



TIME OUT FOR AN ERRAND—Shown above is C. G. Crumley, conductor of "Tweetsie," one-coach, narrow-gauge train that runs between Boone and Johnson City, Tenn., as he takes time out to deliver some children for a neighbor.

Old 'Tweetsie' Has Many Uses To Mountain Folk

By GEORGE KELLY

BOONE, Aug. 3. (P)—For 60 years, a heezing, puffing one-coach train has been nursemaid, errand boy and angel of mercy to natives of the densest parts of the Roan and Grandfather mountains.

The train carries passengers and mail between Johnson City, Tenn., and Boone. But it weren't for its more human activities, it probably would have been cut of commission by now.

It's known affectionately along its route by the name of Tweetsie. Nobody knows where the name came from, but it persists. Tweetsie started running in 1879, to carry iron ore out of the wilds of Western North Carolina. It remains the only dependable outlet for residents of the remote mountain sections.

As a result, the mountain people have adopted "Tweetsie".

"There's hardly a day", says C. G. Crumley, Tweetsie's conductor for 33 years, "that some housewife doesn't ask me to bring her a spool of thread on the return trip, or that some man doesn't give me an order for a pair of shoes, a hat or some tools. Sometimes, they prepare a whole list of things they want from town.

"Many's the time, too, we've rushed medicine to desperately-ill people, because there was no other way to bring it in, and it's nothing unusual for frantic kinsmen to flag us, in order to put some stricken person aboard to be rushed to the only hospital in seven counties".

On days when a mother is busy she stops the train, puts the children on board and instructs Crumley to

deliver them to a neighbor down the line.

The Engineer Waits

Sometimes the neighbor's house is close to the track, but the conductor has been known to walk yards with his charges while S. P. Pippin, engineer for 35 years, keeps Tweetsie waiting.

Tweetsie has cow trouble. "They clutter up the tracks a sight", says Crumley. "But we don't mind. We have become accustomed to stopping several times a day to escort them off the track".

There are a few regular stations on "Tweetsie's" route, but patrons do not always bother to go to them. It's just as easy to flag the train in front of one's house.

Every summer tourists from the East charter "Tweetsie" for special runs, and the train is theirs to command.

Fun For Tourists

The railroad, highest in eastern America, is one of the three narrow-gauge lines remaining in the United States, but it is as dependable as any. "Tweetsie" wheezes and coughs through winter's snow the same as through summer's heat.

A few years ago it was suggested that mail between Johnson City and Boone be re-routed to a round-about motor line. For a time the case looked dark; without the mail there was reason to believe the train couldn't operate without a serious financial loss.

At that critical time, old and young came down out of the mountains to protest. Their pleas saved the day for "Tweetsie".