

John Swanson's Cresson Branch

Photos and text by Ken Wilson

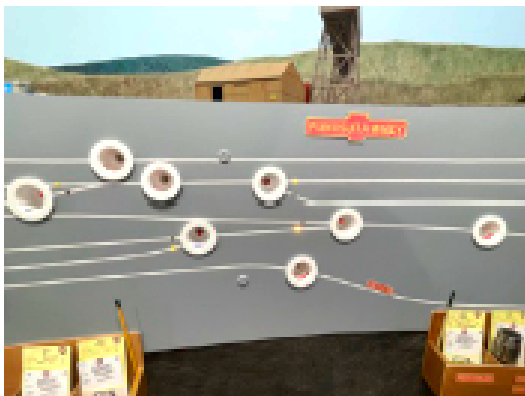
John Swanson's PRR Cresson Branch is a massive HO rendition of the Pennsylvania Railroad's branch that ran from Cresson to just beyond Punxsutawney, Pennsylvania. John does not model a range of years, nor is he vague about the time of year. It's always February 2, 1955: Groundhog Day. (Photo right) Visitors are treated to a variety of the Pennsy's legendary steam and early diesels running through spectacular mountain scenery. (Photo below) I wandered

Dispatcher: February 2, 1955

Train No.	Train Name	Starts At	Track	Departs	Power	Crew	On Duty
CD 7215	McGees Mills Turn	Punxsy	8	10:01 AM	401		
A 6604	NB Passenger	Cresson	Station	10:02 AM	401		10:00
I 32	Mainline Pass.	Cresson		10:06 AM	401		10:00
PQ 4310	Wolflon Turn	Hastings Jct.		10:10 AM	401		10:00
EF 7270	Glen Campbell Turn	Cresson	3	10:12 AM	401		10:05
B 6609	SB Passenger	Punxsy	Station	10:15 AM	401		10:05
GH 7240	Patton Leather Turn	Cresson	2	10:22 AM	401		10:10
I 4320	Kirkpatrick Chrome	Altoona		10:30 AM	401		10:25
M 6651	Revenue/CS Coal	Elk Run Jct.		11:05 AM	401		10:50
N 7290	Enties-North Bound	Windber		11:39 AM	401		10:00
K	Cresson Yard	Cresson			401		10:00
L	Punxsy Yard	Punxsy			401		10:00
O	Riker Yard - B&O	Cloc - B&O			401		10:00
N/A	Kavakick Salvage	Cloc			401		10:00
4307	Mountain Laurel				401		10:00



through the various rooms and aisles reorienting myself to the various sidings and yards. I visited near the end of John's open house, so I could read the various signs he had posted on the layout's fascia without blocking other guests. Something that I never noticed before was the continuous schematic of the tracks and turnouts with recessed switches tucked in where the turnouts were represented. This really



helps with operations. (Photo left) The entire time I was perusing the scenes, trains were constantly running by. (It is the PRR after all.) At one point a steamer was approaching where I was standing alone, and started its bell and whistled for a stop. It was a smooth and gentle stop right in front of me, so I could study the loco's detail. Then it struck me: who was running this train? Most of John's had left,

nobody was at the dispatcher's table, **(Photo right)** and John was just relaxing in the crew lounge without a throttle in his hand!



throttle in his hand! **(Photo left)** It was then that John explained the benefits of JMRI and programming his locomotives to perform specific actions when cued (such as the bell and whistle and gentle stops.) He led me back to the spot and showed me the infrared detector between the rails. Even though he needs a huge crew for operations, he can have multiple trains running without operators for open houses. I do not currently have a layout, but I am certainly going to investigate using JMRI when I'm making my plans.