

FIRST RAL OF 2008

- Norman Holmes, Director

Henry Luna, President of the Pacific Locomotive Association, called me last fall and asked if he could bring a group to Portola on Wednesday, March 5, 2008, so that they could visit the museum and do our Run-A-Locomotive program. I said yes. They would be coming to Reno on the "Snow Train", stay overnight and then come to Portola in the morning.

In late February, Henry confirmed that he was indeed bringing a group of about 35 and would arrive about 10 AM. I informed him that we still had quite a bit of snow on the ground, but we would do our best to accommodate the group.

I notified Steve Habeck of the group's plans so we could prepare the museum for their visit. We had an above average snowfall this winter and, even though we had operated our rotary snowplow earlier, additional snow had covered the tracks. It was decided that we would clear the tracks by operating the rotary as soon as they arrived, then do the R-A-L runs.

Steve spent all day Tuesday watering the rotary engine set (Southern Pacific SD9 4404 and SP GP9 2873) and the rotary power unit. He wanted to make sure that everything was ready to run. My wife Barbara and I checked and cleaned the restrooms and gift shop. A large piece of carpet was found to put down on the mud where the bus was to unload its passengers.

Early Wednesday morning, Steve got all the units running, including the SP TR6A 1100 for the R-A-L. There was a problem with a frozen hose that was needed to add water to the rotary power unit, but that was soon thawed out. I met the bus at the gate and talked to the group, telling them of our plans to operate the rotary for them. They were thrilled. A cab ride was offered in the rotary so they could see the operation first hand. Steve took advantage of this opportunity and asked for a \$20 donation each for the riders.

Most of the remaining group walked up to the sewer crossing (we are going to have to find a better name!) and we got some great pictures of





the snowplow working. The lucky seven were overjoyed with this once in a lifetime experience.

Ken Iverson then, with the SP 1100, coupled into and shoved nine cars, including the derrick, from the lead around the balloon track to free up the tracks for the R-A-L. By this point, it was time for lunch. Henry had made arrangements with Dee's Station Cafe to serve the group. Dee was all set p for us and was able to quickly serve a nice lunch as well as taking care of the regular patrons.

Meanwhile, back at the museum, Ken found out that the 1100 did not want to cooperate. It quit loading. Steve looked it over but could not find the problem. The 2873 was cut out of the rotary set and was used then for the R-A-L. Ken and I took turns as instructors, giving each participant a chance at the throttle for a one-way trip around the balloon.

Linda Knudsen worked in the gift shop where we had a nice wood fire going in the stove. Charlie Spikes came in early to help Steve with

the watering and to control the rotary's blades.

After the group left at 3:30 PM, everything was put back in place and the water drained from the units. It was an early in the year event for us, but the weather cooperated with blue skies and warm, 50 degree temperatures. Everyone said they had a good time.

photos by Norman Holmes

Southern Pacific Rotary MW208

The WPRM is one of the few museums in North America that features a working rotary snowplow. Our ex-SP plow was built in 1927 and was the last on the railroad to be converted to diesel power. It was leased to the Western Pacific and used at Keddie and on the HighLine after the WP retired their own plows. It was also one of the plows used to rescue the *City of San Francisco* in 1953. The only death during that dangerous feat occurred when the 208 turned over while being rerailed, killing engineer Holland Raymond.