

Railcamp '09

On Sunday we toured through the Scranton yards (Steamtown) and looked over some of the train equipment and observed some of the movements. One of the counselors gave us a tour through the back shops. Then we rode the yard shuttle through Steamtown. Then we took an excursion to Moscow, PA; it was pulled by a diesel the Nickel Plate #514 a GP-9. After the excursion some of us watched the Canadian Pacific #2317 pull into the round house. Later on that evening we were split into four groups for activities for the rest of the week.

On Monday we went to Steamtown and gave our interpretations of some of the cars and engines. Our group was assigned the Rutland caboose #28. The other two groups talked about a steam engine and two business cars on display. Once we learned about our respective cars or engine each group made a presentation on the cars history and uses. After that one of the rangers gave us an in depth tour of the shops and the type of activities going on. After lunch we went to the Lackawanna coal mine again breaking into two groups this time; our group went through the museum and the other group toured the mine and then we switched tours. After that we went to the Lackawanna iron furnaces and walked around the ruins.

On Tuesday we when to Harris Tower in Harrisburg and learned how it was operated and we did a few simulated switching moves. Our next excursion took us to Amtrak's Bear Car Shops in Delaware where we learned how the passenger cars are refurbished. At the shops they striped the entire car inside and out. In the interior of the car they rebuilt and reupholstered the seats, on the outside of the car they removed any asbestos, rebuilt the trucks, and once all that was done they put the car back together again tested everything to make sure the car was in order and then they put it back into service. After touring the car shops we went and toured the engine shop. We saw engines in various stages of repair a couple were set to leave the next day another one had its engine removed for a major overhaul. After all this we stopped at a restaurant and had dinner.

On Wednesday we talked with a gentleman from Amtrak about careers with Amtrak and there operations. Then one of the rangers gave us a walking tour of Steamtown during which he described various buildings and explained what they were used for in the past and in the present day. The administrative building was really cool because the second story of the building had a lot of railroad related artifacts along with many railroad related papers and or books on the first floor. We convinced the ranger to take us into the basement where they had an old subway line that used to connect to the building next door when the Lackawanna railroad still owned it. The basement otherwise was pretty much empty except for four speeders and two old baggage carts. After the tour we made our locomotive silhouettes it was neat to be able to use the plasma cutter and do a little bit of welding I enjoyed it so much I'm looking forward to taking it in college. After that we had a little time to kill before we went back the dorms so we walked around Steamtown and found a ranger to unlock the hand cart so that we could use it, which was a lot of fun. During our walk back to the dorms a small group of us crammed into a small hobby shop in downtown Scranton and over-whelmed the owner with our presence. After that we stopped at the Lackawanna station (now a hotel) and briefly looked around the lobby, it was quite impressive with its tall marble walls, beautifully stained glass windows and its highly polished tiled floor.

On Thursday we listened to an Operation Lifesaver program from a Canadian Pacific police officer in the morning. Next we broke up into groups and went through the back shops and learned about the specific operations that they do to keep the trains running. We also learned how to start a diesel, change a brake shoe on a passenger car, and change the knuckle on a freight car. Then we took a trolley ride and went through the trolley museum.

On Friday we started the day practicing radio communications using an O scale layout for a prop. We each had an opportunity to run the 1/8 scale railroad that was set up on a temporary track around the shops. Later that morning we had an opportunity to put a high rail truck on the tracks, it was interesting to see how they put the trucks onto the railroad tracks. That afternoon we practiced using hand signals to couple and uncouple the Nickel Plate GP-9 from a string of passenger cars. We got the chance to take the throttle of the GP-9 and run it for a short distance.

This week was a once in a lifetime experience. I immensely enjoyed every single minute of it. I was able to build some friendships with other railroad enthusiasts. This awesome opportunity helped me to better plan my college classes. I would like to thank everyone who has made this possibly for me to attend.

Sincerely,
Alec Graham