
HIGH BALL

**A Publication for the Mid-Michigan Railroad Club
October 2023**



Grand Elk 13

Our caboose, Grand Elk 13, was built for the Penn Central in 1969 as the PC 18516, a class N11 transfer caboose. In the late 60's the Penn Central and the unions were negotiating the retirement of the remaining wooden cabooses. While road trains carried all steel cabooses, wooden body cabooses survived in yard and transfer service on the Penn Central until 1971.

Transfer cabooses were often spartan compared to their road service counter parts. Built for local switching services and inter yard transfers they sometimes provided little more than a platform to stand on during reverse moves and a place to get out of the weather.

The Penn Central N11 appears to have been better equipped than some. A Conrail general arrangement drawing from 1979 shows the N11's including with a Microphor (air flush) toilet, standard coach seat and desk, 6V battery electrical system, oil stove for heat, 50 gallon water tank and Walton ice box. Better accommodations than CSX in recent years who have welded caboose doors closed.

75 N11's were built at the ex-NYC Despatch car shop in 1969 and 1970. Unlike some earlier transfer cabooses built from retired 40' box cars the N11's were fabricated new. The Despatch shop was a subsidiary of the New York Central, Big Four and Lake Shore Michigan Southern located in East Rochester NY. Despatch built reefers, cabooses and the rack structures for auto racks along with handling car repairs. PC 18516 would be among the last cars built at Despatch. As a part of a consolidation of facilities Penn Central closed the shop in 1970. Car repair continued as an independent operation by Merchants Despatch.

In the 90's now wearing Conrail blue the CR 18516 was assigned to Grand Rapids working yard moves and local work in Plainwell. In 2009 The Grand Elk Railroad took over operations from NS and moved the caboose to Kalamazoo. In 2010 it received the current yellow and black scheme and was renumbered GDLK 13. Watco's black and yellow is said to have been inspired by the Pittsburgh Steelers.

During a hard switching move in Kalamazoo one of the GDLK 13's trucks was knocked off center. The caboose was sidelined and headed for the scrappers torch. Pat Kinney arranged for Watco to donate the caboose to the MidMichigan Railroad Club saving a piece of railroad history.



This N11 at Belfontaine OH. shows what the PC 18516 would have looked like when new.



The lettering is worn and the Conrail blue has chalked in this 2009 view at Kalamazoo taken by Getty Davis. Note the caboose is on cribbing with both trucks removed.



Another view from Kalamazoo. The GDLK 13 shares the engine house leads with an ex-CN GP40-2LW and GDLK 4121 an ex-Milwaukee SD40-2.

Key Projects for 2023

Projects that for sure need to be done this year...hopefully:

- Finish enclosing the old pavilion.
- Erect the new pavilion and install the roof.
- Rod and Tom need help maintaining the grounds. Mowing and trmning.
- Tie replacement. The perpetual task.
- Patti Pittman cleaned up the garden area at the Station and planted Hardy Mums.



Dan Bockheim the clubs tireless track worker laying track in the new barn.



Tom Stick and Mike Schmitzer framing in the end of the barn.



A couple weeks later the barn is almost ready for winter. This will give us more space to store equipment and give a permanent location for track panel and switch building.



Work is underway on the new picnic shelter. Rod and Tom have the foundation beams in and have started the steel work. This location will give a closer view of the track and provide easier access to load and unload vehicles.

Halloween Adventure Run Day Schedule

October 7-8, 14-15, 21-22, 28-29

Christmas Party

Yes old man winter is not far away and neither is the annual Christmas Party. Saturday December 2nd.

We will also have the annual cup auction. Bring your railroad related items to put into the auction.

For Sale



Steve Morris has a partially completed Little Engines 0-6-0 for sale.

Contact Steve at 517-231-1397



Freelance Steam Tractor



This is a free lance tractor driven by what looks like a Stuart vertical engine. Boiler is a dry bottom fire box. Chain drive. There is a small water tank trailer that goes with it.

Contact Pat Patton pattonpat@aol.com

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