

# The Alberta Model Engineering Society Comes To Santa's Help

## *How a Canadian Club Spends Christmas*

By Ray Verdone

One of the great features of our club is that we have a flatbed trailer that proves very useful for helping us relocate a "portable" 7-1/2" gauge track. Every Christmas for the past three years, we have participated in the City of Airdrie's Festival of Lights. The track usually stays up and running from the beginning of December till New Year's Day and is a real hit with children of all ages.

This year we got a special request from Santa himself. Well, not really from Santa, but from a movie company that was making a film called "Mary Christmas." As part of the story line Santa's workshop is shown in full operation, complete with a miniature railway. That's where our club came in. We were asked to set up a track and working train for the outdoor movie set. That proved to be quite an interesting assignment.

On Day 1 we transported the rolling stock and track to the site (**Photo 1**). As well, we had to dig a path through the artificially made snow that had been added to the natural snow already on the ground in early February. We then laid about 200 feet of track in an arc in front of "Santa's house" (actually a restored Victorian homestead ranch house and now a restaurant in Calgary's Fish Creek Provincial Park).

We spent most of Day 2 leveling and testing the track (**Photo 2**) so things would run smoothly for the shoot on Day 3. During this time the film company totally transformed the outside of the building and surrounding grounds into a Christmas wonderland (**Photo 3**).

Day 3, the day of the filming, was a great success; multiple takes and retakes over a ten-hour period went without a single derailment (not to mention that everyone in the crew wanted a turn at "driving the train").

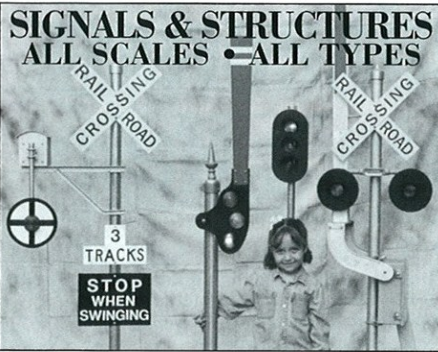
Day 4 was spent taking the railroad apart and returning the track, locomotive, and cars back to their home at Iron Horse Park in Airdrie, Alberta. Although it proved to be a fair amount of work, it was



**1** Delivering the track and rolling stock.

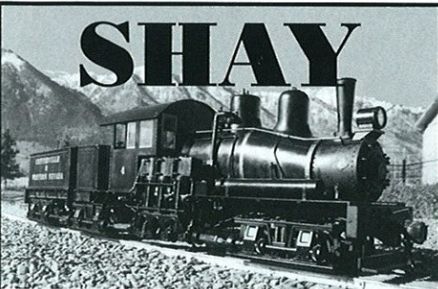


**2** Leveling and testing the track.



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**3** Christmas wonderland in the making.



**4** Ready for ACTION!

a really fun and educational experience for all club members who participated.

Although the steam locomotive is a Live Steam Mogul built by one of the club members, we decided it should not be fired because it would need to be kept hot all day in winter conditions. Power was provided at the rear of the train by an electric car cleverly disguised as some form of caboose/boxcar hybrid invented by the film company (Photo 4). They also repainted a few of the cars which now read SC (Santa Claus) NPRR (North Pole Railroad). The presence of these cars at

our club's track will always bring back fond memories of the experience.

Additional photos of this project are available in the Image Gallery section of our club's website ([www.ironhorsepark.net](http://www.ironhorsepark.net)), as well as more photos and information about our club. We are open to the public every Sunday from May to October. The movie "Mary Christmas" is set to air on the ABC Family network in December of 2006.

*Photos by Author*