

# MORMON PIONEER NATIONAL HERITAGE AREA (MPNHA)

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## Railroad resorts bring Sevier County's railroad past to life

The Denver & Rio Grande Railroad is being resurrected in an unusual way in the Mormon Pioneer National Heritage Area. Partners David Grow and George Jones of Environetics have built a caboose and railroad village at Big Rock Candy Mountain, north of Marysville in Piute County. In February they received a 50-year lease of the old Denver and Rio Grande Depot from the city of Mt. Pleasant to build a similar resort there.

Jones, a retired railroad union executive with an interest in historic railroading, began collecting cabooses several years ago. About six years ago he approached Grow with the idea of turning them into a unique resort.

After several years of planning, last year the pair opened the Track 89 Caboose Village Resort at Big Rock Candy Mountain with three railroad cars. This year they have seven and next year they hope to have 10. The Mormon Pioneer National Heritage Area recently awarded the project a \$25,000 grant for landscaping and parking.

Grow said it is unlikely the Mt. Pleasant facility will be open this season since major work needs to be done to prepare the site and move the railroad cars into place. He is very excited about the location, however.

"We've always loved that old depot and looked into moving it further down Highway 89 but found it was too expensive," Grow said.

In 1977 the building was rescued from demolition by a group of local citizens who wanted to preserve it and had it moved to its present location from 500 West and Main.

The new location is ideal, Grow said. "It has great visibility, right on Highway 89. We will make sure that no lodging will block



*A crane puts a rail car into place at the Caboose Village Resort at Big Rock Candy Mountain. Photo courtesy of Sue Wood and Environetics.*

the beautiful view of the terrific old depot.”

Grow said the Mt Pleasant site could eventually have as many as 15 rail cars.

He said they plan to incorporate several historic elements into the resort, but they have not yet determined if that will be in the setting of a small museum or as enhancements to the railroad cars themselves.

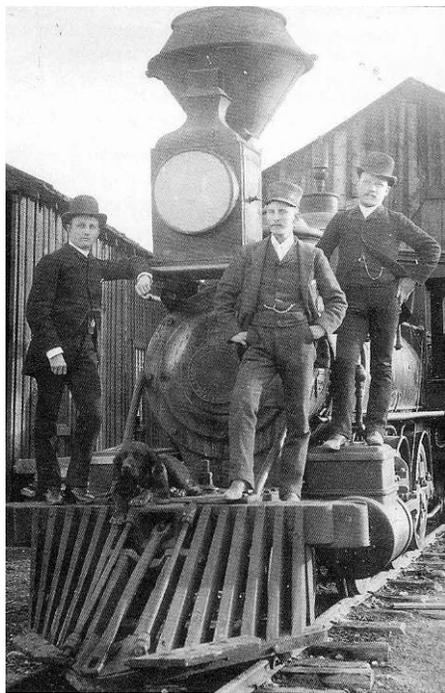
While some have suggested that the pair open a similar resort in Thistle in Utah County, Grow said that the Utah County planning department is not open to the idea.

“It would be like trying to push a river upstream,” he said.

MPNHA Director Monte Bona sees these two resorts as a first step to bringing about a railroad museum and interpretive center in the area, one of the goals of the MPNHA’s management plan.



**Families and individuals who have a love affair with railroading can spend a night (or several nights) in a box car or caboose at the Caboose Village Resort at Big Rock Candy Mountain. Photo courtesy of Sue Wood and Environetics.**



**There have been trains throughout the Mormon Pioneer National Heritage Area for years. We believe this was a photo of a train at the train station in Manti, Utah. Date unknown.**

“The Mormon Pioneer National Heritage Area reached the high threshold for national designation by articulating the thesis that Mormon colonization played a major role in the development of the West. The coming of the railroad era had a significant impact that needs to be interpreted, displayed and conveyed as a crucial part of the Mormon country story,” he said.

The railroad first came to the Sevier Valley in 1893 when the Denver & Rio Grande Railroad expanded its line from Chester to Manti, connecting it with its Valley Line at Thistle Junction via Mt. Pleasant and from Manti to Marysvale.

At its peak, the line ferried passengers to Richfield where tour companies would meet the train at Marysvale and take tourists to Bryce Canyon and the Grand Canyon’s North Rim. For several decades it spurred economic growth in the area, especially in the livestock trade.

However, as automobiles grew in popularity, the railroad began to wane. In 1949, D&RGW dropped passenger service in the area. From then until the Thistle mudslide of 1982 shut down the line completely, the line primarily carried freight. After the mudslide the D&RGW determined it would not be cost-effective to restore the line, which had been operating at a loss for decades.

Now, with the Environetics projects, railroad buffs and families will have a unique opportunity to experience a taste of the rich railroading history of the Mormon Pioneer National Heritage Area.

For more information, contact or MPNHA Director Monte Bona at 801-699-5065 or David Grow at 801-375-9090.

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*The Mormon Pioneer National Heritage Area includes 400 miles of glorious scenic byways, a vast array of wildlife, the best of western living, cattle and sheep ranches, and colorful mountain vistas, all within a trip on Utah Heritage Highway 89.*