

Seaboard Air Line Caboose

The caboose, long a part of railroading, has gone by the wayside like so many things. At one time the caboose was an integral part of the train, bringing up the rear.

While trains today may only have two crew members riding in the locomotives, trains in the past had as many as five persons; an engineer, a fireman, and a head brakeman all rode in the locomotive. In the caboose were the conductor and the rear brakeman.

The caboose served as their look out point to watch the train for problems such as shifting loads, brake failures, etc. In addition they monitored the pressure on the brake system at the rear of the train. The caboose also served as an office for the conductor as he finished his paperwork, and occasionally a kitchen and bunk house.

Early cabooses often served as "a home away from home" for crews, but this changed with the construction of RR hotels and YMCAs to house crews who were away from their home base.

The caboose was replaced on trains in the 1980s by the TED, Electronic Train End Device, which electronically transmits to the engineer the brake pressure and other data from the rear of the train. This, plus crew size reductions negotiated with the unions, spelled the end of an icon of railroading.

Our caboose has been painted with the Seaboard Air Line Railroad logo. It was originally built for the Norfolk and Western Railway in 1968, and is very new for a caboose. It does have the traditional elevated cupola to allow the crew members to see over the top of the train,, and "office" and small cooking area, since the Norfolk and Western served many isolated areas in West Virginia coal country.

While the caboose is gone, the interest in railroads is as strong as ever. Next time you see a train, look for the TED, it's the flashing radio box on the end of the train. You can no longer wave to the conductor, but the TED is still there doing his job, making sure the train operates safely.