

From The Black Hills To Wyoming:

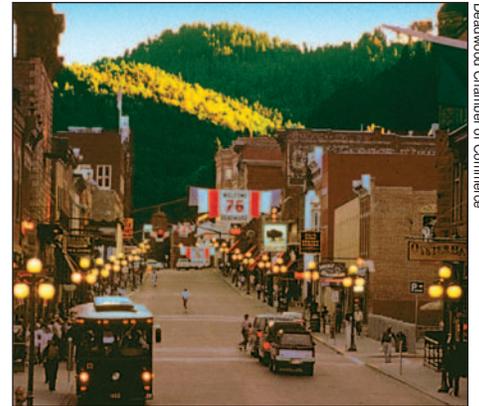
BNSF And DM&E Join RTA In Field Trip Success

One of the most unique events conducted by any trade association is the Railway Tie Association's (RTA) Annual Field Trip. The purpose of the trip is to expose industry members to new and innovative ways other companies handle material, deal with safety issues, and ready products or material for shipment or further processing. In recent years, a focus has also been developed on understanding railroad operations and even competitor industries. No other industry conducts such a comprehensive gathering of diverse interests all with the same purpose—to learn how to do things better in their own operations.

This year's intrepid group numbered 35 for the June field trip held in the Black Hills area of South Dakota and Wyoming. We not only visited several operations but also enjoyed two special presentations along the way. Before the trip even started, a welcome reception hosted by Merichem was followed by a talk by Dakota, Minnesota & Eastern (DM&E) Assistant Chief Engineer-Construction Ray Gigear. That's where we pick up the action.

Sunday Evening

Ray Gigear outlines DM&E plans to extend its track to the Powder River Basin when its federally funded Railroad Rehabilitation and Improvement Financing (RRIF) loan comes through. The plans call for at least 2 million new ties for new and rehabilitative construction.



Deadwood Chamber of Commerce

Thompson Industries capped the evening by sponsoring the transportation for the whole group to go up the road to Deadwood for a little entertainment.



Attendees listen intently to the financing and engineering challenges ahead for the railroad.

day 1

RTA President Tony Helms and RTA Administrator Debbie Corallo discuss the GCC tour. GCC is a cement manufacturing facility serviced by the DM&E.





GCC is known as one of the highest quality manufacturers of cement in the country. Attendees were surprised by how energy intensive the process is and how fuel prices have made costs rise in this industry as well. Also surprising is how technologically advanced a modern cement plant is. Very few workers are required keep this operation going 24/7. Participants also got to see a \$1.5 million robotic X-ray spectrometer that analyzes every single batch of cement without a human hand touching the samples.



Next up was a visit to Wheeler Lumber Company, where field trip point man and Wheeler Vice President Jeff Parrett, left, outlined the tour of the plant to ensue. Parrett explained that in 2003 the original plant, which treated with creosote and pentachlorophenol, burned down and had to be rebuilt from the ground up.



Wheeler ownership decided to rebuild as a state-of-the-art copper naphthenate (CuN) plant designed by Tom Marr of Osmose.



The new plant was fitted with oversized piping and pumps and a brand new automated control system that allows one man to load, treat, pull and do the quality control analytical work. The fact that it is a one-man operation is one of the reasons that CuN is a competitive preservative process at Wheeler. Treatment cycle times have been halved with the new efficiencies.



Parrett further explained that much of the company's railroad work and other processing is reserved for bridges. Large timbers are cut to size, treated with CuN and, in some cases, even assembled for shipment. This bridge component was headed to Maryland.



Although bridge work is a specialty, Parrett is anticipating it will bring in several thousand hardwood ties to the property to be ready for the DM&E expansion, as DM&E has accepted CuN for tie treatment as well.



Material, usually Doug Fir, is still incised before processing.



Next stop is Pope & Talbot's sawmill facility in Spearfish, S.D.



Plant Manager Pat Gray starts the tour with a classroom session on forest management. Using pictures and cross-sections of trees, he explains how critical it is to manage forests to minimize fire and maximize yield. He also tells of the millions spent to keep this mill state of the art and describes how that has allowed Pope & Talbot to stretch the resource.



On the tour, Nick Brueggen and Dave Whitted of Stella-Jones and Gary Williams, right, learn more about this technology.



Computer-controlled optimizers scan logs for solutions to the cuts that will yield the highest value.



Sawyers and graders take it from there in this high-efficiency operation.



Following the training session and tour, the group poses for a class picture.



The evening concludes with a dinner sponsored by Wheeler Lumber Company at a local country club, where one last group photo is taken. Then, it's off to Gillette, Wyo., for the next leg of the trip.

day 2

Working on the railroad again, the day starts bright and early with hospitality provided by Burlington Northern Santa Fe (BNSF).



John Bosshart of BNSF (second from right) escorts the tour to two BNSF facilities.



The first stop is the new switching yard at Donkey Creek, where up to 12 parallel tracks will be constructed to maximize train staging for the coal mines. Bosshart explains how wood ties are used for the panelized switches and as transition ties at crossings on mainlines servicing the mines, right.



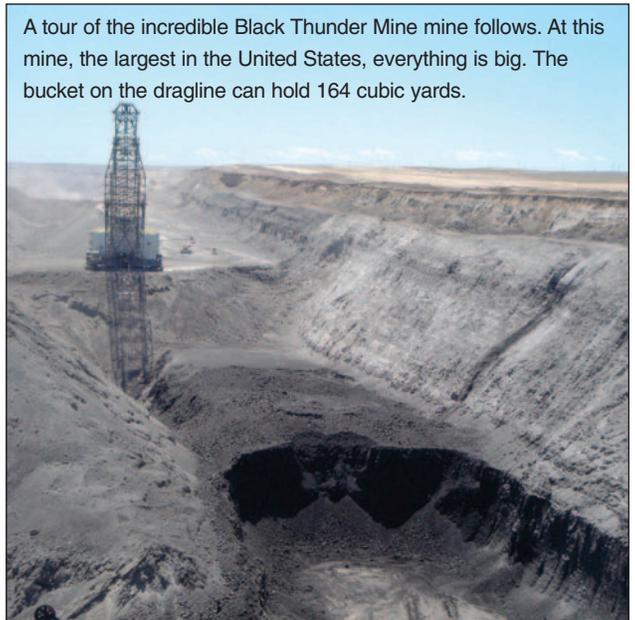
At the second stop, where BSNF is laying a third mainline to service the Thunder Basin Coal Company mine, Bosshart discusses the need for continuing cooperative efforts between BNSF and Union Pacific Railroad in managing and maintaining the track in the area.



240-, 320- & 360-ton dump trucks are some of the largest vehicles of their type in the world and run 24/7 between the mine and the crushers.



Dumping into the crusher only takes a few seconds. Then, the coal is processed for loading onto—you guessed it—railroad cars destined for power generation plants across the country.



A tour of the incredible Black Thunder Mine mine follows. At this mine, the largest in the United States, everything is big. The bucket on the dragline can hold 164 cubic yards.



To complete the day, attendees travel to Sheridan, Wyo., and are treated to dinner and an evening of education by KMG-Bernuth, as Wyoming Public Television's Pete Hickerson tells the tale of the tie hacks from the Wyoming Tie & Timber Company, pictured here.

Wyoming Public TV

day 3

The 2006 field trip comes to a conclusion on Day 3 with an early morning tour of Wyoming Sawmills. The mill is built on what once was a creosote treating plant but now cuts studs and is involved in several innovative product developments. Here, President and General Manager Ernie Schmidt talks about one of the most promising new products for construction developed there, the SSL-I-Joist. This new product is one of the strongest of its type and uses chips in a very efficient process to produce an engineered wood product.



Schmidt also explains the mill operations from debarking to final products.



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RTA and all the field trip attendees would like to thank this year's organizer, Jeff Parrett of Wheeler Lumber Company, for the terrific job of detailed planning that made this trip so memorable. Also, much of what made this trip so special can be attributed to sponsors. In addition to those mentioned above, RTA would like to send out a special thanks to Robbins Engineering and MiTek for box lunches and refreshments served on board the bus that made the several hundred miles of travel far more enjoyable than it would have been otherwise. A complete list of sponsors and attendees follows.

attendees Gene Mall, BioPreserve; Harry Bressler and Mike Neidert, Burke-Parsons-Bowlby; Rob Churma, Canadian Pacific Railroad; Jimmy and Brenda Watt, The Crosstie Connection; Billy Davis, Durable Wood Products; Matt Clarke, Mike Carter and Tommy Harris, Gross & Janes Co.; Billy McKa, Hot Springs Tie & Timber; Wes Piatt, Intermountain-Orient; Rusty Pfeiffer, Tim Ries and Gary Williams, Koppers Inc.; Scott McNair and Gerald Davis, Merichem; Bill and Jane Moss, MiTek Industries; Will Cumberland, North American Tie & Timber, Tom Marr, Osmose; Bernie Gierschke, Robbins Engineering; Jim and Susan Gauntt and Sam and Debbie Corallo, RTA; Barry Cooner and Robby Johnson, Seaman Timber Co.; Dave Whitted and Nick Brueggen, Stella-Jones; Jeff Broadfoot and Tony Helms, Thompson Industries; Jeff Parrett, David Hoak and Dale Draves, Wheeler Lumber.

sponsors Merichem, Sunday night welcome reception at hotel; Thompson Industries, Sunday night bus transportation to Deadwood, S.D.; Wheeler Lumber, Steak Dinner at the Spearfish Canyon Country Club Monday night; MiTek Industries, snacks and refreshments on bus; Robbins Engineering, box lunch on bus Tuesday; and KMG-Bernuth, drinks and dinner Tuesday night at Wyoming's Rib & Chop House.