

# John Swanson's Cresson Branch

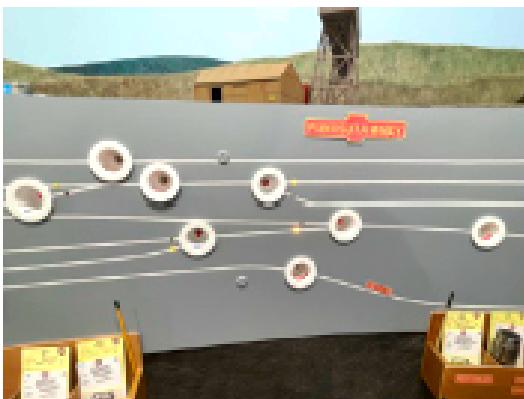
Photos and text by Ken Wilson

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 Milk Turn	Punxsy	8	10:01 AM	Steam			
A	6604	NB Passenger	Cresson	Station	10:02 AM	Diesel		10:00	
I	32	Mainline Pass.	Cresson	W.M.	10:06 AM	Electric		10:00	
PQ	4310	Wolfson Turn	Hastings Jct.	Hastings Branch	10:10 AM	Diesel		10:00	
EF	7270	Glen Campbell Turn	Cresson	3	10:12 AM	Steam		10:05	
B	6609	SB Passenger	Punxsy	Station	10:15 AM	Electric		10:05	
GH	7240	Patton Leather Turn	Cresson	2	10:22 AM	Steam		10:10	
I	4320	Kirkpatrick Chrome	Altoona	W.M. Loop	10:30 AM	Diesel		10:15	
M	6651	Revenue/GS Coal	Elk Run Jct.	W.M. Loop	11:05 AM	Electric		10:50	
N	7290	Emtys-North Bound	Windber		11:39 AM	Steam		10:00	
K		Cresson Yard	Cresson			Steam		10:00	
L		Punxsy Yard	Punxsy			Steam		10:00	
O		Riker Yard - B&O	Clo - B&O	G&W Work		Steam			
	N/A	Kovalchick Schaefer	Clo	W.M. Loop		Steam			
	4307	Mountain Laurel				Electric			



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 JRMI when I'm making my plans.