

TRAIN ROBBERY ON THE LUMBERJACK STEAM TRAIN

The Camp 5 Museum Foundation Restores History Of Unique Town, Provides Family Fun And Enhances Job Opportunities For Children

In the hardwood forests of northeastern Wisconsin, the 4-Spot train steams along the lines heading to Camp 5 lumber camp just as it has for the last 100 years. Camp 5 was established by the Connor logging company outside of Laona, Wisconsin in the late 1800's. While the logging company is no longer in operation, the steam train still takes passengers from Laona to Camp 5 every summer. "The train is a 1916 steam locomotive that the logging company had purchased from another logging company. The track has been in place since 1902 and the steam engine has been used to train loads of logs up to the time it was replaced by diesels. It is a Vulcan model and is the only one of its kind still operating in the world", state Catherine Dellin president of the Camp 5 Museum Foundation.

"It was my parents' idea and initiative to start this", said Ms. Dellin. "They had a two-fold idea that started in 1969 after the local sawmill burned down. The sawmill had served as a tourist attraction for the community and after it burned, there was a void. As a kid, I used to go out and catch a ride on the steam engine. They would use it to burn the grass along the tracks and keep the fires down, the railroad crew would always tell me when they were taking the steam engine out, and I would ride along with them. It was amazing how word traveled with railroad buffs and at every intersection, there were people taking pictures. I told my parents about how many people liked the steam train, and they came up with the idea to use the farm which had a lot of original buildings left and bring visitors on the train. Their goal was to preserve Wisconsin's logging history and educate the public on the wise use of natural resources. They also realized that our county is one of the poorest in Wisconsin and there is not a lot for kids to do here. They felt strongly that if you could give the young kids opportunities for jobs and teach them how to greet people and how to talk to people that this would give them the skills to do well and go off to college."

Ms. Dellin's family played an integral role in not only founding the museum, but in the settlement of Laona and the surrounding logging camps. Ms. Dellin's grandfather was actually the founding father of Laona. "It was my grandfather who came to Laona and bought land from the government and the railroads. He was looking for timber

and founded the town of Laona, because there were lakes and water and rivers that you would need for moving logs. He built a sawmill and boarding houses for workers, he built the post office, a bank, and churches, it was a real company town”, she explained.

After the area around Camp 5 was logged, the area was utilized as a farm to provide supplies to other logging camps. “My grandfather built Camp 5 as one of the early logging camps. Once they cleared the timber, they realized that the land was pretty good and flat and they began to farm and grow hay, potatoes, turnips and parsnips. They had huge hog farms with hundreds of pigs and a slaughter house. The farm was about 600 acres and was built so they could help sustain the logging camps”, Ms. Dellin explained.

Visitors to Camp 5 board the steam train in Laona riding to the camp and are encouraged to explore the history of the area. The camp is home to a museum, general store, café, and other points of interest. “Visitors get on the train at the historic Soo Line depot, they can ride on cabooses, cupolas, or they can ride in a passenger car. It’s a lovely trip, it goes along the mill pond and you get to see blue herons, sandhill cranes, and occasionally a bear crossing the tracks. When they get to Camp 5, they can explore the petting zoo, which is housed inside one of the original hog barns. The petting zoo is popular with kids as there are several animals for them to pet and feed. The black smith shop has a working black smith who makes souvenirs for visitors including lucky horse shoes. There is the museum, the outdoor artifacts, a nature tour and geological exhibits”, said Ms. Dellin.

In addition to the static exhibits, the Camp 5 museum features a train robbery twice per year. “It is really fun, you sort of feel like you are in the middle of a western movie. The cowboys are really authentic with their horses and guns. They are all in costume and they are quite accurate. Some of these guys are terrific riders. There is one, who will stand up on his saddle holding his reins in his teeth and shooting his pistols in the air, that’s pretty good riding!”, stated Ms. Dellin.

The museum expands their exhibits on a continual basis. Their newest attraction is a 9-acre corn maze. Ms. Dellin takes pride in providing family entertainment, “There’s a lot to do for all ages. We were named one of the top ten attractions in the Midwest. We attract people who are train buffs, real history buffs, and people who just want clean family fun.” Her family dream of providing employment for youth of the area as well as educating the public on logging history is continuing. “My daughter is taking on some of the operations and we have some nieces that are helping out as well. We

don't live in the town anymore, but we do it because the message about sustainable forestry and renewable resources is a good one. We also still think that giving these kids an opportunity for their first job is worthwhile", state Ms. Dellin.

Jared Langenegger

A graduate of New Mexico State University with B.S. in wildlife and fisheries science, Jared spent 15 years working in fisheries and parks management. He enjoys camping, fishing, hunting, painting, and wood working.

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