

C&O 1309 Locomotive at Western Maryland Scenic Railroad

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A recent agreement by The Western Maryland Scenic Railroad (WMSR), WMSR Foundation, and Baltimore & Ohio Railroad Museum generated nationwide excitement among railfans when the three organizations announced the transfer of the Chesapeake & Ohio (C&O) 1309 steam locomotive to the Cumberland based railroad. The historic agreement means that Allegany County will be offering railfans and visitors a chance to experience the movement of the largest and most powerful regularly operating steam locomotive in the United States. C&O 1309's journey to Cumberland was a long time in the making.

The C&O 1309 was the last steam locomotive built for domestic use by the Baldwin Locomotive Works. Manufactured for use by the Chesapeake and Ohio (C&O) Railroad in 1949, it was one of the 217 ton Mallet style locomotives built by the manufacturer. Ironically, the 1949 engines were built on an early twentieth century design during a time period when diesel locomotives were replacing steam engines. Even though dieselization of the rail industry was occurring following World War II, the C&Os purchase made sense because the powerful engine was placed in service transporting coal from Logan County West Virginia. The articulated design, meaning the front wheels are able to move for ease of navigation on tightly curved rail turns, expedited the movement of heavy loads through rugged terrain.

Following use on the C&O, 1309 was taken out of service and placed at Peach Creek, WV where it sat dormant for a number of years. The steam locomotive was spared the fate of most Mallets when it was transferred to shops in Huntington, West Virginia for a cosmetic restoration and subsequent shipment to the B&O Museum in Baltimore,

Maryland, in 1972. The impressive locomotive called the museum home until arrival to Cumberland in August, 2014.

The B&O Museum Board of Directors called the move “a one-of-a-kind opportunity for both nonprofit organizations. It ensures the long-term preservation and restoration of an important steam locomotive which is central to our mission.” Mark Farris, President of the Western Maryland Scenic Railroad Board of Directors, states the locomotive will be restored and placed back in service “in a wonderful mountainous setting where thousands of people can enjoy the sights and sounds of a bygone era.” Michael Gresham, General Superintendent of the WMSR, stated, “The 1309 represents the future of the Western Maryland Scenic Railroad for many reasons. As our ridership has grown over the years, we are pulling heavier consists with more cars and the 1309 will have the power to get those consists to Frostburg without a helper. The locomotive is also very important since we understand it was the last commercially produced steam locomotive built for a U.S. railroad; this is the last of a once vast commercial industry. For those who labored to build and maintain those magnificent machines, 1309 will be an operating memorial where future generations can experience what generations before them struggled to build and maintain for the industry that built America.”

Thousands of railfans are awaiting the day when the 2-6-6-2 Mallet will arrive under full steam at the WMSR Station in downtown Cumberland.

The WMSR is offering sponsors an opportunity to participate in the restoration process. For more information on the C&O 1309 and volunteer opportunities see: www.movingfullsteamahead.com.



Photo Courtesy B&O Museum

Photos below: Work in progress at the Western Maryland Scenic Railroad yard.
Right inset: Front truck (wheel assembly) after removal from engine.
Below and inset: Boiler exposed; view without front truck.

