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Lighting the Curve

ALTOONA, PENNSYLVANIA *The historic Horseshoe Curve track through the Allegheny mountains recently celebrated its 150th anniversary, with a little help from an old friend.*

By the middle of the 18th century, European colonists had settled most of southeastern Pennsylvania. Expansion further west was blocked by the rugged Allegheny Mountains which ran through central Pennsylvania like a natural wall. A network of Indian trails that crisscrossed the land served as the only passage through the Alleghenies until the early 19th century, when they were replaced by a system of canals and boats. In order to overcome 30 miles of rugged terrain between the Juniata and Conemaugh Rivers, canal boats and their passengers traveling from Philadelphia to Pittsburgh had to be placed aboard railcars and hauled up the mountains by way of the Allegheny Portage Railroad.

Leading his team of surveyors in 1854, an enterprising civil engineer designed a new technology that would replace the portage railroad. J. Edgar Thomson realized that climbing straight up and over the Alleghenies would be impossible for heavy steam locomotives, so he settled on a mountain pass near Altoona where the track could be configured into a horseshoe shape to make a gradual 2 percent grade. The strategy worked, and Thomson's "Horseshoe Curve" through the Alleghenies was hailed as a major engineering masterpiece. Travel time from Philadelphia to Pittsburgh was reduced from four days to 15 hours.

Horseshoe Curve had an important economic impact, helping to open commerce across the continental United States. Today, 150 years later, 60 to 70 Norfolk Southern intermodal freight trains and

four Amtrak passenger trains pass over Horseshoe Curve every day. Each year, over 100 million tons of freight pass through Horseshoe Curve, including mail, coal, automobiles, construction material and agricultural products.

A BIG SHOT

Our company first crossed paths with the Horseshoe Curve in 1954 when, as the SYLVANIA Electric Products Company, it made history creating the world's largest flash photograph at the Curve. Using 6,000 SYLVANIA-brand Blue Dot® flashbulbs, they captured on film over 2 million square feet of landscape. The photo went into the company archives as number six in a series of 18 large-venue photos known as "Big Shots." On July 4, 2004, OSRAM returned to the Horseshoe Curve to celebrate the track's 150th anniversary. As onlookers cheered, a Norfolk Southern locomotive pulled the half-mile long Train of Light around Horseshoe Curve. The train shone brilliantly, thanks in part to 24 OSRAM XBO® 7,000-watt xenon searchlights placed on board and 24 more placed on land-based platforms nearby. Exterior-mounted OSRAM HPL® 575 theater halogen lamps lighted the locomotives and railcars, while strobe lights on the sides of the cars rippled in the dark.

In all, the spectacular display produced about 33 million lumens of light output, turning the night sky into day. Tom Vidoni, an OSRAM SYLVANIA manufacturing specialist from St. Marys, Pennsylvania, who attended the event, said he overheard an elderly woman ask her companion, "How can they light it all up?" Vidoni said he would never forget the man's response. "With a smile on his face and a great look of anticipation in his eyes, he leaned over and said, 'Honey, SYLVANIA can light anything!'"

OUTDOING THE ORIGINAL

This year's event was sponsored by OSRAM SYLVANIA, Norfolk Southern Corporation, and The Hite Company, a longstanding customer of the Industrial Commercial sales channel. More than 3,000 people attended, and the event was covered by local and national media. The dramatic light show was threatened by a downpour, but the fast-moving storm cleared in time for the show to go on. Francis M. Piscitelli, senior vice president of sales and customer service for General Lighting, spoke to the gathering about the company's history as an employer in Pennsylvania and its long partnership with The Hite Company. Then he turned his comments to the big event. "Our mission was to outdo the original Big Shot photoflash event staged back in 1954," he said. "Back then we used 6,000 flashbulbs. Today, we performed the feat with a light show on rails using the incredible power of some of our most advanced products."





Trains running through the Curve climb 122 feet over its half-mile stretch. Container trains in excess of 300 cars can fit, and with a speed limit of 35 mph, such large trains can take several minutes to cross.

Left: Horseshoe Curve, designated as a national landmark, is located at Kittanning Point near Altoona.

Far left: OSRAM XBO lamps were placed on board the railroad cars.

