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The Berkshire Eagle



Weather

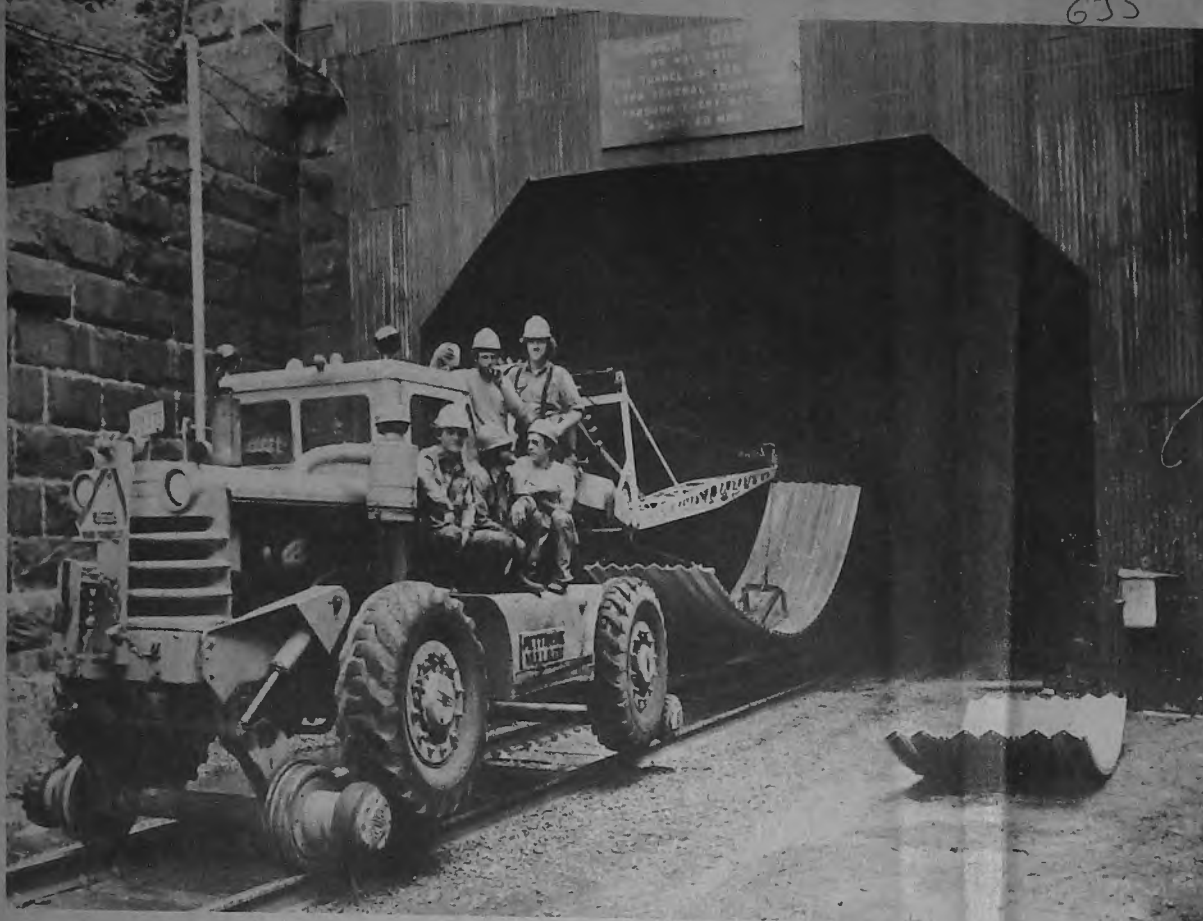
TodaySunny, warm
Tomorrow.....Sunny, hot
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Vol. 88 — No. 74

Pittsfield, Massachusetts, Saturday, July 21, 1979

32 pages — 20¢

WJR
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Photos by Joel Librizz

SWINGLOADER carries galvanized steel arc, and workmen, to work site in Hoosac Tunnel. Vehicle travels on pavement or rails.

Hoosac Tunnel getting steel liner

By Holly A. Taylor

NORTH ADAMS — It's 7:30 a.m. Foreman David Carey and his crew of 13 men pack up their gear and head into darkness for a day's work.

They are repairing the Hoosac Tunnel, the 4.75-mile, 108-year-old railroad passage through Florida Mountain. The western entrance is in a wooded area off Route 8A. Just inside the portal the air is so cool and damp that one's breath condenses.

The workmen ride a small rail car 1,000 to 2,500 feet into the tunnel. A breeze picks up from nowhere and a brook, which one can hear better than see, runs beside the single railroad track. Lights at construction points cast an eerie glow deep inside, creating the impression of an endless mine.

As the men ride along, ground water leaks from above through 13 layers of brick liner, and sprinkles down like a summer snowdrift.

The water is the reason why Carey and his men are here. They are installing galvanized steel liners in a 300-foot section of the tunnel through a \$1 million, six-month renovation. The project is one of those being undertaken by the Boston & Maine Railroad, under a \$26 million federal loan, to upgrade its tracks from Boston to Mechanicville, N.Y.

Just prior to and just after a cave-in about five years ago, metal liners were installed in several hundred feet to reinforce the ceiling. No one was injured in the cave-in, but the B & M then decided

to line sections every few years.

Deeper in the tunnel, far from the surface above, there is no liner at all, only rock. But nearer the western entrance, there is the water problem — and the liner to cope with it.

* * * * *

The B & M's bridge and building division, which employs Carey and his crew, is supervising the project.

Carey and his men started work in April and expect to complete it in October.

Local men working on the project, besides Carey, include Gary Cellana and William M. Plantoni, both of North Adams, and Thomas L. Lesnick and Ricky P. Dyer, both of Adams.

Lining the tunnel is an arduous task. The liners are bolted together outside the tunnel's western gateway to form three sections that are transported to the work site by a swingloader, which can move on either pavement or train track. The three sections are assembled, one on each side and the third on the ceiling, to create a horseshoe-shaped arc.

Once several arcs have been assembled, cement is poured through an opening to fill the space between the steel liner and the brick wall.

* * * * *

Carey must remain alert for trains and have his men out of the tunnel 10 minutes before one comes through. He is in contact with a dispatcher, who tells him the day's schedule.

Each time a train is due, the men must disassemble their scaffolds and hop on the highrail, a small car that takes them back outside.

This is the first time Carey has had a highrail to herd his men in and out of the tunnel. The tunnel used to have manholes in the walls, but most of those have been sealed up, though no one is sure why. Carey said that railroad regulations require an 18-foot clearance on either side of a passing train if workers are to remain in a tunnel. Since the Hoosac Tunnel is only about 18 feet wide from wall to wall, the crews are required to leave.

The crews don't seem to mind the tunnel work. "It doesn't bother me," one worker said. "The tunnel is cool in the summer and warm in the winter."

* * * * *

Some talk about encounters with the ghosts of those who died during construction of the tunnel and were never found. The tunnel took 22 years to build at a cost of 197 lives and \$17 million.

"You want to hear about Ringo?" asked one worker, referring to the most famous of the tunnel's ghosts. "I saw him once. His shadow was glowing and he just kept walking along."

Another worker reported seeing the shadow then finding footprints.

Whether or not the energy crisis signals a revival for the iron horse, the Hoosac Tunnel will be ready for another century of legends and locomotives.



STEEL LINING is being installed inside the Hoosac Tunnel in North Adams to reduce groundwater leakage onto tracks. Story on Page 24.

Joel Librizzi