

Last Stop for the Jackass & Western

Introduction

During the height of operations in the 1960s, the Jackass & Western Railroad, located in Area 25 of the Nevada National Security Site (NNSS), formerly know as the Nevada Test Site (NTS), was the shortest and slowest operating railroad in the United States. However, it was the railroad's important



The 80-ton diesel-electric locomotive sits in the E-MAD as it is prepared for its journey.



The Jackass & Western locomotive is exposed to sunlight after more than thirty years in storage as it is loaded onto the flatbed for transport.

mission that made it such: the railroad transported research reactors, NERVA reactors/ nuclear engines, and equipment between facilities at the NTS Nuclear Rocket Development Station (NRDS) in support of Project Rover. Project Rover researched the adaptation of small, powerful nuclear reactors for long-range spacecraft propulsion.

Background

To accomplish its mission, the Jackass & Western Railroad traveled nine miles of track between three NRDS test stands: A, C, and Engine Test Stand-1; the Reactor Maintenance, Assembly, and Disassembly facility (R-MAD); and the Engine Maintenance, Assembly, and Disassembly facility (E-MAD).

Although small, the railroad had a rolling stock consisting of four locomotives that included the fleet work horse: an 80-ton diesel-electric locomotive; as well as a 17-ton electric prime mover, a 25-ton diesel-electric switch engine, a gas-powered "speeder" track maintenance locomotive, four specialty cars, ten flatcars, two dump cars, one railroad crane with multiple track maintenance cars, and multiple engine test cars.

The Jackass & Western Railroad 80-ton diesel-electric locomotive was specially modified and reconditioned by the General Electric Locomotive Works at a cost of \$117,126 in 1964 for use at the NRDS. Its maximum operating speed is 40-miles per hour with a fuel tank capacity of 400 gallons. It stands 13 feet, five inches above rail with a width of 10 feet, two inches and a length of 38 feet.

Retirement

After the conclusion of Project Rover in 1973, the Jackass & Western Railroad ceased operations and, over time, the rolling stock was dismantled. The giant 80-ton diesel-electric locomotive was stored in the E-MAD building where it remained for more than thirty years.



Until recently. The largest piece of rolling stock remained in the E-MAD facility until the National Nuclear Security Administration Nevada Site Office (NNSA/NSO) joined the Nevada State Railroad Museum on March 14, 2006 to transport the 80-ton locomotive from the NNSA to the Nevada State Railroad Museum in Boulder City, Nevada.

The Big Move

NNSA transferred ownership of the locomotive to the Nevada State Railroad Museum in April of 1997, and the locomotive was surveyed for contamination then released in August of the same year. The Railroad Museum was unable to relocate the locomotive due to funding limitations, but the Nevada State Legislature authorized funds for the relocation as part of the state's 2006 budget.



The locomotive leaves the NNSA on its way to the Boulder City Railroad Museum.

The mechanical beast of burden was prepared for its big move by being loaded onto a specially-designed tractor-trailer used to carry payloads weighing up to 150 tons. The 80-ton locomotive was carefully eased out of the E-MAD and onto the tractor-trailer where it was secured for the trip to Boulder City.

In strict observance of Nevada Department of Transportation regulations, the convoy left the NNSA and slowly headed south to North Las Vegas, where the truck stopped to observe local transportation restrictions. It resumed its slow journey at 1:00 am and arrived at the Boulder City Railroad Museum on March 15, 2006 at 7:00 am.

New Home

After inspection and servicing, plans for the locomotive include operation as an excursion train along the original Union Pacific Railroad route used to haul equipment and material during construction of Hoover Dam.

For more information, contact:
U.S. Department of Energy
National Nuclear Security Administration
Nevada Site Office
Office of Public Affairs
P.O. Box 98518
Las Vegas, NV 89193-8518
phone: 702-295-3521
fax: 702-295-0154
email: nevada@nv.doe.gov
<http://www.nv.energy.gov>

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