

Mike Confalone's **ALLAGASH** STORY



**Volume 3: Planning
prototype operations**

eBook published by
**Model Railroad
Hobbyist magazine™**

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VOLUME 3: Planning prototype operations
By Mike Confalone

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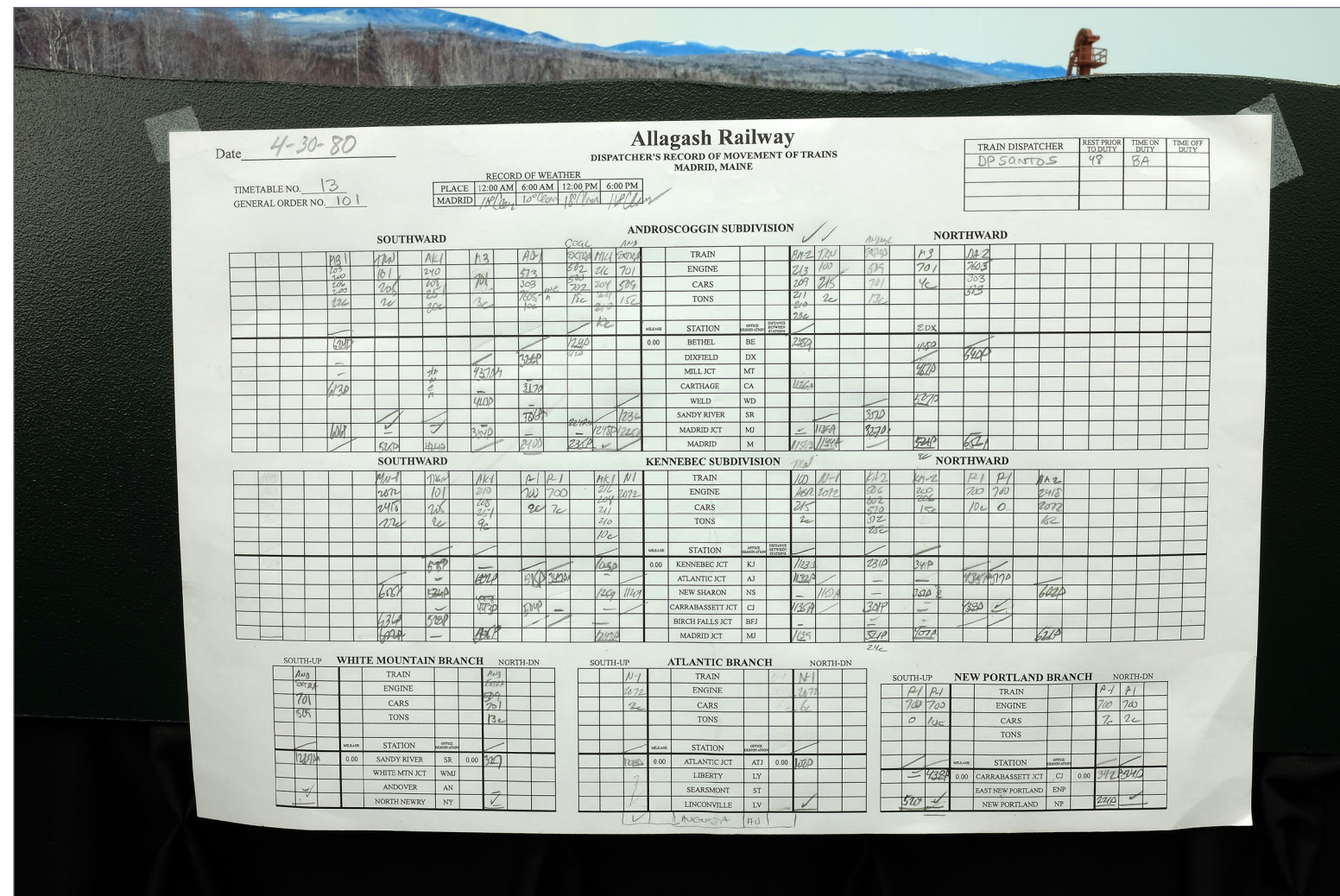
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185: A good chunk of the Allagash diesel fleet congregates at the Madrid engine facility between operating sessions. I had just completed a programming session and used the mainline at Madrid to speed match the entire fleet, hence the locomotive pile-up! After this final adjustment, I'm hoping to never have to do it again. I'm starting scenery at Madrid, and I've mocked up a section of test photo backdrop behind the two-stall engine house.

186: The Allagash Railway train sheet. This was built by Wayne Hills and Dave Santos. This sheet was completed during the March 1 session. Note the "date" of the session was April 30, 1980.



An intro to operations

In Volumes 1 and 2, I discussed the concept behind the Allagash, and the building of the railroad. Now, let's talk about operations.

In the hobby press, there has been an ongoing friendly "debate" among modelers as to what is more important, achieving great scenery or prototypical operations. It seems that many are in one camp or the other.

For me, I've always believed that the two goals are not mutually exclusive, but rather interdependent. Without



one, the other falls flat. Every aspect of building my proto-freelanced Allagash Railway is equally important because my ultimate objective is to create a proto-freelanced railroad that looks and runs like a real railroad.

I believe in operating as soon as is feasible, and addressing issues as they arise. Some modelers fall into the potential trap of trying to make every last detail perfect and never find the courage to take the leap of faith and have that first op. session.

Some are hesitant to operate because scenery isn't complete, or all of their freight cars aren't weathered. These things shouldn't prevent or delay operations. I think it's important to see trains running, the sooner the better.

This will give you the impetus to move forward and strive to improve. I know it did for me.

Operating the Allagash prototypically was always the ultimate end game. It was my primary objective from the start. All of the room preparation, layout planning and construction, scenery building, locomotive and freight car fleet planning and acquisition would all be for naught if the railroad didn't run, and run well. But getting to that point was a long journey.

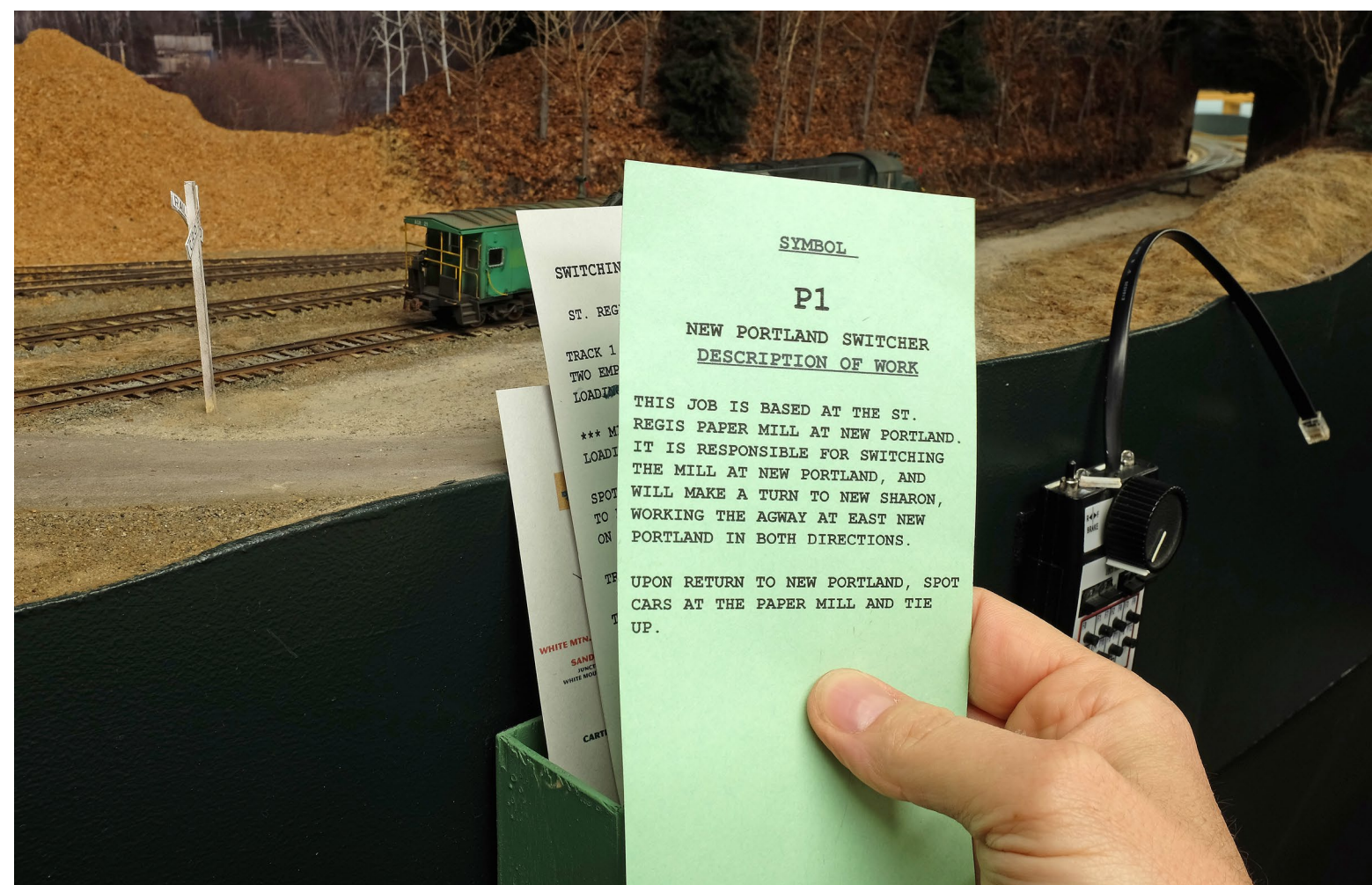
Having successful operating sessions requires serious commitment, significant amounts of time and planning and the flexibility to try new things when something isn't working. The regularly scheduled, successful operating sessions that the guys and I are now enjoying now are the culmination of that effort.

Before getting into the very long list of hardware, paperwork, procedures and myriad tools that make operating the Allagash challenging and fun, it is important to first discuss the railroad's core operating plan as it relates to the primary objective of having prototypical operations.

What trains do we run? Why do we run them, and how do we run them? I had to answer these fundamental questions before any serious operations could commence.

Developing an operating plan

Once the Allagash was firmly located on the Maine map, its footprint and scope clearly defined and its customers and traffic thoroughly planned, I had to ask, and then answer



187: The job card for P1 (New Portland Switcher).



many questions as I began the process of developing an operating plan for the new railroad.

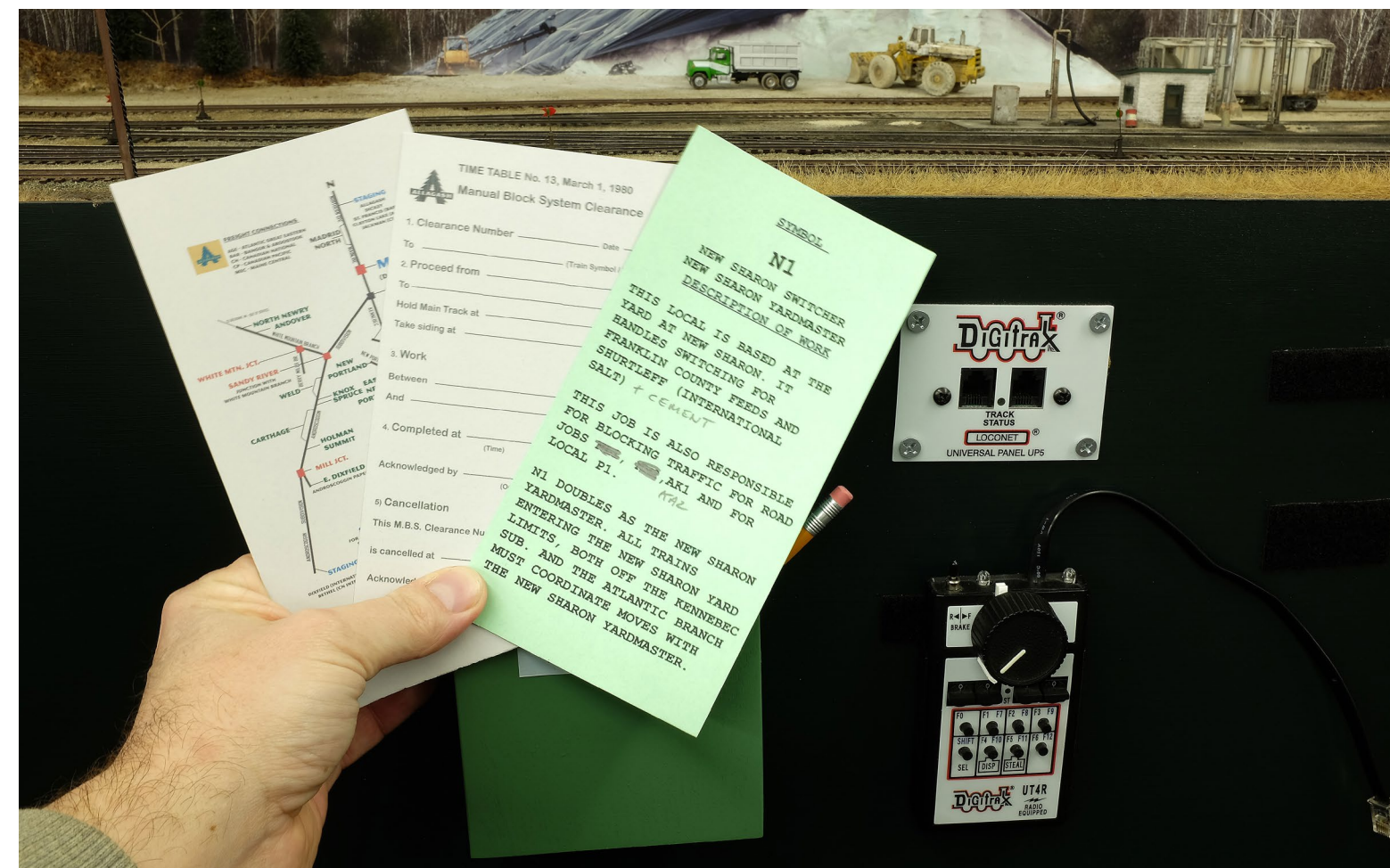
How was all this traffic going to move from point to point? How would the railroad service the shippers and consignees? How would Allagash trains interact with each other and with the prototype connecting railroads represented in staging? How many trains should we run during an operating session? How long should the trains be? How long should an operating session be?

Some of these questions continue to be asked today, despite the fact that we've operated the Allagash many times. I continue to make minor changes to the operating plan in order to improve the overall experience.

Looking back, early operating sessions were nothing but controlled chaos, as early attempts at developing a realistic operating plan were either overly ambitious or just not well thought out. But the important thing is that I analyzed the poor results and made critical changes and still continue to do that today. Because of this, each session continues to be better than the last with few exceptions.

It would be impossible to recount every iteration of the Allagash operating plan. Friend and close advisor (and railroad CMO!) Joe Posik and I have spent countless hours in person, and on the phone, creating, modifying and in some cases throwing out operating plans. There have been so many I have lost count.

Recently, I came across one of the original proposed operating plans. Suffice to say, it was virtually unrecognizable!



188: Key paperwork for the crew of N1 (New Sharon Switcher). From the left: AGR System Diagram, MBS Clearance Form and Job Card. Note the penciled-in changes made to the job card just prior to the op. session.

The train symbols were different, the schedule was different. Everything was different.

Fortunately, after many gyrations we have settled in to a very comfortable routine and have created what I believe to be an effective operating plan that works really well. It has changed very little in the last few sessions. After nearly four years, I think we are very close to finally getting it right!

Following is the current Allagash operating plan. This is the Broadcast of Trains for the most recent operating session, scheduled for Saturday, March 1, 2014. These are



the trains we planned to run, in the order we planned to run them. The key phrase here is “planned.” Some minor changes in the timing of a couple of the trains took place due to circumstances.

To give you some insight into how the Allagash runs during a typical session, let’s take a closer look at what each of these jobs typically does. You might want to follow along on the track plan to orient yourself to Allagash locations as I describe the operations.

189a: Here is a large version of the track plan, in case your screen supports a landscape view.

Broadcast of Trains for Saturday March 1, 2014

Day session

M1 (Madrid switcher first trick)

N1 (New Sharon switcher)

Andover Extra (Madrid-Andover turn)

BM2 (Bethel-Madrid)

MK1 (Madrid-Kennebec Jct.)

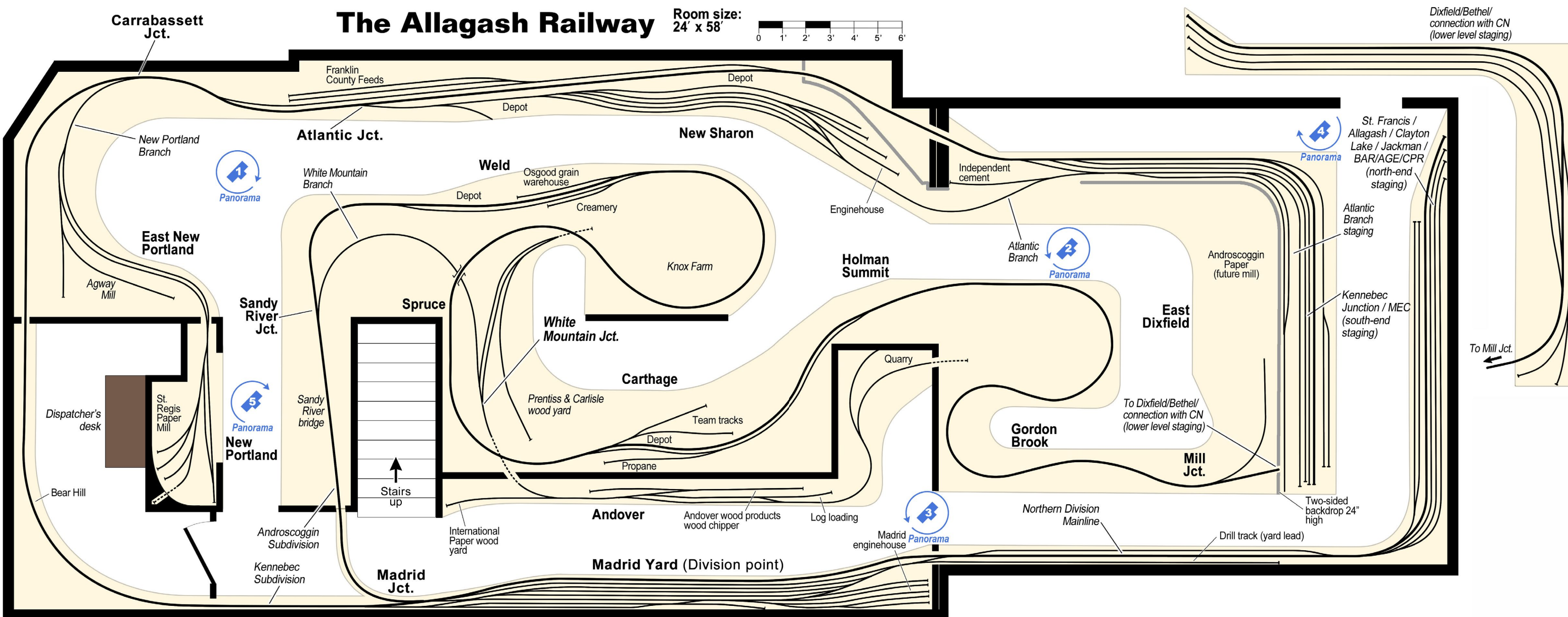
100 (Kennebec Jct. – Allagash. Northstar TOFC)

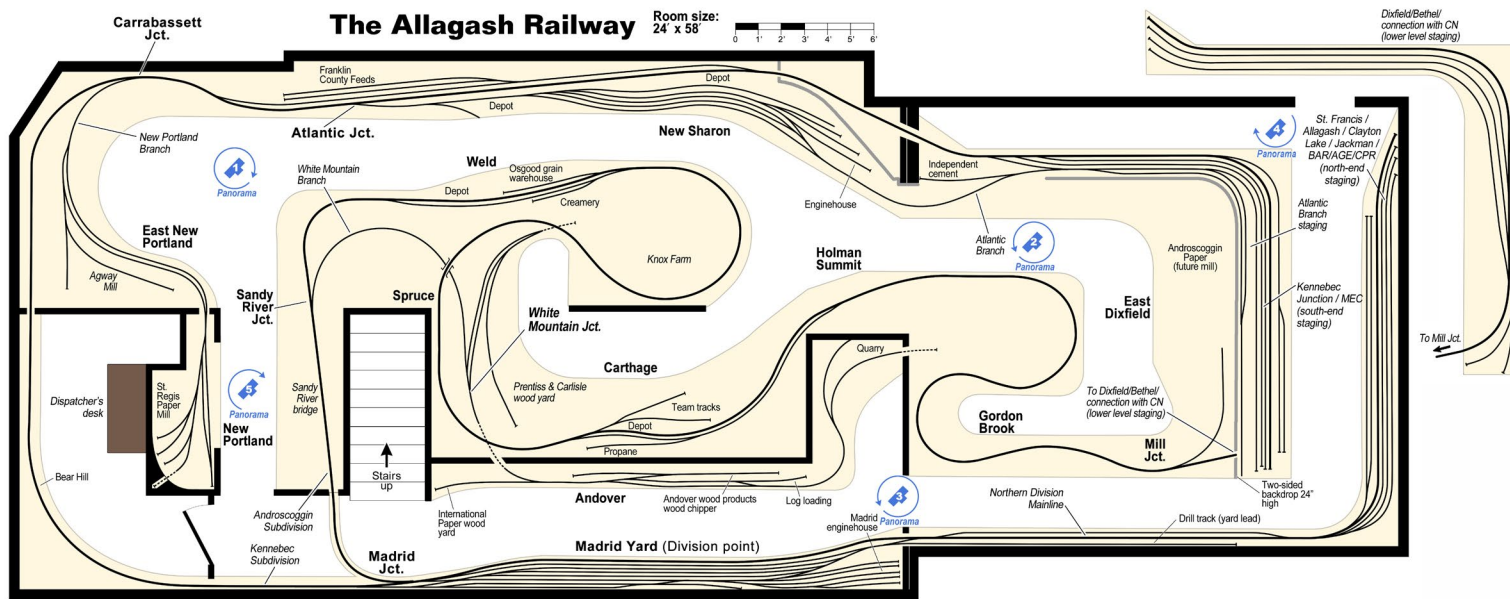
Coal Extra (Bethel-Madrid)

KA2 (Kennebec Jct. – Allagash)

P1 (New Portland Switcher)

AD1 (Allagash – Dixfield, rest) loaded Lumberjack





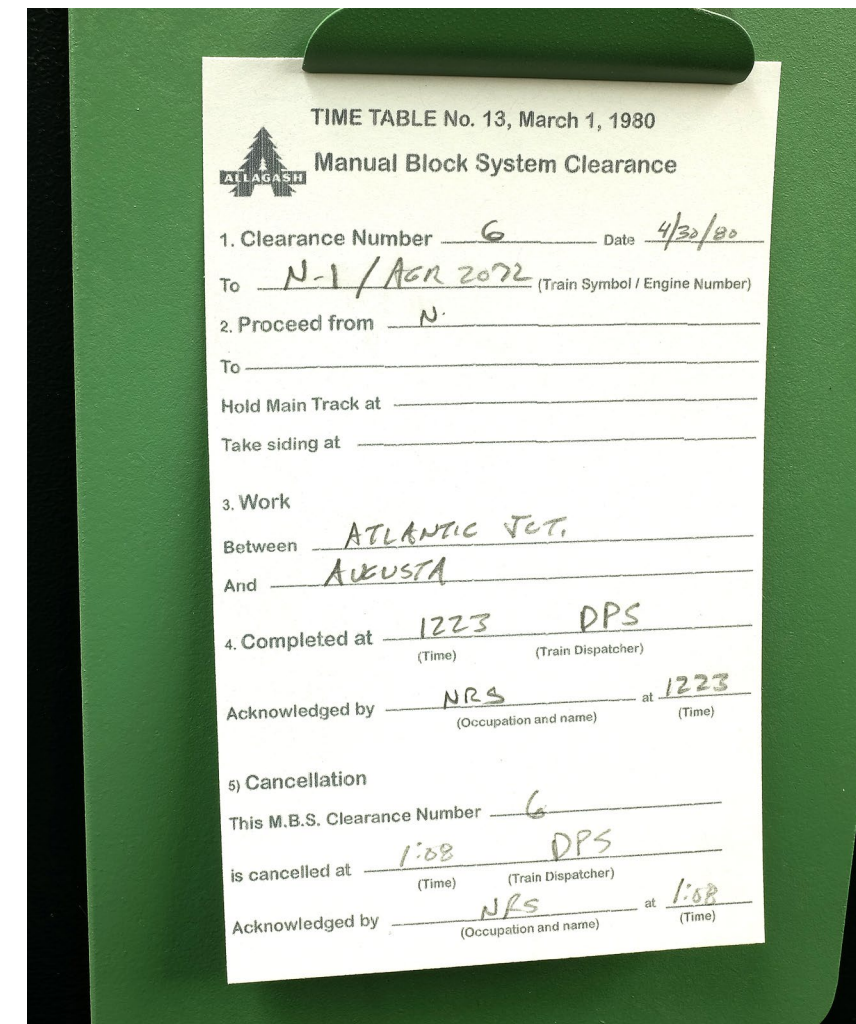
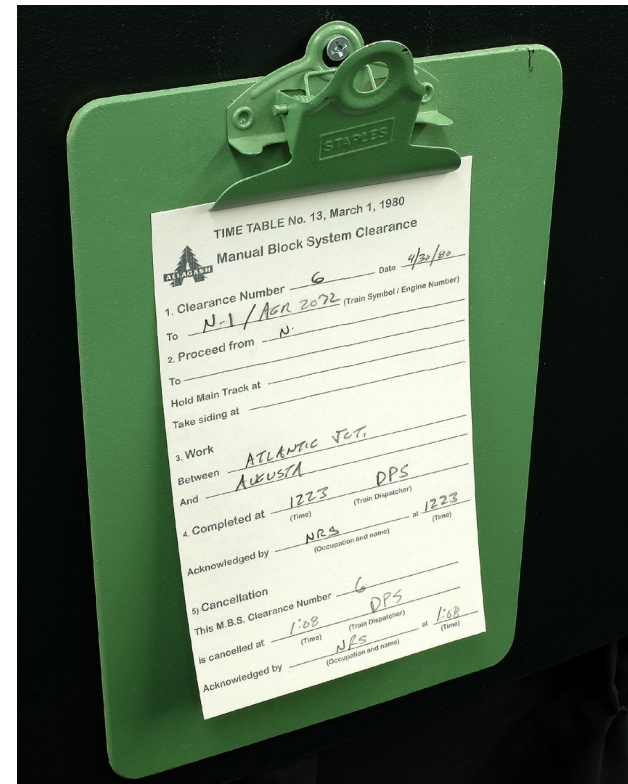
189b: Here's a smaller zoomable trackplan of the Allagash Railway.

Night session

- M2 (Madrid Switcher second trick)**
- KM2 (Kennebec Jct. – Madrid)**
- 101 (Allagash-Kennebec Jct. Northstar TOFC)**
- M3 (Androscoggin local – Madrid – E. Dixfield turn)**
- NM2/MN1 (New Sharon-Madrid Turn)**
- AK1 (Allagash-Kennebec Jct.)**
- DA2 (Dixfield – Allagash) empty Lumberjack**
- MB1 (Madrid-Bethel)**
- 87 (Madrid-Birch Falls Jct.)**

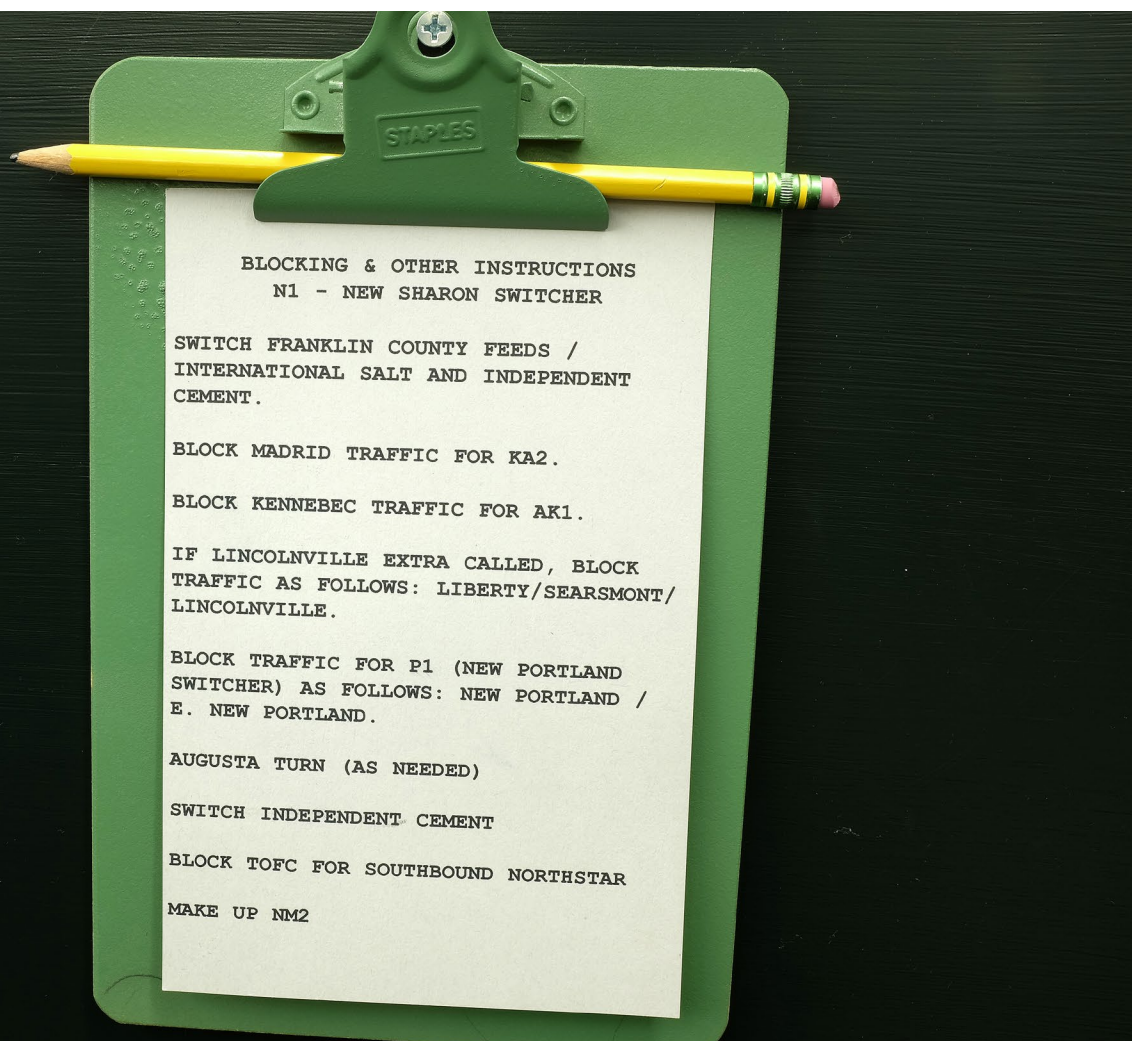
For the March 1st session, we had 19 jobs scheduled, and the schedule was split into two sections, day and night. Let's start from the top, and I'll describe each job's responsibilities.

M1/M2 – Madrid Switcher. This is probably the most important job on the entire railroad. It runs with a two-man crew and a single Alco switcher or roadswitcher. The



190, 191: MBS Clearance #6 from the March 1 op. session. Clearance #6 is giving the crew of N1 (New Sharon Switcher) with engine 2072 a “work order” between Atlantic Jct. and Augusta. The order was completed by dispatcher Dave Santos at 12:23pm and acknowledged by conductor Neil Schofield. The order was cancelled at 1:08pm, after the crew's work in Augusta was complete and they had returned to New Sharon.

job is responsible for switching the division point yard at Madrid. Madrid is the heartbeat of the railroad, with most trains picking up or setting out on their journey over the railroad. If Madrid gets plugged up, the railroad grinds to a halt. Fortunately, the Yardmaster position falls into the very capable hands of Joe Posik, who is able to keep the



192: Switching instructions awaiting the crew on the New Sharon Switcher.

yard fluid, despite what might be coming his way. The action pretty much never stops at Madrid, day or night. And with the typical session lasting 6-7 hours, suffice to say the M1 job is a very challenging one.

N1 – New Sharon Switcher. The second most important job on the railroad. N1 is also a two-man crew, working the secondary yard at New Sharon with a single Alco switcher, Alco roadswitcher or Geep. Responsibilities include switching local customers (Franklin County Feeds, International Salt, Independent Cement, local pulpwood loading and the occasional car of potatoes) and blocking traffic for road trains AK1, KA2 and NM2 as well as local

train P1 down from New Portland. In addition, N1's working limits extend eastward to the state capital of Augusta, where it works a large grocery warehouse, a steel manufacturer and a small, older, coal-fired power plant. The N1 crew can expect to be busy anywhere from 3-6 hours, depending on the day.



193: The next several photos come from several years ago during the very first Allagash operating sessions. Action on the Plywood Pacific! What a difference four years makes. Tim Franz and Bob Gurley switch New Sharon, while Chad Rancourt and Jim Dufour work at what is quickly becoming Weld. In the distance, Mike Rose works present-day White Mountain Jct. There is a whole lot of raw benchwork here, but the railroad is up and running. Note the single logs in the pulpwood cars. These denote loads. Eventually I would construct full, removable loads, but for the time, they worked just fine.



Andover Extra – This job is handled by a one-man crew out of Madrid. The job works the White Mountain Branch, making a turn to Andover and back. The crew will work the pulpwood yard at White Mountain Jct., and then head to Andover where the following local customers are worked: International Paper (wood yard), Andover Wood Products (wood chips and logs), Andover Sand & Gravel (crushed stone) and Northern Maine Minerals (road salt). The White Mountain Branch is worked as an extra to reflect the fact that this is a branch in decline. Traffic fluctuates, much of it is seasonal (stone), but in general traffic is waning and the branch does not get a regularly scheduled job. The Andover Extra generally runs with a single or pair of older units and anywhere from 5-15 cars.

BM2 (Bethel-Madrid) – BM2 is a heavy road job on the Androscoggin Subdivision. It operates from the CN connection at Bethel, through to Madrid yard. BM2 is a one-man crew and handles interchange off the CN (much of it cement and grain for New Sharon), as well as loaded paper traffic from the railroad's largest and most important shipper – International Paper, at Dixfield. The train makes no stops en route. Due to the severe grades on the Androscoggin Sub., BM2 usually rates four or five of the AGRs best power, usually GP38s, and is always the first scheduled road train out. Upon arrival at Madrid, the power goes right to the house, and the M1 switcher crew goes to work on it. BM2 can run anywhere from 20-35 cars.

MK1 (Madrid-Kennebec Jct.) – As soon as BM2 arrives at Madrid, train MK1 springs into action. A set of road power has already been set up and is waiting at the ready

on the Madrid service tracks, and a one-man crew has been called. MK1 primarily handles traffic from BM2 that is destined for the Maine Central connection at Kennebec Jct. If MK1 wasn't called upon BM2s arrival, Madrid Yard would plug up quickly, so in a way MK1 is a safety valve, releasing pressure from Madrid. MK1 usually has 15-25 cars and three road units.

101 (Kennebec Jct. – Allagash. Northstar TOFC) – A brand new train debuted on March 1. This is a joint Allagash/Maine Central piggyback train called the Northstar. The train operates from Allagash to Kennebec Jct., where it is turned over to the Maine Central for forwarding to the Boston & Maine and connections to Conrail at Springfield, MA. The Northstar will make a quick stop at New Sharon to pick up TOFC flats as needed, but beyond that, it's a priority train that needs to get across the railroad with minimal delays. 101 and counterpart 100 will generally operate with a single locomotive and a one-man crew. Allagash pools power with Maine Central in a 75/25 AGR/MEC ratio, so from time to time a Maine Central unit will run through all the way to Allagash. The Northstar runs with a combination of four-to-six 85' or 89' flats and 7-12 trailers.

Coal Extra (Bethel-Madrid) – This is recently-added traffic. The coal comes off the C&O at Detroit and is billed to the Central Maine Power generating plant at Augusta, on the Atlantic Branch. This extra will operate as a unit train (18 cars) from the CN connection at Bethel up to Madrid. At Madrid, the 18-car block will be split into two blocks of nine. The first block will be handled later that night by the turn job up from New Sharon (NM2). The





194: Long before the waybill system was implemented, we used switch lists to route cars during the early operating sessions. Leo Landry and Joe Posik prepare for another move at Madrid. Note the bare cement floors. The carpet would come several years later.

second block will sit in Madrid yard until the next session. This extra will generally operate with a one-man crew and three locomotives.

KA2 (Kennebec Jct.-Allagash) – KA2 is a road train covering the Kennebec Sub. and Northern main line of the railroad from the Maine Central connection at Kennebec Jct., all the way up to Allagash. KA2 will work New Sharon on its way north, dropping off local cars for the New Sharon Switcher. It will also work Madrid Yard, and may drop an

engine there depending on tonnage. KA2 operates with a single man crew and three or four road units.

P1 (New Portland Switcher) – P1 is a local job handled by a single crew and engine and is based at the paper mill town of New Portland. P1's primary responsibilities are to switch the St. Regis Pulp and Paper co. mill at New Portland. After local cars are gathered, P1 heads down the New Portland Branch, working the Agway feed and fertilizer plant at East New Portland. After work is complete here, P1 heads to Carabasset Jct., the junction with the Kennebec Sub. P1 then enters the Kennebec Sub. main track and



195: Perhaps the most dramatic change to the landscape came with the elimination of the huge sand and gravel pit between Sandy River and Weld. This scene is pretty much unrecognizable today. Chad Rancourt and Brian Bennett share a laugh over at New Sharon, still in a primitive stage.

heads down to New Sharon. Here, P1 makes connections with the New Sharon Switcher, exchanges cars and returns to New Portland.

AD1 (Allagash-Dixfield, “the Lumberjack”) – AD1, locally referred to as “the Lumberjack” handles pulpwood and wood chips from AGR Northern Division points, and off neighboring Atlantic Great Eastern at Clayton Lake. All of this traffic is destined for the International Paper co. mill at Dixfield. AD1 makes a pick-up at Madrid, and will usually add an engine here since this is a heavy tonnage train. The train runs with a single crew member. Power from neighboring Atlantic Great Eastern occasionally runs through to Dixfield.

Night session

KM2 (Kennebec Jct. –Madrid) – Counterpart to MK1, this train operates over the road from the Maine Central connection at Kennebec Jct. to Madrid. KM2 does no work en route.

100 (Kennebec Jct.-Allagash, Northstar TOFC) – Counterpart to 101, this is the northbound Northstar TOFC train. 100 will make a stop at New Sharon as needed to drop a TOFC flat/trailer destined for the Hannaford Grocery Warehouse at Augusta on the Atlantic Branch.

M3 (Androscoggin local – Madrid – E. Dixfield turn) – This local job is called out of Madrid and is responsible for serving local customers on the Androscoggin Sub. between Madrid and East Dixfield. M3 will work the team track and Osgood grain at Weld, and then head up to

Carthage where it will work Pine Tree Gas, and handle any pulpwood loads on the team track. The pulpwood here is destined for Dixfield and must be back-hauled to Madrid where it will be picked up by AD1. On occasion there will be a car of bagged grain for a local feed dealer at Carthage. M3 will then head down Holman Mountain to East Dixfield where it will spend considerable time switching the Androscoggin Paper Co. mill (to be built). After switching is complete at East Dixfield, M3 will head back to Madrid and tie up for the night.

NM2/MN1 (New Sharon-Madrid Turn) – NM2/MN1 is an important night turn job called at New Sharon. Power for the New Sharon switcher will pair up with an extra unit from New Sharon for the trip over the road to Madrid and back. This turn is responsible for ferrying all of the New Sharon-based traffic (New Sharon proper, Atlantic Branch, New Portland Branch) destined for gateways other than Kennebec Jct. In reality, this job serves to relieve tonnage. Road trains AK1 and KA2 could, in theory, handle traffic destined to/from New Sharon points, but the trains would be too long. This job enables us to retain desired traffic levels, but keeps the train sizes manageable.

AK1 (Allagash-Kennebec Jct.) – A single man handles AK1 from the railroad’s namesake town of Allagash down to the Maine Central connection at Kennebec Jct. Traffic consists primarily of cars to/from the big St. John Pulp & Paper mill at Allagash (north-end staging). This train also works the CP Rail interchange at Jackman (north-end staging). AK1 works Madrid, picking up and setting out as required. And like counterpart KA2, it also works New Sha-



ron, ferrying cars from New Sharon points to the Maine Central at Kennebec as required.

DA2 (Dixfield – Allagash) empty Lumberjack. This is the counterpart to AD1. It handles the empty pulpwood and wood chip traffic out of International Paper at Dixfield. DA2 will set out empties and drop a unit at Madrid before continuing on to the Northern Division.

MB1 (Madrid-Bethel) – Counterpart to BM2, MB1 is a late night train that handles primarily paper empties back to the IP mill at Dixfield, as well as empty grain and cement from New Sharon and other traffic destined for the CN gateway at Bethel. Four or five road units and a single man crew are the rule.

88/87 (Birch Falls Jct.-Madrid) – This is typically the first early morning train of the session and is a quick run from the Atlantic Great Eastern staging track behind the boiler in the dispatcher’s office into Madrid yard and return. Traffic consists of paper loads from the various Allagash mills that are destined for the AGE gateway at Birch Falls Jct. (Berlinton, N.H). A pair of AGE road units is sufficient to handle this job. Staging capacity is tight and the train cannot exceed 15 cars or so.

Now that we’ve established a solid operating plan, I’d like to discuss the many strategies needed to execute the plan and get the most enjoyment out of a typical Allagash operating session.●



196: New Sharon - then. For a while, we used the shell of an old power plant as a stand-in for the to-be-built Franklin County Feeds mill. Pictures of the actual mill are pinned to the wall to show what is coming down the road. A card leaned against the propane tanker says “need bills.”