



Send your news, articles and other material to the Editors. All contributions used with gratitude!!

October 2004

Editor's Note

- Due to a production error, September's editions of *Claude's Corner* and *Rick's Rantz* were not included in the email version of *Roundhouse Ramblings*. We apologize for the error and have included both September and October editions following the month's news in this mailing.

Saturday, 30 October

- Interesting development in the **Maple Leaf Tracks** story: if you click on their website address, you will now be redirected to a new company called [StreamLines](#).
- We have received an email from Alan (Hogger6060, ID# 53) about the [Canadian Pacific Steam Locomotives Heritage Collection](#): "An upgrade patch has been posted on our web site that will correct a few minor problems that were spotted by one of our users. Seems that the boiler tube pilots on the 2816, and 5916 were in need of adjustment." Some of our members have ordered this collection, mentioned below (see Monday, October 11), so it would be worth their while to download this patch.

Friday, 29 October

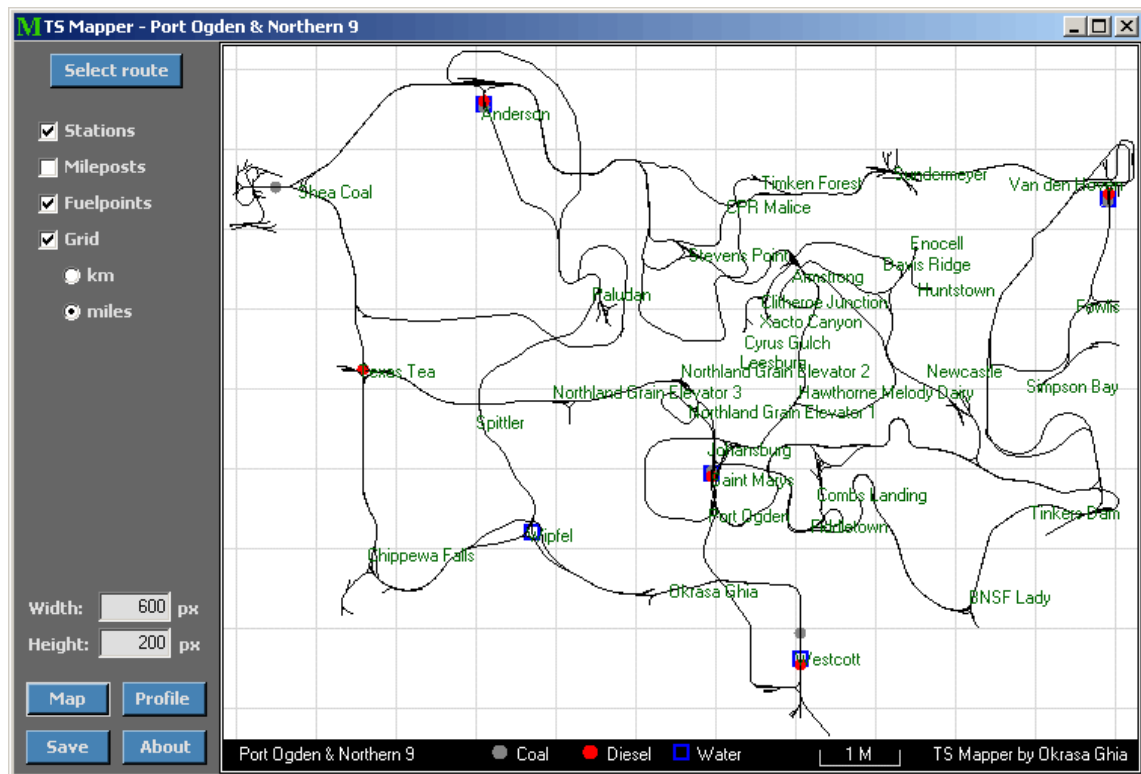
- If you have downloaded the latest version of ConBuilder (2.2.8), you might not have noticed yet that there is a new item in the folder - CBklite. It's a stripped-down version of CB with no testing facilities. It lets you produce consist and photographs of the items, and that's it. A very handy little version.

Thursday, 28 October

- If you have the payware route called Michigan Iron Ore (the LS&I route), you can find an update (3Mb file) at www.MLTdownloads.net which will convert your v1.0 to v1.3 and give you a missing consist. Thanks for the news, Jim (Intelvet, ID# 260). Also on that site is an update for the Sandpatch route that converts it to v1.03 - a 1.35Mb file. The site also has a good range of locos and items of rolling stock. You will need to register before you can download from the site, but it's free.

Wednesday, 27 October

- There is a new version of **Okrasa Ghia's set of utilities - tkutils** - on T-S.com. We have requested permission to host it here on our NERR website so that you can get easier access to it - it will be on the Other Downloads page as soon as we receive permission. Below is a sample of the output from one of the utilities - Mapper.



The other utilities are Archibald (an editor for MSTS), Horace (a route converter), and Zipper (compression tool). You must have the .NET Framework installed on your computer (on most recent computers), and you need a bit of patience when you ask Mapper to produce a route. The maps that it produces are not up to the standard of our own cartographers, but they will do as a quick reference if there is no alternative - and you don't need to open the MSTS AE!

Monday, 25 October

- Don't forget about our two subsidiary VRs that focus on the use of payware routes, with some freeware routes to join the routes into a cohesive network. Go and take a look at their websites and read their operations manuals. They will operate differently from the NERR and will be for serious and skilled engineers.
 - **Great Lakes & Allegheny** - run by jvaughan (Jim, ID# 4) - currently using Kicking Horse Pass II, Michigan Iron Ore (LS&I), the Bridge Line (D&H), and Sandpatch - though there plans to adjust this because of the current difficulty of buying some of these routes now that MLT is in limbo. The freeware routes to be used to form a cohesive network have not been finalised. This VR is open for business and currently has almost 40 members.
 - **Pacific & American** - run by artimrj (Bob, ID# 1) - currently planning to use Whitefish 5, Cascade Crossing, NERR Hoodoo Pass, Tehachapi Pass II, Cajon Pass, and Clinton Sub. This VR is not yet open for business. The opening is planned for early November. Engineers will need to also acquire a range of equipment packs from payware sites.

Sunday, 24 October

- I have almost finished installing MSTS again, using the process that was described below on 16 October. I now have 33 routes (plus the 6 default ones), including 9 payware ones. Not all of the NERR network routes are installed. The MSTS folder is 14.5Gb, with 178,250 files in 2,255 folders. Route-Riter gives me zero errors in the Routes. Activity Analysis gives me zero errors in the activities. There are 472 locomotives, 1006 pieces of rolling stock, and 1788 consists in the Trains folder. ConBuilder gives me zero errors in the locos. I have backed up the Routes and Trains folders to another hard drive on our home network, just in case this laptop crashes on me

like the previous one did! I'll also burn the folders to a couple of DVDs for more permanent storage. I've even had time to run a few short work orders on a few routes. I really like activities that take 30-45 minutes as a way of relaxing from concentrated thinking work! So make more of these please. Longer ones are for while I am watching movies or long sporting events.

Saturday, 23 October

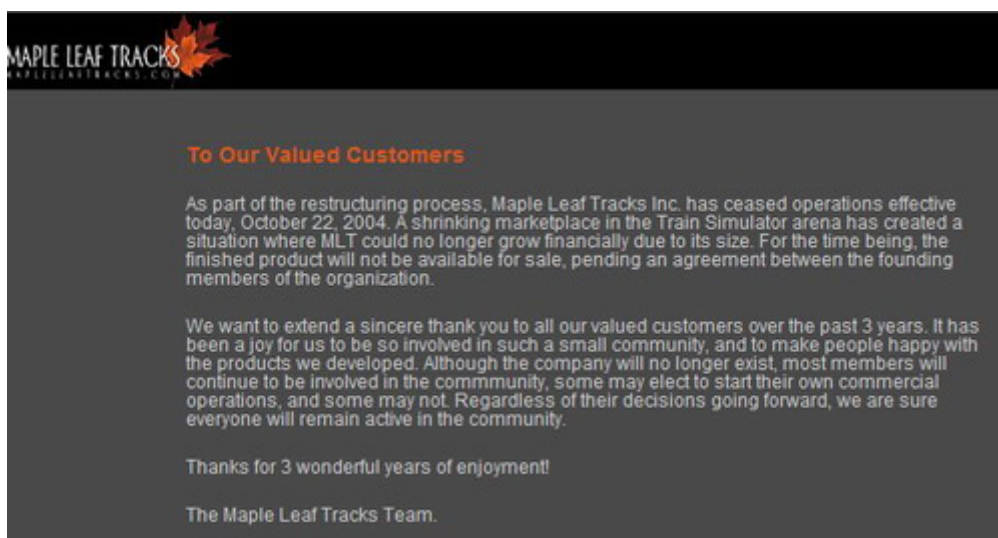
- **Our engineers have submitted over 10,000 time slips** since 12 January 2004! The 10,000th time slip was submitted by John Saunders (Hogger, ID# 47) for work order NESE-260-02, developed for the Seattle route in the North West Division by Jim (Intelvet, ID# 260). The work order is one of the most popular for the Seattle route, having been run 16 times this year. It requires the engineer to deliver a mixed consist of 86 freight cars to the yard at Interbay.

Congratulations, John, on being the engineer to submit the 10,000th work order!
Congratulations, Jim, on being the developer of the activity for the 10,000th time slip!

- Major news item! The developers of some of the best quality routes and equipment for the MSTS VWorld, **Maple Leaf Tracks**, has closed down their company, not just their website! The company produced routes such as Sand Patch, Cascade Crossing (Willamette), Bridge Line (D&H), Kicking Horse Pass 2, and Michigan Ore (LS&I), together with some excellent equipment packs.

Apparently there are moves by at least one of the partners to start up another company to produce further material, but it is not known at this stage if the current Maple Leaf Tracks material will be part of that. Danny Beck, one of the people involved, made the following statement in a forum thread at t-s.com: "It is the end of MLT and that is even more heartbreaking to us involved. It is also the beginning. The UP pack is still coming... just under a new banner. I am excited about what is going to be a new endeavor. This new organization has me excited about MSTS and whatever future train sims yet to come... We are taking a step back to evaluate a new approach to the business. I think you will all be pleased. The spirit and love for the hobby still remains strong. Long story short... the team may not be entirely the same and the name is changing but we are still here." We hope that the people involved can work out ways to at least keep the existing routes and equipment available, even if it is through a third party company, so that the excellent routes and equipment are not lost to the VWorld.

The announcement is shown below in a screen capture of **the only page now available at their website:**



There is also a note from Bill (UK Bill, ID# 286) in a thread on our NERR forums (in the Locker Room) which states that the Maple Leaf Tracks routes, apart from the newest one - Cascade Crossing, are available in boxed form from **Contact Simulations**.

Thursday, 21 October

- A new development that has appeared first on the **Ohio Valley System VR website**. If you follow the "Run Through Trains" link on the main page of their website, you will find the first activities that are intended to form a series in which an engineer can drive a work order that covers routes across multiple VRs. On the page are 4 work orders for OVS routes that link with the NERR and 2 work orders for OVS routes that link with the vFBL routes. The page also has links to the OVS locos and rolling stocks that are needed to run the work orders. The NERR and vFBL locos and equipment can be obtained from their own websites.

This is a serious attempt to promote cooperation between various VRs, and it is a great idea. There is a feedback form on the OVS website page so that the level of interest in running these sorts of activities can be ascertained. It is hoped that members will support this initiative - so please consider running the work orders.

- Interesting release of a new route on t-s.com today. The route is the **Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority** route (also known as "The T"). So far, there are 8 of the 16 required files available for download, and they total over 670Mb! One of the files is about 175Mb. Apparently, the author does not trust Route-Riter to compact the files without changing them and so changing the appearance of the route. It does include most trains and consists for the route, as well as the route itself. And it does include all the textures and other files, so there is no need to run an install.bat file - you run what you download. It will be interesting to see what the comments are from the people on dialup or on limited download limits. The author has spent several years developing the route, so it would be a shame not to make it available to everyone, regardless of limitations of the internet.
- Alan (Hogger6060, ID# 53) has sent us a link that will be useful for people who have Maple Leaf Tracks products - www.mltdownloads.net - it is an official part of Maple Leaf Tracks, and it has lots of downloads for their routes, including support for the discontinued version 1 of the Kicking Horse Pass route. There are also some good-looking locomotives in a variety of liveries. You need to register at the site before you can download files, but it's free.

Tuesday, 19 October

- If you like reading about Real World railroad activities and experiences, you will enjoy the website called **Tales from the Krug**. Al Krug is an engineer with the Burlington Northern Sante Fe railroad, and he carries a digital camera with him on the job. He has compiled over 60 photo-essays about his experiences. The photos are great, and the stories are very interesting and easy to read.

Monday, 18 October

- Please note: I left out a rather important step in my story about installing MSTs - described below on 16 October. I forgot to list the installation of the XTracks and NewRoads filesets. I have added that step below in purple to highlight the addition. Thanks to the members who contacted me with that reminder! I appreciate their help.

Sunday, 17 October

- The MSTs installation is going well. I now have a Trainset folder with about 90% of the NERR equipment installed, and there are still zero errors. I have about 6 routes completely installed with all the NERR activities installed and checked. And my blood pressure is still quite good!
- Our final interview for this month is with one of our non-North American members - **Paulo Sousa** (paulos, ID# 198). Paulo lives in Lisbon (Lisboa), Portugal, and he has been a member since 12 January 2003. He lists his occupation(s) as Quality Analyst, Informatics Technician, Electronics & Computer Engineering Student, and his interests / hobbies as trains, trains & trains (and computers).

1. Where do you live? Can you tell us your three favourite things about the area where you live? How long have you lived there? Have you moved around much during your life?

I live in a small town in the outskirts of Lisbon, our capital city, in Portugal. A nice spot far enough from Lisbon and near the beaches and the mountains. But now, as population and traffic is increasing, I think I need a quieter spot.

2. Do you have any connection with railways (railroads) in the real world? If so, would you tell us something about those connections?

Unfortunately I have no connections at all to the RW railroads. But I haven't quit hoping. LOL

3. How did you start with MSTS? What were your early experiences - good and bad?

I knew MSTS from magazines and the WWW and waited many months for its release. I think I was one of the first people to buy it when it was released here. The next step was to download stuff from t-s.com and have fun. Of course there are many limitations and bugs in MSTS, but that can't take the fun out of it. But the best part was when I joined NERR.

4. Did you have any experience with other VRs?

I checked some of the forums of other VRs. But when we have the best in our own VR, there is no need to look around.

5. How did you find the NERR? Why did you join it?

I found it on an early post on ts.com announcing it would be open soon. But I completely forgot to apply, and it was only when I saw Jim's post that I remembered it again. This time I took no chances and applied instantly. LOL

6. What part of the VR world and MSTS do you enjoy the most - running trains, doing work orders, or ...?

The best part is knowing that, whatever problem we have, there will always be someone to help us. And through our fora, some of our members get help in great detail for MSTS. Then, after the people we have here, I love to run and paint trains.

7(a). Where do you think / hope MSTS will be in 5 years' time?

In 5 years' time, MSTS will still be here. Of course we all hope that by then others will have developed other simulators. But there is too many stuff available for it to simply die. And the NERR is the right place to get the most out of it.

7(b). Where do you think / hope the NERR will be in 5 years' time?

NERR will be alive and kicking and even stronger than today. It doesn't matter now if it will be with or without MSTS or some other simulator. As they say in Scotland, we'll cross that bridge when we come to it. In 5 years, NERR will be the result of what we are doing today. And today we are working to be the best.

7(c). Where do you think / hope that you will be in the VR world in 5 years' time?

I hope to be with NERR, helping it grow. There is a lot to be done, and I would like to help it.

8. If you could add or change two things to the VR world and/or to the NERR, what would they be?

In the VR world, I would like to see more cooperation between the several VRs, sharing their differences and helping each other. We can see some of that between a couple of them, but there is room to do much more. In NERR, I would like to see our trains move with a purpose, and several people are already working on that. There is

also a move toward more realistic operations with the help of real engineers, and that is also very good.

9(a). What is your favourite NERR route? Why?

LGV Med, where the fast trains go. But I also like Wupper Express and NEC4.

9(b). What is your favourite non-NERR route? Why?

The Fertagus line. It is not modeled yet, but it runs near my house!

10. What is your favourite NERR loco? Why?

Anything ALCO. LOL No reasons needed. LOL

11. What is your favourite type of activity / work order? Why?

Mostly high speed trains. I really like to speed a TGV 2N (not available at NERR) to its full speed. But a freight train is also good to see the scenery, and especially because they are the most common activities available around. And occasionally some yard switching.

12. Is there anything else that we should know about you?!

Not much, I've been crazy about trains ever since I can remember. I have been married to Carmen, my lovely wife, for almost 15 years. We are both 35 years old, and I have no kids. I work for VW in the quality department doing data processing and analysis to support management decisions. I'm also studying electronics and computer engineering. And this year I finally started my collection of N scale models, and I hope to build a layout very soon!

Saturday, 16 October

- I have been installing MSTS onto my new laptop this week, and I'd like to share my experience and my process with our readers. This process can apply either a new installation by a new NERR engineer or a re-install (can be shortened a bit if you know your equipment in your backup has zero errors). This is how I am doing it. It is a long and involved process doing it this way, but the end result will be worth the effort.
 - installed MSTS from the two CDs supplied in the box. I bought it in mid-2002, so it is version 1.
 - opened the Microsoft download site (url on the Other Downloads page of this web site - I knew that I put the link there for a good reason!!
 - installed the train update, the Class 50 loco for the UK line, and the SD40-2 loco for the US lines. Several new items of rolling stock are included in the update. This brings MSTS up to version 1.2, which is the version available in shops now, I think.
 - installed the tsunpack-fix, which helps to unpack the zipped activity files - making sure that apk files are associated with this program - then I can just double-click on the apk file to install the activity automatically.
 - installed ConBuilder - I use it to check locos and rolling stock. I checked the default locos and rolling stock to make sure that they had installed properly and that ConBuilder was working properly.
 - installed Route-Riter - I use it to check routes, plus a few other things that are not relevant to installing MSTS. I ran RR on each of the default routes to check that they had installed properly and to check that RR was working properly.
 - installed Activity Analysis - I use it to check activities - it is payware, and I have used it for 2 years, so I stick with it. You can use Route-Riter for this task. I checked a couple of default activities to make sure that AA was working properly.

- installed Train Store. I stored one of the default routes and then unstored it to make sure that TS was working properly. (And yes, I am somewhat - my wife would say very - picky about ensuring that things work properly, so I check and re-check.)
- installed the NERR_Upgrade_1.2 file to upgrade the default rolling stock to NERR standards.
- ran a couple of short activities on the default routes to make sure that MSTs was working properly. My new laptop has a dedicated video card with 64Mb of RAM (an Nvidia Geforce FX Go5200) - all previous ones used built-in ones with shared RAM - and I can not believe what a difference it makes to MSTs. With that plus 1Gb of RAM, the 1.7 Centrino-powered Toshiba Tecra M2 gives me 30-55 fps, with everything maxed out except for dynamic shadows, in places where the best that I had been able to get was 10-25! I love my new toy!
- **installed XTracks and NewRoads - both available from the Other Downloads page of our web site. Not all routes require this step, but an increasing number of routes need these additional files.**
- Now I was ready to start installing the NERR stuff - at last!
- I copied the Chippewa Valley route onto the hard drive. If you haven't installed it before, then you will have to do the usual installation steps - unzip the various files and run the install.bat for most routes. If you have installed it previously, then you will, of course, have a copy of the folder on a CD so that you can just copy it to your new installation rather than do the whole installation thing again! I have a copy of my Routes, Trainsets and Consists folders on a network drive on our home network, so this saved me a lot of time. I still ran Route-Riter to check that all the files had copied properly - a few minutes of checking now could save me some MSTs-crash time later. I cleared out all the files from the following folders - Activities, Paths, Services, Traffic. I did not delete them, but moved them to a storage folder, which I'll burn to a CD later - I'm not paranoid; I know that "they" are out to get me!
- downloaded all the activities for the CW route from the web site (that gives me the latest versions of the activities) and installed them.
- installed one of the activities - then checked it with Activity Analysis (could have also used Route-Riter) - then installed the necessary locos and rolling stock. That last step is quick to say but rather time consuming to do. I used ConBuilder to check the locos and rolling stock - ran it after installing every 3-4 items. Again, that is time consuming, but once you do it once and check that each item has zero errors, you will not have to do it again (just make a backup of the folder in a safe place, e.g. on a good quality CD).
- repeated that last step for each activity. The time it took for each activity decreased as more items of equipment were installed and checked.
- repeated the last two steps for each of the routes.

By the time that is all done, the installation should be as close to perfect as it can be - no route errors and no equipment errors. That is the aim of the exercise.

- Some handy hints from other engineers about re-installing MSTs:
 - "Once you have installed everything and got it just the way you want it SAVE IT. I have the whole of TS saved in a 12GB zip file (www.Zipbackup.com - mine is paid for but you can download 30 day trial) with incremental backups done every month. To reinstall I just delete and reinstall the default MSTs then unzip everything. Takes around 2-3 hours in total most of it unattended time." (Bill, UKBill, ID#286)
 - "I lost count on how many times I had to reinstall MSTs before I learned to read the instructions with every download carefully. One thing I did was have my son burn all the NERR rolling stock, locomotives on to a CD and then each Division with its unzipped routes onto a CD for each division. We are working on burning the TrainStore files and all the various files I have downloaded over the past few months from t-s.com. so the next time I have to reinstall it will be less painful." (Bill Prieger, ID#269)

- "One thing I have done after removing the MSTS portion of TS, I renamed the folder to something like **Old MSTS Oct12** . In those files are all the rolling stock, all the routes, and all the other things I need - hope it's true! My theory right now anyhow. I will let you know. I have downloaded all the extras from our site.... then have the payware stuff, no problems there." (Alan, Hogger6060, ID#3)
- "I made a list as well of all the MSTS related items listed in my start panel under Programs. Then when I reinstall MSTS, I move everything back from where I backed it up to, then go back and totally re-install all the items I have listed from the start list. Don't know if it is "needed" but seems to me that it runs better when it is a fresh install. Also do a fresh install on certain cars if, when I save an activity and quit MSTS, I go back to it later, and it fails to load a car. I re-install it and so far it has been coming back up." (Ken, Speedy, ID#276)
- "The key I have found to reinstalling is to put MSTS on as suggested, and then add your routes one at a time as you want to use them. Ditto with the stock - which I put on one at a time, check with ConBuilder, then the next, etc. This means a reinstall to get up and running takes around an hour. I have also done two things to make life easier. I copy all the Trainset files to a CD - saves having to fix files again. And, with MSTS there are all the little add-ins one likes. These are on one CD, each add-on in a directory numbered 1, 2, 3 etc. Then, I just run through the directories in number order, without having to think. I put this CD together incidentally when I was doing a reinstall, and have not looked back since!" (Kevin W-S, ID#239)

Friday, 15 October

- The issue of **how to re-install MSTS** often comes up in the forums. A few people have taken the time to talk about their process of re-installation - and everyone does it a bit differently. Here's the process that MickyT, ID# 102 from New Zealand, uses:
 - "Install MSTS from the CDs.
 - Install the MSTS updates:
 - trainupdate (general stuff).
 - tsunpack-fix (helps with unpacking activities).
 - class50_content_update (British loco).
 - sd40-2_content_update (US loco). The SD40-2, if not installed, gives a error message in Route Control if you use it.
 - and, if you need them, TrainSimGmaxGamePack and TSgmaxSampleLoco."

All of the above can be downloaded from the link on the Other Downloads page - log in through NETS.

- "Install NERR_Upgrade_1.2 to upgrade default NERR stock.
- Now see if it all works.
- After that, install whatever routes you require. Remove the non-NERR activities - shift them to other folders or to CDs.
- If we are talking a clean install, now is the time to install locos and rolling stock.
- But my usual way is to install one activity at a time, check for missing stock with Route Control, and then install the required locos and rolling stock. Over a matter of months you'll be back where you started. So Route Control would be a utility I'd install about now.
- I recommend buying the NERR disks for a fast reinstall. All the MSTS and NERR updates are on it.
- After that, install any utilities you want, Train Store, Sky Conductor, etc."

- Here's an interview with a member of the NERR who is not known to most of you - Gary Kunder, ID# 11. You will come across him only in certain special circumstances.

Q. Let's start out with some of the basic stats. What's your full name, age, and place of birth?

Easy! Gerald V. Kunder, 45. Rochester, PA. I'm an ex special forces army ranger.

Q. Most of us at NERR haven't heard that much from you. What exactly is it that you do?

Officially, I'm the Chief of Security. That means I deal with the nincompoops that whine a lot and don't actually complete any work orders. I'm on the forums from time to time but am pretty busy, so Dandy usually beats me to it. I've been here since we opened and participate in a lot of the HQ banquets, "conferences", etc.

Q. Have you had a lot of problems with these individuals?

From time to time someone comes along. Wants to download everything all at once. Gets all riled up when he can't figure out how everything works right away. Doesn't bother reading the docs and doesn't READ when people are trying to help in the forums. That's when I have to step in and "escort them to the door" if they don't calm down. These people usually end up at other virtual railroads that will go unnamed. It hasn't been too bad recently though, with the Welcoming Committee (my idea despite what anyone else says!!!).

Q. Tell us about your family.

I'm married with 2 boys - Gary Jr and Matthew. They keep Deb and I real busy. We also have 2 black labs, one red.

Q. What's the first thing you say when you wake up?

Again, honey???? Well, at least when the kids are at their grandparents. Oh, that's what I say when I'm wakened up....

Q. What do you do for your "real" job?

I'm an air traffic controller. It's true what they say about that job. I spend so much time staring right at computers/radar that I try and avoid my computer at home for the most part. That's why you don't see me around a lot. The computer is gettin' old, can barely run MSTs, real low frame rates, not much fun. I'll probably get a new one soon for the kids.

Q. What other hobbies do you have other than NERR?

I like to travel with my wife and kids. We went to Bermuda this summer, Switzerland on the spring break, etc. When the kids are a bit older we want to take them to Alaska and spend a summer camping and just taking it all in.

Q. What's your favourite book?

'Stupid White Men' by Michael Moore, no question.

Q. Where do you see NERR in a year's time?

With NETS up and running, it should be a well-oiled machine. Admin (especially Bob) will have a lot more time to spend working on the details and writing more activities. And the training courses at NEARS will just keep getting better, the engineers will want more challenging work orders... and of course we'll have a replacement for MSTs, so it'll be a whole new ballgame.

Q. Anything else?

Stay out of trouble, or you'll have to deal with me!!!

Wednesday, 13 October

- Over 9800 time slips have now been submitted by our engineers. Who will submit the 10,000th time slip, and when will it be? And which work order will be on that 10,000th time slip? And does anyone really care? Yes, we do.

Tuesday, 12 October

- There are a couple of new files for the Wupper Express 8 route on www.thetrain.de today - a small fix file plus a different sound file + 2 activities.

Monday, 11 October

- The files for Wupper Express V8 are now available on ts.com. See below for some details of the route.
- Alan (Hogger6060, ID# 53) has sent us a link to the [Canadian Pacific Steam Locomotives Heritage Collection](#) for MSTs. Some of our members have ordered the package, so it will be interesting to hear what they have to say about it when they have run the equipment on a route or two.

On the front page of the web site, it says: "This collection of Steam Locomotives and steam era coaches has been produced as a donationware package to benefit steam preservation in Canada. It includes 9 new unreleased CP steam locomotives, 2 new coaches, and repaints of heavyweight coaches in CP livery." The project has been coordinated by John Fowles, with material being supplied by a group of people, many of whom are well-known in the MSTs modelling world, "including Harold Clitheroe (who provided the CP sounds and ".sms" files as well as historical background information and feedback and liaison with Canadian Pacific Railroad), Rick Grout (who is the author of those beautiful CP-style cabs), Russ Dobell (the author of the 4-4-0 CP 29 model), Teemu Saukkonen (author of the heavyweight coaches included in the package), Bob Boudoin (for refining the physics on various models)."

"This package has been produced as a fund raising effort for steam preservation in Canada. All funds collected through the sales of the Canadian Pacific Steam Locomotive Heritage Collection, less the cost of CDs and postage, will be donated to organizations furthering that cause. Donations will be made under the name CPHS, and the donations will be attached to a letter explaining the true source of the funds, you the Train Simulator enthusiast. CPHS would like to thank the **Canadian Pacific Railroad** for allowing the distribution of this package, use of their heritage liveries, and for waiving royalties so that we can provide the maximum possible donation to Canadian steam preservation.

The *Canadian Pacific Steam Locomotive Heritage Collection* is offered to you for a donation of \$12 US or \$15 CDN (this includes shipping to Canada and US by Canada post). International orders (places other than Canada and US) will cost \$13.50 US or \$17 CDN."

Sunday, 10 October

- **Statistics for September:** with the data for August for comparison purposes. Now we need to find a way to encourage the other engineers to submit their two time slips each month - the NERR needs the funds! :->

	August 2004	September 2004
No. of Engineers who submitted time slips	124	109
Total no. of time slips	795	772
No. of NERR time slips	652	606
Total hours	1443	1264
Average hours per work order	1.8	1.6
Total Revenue for the month	\$ 43,290	\$ 37,926
Average revenue per work order	\$ 54	\$ 48

- The most popular routes run during September were as shown in the table below. This ranking is done simply on the number of time slips submitted for each route - remember that there is a great difference between the number of work orders available for the different routes.

Chippewa Valley - 61	Full Bucket - 53	Dual Fictional - 51
North East Corridor - 42	Whitefish - 34	Glorieta Pass - 30
Marias Pass - 30	Newark & New Jersey - 27	CSX M&M - 25
Lehigh Valley - 22	Seattle - 20	Hamilton Norfolk - 18
Ohio Rail - 16	Monon - 15	Raton Pass - 15
South Rail - 14	Blue Mountains - 14	East River - 13
San Diego - 12	Hoodoo Pass - 10	LGV Med - 6
East Metro - 3	Unterland - 3	Niederelbebahn - 2
Wupper Express - 2	Florida - 2	Melbourne - 1

- The new version of the **Wupper Express route** (version 8) is now available on The Train web site at www.thetrain.de - German and English language web site.
 - It has over 250 miles (400 kilometres) of line. It features the Ruhr industrial region in western Germany. It is fully electrified. It has a new signal system. It covers:
 - Moenchengladbach-Dusseldorf.
 - Cologne-Dusseldorf (with a branch into the chemical complex at Bayerwerke Leverkusen).
 - Cologne-Solingen-Wuppertal.
 - Dusseldorf-Duisburg-Essen-Bochum-Dortmund.

- Dusseldorf-Ratingen-Essen.
 - Dusseldorf-Solingen.
 - Dusseldorf-Wuppertal-Hagen-Dortmund.
- Cologne has a magnificent cathedral as the main feature on the sky line. The photo below is the Cologne railroad station.



- It is on the Rhine River, as is Dusseldorf. The other cities are to the east in the Ruhr valley, except for Moenchengladbach, which is west of Dusseldorf. [Click here to view a map of the route from the MSTs AE \(this thread from ts.com will open in a new window.\)](#)
 - There are 2 zipped exe files in the route download (24Mb each) plus an equipment file (11Mb) and an activity package (1Mb).
 - It should be available on ts.com soon.
 - It installs into its own folder called "Wupper 8", so you can have versions 7 and 8 on your hard drive at the same time.
 - There are a lot of fixes available for the equipment that is supplied in the equipment file mentioned above, so if you have problems with it, go to [this web site](#) and check the 10 October entry that discusses this route. That web site also lists the extra equipment needed for the activities supplied in the file mentioned above - and the web sites where you can download the equipment.
- And just for something completely different:

A man who had spent his whole life in the desert visited a friend. He'd never seen a train or the tracks they run on. While standing in the middle of the RR tracks, he heard a whistle, but didn't know what it was. Predictably, he's hit and is thrown, ass-over-tea-kettle, to the side of the tracks, with some minor internal injuries, a few broken bones, and some bruises.

After weeks in the hospital recovering, he's at his friend's house attending a party. While in the kitchen, he suddenly hears the teakettle whistling. He grabs a baseball bat from the nearby closet and proceeds to batter and bash the teakettle into an unrecognizable lump of

metal. His friend, hearing the ruckus, rushes into the kitchen, sees what's happened and asks the desert man, "Why'd you ruin my good tea kettle?"

The desert man replies, "Man, you gotta kill these things when they're small."

- And there must be something about a uniform! Obsessive trainspotter, Kenji Hishida, was caught stealing two pairs of trousers from a railroad office in Akashi, western Japan. Police later found 10,000 uniforms in his apartment.

Saturday 9 October

- The **Reviews Page** has been removed - not enough new reviews to keep it going as a separate page. The two main reviews from that page have been added to the bottom of this month's Ramblings. Future reviews will be added to the main news page with all other news items.
- **Murphy's Law:** There's grim news for people who worry that if something can go wrong, it will go wrong. A new mathematical formula has proved Murphy's Law really does strike at the worst possible time. Ordinary people have long known that computers crash on deadline and cars break down in emergencies, while previous studies have shown the law, also called Sod's Law, is not a myth and toast really does fall buttered side down. But now a panel of experts has provided the statistical rule for predicting the law of "anything that can go wrong, will go wrong" - or $((U+C+I) \times (10-S))/20 \times A \times 1/(1-\sin(F/10))$.

After tests of the experiences of 1000 people, they have discovered "*things don't just go wrong, they do so at the most annoying moment*". Now the experts commissioned by British Gas - a psychologist, a mathematician and an economist - say the formula allows people to calculate the chances of Sod's Law striking, and even try to beat bad luck. Project psychologist Dr David Lewis said: "The lesson from this is that, to cut the seemingly unbeatable Murphy's Law gremlins down to size, you need to change one of the elements in the equation. So, if you haven't got the skill to do something important, leave it alone. If something is urgent or complex, find a simple way to do it. If something going wrong will particularly aggravate you, make certain you know how to do it." But he added a note of caution: "There is, of course, a Sod's Law factor to the equation. If you judge your ratings wrongly, you might become too optimistic - and calamity will strike."

In the calculation, five factors have to be assessed: urgency (U), complexity (C), importance (I), skill (S) and frequency (F), and each given a score between one and nine. A sixth, aggravation (A), was set at 0.7 by the experts after their poll.

Top of the most likely - and most annoying - events was spilling something down yourself before a date and the hot water heater breaking down in cold weather, followed by rush hour being worse when you're already late.

- Here is an interview with Greg Lane, one of the head guys from Auran, the developers of **Trainz**. This company was started, and is still based, in Brisbane, Queensland. Trainz was not their first game - that was Dark Reign, which sold over 800,000 copies around the world. That game also led to the development of their game toolset called Jet, which has been another success for them. (The interview was published in the ICT section of the *Courier-Mail*, our local newspaper.)

Q: Have you built your business on Jet's development?

A: Since then we have sold three separate role playing products as well as umpteen zillion versions of Trainz, and now that Microsoft has announced that it is abandoning that market, it leaves the way open for us to be the main railroad game simulation developer in the world, which is a bigger development than you'd think, as the Trainz series has been hugely successful, particularly in Europe where rail transport is a much bigger part of the culture.

Q: Has Jet been an important part of the product?

A: Yes. Trainz has turned into an evergreen franchise, and every year we have been able to sell upgrades to the hard-core audience. The improvements have been many and our technology has been cutting-edge, but the other thing we nailed with Trainz was that the game shipped with an integrated editor which is part and parcel of the product. This has kept the game more popular as building the railroads has become as big as playing the game itself. Even though we shipped one fifth of what Microsoft has shipped we have over five times the content as our loyal community has helped to grow the game for us. There is a real lesson here in that you can benefit a lot by having a relatively open source development approach.

Q: How successful has Trainz been?

A : We have sold over 200,000 copies of the game, and given that we self-publish, this has meant fantastic returns for us as there is no middleman.

Q: What is next for the franchise?

A: We have recently announced that we are working on a new product called **Rail Sim Pro**, which is a totally new product. We have shipped our final version of Trainz, Trainz Deluxe, which has local content for each region it is sold. You'll see Aussie landmarks in the game which is something that has proved really popular. We have localised content right now going into Italy, France Germany and Spain with more to follow.

Rail Sim Pro will feature new technology, as it will utilise the latest incarnation of our Jet game development tool system. Jet 3 will run on Unix, SGI and Macintosh machines as well as PC, so that opens up the market for it considerably. Indeed we are even developing a version of the game which will be used by European rail companies as a teaching aid, and a stripped-down version of this will also be on sale as a deluxe version of the retail game. So there will be home, professional and commercial versions of the game. This is similar to what Microsoft has done with its Flight Simulator series.

Q: To what do you attribute the success of Trainz?

A: One great thing we have managed to do with Trainz, and this is something which is critical to our success is that we have managed to develop and maintain control over our own internally developed IP (intellectual property). Having valuable commercially successful IP gives us bargaining power as a developer and control as a publisher or in dealing with other publishers.

Q: Was this a big motivating factor in your decision to make Trainz?

A: Yes, but we honestly also set out to make something we could afford to build, and Trainz was a logical option. We wanted a series which was "evergreen" in that we could continue to release refined versions of the game to a loyal audience. Looking at the two evergreen models, we know we could have chosen sport or simulation. We decided not to do sport as there are too many cultural differences between various markets, and simulation better suited our design strategy anyway. We looked at trains and worked out that no one was doing it properly, and so we decided to have a crack at it.

Thursday, 7 October

- There is a patch for the **New Roads** set of shapes for MSTs on the Other Downloads page on this web site - log in through NETS. It adds some files that were apparently missing from the original V3.1 release. It brings New Roads to v3.1.1.
- **Don't forget** to use the **NERR FAQ** facility on this web site to look for answers to the questions that you might have about work orders or other aspects of the NERR. For example, if you want to contact another engineer, here is the FAQ entry that will help you:
 - "Either go to "memberlist" at the top of the page, find them and either email or PM, or it is probably best to ask the question on the 'proper' forum on here. By proper, I mean either freight, passenger, or possibly the route it's for, if there is a forum hosted here for it.
 - However, chances are, if you have a question about it, there are probably another 10 with the same question that haven't figured out the answer either. Everyone on here is pretty good about helping when/where they can.
 - Alternatively, you can go to NETS by engineer number if you don't see them here. Look them up there and get their email address. Else, I agree with Robert, forums are the go, using the activity name as the subject will get the attention of the activity writer, the F-Team who tested it, and others who have run it.....lots of help, wherever you turn.... Go to the Callboard, find the engineer, click on his name, this takes you to his profile pages. Once there, click on the little username on the left and that is their email link. You can email them right from the callboard."

Tuesday, 5 October

- Follow-up to the item yesterday about the vFBL VR: the web site owner (Auzze, ID#56) has told us that he has bought the web hosting company, so he should have no more troubles with the web site! So the vFBL should be back very soon.
- Read elsewhere that Version 8 of the Wupper route is due to be available this coming weekend (9/10 October). We use that route in the North-East Division. The original is in the Dusseldorf - Cologne-Dortmund area in Germany.
- **Handy Hint:** Thanks to GaryH (ID# 100) for this one - he was helping Claude in the forums today. Sometimes, your computer will lose its way - its chips get confused! As an example, you might find that you can no longer open a document or other file by double-clicking on it. Generally when this happens, it means that the Association between the file and the program you used to use to open it with has been lost. Try the following to restore the File Association:
 - To ensure that Windows always uses the same program to open the file, or any other file with the same file name extension (e.g. pdf, doc, txt, eng, ...), right click on the file and select the "Open With" menu item.
 - In the Open With dialog box, select the "Always use this program to open these files" check box.
 - So, to restore the File Association between a pdf file and Acrobat Reader, right click on any pdf file,
 - choose "Open With",
 - choose "Program",
 - pick "Adobe Reader", and
 - check the box that is labelled "Always Use this program to open these files".
 - Click OK until all the boxes close. Then double-click on a file of the relevant type - it will work! Trust us!

Monday, 4 October

- We have been unable to make contact with the vFBL web site in recent days, and we thought that it might have become a fallen flag. But we have read on another web site that the web site host server has closed down. The VR web site owner is working to have things up and running again in the near future. The FBL is a great route - one of the first freeware routes developed for the MSTs. We hope that vFBL can get to full operations quickly for the sake of the members over there.
- The first of our interviews this month is with our Superintendent of Maintenance of Way, **Brian Element** (elementb). He coordinates the work of the F-Team and looks after the equipment roster on the web site and started the Site Index and updates all the work order lists on the web site and ... - and he even occasionally sleeps, eats and works in the RW!

1. Where do you live, and what are your three favourite things about that place? How long have you lived there, and where else have you lived?

I live in Ottawa, Ontario, Canada. I guess one of the favourite things is the amount of woods near my house for taking the dogs for walks. The city has a greenbelt circling the city of Ottawa and I live just outside of that greenbelt so it is easy access for taking long walks with my 2 dogs. We constantly see deer, rabbits, beavers and even the occasional coyote on our walks.

If you love winter sports, this is a great city to live in. It has the longest skating rink in the world (John, didn't part of your anatomy make the acquaintance of the ice? *Yes, it did - several times! Not a lot of ice in Queensland!*). It is also not a large city, so it has everything but still easy to get around in. Finally, and probably the most important thing is, that it is the city that I make my living in that lets me have time to play with trains!

I have lived in Ottawa for about 15 years now. Prior to that I lived in Sherbrooke, Quebec, where I attended CEGEP (a form of College) and University. I grew up about 45 minutes from Sherbrooke in a small town of Danville, Quebec (about 2000 people). Some of the engineers might remember some pictures that I posted last spring of a large open pit Asbestos mine. Well, that was the main industry for the area, and both my dad and his father worked their whole careers at the mine (it is now closed down).

2. Do you have, or have you ever had, any real world connections with trains? What do you do in your time in the real world? How do you spend your spare time, apart from your work with the NERR?

Well, for real world connections, my great-grandfather on my mother's side was a conductor on the old Grand Trunk Railroad before it was merged with CN. I have a retirement picture of him next to his steam train. Unfortunately you can't see enough of the train to tell what it is, but I do have the train number, so one of these days I will bug Taz to find out what it is! I also have 2 older cousins, one of them now being retired who was an engineer with CN and then VIA Rail – when he retired he was the engineer for the Montreal – Toronto run. My other cousin is an engineer out of the Montreal yards. Also, where I grew up was near Richmond, Quebec, which in the year 1900 was the 3rd largest station in Canada - only Montreal and Toronto were larger. It was on the main line to the Maritime Provinces and also the main line to the United States from Montreal. There was also a small freight yard used by the mine near my house, so I used to go down there and watch them doing switching when I was young. So you could say I grew up in a family and region that respected trains.

In the Real World, I work for the Government of Canada in the Department of Social Development. I work as an internal auditor there (I am an accountant), and prior to that I was 13 years with the Office of the Auditor General of Canada.

Spare time - well, as I have already mentioned, I have 2 German Shepherd mixes that take up some of my time. I also enjoy reading (mostly Science Fiction) and watching movies and getting together with friends - I guess the regular stuff!

3. How did you discover MSTs? How involved with it did you become before joining the NERR?

I heard about it, I guess, either through the gaming magazines or on the 'net before it first came out, but for one reason or another I was skeptical about it. I actually didn't purchase it until the December after it was released. After that I soon found train-sim.com and started downloading routes. I think one of the first routes I discovered was East Metro, which I still consider as one of my favourite routes.

Before becoming a member of NERR, I played with it off and on, had lots of problems with it (namely it was overheating my computer in winXP so that I ended up creating a dual boot system so that I could play it in 98 and not have to worry about it overheating all the time and locking up). I played with East Metro and the Ohio routes mostly and checked out the boards at ts.com and ACR but did not get actively involved in the community - just stayed on the side lines.

4. How long after that did you find the NERR? How did you discover it?

I saw Bob's posting at ts.com about it opening and went over to have a look at it, and it interested me. I had checked out ACR prior to that but had never bothered to join. It seemed kind of dead when I was looking, and for whatever reason I didn't bother joining. I had downloaded several pieces of their equipment and activities and had played with them without bothering to become a member. I also saw Bob's GNRR site prior to him starting NERR and had downloaded the equipment and activities and played with them, always hoping for more stuff. After seeing the posting about the NERR at ts.com, I decided to join. It was free, so I had nothing to lose, At that point, I was looking for more activities to run, as I had long since tired of the defaults and the ones at ts.com, which I was rarely ever able to complete, either from having difficulty in finding equipment or from finding that the activity wasn't well developed, and you couldn't complete it. My joining date at the NERR was September 1, so I am one of the original engineers on the site.

5. How did you come to be part of the NERR Admin group? Why did you take on the role of F Team coordinator?

Well, I guess I annoyed Bob enough that he thought I was better off in being part of management instead of bothering him all the time! I guess when I had joined I just started helping other people out on the boards and pestering Bob with one of his original work orders that I couldn't get to work. I think I have had almost every problem you can have with MSTs over the time and managed to get around it, so I was in a position to help out new people. The forums were staying friendly (unlike at ts.com), so I didn't mind posting advice without having to worry about having several people start flaming me that they didn't need my advice or it was wrong!

So after about a month of making a nuisance of myself on the boards, Bob asked if I wanted to join the management team. I jumped at the chance. At that time, I was running all the work orders on the site (that was back in the days when that was still possible and still have a day job!) and helping out with advice for engineers who were having problems. Bob started sending me over the new stuff (I think the first ones that I tested were from PJ) to try out before posting them

on the site. That gave me an idea of actually creating a team of people to test every new work order that gets posted on the site and verify that each one could be run and completed before being posted. That was the start of the F-Team. Since its creation, we have probably tested over 700 work orders, with the majority of them being posted.

6. How did you learn to produce web pages? What aspects of the NERR web site do you manage?

I have always enjoyed computers. My first one was a Commodore Vic-20. I then went to a Commodore 64, then the 128, an Amiga. My first IBM-PC was an IBM 386. Along the way, I have played around with different programming languages. When I got hooked to the internet, I started fooling around with html coding. The first web pages I made were for my oldest dog Spinner (you can see them [here](#), but I haven't updated these pages in years). So it was fairly easy to go from coding directly in html to using FrontPage.

The parts that I regularly keep updated are all the work order pages, the equipment pages and the equipment roster, along with the division pages and anything else that Bob might ask for help with.

7. Where do you see yourself and the NERR and MSTS being in 3-5 years' time? Do some crystal-ball-gazing.

I will probably still be around. The F-Team pretty much runs itself these days, with me just being the go-between for them - and I'm usually the one being the bottle neck(!) in getting the stuff posted. I have been fooling around with routes off and on since I got MSTS. I also have 3 locos in the works - 2 of them more or less just needing the finishing touches when I get the chance. So long as Bob is around, there will be an NERR, as he is the driving force for the entire site. With 2 new simulators possibly in the works that may be compatible with MSTS, I can see us moving away from MSTS and adopting one or both of these new simulators over the years. I think we are reaching our limits to what can be done with MSTS. Examples of this are the problems that Facing Point is having with their Surfliner route, and the latest route from MLT which is a great route but can be a frame rate hog and hard to run unless you have a high end computer. People will still be coming out with new routes and equipment, but I think we are reaching the limits of what can be done with MSTS. Now we are at the point where we are trying to fine tune it, such as for the front coupler bug.

8. What do you believe have been the greatest successes in the MSTS world and the NERR? Are there things that you would like to see developed in the future, either in the NERR or outside it?

Probably one of the greatest surprises is that a software package that is as flawed and also without vendor support as MSTS is, has become such a hit with so many people. NERR has built a community around MSTS, with many of the members, even though from all over the world, getting together to meet!!!

I think the stuff that I would like to see may already be in development. A better platform would be great, and hopefully the 2 companies that are now working on this will give us something to look forward to.

9. Have you had any disappointments with MSTS over the past couple of years?

The biggest is probably the lack of updates with the original, and then the cancellation of MSTS 2. There has never been any support from MS on this product. I can just imagine what MSTS could have been like if there had been a team behind it like over at Trainz that really support their product and are always

trying to improve it. (Or even if MSTs had been given the sort of support and development that MSFS has had over the years!)

10. How can the ordinary NERR member contribute to its continued success? Just keep running those work orders and contributing on the forums when they have a chance. Also look around for opportunities to help out if they have the time and the inclination.

Saturday, 2 October

- Have you installed the **upgrade to our equipment** that fixes "bugs in our equipment"? Read the full information and download the patch file from the **Train Update forum** - available only to registered members:

"**NERR Major Update #1** - September 6th, 2004: This update addresses several bugs in our equipment that prevented sounds from playing and brakes from operating on various pieces of equipment. SMS files have been edited, sound files added, cvf files edited. All errors were produced and identified with Conbuilder 1.06. If you have **ALL** NERR trains installed, you can just run this installer at default settings. Otherwise, install it to a temp folder and cut and paste what you need to your installation."

- And the **Top 25 Work Orders** (#1 at the bottom of the table this month!) in terms of the number of time slips that have been submitted for them since the start of the NETS are:

WO#	Work Order Name	Loco	Type	Length	Developer	Time Slips	Rank Last Month
241	NENE-035-01	Diesel	Freight	1:30	JayKay	26	>10
82	NENE-KA-002	Diesel	Freight	2:45	Kevin Arceneaux	26	>10
374	NEWH-150-01d	Diesel	Freight	3:20	buttercup	26	>10
299	NENE-061-01	Electric	Passenger	0:35	Firsty	27	>10
552	NENE-163-01a	Diesel	MOW	1:10	Stumbl	27	>10
125	NEDF-109-X01a	Diesel	Freight	1:20	Robert Reedy	28	>10
415	NEFB-100-05B	Diesel	Freight	0:50	GaryH	28	>10
447	NEFB-123-01a	Diesel	Freight	1:45	Hiemdal	28	>10
90	NEOW-260-02	Diesel	Freight	0:50	Intelvet - Jim	28	>10
240	NENE-018-1a	Electric	Passenger	0:30	Gary Gardner	29	>10
358	NENE-105-03a	Diesel	Freight	1:30	Manuel Pinochet	29	>10
434	NEMM-110-01	Diesel	Freight	1:40	Antonio Miranda	30	8
373	NEWH-150-01c	Diesel	Freight	1:20	buttercup	30	>10
124	NEDF-109-X01	Diesel	Freight	1:50	Robert Reedy	31	8
380	NELV-260-01	Diesel	Freight	1:00	Intelvet - Jim	31	>10
412	NEWH-100-01a	Diesel	Freight	2:15	GaryH	31	>10
372	NEWH-150-01b	Diesel	Freight	1:35	buttercup	31	>10
596	NECV-007-03b	Diesel	Freight	1:30	elementb	33	8
414	NEFB-100-05A	Diesel	Freight	0:50	GaryH	33	7
371	NEWH-150-01a	Diesel	Freight	0:30	Buttercup	33	6

483	NEFB-045-01	Diesel	Freight	1:30	Mont Denver Gold	35	>10
411	NEWH-100-01	Diesel	Freight	1:18	GaryH	36	5
106	NEER-110-01	Diesel	Freight	1:00	Antonio Miranda	38	4
81	NENE-KA-001	Diesel	Freight	2:45	Kevin Arceneaux	44	2
595	NECV-007-03a	Diesel	Freight	0:45	elementb	46	3
383	NEWC-1-Grainmove	Diesel	Freight	1:00	Bob Artim	47	1

- If you are having problems with any of the following NERR equipment, you might not have the latest version - download it from the Fleet Download page of the web site - log in through NETS to access this members-only area.

- NE_NALW_BigBoy
- NE_AMD103
- NESuperBox00
- NEtankers_MS_ACF
- NE_NALW_NEXsounds
- NE_NALW_Comet_Sounds
- NE_NALW_Bershiresounds
- NALW_Genesis_Sounds
- US2Default_Stock_RRS_NERR_Upgrade_1-2
- NX-Pro_Coalhoppers
- NE_NALW_Smooth_set
- NE_NALW_Smooth_Blue
- NE86ft_box_Epstein
- 3Dts_SD70
- NX-Pro-Boxcars
- NXgondola
- NERdc
- NE_SD70m_9237
- NE_SD40-2_2921
- NE_GP35_2035
- Spiverset01box
- NXflat_132241
- NXflatcars

Review from 8 September

Obo's MSTS Locomotive Catalog

Do you want to know what a particular MSTS loco looks like? If so, chances are that, if it's been modelled for MSTS, then you can probably find a screenshot of it on [this web site](#).

He has compiled over 1700 entries in the categorised listing. There have not been a lot of additions this year, but the author is back in action now. He's been asking for suggestions over at [Train-Sim.com](#). Each loco is shown beside a listing of the railroad it is used on, the version available for MSTS, the loco's number, the name of the developer, and a link to the web site where it can be downloaded (not all links are live). An example of the screenshots in the catalog is shown below - the Australian National Rail Class 53 TraileRail loco Number NR53.



Review from 24 August (contributed by HHackman, Engineer #147):

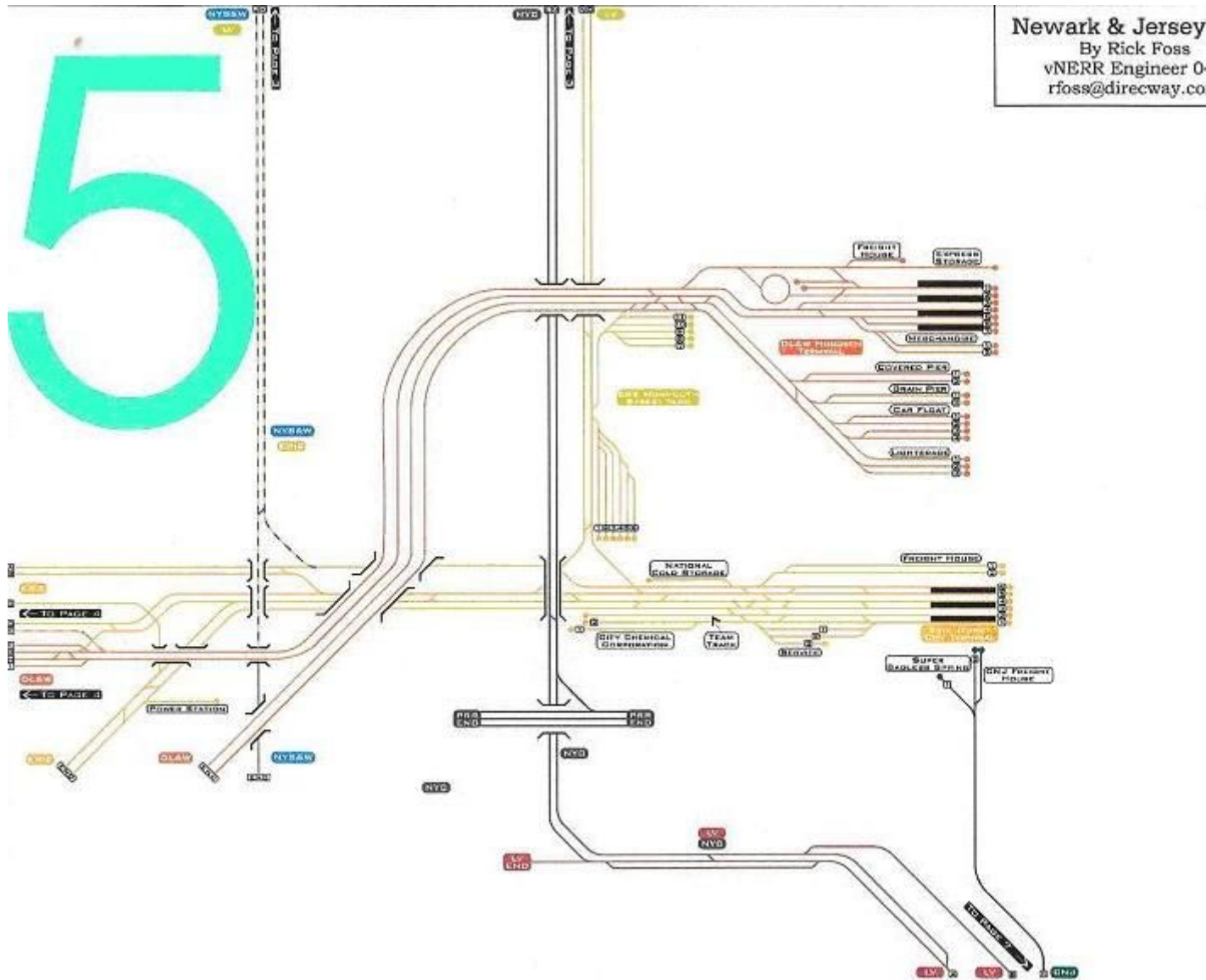
The new N&NJ Map

I got a sneak peek at this map from Silvermeteor, and let me tell you, this is a wonderful map. I've always wondered why nobody has ever tried to make multi-RR lines different colors in a map with shared RR lines as multi-colored dashed lines. Well, the wait is finally over; Silvermeteor has done just that, with a few new improvements as well.

- v Now the top of all maps point north.
- v Multi-RR lines are different colors.
- v Shared-RR lines are multi-colored dashed lines.
- v Maps go from the north end of the route down to the south end of the route, generally, instead of jumping all over the place.
- v Easier for reading activities as well as making them.

- v And probably best of all, he's reduced the number of pages from 28 down to 12.

The maps are made so you can tape them together on the wall and see exactly where you are. The map below is a sample of page 5 to show the different aspects of the maps.



This map, along with the schematics of many of the other routes that are part of the NERR Network, can be found on the [Routes Page](#) of this web site.

Rick's Rantz

by Rick Foss (silvermeteor), NERR Engineer #42

11 October 2004

Tolerance & Concern For Others vs Individual Rights

Have you noticed how easy it is to lose sight of the responsibilities associated with the right to freedom of expression? Sometimes we get so wound up in an individual right to express ourselves that we forget that the expression should not infringe on the rights of others.

Although not often, we have had incidents here at NERR, and they seem to be an every day occurrence at Train-Sim. It is not surprising that these things happen when you gather together a large number of individuals from different nationalities, ethnic groups, religions, education, etc.

That is precisely the reason that each of us has to strive especially hard not to let our right to individual expression put us into the position of thinking that our thoughts or opinions come before the general good of the group. There are rules, both written and unwritten, that we each should be willing to accept for the privilege of belonging to NERR and enjoying the company of a very diverse group of train enthusiasts.

Isn't it amazing how an interest in trains seems to be a universal thing? We have members from the UK , Australia , USA , New Zealand , South Africa , New Zealand , Portugal , Croatia, and probably more that I have not noticed. (Please do not be offended if your country was not mentioned.)

Why should it be so hard to accept a few rules of conduct that are designed to keep us focused on the enjoyment of trains rather than allowing us to become sidetracked into discussions about race, religion, politics, etc? There are other and better suited forums designed for that type of expression. These forums are designed to discuss trains!

Even within the subject of trains, there seems to be plenty that we can disagree about. These discussions are interesting and enlightening, but they should also be kept civil. There should not be any tolerance for personally demeaning attacks here at NERR. Although it is impossible to avoid the occasional conflict of personalities, these conflicts should be minimized and, most importantly, resolved behind the scenes by the management using PMs, email, and even telephone conversation when a more personal touch is necessary.

When I place a post on the forums, I try to read it over at least three times before I press the Send button. It is amazing how many times I will change a word, reword a sentence, or just plain delete a thought that might be offensive to others that seemed good when I originally wrote it. Remember the people reading that post cannot see your face. Is your statement made in anger or in jest? Use smilies when you can to help convey your emotion.

Finally, these forums are the private property of Mr. Artim. They are his lock, stock and barrel and he has decided, after talking with other members of his Admin group, that this is not the place for political, national or defamatory statements. That is his personal right, which he has chosen to exercise and which each of us accepts when we request permission

to belong to NERR and enjoy playing with trains and exchanging ideas with a great group of traintastic individuals.

So let us all go into the world with a greater respect for the rights of others and not be overly impressed with our own individual rights. Let us discuss the color that looks best on a locomotive without going to blows over whether that color should contain one more or less drop of yellow to make it exactly right. Let us share an interest in railroads that unites us across all sorts of physical, spiritual and emotional boundaries.

Most of all - let us have FUN!

17 September 2004

Mind Over Matter

One would think that with my mind it really doesn't matter but here I am anyway.

All right! I admit it! I made a mistake. I know that it doesn't happen often but sometimes There are you happy now?

"What the heck is this idiot talking about." you ask yourself? Well, I'm talking about this column. My mistake was to write the first one. You see, I was feeling down about the hurricane that we had just experienced and thought that I would unburden myself of some deep dark hidden secrets about my questionable behavior during Hurricane Hugo a number of years ago. Don't know what I'm talking about? Only way to solve that is to read the first article.

Anyway, the mistakes just kept on coming. A person, whose name will go unmentioned, published it in this newsletter. Then a discussion arose about the name, and someone else, whose name will be lost to historians, suggested the column be named Rick's Rantz. I can only believe that it was in honor of my sterling character and less than acerbic tongue. Right? Oh well! (*Actually, it was because both words start with 'R', as in Railroad. Sorry, Rick! ☺*)

Oh yes, we were talking about mistakes.

Then we proceeded to receive the attention of two more hurricanes, not to mention over eleven inches of rain in four days. That must have been a mistake too, but it was not the most recent mistake in this unprecedented string of unlikelihoods. Next, our fearless editor has had the temerity to suggest that I write yet another installment. Utter foolishness! But, as one who stands near the head of the class of fools, I said why not?

Problem was that I had absolutely no idea what I could rant about this month, and then it came to me. Why not discuss BrianE's recent guidelines for activities. So here goes.

The first item on the list seems to be the one that has sparked the most interest.

1. Keep them within approximately 2 hours.

My mother always tried to teach me that I should not complain about something unless I was prepared to offer a solution. So hang in there for a few minutes, because I think this can be addressed to everyone's satisfaction with a little "Mind over Matter". But first, let's review the different opinions presented in the thread.

"The two hour limit has to be broken occasionally if you want to have a good switching activity or are simply doing a long pull across a large route." (by: Buttercup)

"I personally stay away from most work orders that are much over an hour." (by: mmartin51)

"The average time slip submitted for August was 1.8 hours . . ." (by: JohnH)

Now we all know that in the real world there is a precedent for almost anything and everything. So what do we have to work with here? Many engineers prefer to run work orders of 2 hours or less. The average work order

length would seem to support that. It would seem that, at least on some occasions, a work order will require a length of more than two hours.

Everything we have said is true. So what does this tell us and what can we do about it. The answer, at least to me, is quite simple!

There are restrictions in the real world. One of the most important is that if you are on duty for more than twelve hours everything comes to a screeching halt ... Period!

Why not assume that the two hour limit implemented by BrianE, and seemingly embraced by many engineers, is equivalent to a twelve hour shift? In the real world, many runs are not a full eight hour shift and many runs are in excess of eight hours. However, when you reach the magic twelve hour limit you are supposed to park the train wherever you are, within reason, and wait for a replacement crew.

Now I know that it is hard for activity creators to control the length of time that an activity runs. In fact, I am currently working with Intelvet to create an activity for the Blue Ridge & Tidewater that runs the length of Hoodoo Pass. Total time for this run is over four hours. This activity was begun prior to BrianE's new guidelines and may have to remain as it is. I have asked Jim to see if it is possible to bring it into compliance with the new guidelines. It may not be worth the effort. The point is that there is a perfectly acceptable precedent for stopping anywhere and breaking an activity into multiple pieces.

Here is my proposal. Keeping in mind that this is virtual railroading and that we are free, as long as our wives will allow it (), to exercise our "Mind over Matter" we should be able to establish the following guidelines:

- Every ten minutes run on vNERR is equal to one hour in the real world.
- Every hour run on vNERR is equal to six hours in the real world.
- At the end of two hours run (approximately) on vNERR you have reached the twelve hour real world shift limit and the crew must be changed.

If we are all willing to embrace this concept, it would seem to me that the concerns of everyone will have been addressed.

Claude's Corner

by Claude Thibault, NERR Engineer #23

Article #3 - 11 October 2004

What's it like to be on the F-team? a lot of people have asked me, well a few, actually nobody ever asked me, but I'm going to tell you anyway, because this is my column, and I write what I want! There! If you're not happy, find your own column and get out of mine! Sheesh! Anyways, as I was saying, being on the F-team SEEMS to be easy, but well actually it is easy so here's how it works. First of all, I'll let you in on a little secret. The F-team has a special secret forum called The F-team! Surprised you there, huh? Now close your mouth. Not polite. The F-team boss is Brian, known as "the arm" (see his avatar). So, activity creators send Brian an activity, and he posts it on the F-team forum. That's where the fun begins!

Now you see it's a first come, first served thing, so you gotta be pretty fast on the mouse finger if you want to test an activity. We got people here that monitor the forum 24 hours a day, finger on the mouse ready to jump. Now if you're like me, kinda slow on the draw, it's a nightmare! When I finally get one, it's usually one of those 37 hour thing with 767 manual switchings and 43 bugs to the minute. Or one of those 90 hour passenger activity on a desert route You know, the ones where once you get up to speed, it's like looking at your screensaver for 90 hours.

There are about a dozen F-team testers, and we span the world. We got a guy in England, a few in the US, Spain, France, Canada and we're like the UN of Virtual Railroading. We are paid in PBL. If we meet with a problem, we contact the author of the activity to have him change certain aspects of his work to bring it up to NERR standards. Once the activity is tested, and we are 100% sure it is feasible, then we file in a report stating the activity is "ready to package". This is F-team work, making sure each and every activity available to NERR engineers is guaranteed flawless. In other words, if you can't complete a NERR activity, the problem resides between your keyboard and the back of your chair.

Montréal is an island one of the bridges you cross to reach Montréal, the Champlain bridge, *is younger than I* depressing! Actually, age is relative. You are young or old when you compare yourself with others. Were you alone in the world, you would not be old or young, you'd be! Actually many things are relative. There was a man named Joe. He lived on an island in the Pacific. He was alone. He had no clothes, no money. He fed himself on fish and fruit taken on the island. He was very happy. One day a boat came by, and a man stepped on the island. His name was Roger. Roger had no clothes but he had a 5 dollar bill. Joe instantly became poor. I used to teach. I had 30 students in my class and I was happy. One Tuesday, the teacher in the class across the hall left his door open, and I noticed that he had only 20 students. Instantly, my job became a pain. One day I decided to stop comparing myself with others. Man, am I happy! I'm a millionaire, I'm handsome, I live a fantastic life in a beautiful house, I'm a gourmet cook... and I am young!

Want to be young? Hang around with people older than you. Voilà! Instant youth. Can't find anybody younger than you?..... Sorry!

Life without NERR Went to the store, bought a game called Microsoft Train Simulator. Six routes in the game, 18-20 activities, tried them all, got bored, deleted the Train Simulator folder and moved on, am now very good at Spider Solitaire

Somewhere, 1999 a bunch of guys in a crowded office putting the final touches to a new computer game called Microsoft Train Simulator. One of the programmers asks his colleagues: "might be better to put a limit to the number of wagons the game can allow".

Jokingly, another answers: "Let's put an impossible number let's say 500. After all, this game should not last very long!" They laughed! And the limit is set in programming code that would read: "if wagons/engines more than 500, then end game".

Ambridge PA, March 31st 2005, squinting through his glasses, Bob "Tombstone" Artim is putting the final touch to his latest creation; a red and yellow passenger car commemorating the centennial of the first cloning of an ingrown toe-nail. As he posts it on NERR, he notices that it is the 500th train to be offered to NERR engineers. He smiles and thinks back to the day he dreamt of the NERR.

Whatsinaname , Australia , April 1st 2005 , John "Travelin' man" Hodgkinson, using his new Super-2000 Astro Turbo-Mouse, downloads the Ingrown Toenail Commemorative Passenger Car, cranks up MSTs, and prepares to tackle Tigermon's 'Trip to Disneyland' activity. As the activity begins, John picks up speed and at exactly 3:07 into the activity, an AI approaches, 1 engine, 6 cars including the Toenail Special. Just as the Commemorative car comes in view, a loud bang is heard coming from the motherboard of the computer, the screen fills up with red and yellow diagonal lines before going blank. Mrs Hodgkinson, hearing the terrible sound, rushes to her husband's desk and faints as she sees only her husband's clothes on the chair, the shoes and socks on the floor, the pants and shirt placed as if the body had melted. The policeman called in to investigate notices that the only thing missing, aside from John, is the Super-2000 Astro Turbo-Mouse. Search goes on for a couple of weeks and then the file is put aside as the Australian Cricket season begins. As everyone knows, Cricket season in Australia means everything comes to a halt as Australians try to understand the game of cricket so that someday they can explain it to the rest of the universe.

Whatsinaname, Australia, June 2017, the doorbell rings. Mrs Hodgkinson opens the door to find a man in rags looking vaguely familiar. The man seems lost, he is dazed, as he starts to talk, a little smoke comes out of his left ear, and no words come out of his mouth just the sound of a whistling train. In his right hand he is holding a charred but still functional vintage Super-2000 Astro Turbo-Mouse! She offers him a glass of Merlot He smiles!

Article #2 - 13 September 2004

Stupidity is, unfortunately... universal!

I was reading a post last week about an American restaurant serving six pound burgers. One of our younger engineers was shocked at such stupidity, "***two thirds of the world starving bla... bla... bla...***". That same day, in the paper, this woman in Malaysia is trying to break a Guinness record for living in the same room with 6000 deadly scorpions. The woman said: "When I'm bitten 2-3 times in a row, I faint!" As I was reading, a yoyo passed on my street riding an All-Terrain-Vehicle at about 100 mph with no muffler on his Bozo-machine. I looked on the tube as they were showing motorcyclists in Athens. The law says you must have a helmet when riding a motorcycle. The law does not say to wear it so they have it hanging from their arm... No kidding, saw it on the news! Dozens of people riding motorcycles and scooters wearing their helmets on their arms... I guess I could go on and on but I think you got the message.

Saw my doctor today. After sticking his fingers in my butt and tickling my tonsils from behind in order to see if my prostate was happy, he was looking at my dossier and said: "I don't like these results. Your triglyceride and cholesterol levels are much too high. You gotta stop drinking beer!" Now I looked at him and said: "Why?" He said "You're gonna die." To which I said: "Isn't that the idea doc, you're born, you live and then you die!" "Yes, he said, but you're gonna die younger!" "Younger than what," I asked. "Younger than you should."

"O.K. doc, now tell me, at what age **should** I die?" Now at this point he looked up from my file, stared at me for 35 seconds, got up and walked out of the office. What was I to do? What was happening here? He's not supposed to leave me alone in here. Where has he gone? And then it dawned on me. He's going to get help to kick me out of here!

Just as I was about to leave, the door opened, the doctor walked in carrying two cans of cold Budweiser, he popped one open, handed it to me, opened the other one and took a long sip, sat down and said: "Your prostate is just fine. Are you free for a little golf Sunday morning?" You gotta love my doctor!

My 12 month old grandson is starting to walk using a walker, his mom is really happy about this. I remember when my 90 year old grand-father started walking using a walker... I can't remember if HIS mother was happy.

I knew it would happen... And it happened! It was a formal dinner, about twenty people of different backgrounds. We had enjoyed a great meal and now some of us were strolling around the grounds of a beautiful property, pool, patio. A few of us had taken chairs around the patio table, drinks in hand, chit-chatting when the subject came around about hobbies and activities. There were the usual ones who played golf, one was an avid stamp collector, and another was raving about genealogy. Then all eyes turned to me as someone asked: "So Claude, what's your favourite leisure time activity?" At first I said nothing. I was trying to figure out an intelligent way to explain to these nice people that my leisure time was spent riding *virtual* trains on a *virtual* railroad for a *virtual* railroad company. My hands got sweaty as I realised that, unless you bring all these people to my house, sit them in front of my computer, and spend a few hours telling them about VNERR, how it started, where it's going etc. etc. So I looked at them all and blurted out: "Sex!" Now of course this got everybody laughing and everyone started telling jokes on sex and I was saved... for now!

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