

# RAILROAD WEEDS: One Headache You Can Do Without

Top: That's the famed sculpture of Jefferson Davis, Robert E. Lee and Stonewall Jackson at Stone Mountain, Ga. The carving is 90 feet tall and 120 feet wide. Bottom: Moving along at 15 mph, the truck sprays the entire five-mile track with a residual herbicide eight feet from the center.



WEEDS ARE a problem in any railroad operation. They obstruct view of the track, hinder maintenance, interfere with equipment, create a fire hazard, and they hold water so it doesn't drain off ballast properly. No matter how many miles of track you've got, weeds are one headache you can do without.

Alexander Hamilton McAfee, president and general manager of the Stone Mountain Scenic Railroad, only has five miles of track to worry about. Not a big problem as far as railroads go. After all, there are more than three million acres of railroad rights-of-way in the country today.

In fact, unless you're a native of the South, chances are pretty good you've never heard of the Stone Mountain Scenic Railroad, or of Stone Mountain, Ga., either. The mountain just happens to be the world's largest solid-granite outcrop, with the world's largest piece of sculpture. The railroad is the largest full-size, standard gauge park railroad in the country.

Both are located just east of Atlanta on U.S. 78, where the mountain rises some 1,683 feet above sea level and around its base some 3,200 acres have been set aside as a state park.

The railroad, considerably newer than the mountain or the sculpture (which was first commissioned in 1915 by the United Daughters of the Confederacy), made its first official passenger run in 1962 and is a railroad buff's dream. The five-mile track circles the mountain, and unlike many other railroad attractions, the equipment is authentic. All of the locomotives are live steam with 4-0-4 wheelbases. The engines and coaches have been remodeled, however, to give them the appearance of railroad equipment in use during the 1880's.

Since that first run, the Stone Mountain Scenic Railroad has carried over three million passengers, and better than 350,000 ride her rails

each summer. Ask McAfee about the problems of keeping the track and engines in operation and you'd better have a couple of free hours to listen. Ask about his weed control program, however, and he whips out a big, broad smile.

Any weed can be a problem, but McAfee's special nemesis is kudzu — a hardy Japanese import that will take over everything once it gets a stand. Uncontrolled, it can cover a track in a matter of weeks in the warm, moist Georgia climate. Kudzu, along with mixed grasses and broadleafs, accentuates this problem for the Stone Mountain line. Part of the trip requires the engines to pull a grade, and with a full complement of passengers, a wet track can cause wheels to spin — another hazard. Passenger safety demands such problem weeds be eliminated, and after more than 10 years of trying everything, McAfee finally found the answer last spring.

The answer was 15 pounds of Krovar I weed killer with six pounds of 2,4-D per acre. Krovar I is a residual herbicide. Absorbed through the roots, it moves into the plant's water stream where it interferes with the plant's food producing mechanism. Effective over a relatively long period of time, it reduces the necessity of multiple applications. A broad spectrum product, it is effective against perennial grasses and broadleaf weeds.

The 2,4-D is a selective systemic, and while it has very little effect on grasses, it is effective on broadleaf weeds and woody vines. It knocks out some of the weeds that are up and growing, while Krovar I provides more thorough, longer-lasting control.

And that's exactly what the Stone Mountain line got — effective control. "It's never looked this good," says McAfee, "and we've tried everything we could get hold of."

This was also McAfee's first time  
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Stone Mountain Scenic Railroad is something to see for a railroad buff, but their effective weed control program is something to

see for anyone with a weed control problem. Clear track as far as the eye can see, is the objective of their program.

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to try a Hi-Rail on his tracks. Previous sprays were applied with hand equipment. A Nalco Chemical Company truck put out the herbicide treatment mid-May of last year, and "we got results in about three weeks," McAfee says.

Another bonus with the herbicides used is that at normal rates of application they have no direct effect on wildlife or people — and with 2,000 to 3,000 tourists underfoot watching the spraying operations, you can't be too careful and safety conscious. A. H. McAfee is certainly safety conscious lately. He's been replacing the original 60-

pound rail that was laid with 85 and 90-pound rail to give his passengers a better ride.

They get quite a ride the way it is. The track was laid out through the lovely Georgia woodland, and scenes along the line do a fantastic job of depicting life in the mid-1880's. There are Indians, train robbers and recreations of towns from the film, "The Great Locomotive Chase." All three of the railroad's engines are replicas and namesakes (General II, Yonah II and Texas II) of the locomotives that took part in the famous Civil War chase of 1862 which started not far from Stone Mountain at Big Shanty (now

Kennesaw, Ga.) where a Union spy and his men stole the locomotive, "General." the chase ended in Ringgold, Ga., near Chattanooga.

Even if you're not a railroad history buff, you'll probably enjoy the ride. It starts from under the imposing sculpture of Jefferson Davis, Robert E. Lee and Stonewall Jackson carved out of the face of the mountain. After the ride, there are lots of other things to do — take the mountain sky lift, ride a steamboat or visit an authentic ante-bellum mansion. Or you could visit Alexander Hamilton McAfee. And if you want to see him smile, just ask about his weed control program. □



The Hi-Rail truck sets up to spray the residual herbicide and 2,4-D treatment. This versatile on-off track vehicle is faster and more efficient than the hand sprayers the railroad had been using. Background displays the "1880's motif" seen along the track.