Tunnel WMA” on the internet, and you’ll find a map and lots of other good info. In fact, that’s where the basic info for this article came from.

JG